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SPARTAN PLANET

BY A. BERTRAM CHANDLER



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SPARTAN PLANET

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For Susan, whose idea it was.

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Chapter One

THERE WAS THAT sound again—thin, high, querulous, yet audible even above the rhythmic stamp and shuffle of the dance that beat out through the open windows of the Club. It sounded as though something were in pain. Something was.

Brasidus belched gently. He had taken too much wine, and he knew it. That was why he had come outside—to clear his head and, he hoped, to dispel the slight but definitely mounting waves of nausea. The night air was cool, but not too cool, on his naked body, and that helped a little. Even so, he did not wish to return inside just yet.

He said to Achron, "We may as well watch."

"No," replied his companion. "No. I don't want to. It's . . . dirty, somehow . . ." Then with a triumphant intonation he delivered the word for which he had been groping. "Obscene."

"It's not. It's . . . natural." The liquor had loosened Brasidus' tongue; otherwise he would never have dared to speak so freely, not even to one who was, after all, only a helot. "It's we who're being obscene by being unnatural. Can't you see that?"

"No, I can't!" snapped Achron pettishly. "And I don't want to. And I thank Zeus, and his priest-

hood, that *we* don't have to go through what that brute is going through."

"It's only a scavenger."

"But it's a sentient being."

"And so what? I'm going to watch, anyhow."

Brasidus walked briskly to where the sound was coming from, followed reluctantly by Achron. Yes, there was the scavenger, struggling in the center of the pool of yellow light cast by a streetlamp. The scavenger—or scavengers . . . Had either of the young men heard of Siamese twins, that would have been the analogy to occur to them—a pair of Siamese twins fighting to break apart. But the parallel would not have been exact, as one of the two linked beings was little more than half the size of the other.

Even in normal circumstances the scavengers were not pretty animals, although they looked functional enough. They were quadrupedal, with cylindrical bodies. At one end they were all voracious mouth, and from the other end protruded the organs of excretion and insemination. They were unlovely but useful, and had been encouraged to roam the streets of the cities from time immemorial.

Out on the hills and prairies and in the forests, their larger cousins were unlovely and dangerous, but they had acquired the taste for living garbage.

"So . . . messy," complained Achron.

"Not so messy as the streets would be if the beasts didn't reproduce themselves."

"There wouldn't be the same need for reproduction if you rough hoplites didn't use them as javelin targets. But you know what I'm getting at, Brasidus. It's just that I . . . it's just that some of us

don't like to be reminded of our humble origins. How would *you* like to go through the budding process, and then have to *tear* your son away from yourself?"

"I wouldn't. But we don't have to, so why worry about it?"

"I'm not *worrying*." Achron, slightly built, pale, blond, looked severely up into the rugged face of his dark, muscular friend. "But I really don't see why we have to watch these *disgusting* spectacles."

"You don't have to."

The larger of the scavengers, the parent, had succeeded in bringing one of its short hind legs up under its belly. Suddenly it kicked, and as it did so it screamed, and the smaller animal shrieked in unison. They were broken apart now, staggering over the cobbles in what was almost a parody of a human dance. They were apart, and on each of the rough, mottled flanks was a ragged circle of glistening, raw flesh, a wound that betrayed by its stench what was the usual diet of the lowly garbage eaters. The stink lingered even after the beasts, rapidly recovering from their ordeal, had scurried off, completing the fission process, in opposite directions.

That was the normal way of birth on Sparta.

Chapter Two

THAT WAS THE normal way of birth on Sparta—but wherever in the universe there is intelligence there are also abnormalities.

Achron looked at his wristwatch, the instrument and ornament that marked him as something more than a common helot, as almost the social equal of the members of the military caste. He said, "I have to be getting along. I'm on duty at the crèche at 2400 hours."

"I hope you enjoy the diaper changing and the bottle feeding."

"But I do, Brasidus. You know that I do." His rather high voice dropped to a murmur. "I always feel that one or two of them might be . . . yours. There *are* a couple in this new generation that have your nose and eyes."

Brasidus put a large, investigatory and derisory hand to his face. "Impossible. I've still got them."

"Oh, you know what I mean."

"Why not keep a lookout for your own offspring, Achron?"

"It's not the *same*, Brasidus. In any case, it's not often I'm called upon to contribute . . ."

The two friends walked back to the Club House, but did not go farther inside than the cloakroom.

Brasidus watched Achron slip into his tunic and sandals, then, on an impulse, Brasidus followed suit. Somehow he was no longer in the mood for the dance, and his prominent nose wrinkled a little at the acrid smell of perspiration, the sweet-sour reek of vomit and spilled wine that drifted into the anteroom from the main hall. The thudding of bare feet on the polished floor, in time to the drums and the screaming, brassy trumpets, usually excited him, but this night it failed to do so, as even did the confused shouting and scuffling that told him that the inevitable brawl had just broken out. On other occasions he had hurled himself gleefully into the press of struggling, sweating naked bodies—but this, too, had lost its attraction for him.

More and more he was feeling that there was something missing, just as there had been something missing when he had been a guest at Achron's club. He had thought, at the time, that it was the boisterous good fellowship, the hearty food and the strong, rough wine. Now he had stated himself with all of these, but was still unsatisfied.

He shrugged his heavy shoulders, then tugged the hem of his tunic down to its normal midthigh position. He said, "I'll stroll down to the crèche with you, Achron. I don't feel like going back to the barracks just yet. And, anyhow, tomorrow's my free day."

"Oh, thank you, Brasidus. But are you sure? Usually you hate to leave while there's any wine left in the jars."

"Just don't feel like any more drinking or dancing. Come on."

It was dark outside the building. The sky, although clear, was almost starless, and Sparta had no moons. The widely spaced streetlamps on their fluted columns seemed to accentuate the blackness rather than to relieve it, and the glimmering white pillars of street-fronting buildings appeared to be absorbing rather than reflecting what little light there was. In their shadows there was furtive movement, but it was no more than the scavengers going about their appointed tasks. Then, overhead, there was the drone of engines.

Brasidus stopped abruptly, laid a detaining hand on Achron's upper arm. He looked up, staring at the great, shadowy bulk that drove across the night sky, its course set for the blinking beacon atop the Acropolis, its tiers of ports strings of luminous beads, its ruby and emerald navigation lights pendants at the end of the necklace.

Achron said impatiently, "*Come* on. I don't want to be late clocking in. It's only the night mail from Helos. You must have seen it *dozens* of times."

"At least," agreed Brasidus. He fell into step again beside his companion. "But . . ."

"But you always wanted to join the Air Navy yourself, Brasidus. But you're too big, too heavy. A pity." There was a hint of spite in Achron's voice.

Brasidus recognized it, but ignored it. He murmured, "And there are even better things to be than an airman. I've often wondered why *we* didn't build any more spaceships after we colonized Latterhaven, why we allowed the Latterhaveneers to have the monopoly of the trade between the two worlds. We should own and operate our own spaceships."

Achron laughed unkindly. "And what chance do you think you'd have of being a spaceman? Two ships are *ample* for the trade, and the spice crop's only once a year. What would you do between voyages?"

"We could . . . explore."

"Explore?" Achron's slim arm described an arc against the almost empty sky. "Explore *what*? And on the other side of the world there's the Lens—and we all know that it's no more—or less—than a vast expanse of incandescent gases."

"So we've been told. But . . . I've managed an occasional talk with the Latterhaven spacemen when I've been on spaceport guard duty, and *they* don't think so."

"*They* wouldn't. Anyhow, you could be a lot worse things than a soldier—and in the Police Battalion of the Army at that. And as far as the possibility or otherwise of other worlds is concerned, I'd sooner listen to our own priests than to that atheistical bunch from Latterhaven."

They were almost at the creche now, a huge, sprawling adjunct to the still huger temple. Its windows glowed with soft yellow light, and above the main doorway, in crimson neon, gleamed the insignia of the State Parenthood Service, the red circle from which, at an angle, a barbed arrow jutted up and out. Brasidus wondered, as he had wondered before, how the crèche had come to take for its own the symbol of Ares, the God of War. It was, he supposed, that the highest caste into which a child could grow was, after the priesthood, the military. Then he thought about his own alleged parenthood.

"These babies like me . . ." he said abruptly.

"Yes, Brasidus?"

"I . . . I think I'll come in with you, to see for myself."

"Why not? It's outside visiting hours—not that anybody does ever visit—but you're a police officer. Old Telemachus at the desk won't know if you're on duty or not."

Telemachus, bored by his night duty, welcomed the slight deviation from normal routine. He knew Brasidus slightly but, nonetheless, insisted that he produce his identity card. Then he asked, his wrinkled head protruding turtle-like from his robes, "And what is the purpose of your visit, Sergeant? Has some criminal taken refuge within our sacred precincts?"

"Achron tells me that two of his charges might be . . . mine."

"Ah. *Potential* criminals." The old man cackled at his own humor. "But seriously, Sergeant, it is a great pity that more of our citizens do not evince greater interest in their sons. Even though the direct physical link was abolished ages ago, there should still be responsibility. Yes. Responsibility. Before I was asked to resign from the Council, I succeeded in having the system of regular visiting hours introduced—not that anybody has taken advantage of them . . ."

"Phillip will be waiting for his relief," broke in Achron sulkily.

"So he will. But it will not hurt that young man to be kept waiting. Do you know, at the 2200-hours feed he failed to ensure that the bottles were at the correct temperature! I could hear Doctor Heraklion carrying on, even out here. Luckily the Doctor came into the ward at just the right time." Telemachus added spitefully, "I honestly think

that Phillip will make a better factory hand than a children's nurse."

"Is the correct temperature so important, sir?" asked Brasidus curiously. "After all, we can eat hot things and cold things, and it never seems to do us any harm."

"But we are fully developed, my dear boy. The children are not. Before the priests learned how to improve upon nature, a child, up to quite an advanced age, would be getting his nourishment directly from the father's bloodstream. So—can't you see?—these immature digestive organs must be coddled. They are not ready to handle what we should consider normal food and drink."

"Phillip will be in a bad temper," complained Achron. "I hate him when he's that way."

"All right then, you can relieve your precious Phillip. Are you sure you don't want to stay on for a talk, Brasidus?"

"No, thank you, Telemachus."

"Off you go, then. And try not to make any arrests."

Brasidus followed his friend through long corridors and then into the softly lighted ward where he was supposed to be on duty. They were met at the door by Phillip, a young man who, save for his dark coloring, was almost Achron's twin. He glowered at his relief. "So you've condescended to show up at last. I should give you something to help you to remember to get here on time."

"Do just that," said Brasidus roughly.

Phillip stared insolently at the Sergeant and sneered, "A pity you brought your *friend* with you. Well, I'm off, dearie. It's all yours, and you're welcome to it."

"What about the handover procedure?" demanded Achron sharply.

"What is there to hand over? Fifty brats, slumbering peacefully—until they all wake up together and start yelling their heads off. Thermostat in the dispenser's on the blink, so you'll have to check bottle temperatures before you break out rations for the little darlings. Clean nappy bin was replenished before the change of watch—or what *should* have been the change of watch. I'm off."

He went.

"Not really suitable for this profession, is he?" asked Achron softly. "I sometimes think that he doesn't *like* children." He gestured toward the double row of white cots. "But who couldn't love them?"

"Not you, obviously."

"But come with me, Brasidus. Leave your sandals by the door and walk softly. I don't want them woken." He tiptoed on bare feet over the polished floor. "Now," he whispered, "I'll show you. This is one of them." He paused at the foot of the crib, looked down lovingly.

And Brasidus looked down curiously. What he saw was just a bud, a baby, with a few strands of wispy black hair plastered across the overlarge skull, with unformed features. The eyes were closed, so he could not tell if there were any optical resemblance between himself and the child. The nose? That was no more than a blob of putty. He wondered, as he had often, how Achron and the other nurses ever told their charges apart. Not that it much mattered, not that it would matter until the boys were old enough for aptitude tests—and by that time all characteristics, psy-

chological and physiological, would be well developed.

"Isn't he *like* you?" murmured Achron.

"Um. Yes."

"Don't you feel . . . proud?"

"Frankly, no."

"Oh, Brasidus, how *can* you be so insensitive?"

"It's a gift. It goes with *my* job."

"I don't believe you. Honestly, I don't. But quiet. Heraklion's just come in."

Brasidus looked up and saw the tall white-robed figure of the Doctor at the end of the aisle. He bowed stiffly, and the salutation was returned. Then Heraklion beckoned. Remembering to walk softly, the young man made his way between the rows of cots.

"Brasidus, isn't it?" asked Heraklion.

"Yes, Doctor."

"What are you doing here, Sergeant?"

"Just visiting, with Achron."

"I really don't approve, you know. Our charges are very . . . delicate. I shall appreciate it if you don't go wandering all over the building."

"I shan't be doing that, Doctor."

"Very well. Goodnight to you, Sergeant."

"Goodnight to you, Doctor."

And as he watched the tall, spare figure of Heraklion striding away along the corridor, Brasidus, the policeman in his makeup suddenly in the ascendant, asked himself, *What is* he *hiding?*

And then the first of the babies awoke, and almost immediately after the other forty-nine of them. Brasidus bade a hasty farewell to Achron and fled into the night.

Chapter Three

THERE WAS AN odd, nagging suspicion at the back of Brasidus's mind as he walked slowly through the almost deserted streets to the police barracks. Normally he would have been attracted by the sounds of revelry that still roared from the occasional Club—but the mood that had descended upon him earlier still had not left him, and to it was added this new fretting surmise. Crime was not rare on Sparta, but it was usually of a violent nature and to cope with it required little in the way of detective ability. However, crime against the state was not unknown—and the criminals were, more often than not, highly placed officials, better educated and more intelligent than the commonalty. There was a certain smell about such malefactors—slight, subtle, but evident to the trained nose.

Brasidus possessed such an organ, and it had twitched at the odor that lingered about Doctor Heraklion.

Drugs? Could be—although the man himself did not appear to be an addict. But, in his position, he would have access to narcotics, and the peddlers had to get their supplies from *somebody*.

Even so, Brasidus was reluctant to pass his sus-

picions on to his superiors. To begin with, there was no proof. Secondly—and this was more important—he had witnessed what had happened, more than once, to overzealous officers who had contrived to trample on the toes of the influential. To present his captain with a *fait accompli,* with all the evidence (but of *what?*) against Heraklion neatly compiled, would be one thing, would almost certainly lead to promotion. To run to him with no more than the vaguest of suspicions, no more than a hunch, actually, could well result in permanent banishment to some dead-end hamlet in the bush.

Nonetheless, an investigation *could* bring rewards and, if carried out discreetly and on his own time, would not be too risky. After all, there was no law or regulation to debar any citizen from entry to the crèche. Now and again, at the instigation of members like Telemachus, the Council had attempted to encourage visits, although with little success. Perhaps a sudden access of parental feeling would look suspicious—but calling to see a friend, one of the children's nurses, would not. Too, Achron himself might have noticed something odd, might even be induced to remember and to talk about it.

"What's biting you, Sergeant?" asked the bored sentry on duty at the barracks gate.

Brasidus started. "Nothing," he said.

"Oh, come off it!" The man who had served with Brasidus for years and was shortly due for promotion himself, could be permitted liberties. "Anybody'd think you had a solid week's guard duty ahead of you, instead of your free day." The sentry yawned widely. "How was the dance, by

the way? It's unlike you to be back so early, especially when you've a morning's lay-in for recuperation."

"So-so."

"Any good fights?"

"I don't know. There seemed to be one starting just as I left."

"And you didn't join in? You must be sickening for something. You'd better see a doctor."

"Maybe I'd better. Good night, Leonidas—or should it be good morning?"

"What does it matter to *you*? You'll soon be in your scratcher."

On his way to his sleeping quarters Brasidus had to pass the duty sergeant's desk. That official looked up as he approached. "Oh, Brasidus . . ."

"I'm off duty, Lysander."

"A policeman is *never* off duty—especially one who is familiar with the routine for spaceport guard duties." He consulted a pad on his desk. "You, with six constables, are to present yourself at the port at 0600 hours. The men have already been checked off for the duty, and arrangements have been made to have you all called. You'd better get some sleep."

"But there's no ship due. Not for *months*."

"Sergeant Brasidus, you and I are policemen. Neither of us is an expert on astronautical matters. If the Latterhaveneers decide to send an unscheduled ship, and if the Council makes the usual arrangements for its reception, who are we to demand explanations?"

"It seems . . . odd."

"You're a creature of routine, Brasidus. That's your trouble. Off with you now, and get some sleep."

Once he had undressed and dropped onto the hard, narrow bed in his cubicle he did, rather to his surprise, fall almost at once into a dreamless slumber. And it seemed that only seconds had elapsed when an orderly called him at 0445 hours.

A cold shower completed the arousing process. He got into his black and silver uniform tunic, buckled on his heavy sandals and then, plumed helmet under his arm, made his way to the mess hall. He was the first one there. He looked with some distaste at the already laid table—the crusty bread, the joints of cold meat, the jugs of weak beer. But he was hungry, and pulled up a form and began his meal. As he was eating, the six constables of his detail came in. He nodded in greeting as they muttered sullenly, "Morning, Sergeant." Then, "Don't waste any time," he admonished. "They'll be waiting for us at the spaceport."

"Let 'em wait," growled one of the latecomers. He threw a gnawed bone in the general direction of the trash bucket, missed.

"That's enough from you, Hector. I hear that there's a vacancy for village policeman at Euroka. Want me to recommend you?"

"No. Their beer's lousier even than this, and they can't make wine."

"Then watch your step, that's all."

The men got slowly to their feet, wiping their mouths on the back of their hands, halfheartedly dusting the crumbs from the fronts of their tunics. They took their helmets from the hooks on the wall, put them on, then filed slowly from the mess hall to the duty sergeant's desk. He was waiting for them, already had the armory door unlocked. From it he took, one by one, seven belts, each with

two holsters. *So,* thought Brasidus, *this is an actual spaceship landing.* Staves and short swords were good enough for ordinary police duties. As the belts were being buckled on, the duty sergeant produced the weapons to go with them. "One stun gun," he muttered, passing them out. "One projectile pistol. To be used only in extreme urgency. But you know the drill, Sergeant."

"I know the drill, Sergeant," replied Brasidus.

"We should," grumbled Hector, "by this time."

"I'm telling you," explained the duty sergeant with ominous patience, "so that if you do something silly, which is all too possible, you won't be able to say that you weren't told not to do it." He came out from behind the desk, inspected the detail. "A fine body of men, Sergeant Brasidus," he declaimed sardonically. "A credit to the Army. I don't think. But you'll do, I suppose. There'll be nobody there to see you but a bunch of scruffy Latterhaven spacemen."

"What if they aren't from Latterhaven?" asked Brasidus. He was almost as surprised by his question as was the duty sergeant.

"Where else can they be from? Do you think that the gods have come all the way from Olympus to pay us a call?"

But if the gods came, it would be, presumably, on the wings of a supernal storm. It would not be a routine spaceship arrival—routine, that is, save for its unscheduled nature.

The men were silent during the ride to the spaceport.

Air-cushioned, the police transport sped smoothly over the cobbled streets of the city, the

rough roads of the countryside. Dawn was not far off and already the harpies were uttering their raucous cries in the branches of the medusa trees. One of the birds, its wings whirring about its globular body, swept down from its perch and fluttered ahead of the driver's cab, squawking discordantly. The vehicle swerved. Hector cursed, pulled his projectile pistol, fired. The report was deafening in the still air. The harpy screamed for the last time and fell, a bloody tangle of membrane and cartilage, by the side of the road.

"Was that necessary, hoplite?" asked Brasidus coldly.

"You heard what Sergeant Lysander told us, Sergeant." The man leered. "This was an emergency."

Only a bird, thought Brasidus. *Only a stupid bird. Even so . . .* He asked himself, *Am I getting soft? But I can't be. Not in this job. And in all my relationships I'm the dominant partner.*

The spaceport was ahead now, its latticework control tower looming starkly against the brightening yellow of the eastern sky. Atop the signal mast there was flashing the intense green light that warned of incoming traffic. A ship was due. *Latterhaven Venus* or *Latterhaven Hera*? And what would either of them be doing here off season?

The car halted at the main gates, sitting there on the cloud of dust blown up and around it by its ducts. The guard on duty did not leave his box, merely actuated the mechanism that opened the gateway, waved the police through. As they drove to the Spaceport Security Office, Brasidus saw that the inner barrier was being erected on the

concrete apron. He noticed, too, that only one conveyor belt had been rigged, indicating that there would be very little cargo either to load or to discharge. That, at this time of the year, made sense. But why should the ship be coming here at all?

They were outside the office now. The car stopped, subsided to the ground as its fans slowed to a halt. The constables jumped out, followed Brasidus into the building. To meet them there was Diomedes—corpulent, pallid, with a deceptively flabby appearance—the security captain. He returned Brasidus' smart salute with a casual wave of his pudgy hand. "Ah, yes. The guard detail. The usual drill, Sergeant. You're on duty until relieved. Nobody, Spartan or spaceman, to pass through the barrier either way without the Council's written authority." He glanced at the wall clock. "For your information, the ship is due at 0700 hours. You may stand down until 0650."

"Very good, sir. Thank you, sir," snapped Brasidus. "If I may ask, sir, which of the two ships is it?"

"You may ask, Sergeant. But I'm just Security. Nobody ever tells me anything." He relented slightly. "If you *must* know, it's neither of the two regular ships. It's some wagon with the most unlikely name of *Seeker III.*"

"Not like the Latterhaveneers to omit the name of their precious planet," muttered somebody.

"But, my dear fellow, the ship's not from Latterhaven. That's the trouble. And now, Sergeant, if you'll come with me I'll try to put you into the picture. It's a pity that nobody's put me into it first."

Chapter Four

THE SHIP THAT was not from Latterhaven was no more than a glittering speck in the cloudless morning sky when Diomedes, followed by Brasidus and the six hoplites, marched out from the office onto the apron, to the wire mesh barrier that had been erected to define and enclose the strange vessel's landing place. It was no more than a speck, but it was expanding rapidly, and the rhythmic beat of the inertial drive, faint to begin with, was becoming steadily louder.

Old Cleon, the port master, was there, his long white hair streaming out in the breeze. With him were other officials, one of whom carried a portable transceiver. Brasidus could overhear both ends of the conversation. He learned little; it was no more than the exchange of messages to be expected with standard landing procedure. Cleon himself did not seem to be very interested. He turned to Diomedes. "Most unprecedented!" he complained. "Most unprecedented. Had it not been for the Council's direct orders I should have refused permission to land."

"It's not a very large ship," said Diomedes, squinting upwards.

"Large enough. Too large, for an intruder.

Those rebels on Latterhaven might have let us know that they've discovered and colonized other habitable planets."

"They, too, must have a security service," said Diomedes.

"Secrets, secrets! How can I run a spaceport when nobody ever tells me anything? Answer me that, Captain!"

"Descending under full control, to area designated," reported the man with the transceiver.

Diomedes turned to his men. "I've told Sergeant Brasidus all that *I* know, and he's passed it on to you. So keep alert. We're not expecting any hostile action—but be ready for it. That's all."

Brasidus checked the freedom of his weapons in their holsters. The others followed his example.

Lower dropped the ship, lower. Even with nothing against which to measure her, it could be seen that she was small—only half the size, perhaps, of *Latterhaven Venus* or *Latterhaven Hera*. The gold letters embossed on her side were now readable. "*SEEKER III.*" (And what, wondered Brasidus, of *Seeker I* and *Seeker II*?) And above the name there was a most peculiar badge or symbol. A stylized harpy it looked like—a winged globe surmounted by a five-pointed star. It was nothing like the conventional golden rocker worn on Latterhaven uniforms.

The ship came at last between the waiting men and the rising sun, casting a long, chill shadow. The throbbing of its engines made speech impossible. And then, suddenly augmenting their beat, there was the drone of other machinery. Slowly, majestically, no less than six of the great airships

of the Spartan Navy sailed over the spaceport and then, in line ahead, circled the landing field. Their arrival was clearly not fortuitous. Should *Seeker's* crew attempt any hostile action they, and their ship, would be destroyed by a shower of high-explosive bombs—as would be, Brasidus realized, the military ground party and the port officials. The same thought must have occurred to Diomedes. The portly captain looked even unhappier than usual and muttered, "Nobody ever tells me *anything*."

With a crunch of metal on concrete the ship landed, an elongated ovoid quivering on her vaned landing gear, in spite of its bulk somehow conveying the impression that the slightest puff of wind could blow it away. Then, as the engines were shut down, it ceased to vibrate, settled down solidly. There was a loud *crack* and a jagged fissure appeared in the scarred concrete of the apron. But the strange vessel was not especially heavy. The initial damage had been caused by a clumsy landing of *Latterhaven Hera*, and Cleon, with months in which to make the necessary repairs, still hadn't gotten around to it.

Slowly an airlock door toward the stern of the ship opened. From it, tonguelike, an extensible ramp protruded, wavered, then sought and found the ground. There were beings standing in the airlock chamber. Were they human? Brasidus had read imaginative stories about odd, intelligent life-forms evolved on other planets—and, after all, this ship could be proof that there were more habitable planets than Sparta and Latterhaven in the universe. Yes, they seemed to be human. Nevertheless, the Sergeant's hands did not stray

far from the butts of his holstered weapons.

Somebody was coming down the ramp, a man whose attire bore no resemblance to the carelessly informal rig of the Latterhaven spacemen. There was gold on his visored cap, and a double row of gold buttons on his odd tunic, and bands of gold on the sleeves of it. His black trousers were not the shapeless coverings worn for warmth and protection in the hill country, but were shaped to his legs and sharply creased. His black, highly polished footwear afforded him complete coverage—*and must be*, thought Brasidus, wriggling his toes, *extremely uncomfortable*. He reached the ground, turned and made a gesture toward the open doorway. Another man came out of the airlock, followed the first one to the ground. He, although his uniform was similar, was dressed more sensibly, with a knee-length black kilt instead of the constricting trousers.

But was it a man, or was it some kind of alien? Brasidus once again recalled those imaginative stories, and the assumption made by some writers that natives of worlds with thin atmospheres would run to abnormal (by Spartan standards) lung development. This being, then, could be deformed, or a mutant, or an alien. Somebody muttered, "What an odd-looking creature!"

Walking with calm deliberation the two men approached the barrier. The one with the trousered legs called, "Anybody here speak English?" He turned to his companion and said, "That was a silly question to which I should get a silly answer. After all, we've been nattering to them on RT all the way in."

"We speak Greek," answered Diomedes.

The spaceman looked puzzled. "I'm afraid that I don't. But your English is very good. If you don't mind, it will have to do."

"But we have been speaking Greek all the time."

"Something odd here. But skip it. Allow me to introduce myself. I am Lieutenant Commander John Grimes, Interstellar Federation Survey Service. This lady is Doctor Margaret Lazenby, our ethologist . . . "

Lady, thought Brasidus. *Then he must be a member of some other race. The Ladies? I wonder where they come from. . . . And such odd names—Johngrimes, Margaretlazenby. But the Latterhaveneers go in for odd names, too.*

Diomedes was making his own self-introduction. "I am Diomedes, Captain of Spaceport Security. Please state your business, Johngrimes."

"I've already done so. And, as you must know, I received clearance to land."

"Then state your business again, Johngrimes."

"All right. We're carrying out the census in this sector of space. Of course, your cooperation isn't compulsory, but it will be appreciated."

"That is a matter for the King and his Council, Lieutenant Commander."

"We can wait. Meanwhile, I'd like to comply with all the usual regulations and clear my ship inwards. I'm ready to receive the officers from Port Health and Customs as soon as you like."

"We have no need for them here, Lieutenant Commander Johngrimes. My orders are that you and your crew stay on your side of the barrier until such time as you lift off."

The strange-looking man was talking to the

spaceship commander in a high, angry voice. "But this is impossible, Commander. How can we carry out any sort of survey in these conditions? They distinctly told us that we could land—and now they turn their spaceport into a prison camp just for our benefit. *Do* something, Commander."

Brasidus saw the Captain's prominent ears redden. Nonetheless, he replied mildly enough, "But this is their world, Miss Lazenby. We're only guests."

"Guests? Prisoners, you mean. A wire barrier around us, and a fleet of antique gasbags cruising over us. Guests, you say!"

Strange, thought Brasidus, *how this peculiar-looking spaceman appears attractive when he's in a bad temper, while poor Achron and his like just get more and more repulsive. . . . And why do I compare him to Achron and the others? A finer bone structure, perhaps, and a more slender body—apart from that shocking deformity—and a higher voice?*

"Quiet, please!" The owner of the shocking deformity subsided. Johngrimes turned again to the barrier. "Captain Diomedes, I request that you get in touch with some higher authority. I am here on Federation business."

"What federation?" asked Diomedes.

"You don't know? You really don't know?"

"No. But, of course, I'm Security, so nobody ever tells me anything."

"What a bloody planet," murmured Margaret-lazenby. "What a bloody planet!"

"That will do, Peggy," admonished Johngrimes.

And how many names do these people have?

Brasidus asked himself. Through the wire mesh of the barrier he stared curiously at the Lady. *He must be some sort of alien,* he thought. And yet . . . Margaretlazenby, suddenly conscious of his stare, blushed, then returned his gaze in a cool, appraising manner that, fantastically, brought the blood flooding to the skin of his own face.

Chapter Five

BRASIDUS FLUSHED AS he met the spaceman's appraising—and somehow approving—stare. He heard him murmur to his captain, "Buy that one for me, Daddy," and heard Johngrimes' reply, "Peggy, you're incorrigible. Get back on board at once."

"But I *am* the ethologist, John."

"No need to get wrapped up in your work. Get back on board."

"Yes, sir. Very good, sir. Aye, aye, sir."

He looked at Brasidus for a long, last time and then turned with a flounce of kilts. The movement of his hips and full buttocks as he mounted the ramp was disturbing.

"Now, perhaps," said the Commander, "we can get down to business. I may be old-fashioned, but I've never cared much for a mixed crew."

"So it's true, Lieutenant Commander," Diomedes said. "So you aren't from Latterhaven."

"Of course not. We shall be calling there after we've finished here. But tell me, what made the penny drop so suddenly?" He grinned. "Or should I have said 'obol'?"

"You speak strangely, Johngrimes. What do you mean?"

"Just a figure of speech. Don't you have automatic vendors? No? What I meant was this: Why should my mention of a mixed crew suddenly convince you that my claim that this is a Federal ship is correct?"

Diomedes did not answer at once. He glared around at Cleon and his aides, at Brasidus and his men. He growled, "You all of you have ears—unluckily. You all of you have heard far too much. But you will not speak of it. To anybody. I need not remind you of what has happened in the past to men who have breached Security." He turned back to the space captain. "Your arrival here, Lieutenant Commander, has rather upset our notions of cosmogony. It is now a matter for the Council—and for the Council only."

"But why *did* the penny drop?" persisted Johngrimes.

"Because you have brought evidence that there is more than one intelligent race in the universe. At first we thought that your Margaretlazenby was deformed—on this world, of course, he would have been exposed immediately after birth—and then you told us that you have a mixed crew."

The Commander stared at Diomedes incredulously. He said at last, "Of course, it has been said more than once, not altogether in jest, that they aren't really human. . . . But tell me, Captain Diomedes, do you actually mean what I think you mean? Haven't you anybody like her on your planet?"

"Like *what*, Lieutenant Commander?"

"Like her. Like Doctor Lazenby."

"Of course not. We are all human here. As we should be, Sparta being the birthplace of the human race."

"You really mean that?"

"Of course," replied Diomedes.

But does he? wondered Brasidus, who had worked with the Security Captain before.

"And you have no . . . ?" began the spaceman, then pulled himself up abruptly. Brasidus recognized the signs. *Find out all you can, but give nothing away yourself.*

"We have no what?" prompted Diomedes.

Johngrimes made a quick recovery. "No Immigration, no Customs, no Port Health?"

"I've already told you that, Lieutenant Commander. And I've already told you that you and your crew must remain confined to your ship."

"Then perhaps you would care to come aboard, Captain Diomedes, to talk things over."

"Not by myself—and not unarmed."

"You may bring one man with you," said Johngrimes slowly. "But both of you will leave your weapons this side of the barrier."

"We could board by force," said Diomedes.

"Could you? I think not. *Seeker* may be carrying out the Census, but she's still a frigate, with a frigate's armament. In a matter of seconds we could sweep this field—*and* the sky over the field—clear of life. This is not a threat, merely a statement of fact." The words carried conviction.

Diomedes hesitated. "Very well," he said at last. He looked up to the circling airships as though for reassurance, shook his head doubtfully. He addressed Cleon, "Port Master, please have your radioman inform the Flight Admiral of my movements." He turned to Brasidus, "Sergeant, you may come with me. Leave Leading Hoplite Hector in charge."

Brasidus got close enough to Diomedes so that he could speak in a low, urgent whisper. "But, sir, the standing orders . . . the passes, to be signed by a member of the Council . . ."

"And who do you think drew up those standing orders, Sergeant? *I* am Security." Diomedes unlocked the gate with a key from his belt pouch. "Come with me."

"Your weapons," reminded Johngrimes.

Diomedes sighed, unbuckled his belt with its two holstered pistols, passed it to one of the men. Brasidus followed suit. The Sergeant felt naked, far more so than when stripped for the dance or for field sports. He knew that he still retained one weapon in the use of which he was, as were all members of the police branch of the Army, superbly trained—his body. But he missed those smooth, polished wooden butts that fitted so snugly into his hands. Even a despised sword or spear would have been better than nothing.

Ahead of them, Johngrimes was walking briskly toward the open airlock door, toward the foot of the ramp. Diomedes and Brasidus followed. They could see, as they neared the vessel, that the odd excrescences on its skin were gun turrets, that from at least two of them slender barrels were trained upon them, following them, that from others heavier weapons tracked the circling airships.

Johngrimes was taking no chances.

Although he had been often enough on spaceport guard duties, this was the first time that Brasidus had been aboard a spaceship; usually it was only Diomedes who boarded visiting vessels.

Mounting the ramp, the Sergeant eyed professionally the little group of officers waiting just inside the airlock. They all carried sidearms, and they all looked competent enough. *Even so,* thought Brasidus, *they'll not be able to use their pistols, for fear of hitting each other. The knee to the groin, the edge of the hand to the neck . . .*

"Better not," said Diomedes, reading his subordinate's face.

"Better not," said Johngrimes, turning back to look at the pair of them. "An incident could have unfortunate—for your planet—repercussions."

Better not, thought Brasidus.

Soldierlike, he approved the smartness with which the spacemen saluted their commander. And soldierlike, he did not like the feel of a deck under his feet instead of solid ground. Nonetheless, he looked about him curiously. He was disappointed. He had been expecting, vaguely, vistas of gleaming machines, all in fascinating motion, banks of fluorescing screens, assemblages of intricate instruments. But all that there was was a little metal-walled room, cubical except for the curvature of its outer side, and beyond that another little room, shaped like a wedge of pie with a bite out of its narrow end.

But there must be more to the ship than this.

An officer pressed a button on the far, inwardly curved wall of the inside room. A door slid aside, revealing yet another little compartment, cylindrical this time. Johngrimes motioned to his guests—*or hostages?* Diomedes (but he was familiar with spaceships) entered this third room without any hesitation. Apprehensively Brasidus

followed him, with Johngrimes bringing up the rear.

"Don't worry," said Diomedes to Brasidus. "This is only an elevator."

"An . . . an elevator?"

"It elevates you. Is that correct, Lieutenant Commander?"

"It is, Captain Diomedes." Johngrimes turned to Brasidus. "At the moment, we are inside the axial shaft—a sort of hollow column running almost the full length of the ship. This cage that we've just entered will carry us up to my quarters. We never use it, of course, in free fall—only during acceleration or on a planetary surface."

"Do you have machines to do the work of your legs, sir?"

"Why not, Sergeant?"

"Isn't that . . . decadent?"

The spaceship commander laughed. "Men have been saying that ever since the first lazy *and* intelligent bastard invented the wheel. Tell me, did you march out from the city to the spaceport, or did you ride?"

"That's different, sir," said Brasidus lamely.

"Like hell it is." Johngrimes pressed a button. The door slid shut. And almost immediately Brasidus experienced an odd, sinking sensation in his stomach. He knew that the cage was in motion, felt that it was upward motion. Fascinated, he watched the lights flashing in succession on the panel by the door—and almost lost his balance when the elevator slowed to a stop.

The door slid open again, revealing a short stretch of alleyway. Still there were no machines,

no instruments—but the air was alive with the subdued murmur of machinery.

Brasidus had likened the ship to a metallic tower, but this was not like being inside a building. It was like being inside a living organism.

Chapter Six

"COME IN," SAID Johngrimes, pushing a button that opened another sliding door. "As a very dear friend of mine used to say, this is Liberty Hall. You can spit on the mat and call the cat a bastard."

"Cat?" asked Brasidus, ignoring an admonitory glare from Diomedes. "Bastard? What are they?" He added, "It's the second time you've used that last word, sir."

"You must forgive my Sergeant's unmannerly curiosity, Lieutenant Commander," said Diomedes.

"A healthy trait, Captain. After all, you are both policemen." He smiled rather grimly. "So am I, in a manner of speaking. . . . But sit down, both of you."

Brasidus remained standing until he received a grudging nod from his superior. Then he was amazed by the softness, by the comfort of the chair into which he lowered himself. On Sparta such luxury was reserved for the aged—and only for the highly paced aged at that, for Council members and the like. This lieutenant commander was not an old man, probably no older than Brasidus himself. Yet here he was, housed in quarters that the King might envy. The room in which Johngrimes was entertaining him and Diomedes

was not large, but it was superbly appointed. There were the deep easy chairs, fitted with peculiar straps, there was a wall-to-wall carpet, indigo in color, with a deep pile, there were drapes, patterned blue, that obviously concealed other doorways, and there were pictures set on the polished paneling of the walls. They were like no paintings or photographs that Brasidus had ever seen. They glowed, seemingly, with a light of their own. They were three-dimensional. They were like little windows on to other worlds.

Brasidus could not help staring at the one nearest to him. It could have been a typical scene on his own Sparta—distant, snow-capped peaks in the background, blue water and yellow sand, then, in the foreground, the golden-brown bodies of naked athletes.

But . . .

Brasidus looked more closely. Roughly half of the figures were human—and the rest of them were like this mysterious Margaretlazenby. So that was what he must look like unclothed. The deformity of the upper part of the body was bad enough; that of the lower part was shocking.

"Arcadia," said Johngrimes. "A *very* pleasant planet. The people are enthusiastic nudists—but, of course, they have the climate for it."

"We," said Diomedes, turning his attention to the picture from the one that he had been studying, a bleak, mountain range in silhouette against a black sky, "exercise naked in all weathers."

"You would," replied Johngrimes lightly.

"So," went on Diomedes after a pause, "this Margaretlazenby of yours is an Arcadian." He got to his feet to study the hologram more closely. "H'm. How do they reproduce? Oddly enough, I

have seen the same deformation on the bodies of some children who have been exposed. Coincidence, of course."

"You Spartans live up to your name," said Johngrimes coldly.

"I don't see what you mean, Lieutenant Commander. But no matter. I think I begin to understand. These Arcadians are a subject race—intelligent but nonhuman, good enough to serve in subordinate capacities, but temperamentally, at least, unqualified for full command."

"Doctor Lazenby was born on Arcadia. It's a good job she's not here to listen to you saying that."

"But it's true, isn't it? H'm. What amazes and disgusts me about this picture is the way in which humans are mingling with these . . . these aliens on terms of apparent equality."

"I suppose you could look at it that way."

"Here, even though we are all Men, we are careful not to be familiar with any but privileged helots. And these Arcadians are *aliens*."

"Some time," said Johngrimes, "I must make a careful study of your social history. It should be fascinating. Although that is really Peggy's job."

"Peggy?"

"Doctor Lazenby."

"And some time," said Diomedes, "*I* must make inquiries as to your system of nomenclature. I have heard you call this Margaretlazenby by his rank and profession, with the first part of his name missing. And I have heard you call him Peggy."

Johngrimes laughed. "I suppose that it is rather confusing to people who have only one name apiece. *We* have at least two—the surname, or family name . . ."

"But there is only one family. The State."

"On Sparta, perhaps. But let me finish, Captain Diomedes. We have the family name, which, with us, comes last, although some human races put it first. Then we have one, if not more, given name. Then we have nicknames. For example, Margaret, one word, Lazenby, one word. Peggy—which for some obscure reason is a corruption of Margaret. Of course, she could also be called Maggie or Meg. Or Peg. In my own case—John Grimes. But that 'John' can be changed to 'Jack' or 'Johnnie' by people who really know me."

"Like Theo for Theopompus," contributed Brasidus.

"Yes. Some of our nicknames are curtailments, like Margie or Margo for Margaret."

"How many names *has* that being got?" exploded Diomedes.

"I've heard her called other things—and called her them myself. But you wouldn't know what a bitch is, would you?"

"Doubtless some exotic beast you've run across on your travels. But, Lieutenant Commander, you keep on using these odd pronouns—'she' and 'her.' Are they confined to Arcadians?"

"You could say that." Grimes seemed to be amused by something. "Now, gentlemen, may I offer you refreshment? The sun's not yet over the yardarm, but a drop of alcohol won't kill us. Or would you rather have coffee?"

"Coffee? What's that?"

"Don't you have it here? Perhaps you would like to try some now."

"If you partake with us," said Diomedes cautiously.

"But of course." Grimes got to his feet, went to

his desk, picked up a telephone. "Pantry? Captain here. I'd like my coffee now, please. Large pot, with all the trimmings. Three cups."

He took an oddly shaped wooden...instrument(?) off the desk top, stuffed a hollow bowl at the end of it with what looked like a dried brown weed, put the thin stem in his mouth, applied a flame from a little metal contraption to the open top of the bowl. He inhaled with apparent pleasure, then expelled from the between his lips a cloud of fragrant fumes. "Sorry," he said, "do you smoke?" He opened an ornamental box, displaying rows of slim cylinders obviously rolled from the brown weed.

"I think that one strange luxury will be enough for one day, Lieutenant Commander," said Diomedes, to Brasidus' disappointment.

The door to the outside alleyway opened. A spaceman came in, by his uniform not an officer, carrying a large silver tray on which rested a steaming silver pot, a silver jug and a silver bowl filled with some white powder, and also three cups of gleaming, crested porcelain each standing in its own little plate. But it was not the tray at which Diomedes and Brasidus stared; it was at the bearer.

He was obviously yet another Arcadian.

Brasidus glanced from him to the picture, and back again. He realized that he was wondering what the spaceman would look like stripped of that severe, functional clothing.

"Milk, sir? Sugar?" the man was asking.

"I don't think that they have them on this planet, Sheila," said Grimes. "There's quite a lot that they don't have."

Chapter Seven

SLOWLY DIOMEDES AND Brasidus made their way down the ramp from the airlock. Both were silent, and the Sergeant, at least, was being hard put to sort and to evaluate the multitude of new impressions that had crowded upon him. The coffee—could it be a habit-forming drug? But it was good. And that burning weed the fumes of which Lieutenant Commander Grimes had inhaled with such enjoyment. And the un-Spartan luxury in which Grimes lived—luxury utterly unsuitable for a fighting man. And this Interstellar Federation, an officer of whose navy—although it was called the Survey Service—he claimed to be.

And those oddly disturbing Arcadians (if they were Arcadians)—the doctor Lazenby, the steward Sheila, and one or two more whom the Spartans had glimpsed on their way ashore . . .

They were out of earshot of the ship now, halfway between the airlock and the gate, outside which Hector and the other hoplites had stiffened to attention. Diomedes said, "Come to my office, Sergeant. I want to talk things over with you. There's a lot that I don't understand, but much of it strengthens my suspicions."

"Of whom, sir? This Lieutenant Commander Grimes?"

"No. He's just a spaceman, the same as Captain Bill and Captain Jim of the *Venus* and the *Hera*. If his service prefers to tack a double-barreled label on him, that's his worry. Oh, I want to find out where the ship *is* from and what's the *real* reason for its visit, but my main suspicions are much nearer home."

They passed through the gate, opened for them and locked after them by Hector, Old Cleon approached them, was brushed off by Diomedes. They continued their march to the office, although in the case of Diomedes it was more of a waddle.

"In my job," went on the Security Captain, buckling on his pistol belt as he walked, "I'm no respecter of persons. I shouldn't be earning my pay if I were." He gestured upwards. "Flight Admiral Ajax up there, for example. He holds his rank—and his life—only because I do not choose to act yet. When I do . . ." He closed his pudgy fist decisively and suggestively. "You're an ambitious man, Brasidus. And an intelligent one. I've had my eye on you for some time. I have been thinking of asking to have you transferred to Security. And when Diomedes *asks*, people hurry to oblige him."

"Thank you, sir."

"With promotion to lieutenant, of course."

"Thank you, sir."

"Think nothing of it. I need a young assistant for the . . . the legwork." He smiled, showing all his uneven, discolored teeth, obviously pleased with the expression that he had just coined. "The legwork," he repeated.

The two men entered the Spaceport Security

Office, passed through into Diomedes' private room. At the Captain's order, Brasidus sat down. The chair was hard, comfortless, yet he felt far happier on it than he had felt in the luxury of Lieutenant Commander Grimes' day cabin. Diomedes produced a flagon of beer, two mugs. He poured. "To our . . . partnership," he said.

"To our partnership, sir."

"Now, *Lieutenant* Brasidus, what I am saying to you is strictly confidential. I need not remind you of the consequences to yourself if you abuse my confidence. To begin with, I played along with this man Grimes. I asked the silly questions that he'd assume that I would ask. But I formed my own conclusions."

"And what were they, sir?"

"Oh, I'm not telling you yet, young Brasidus. I could be wrong—and I want your mind to remain uninfluenced by any theories of mine. But they tie in, they tie in. They tie in with the most heinous crime of all—treason to the State. Now, tell me, who're the most powerful men on Sparta?"

"The most powerful man is the King, sir."

Diomedes' thin eyebrows lifted, arching over his muddy eyes. "Is he? But no matter. And I said 'the most powerful *men*.' "

"The Council, sir."

"H'm. Could be. *Could* be. But . . ."

"What are you driving at, sir?"

"What about the doctors, our precious medical priesthood? Don't they control the birth machines? Don't they decide who among the newly born is to live, and who, to die? Don't they conduct the fatherhood tests? Don't they say, in effect, that there shall be so many members of the

military caste, so many helots—*and so many doctors?*"

"Yes. That's so, sir. But how could they be traitors?"

"Opportunity, dear boy. Opportunity. Opportunity for a betrayal of the principles upon which our State was founded. Frankly, although I have long harbored suspicions, I did not really think that it was possible until the man Grimes landed here with his ship and his mixed crew. Now I realize the evil spell that can be exerted by those . . . creatures."

"What creatures?" demanded Brasidus as impatiently as he dared.

"The Arcadians? Yes—that's as good a name as any." He refilled the mugs. "Now, I have to make my report and my recommendations to the Council. When Grimes made his first psionic contact with the spaceport authorities, before he reentered normal Space Time, he requested permission to land and to take a census, and also to carry out ecological and ethological surveys. Ethology, by the way, is the science of behavior. I learned that much, although I've been making use of its principles for years. Later he confirmed this by normal radio—psionic reception at this end was rather garbled as our telepaths were completely unfamiliar with so many new concepts.

"As you well know, after your many spells of spaceport guard duty, it has always been contrary to Council policy to allow visiting spacemen to mingle with our population. But I shall recommend that in this case an exception be made, arguing that Grimes and his men are quite harmless, also that the Federation—yes, I'm afraid that

there *is* one—is obviously powerful and might take offense if its servants are not hospitably received.

"My real reason for the recommendation I shall keep to myself."

"And what is it, sir?"

"When a pot boils, Brasidus, all sorts of scum comes to the top. A few . . . Arcadians running around on Sparta might well bring the pot to the boil. And who will get scalded? *That* is the question."

"You don't like the doctors, Captain?"

"That I do not. I am hoping that those whom I suspect of treason will be forced to act—and to act rashly."

"There *is* something suspicious about them—or about some of them." Briefly, but omitting nothing, Brasidus told Diomedes of his encounter with Heraklion in the crèche. "He was hiding something," he concluded. "I am sure of that."

"And you're ideally situated to find out what it was, Brasidus." Diomedes was thoughtful. "This is the way that we shall play it. Officially you are still a sergeant in the Police Battalion. Your pay will be made up, however, to lieutenant's rates out of Security funds. You will be relieved of spaceport guard duties. You will discover, in fact, that your captain will be allowing you considerable free time—free insofar as *he* is concerned. As far as *I* am concerned, it will not be so free. Off duty, you will be able to visit your friend Achron at the crèche. I already knew of your friendship with him, as a matter of fact—that was one of the reasons why I was considering having you transferred to my Branch. One of the nurses might have

been a better recruit—but their loyalties are so unreliable. On duty, you will act as escort to Lieutenant Commander Grimes and his officers.

"And you will report to me everything—and I mean *everything*–you learn."

"And what shall I learn, sir?"

"You'll be surprised. It could be that I shall be, too." He picked up the telephone on his desk, ordered his car brought round to the office. Then he said to Brasidus, "Give Hector his instructions. He can carry on until relieved. Then you can ride with me back to the city."

Chapter Eight

BACK IN THE city, Diomedes had his driver proceed directly to the police barracks. There, with no trouble, he obtained an interview with Brasidus' commanding officer. Brasidus, sitting on the hard bench outside the captain's office, wondered what was being said about him. Then the door opened and he was called in.

He looked at the two men confronting him—the squat, somehow squalid Diomedes, the tall, soldierly Lycurgus. Diomedes looked smugly satisfied, Lycurgus, resentful. There could be no doubt as to how things had gone—and, suddenly, Brasidus hoped that he would not regret this change of masters.

"Sergeant—or should I say Lieutenant?" growled Lycurgus. "I think that you already know of your transfer. Officially, however, you are still a sergeant and you are still working for me. Your real orders, however, will come from Captain Diomedes." He paused, then went on, "You are relieved from duty until 0800 hours tomorrow morning, at which time you are to report to the spaceport." He turned to Diomedes. "He's all yours, Diomedes."

"Thank you, Lycurgus. You may accompany me, Brasidus."

They left the office. Diomedes asked, "And when is your friend Achron on duty again, young man?"

"He has the midnight to 0600 shift for the rest of this week, sir."

"Good. Then I propose that you spend the rest of the day at leisure; after all, this was supposed to be your free time, wasn't it? Get some sleep this evening before midnight—you might visit Achron again then. Of course, you will report to me at the spaceport tomorrow morning. I have no doubt that I shall be able to persuade the Council to accede to Lieutenant Commander Grimes' requests, so you will be required for escort duties."

"And when I visit Achron, sir? Am I to carry out any investigations?"

"Yes. But cautiously, cautiously. Find out what you can without sticking your neck out. But I must leave you now. I have to report to my lords and masters." His sardonic intonation left no doubt in Brasidus' mind as to who was the real lord and master.

Brasidus went to the mess hall for a late and solitary luncheon of bread, lukewarm stew and beer. Then, conscious of his new (but secret) rank and his new responsibilities, he decided to visit the library. There were books, of course, in the recreation hall of the barracks, but these were mainly works of fiction, including the imaginative thrillers that were his favorite reading. (But none of the writers had imagined monsters so fantastic as these Arcadians—fantastic because of similarities to as well as differences from normal humankind.) He was in uniform still, but that did

not matter. However, there was his belt, with its holstered pistols. He went to the desk sergeant to turn it in.

"Keep it, Brasidus," he was told. "Captain Lycurgus said that you were on instant call as long as the spaceship's in port."

It made sense—just as the regulation forbidding the carrying of firearms when not on duty made sense; they might be used in a drunken brawl at one of the Clubs. However, Brasidus always felt happier when armed and so did not inquire further. He went out into the street, his iron-tipped sandals ringing on the cobbles. He stood on the sidewalk to watch a troop of armored cavalry pass, the tracks of the chariots striking sparks from the paving, the gay pennons whipping from the slender radio masts, the charioteers in their plumed helmets standing tall and proud in their turrets.

Cavalry in the city. The Council must be apprehensive.

Brasidus continued his walk when the chariots had gone by. He strode confidently up the wide stone steps to the white-pillared library entrance, but inside the cool building diffidence assailed him. An elderly man behind a big desk surveyed him disapprovingly, his gaze lingering on the weapons. "Yes, Sergeant?" he demanded coldly.

"I . . . I want to do some reading."

"Unless you've come here to make an arrest, that's obvious. What sort of reading? We do have a thriller section." He made "thriller" sound like a dirty word.

"No, not thrillers. We've plenty of those in our own recreation hall. History."

The bushy white eyebrows lifted. "Oh. Historical thrillers."

"No. Not thrillers." Brasidus was finding it hard to keep his temper. "History."

The old man did not get up from his seat, but turned and pointed. "Through there, Sergeant. That door. If you want to take a book out, you'll have to sign for it and pay a deposit, but there are tables and benches if you want to read on the premises."

"Thank you," said Brasidus.

He went through the door, noted the sign "HISTORICAL SECTION" above it. He stared at the book-lined walls, not knowing where to begin. He walked to the nearer shelves, just inside the doorway, the clatter of his uniform sandals on the marble floor drawing disapproving glares from the half dozen or so readers seated at the tables. But they were only helots, by the looks of them, and their feelings did not matter.

He scanned the row of titles. *A History of Sparta*, by Alcamenes. That would do to start with. He pulled it from its place on the shelf, carried it to a vacant table, sat down. He adjusted the reading lamp.

Yes, he had been lucky in his random choice. This seemed to be a very comprehensive history—starting, in fact, in prehistorical days. The story it told should not have been new to Brasidus. After all, he had been exposed to a normal education. But he had not paid much attention to his teachers; he had known that he was destined to be a soldier. So, apart from the study of past campaigns, of what value was education to him?

But here it all was. The evolution of a biped from a big-headed quadruped, with forelimbs modified to arms and hands. The slow, slow beginnings of civilization, of organized science. And then, at last, the invention of the birth machine by Lacedaemon, the perfection of the technique by which the father's seed could be brought to maturity apart from his body. No longer hampered by the process of budding, men went ahead by leaps and bounds. Aristodemus, the first King of Sparta, organized and drilled his army and navy, subjugated the other city-states, imposed the name of his capital upon the entire planet, although (even to this day, as Brasidus knew) there were occasional armed revolts.

And there were the scientific advancements. The mechanical branch of the priesthood advanced from aeronautics to astronautics and, under Admiral Latterus, a star fleet was launched, its object being the colonization of a relatively nearby planet. But Latterus was ambitious, set up his own kingdom, and with him he had taken the only priests who knew the secret of the interstellar drive. After many generations the people of Latterhaven—as Latterus' colony had been called—revisited Sparta. A trade agreement was drawn up and signed, complying with which the Latterhaveneers sent two ships every year, bringing various manufactured goods in exchange for shipments of the spices that grew only on Sparta.

Impatiently Brasidus turned to the index. Interstellar Federation. No. Not listed. Interstellar ships, interstellar drive, but no Federation. But that would have been too much to expect. Latterhaven had a history, but its people kept it to

themselves. This Admiral Latterus had his ships and, no doubt, one planet had not been enough for him. He had his birth machines—and, even though Brasidus was no biologist, he was sure that it would be possible to accelerate production. The natural way—intercourse between two beings and, possibly, each one budding—was slow and wasteful. Suppose that *all* the seed were utilized. Then how long would it take to build up teeming populations on a dozen worlds?

Terra, for example.

And Arcadia?

No. Not Arcadia.

But *were* the Arcadians humans? Could they be the result of a malfunction of the birth machine set up on their planet? If this was the case, how could they, with their obvious physical deficiencies, reproduce?

Brasidus looked up Arcadia in the index. It was not, of course, listed.

He put Alcamenes' book back on the shelf, went out to see the old librarian. "Have you," he asked, "anything on the Interstellar Federation? Or on a world called Arcadia?"

"I told you," huffed the ancient man, "that it was fiction you wanted. Science fiction, at that."

"Suppose I told you that there *is* an Interstellar Federation? Suppose I told you that there are, at present, Arcadians on Sparta?"

"I'd say, young man, that you were quite mad—if it wasn't for your uniform. And it's not that I'm afraid of *that*, or of the guns you wear into my library. It's because that I know—as who doesn't?—that a strange unscheduled ship has made a landing at the spaceport. And you're a

sergeant in the Police Battalion of the Army, so you know more about what's going on than we poor scholars." He cackled. "Go on, Sergeant. Tell me more. I am always willing to acquire new knowledge."

"What rumors have you heard?" asked Brasidus. After all, he was a Security officer now and might as well start acting like one.

"They say that this ship's a battleship—and, with the Air Navy hanging over the spaceport like a bad smell and the streets full of cavalry, it could well be. They say that the President of Latterhaven has demanded our instant surrender. They say, too, that the ship's not from Latterhaven at all, that it's manned by robots with twin turrets on their chests from which they shoot lethal rays."

"They must be functional . . . " mused Brasidus, "I suppose."

"What must be?" demanded the librarian.

"Those twin turrets. Good day to you."

He clanked out through the wide doorway, down the stone steps.

Chapter Nine

BRASIDUS WALKED BACK to his barracks, thinking over what he had read and what the librarian had told him. It all tied in—almost. But how did it tie in with Diomedes' suspicions of the medical priesthood? Perhaps tonight he would be able to find something out.

In the mess hall he partook of an early evening meal—and still his active brain was working. The spices exported to Latterhaven were a luxury, so much so that they were used but rarely in Spartan cookery. *And you can say that again,* Brasidus told himself, chewing viciously on his almost flavorless steak. Obviously they were also a luxury on the other planet; otherwise why should the Latterhaveneers find it worthwhile to send two ships every year for the annual shipment? But what *did* the Latterhaveneers bring in return for the spices? Manufactured goods. But *what* manufactured goods?

Brasidus, as a spaceport guard, had watched the Latterhaven ships discharging often enough. He had seen the unmarked wooden crates sliding down the conveyor belts into the waiting trucks, had vaguely wondered where these same trucks were bound when, escorted by police chariots,

they had left the spaceport. He had made inquiries once, of one of the charioteers whom he knew slightly. "We just convey them into the city," the man had told him. "They're unloaded at that big warehouse—you know the one, not far from the crèche. Andronicus Imports."

And what did Andronicus import?

Diomedes might know.

Finishing his meal, Brasidus wandered into the recreation hall. He bought a mug of sweet wine from the steward on duty, sat down to watch television. There was the news first—but there was no mention of the landing of *Seeker III*. Fair enough. The Council had still to decide what to say about it as well as what to do about it. The main coverage was of the minor war in progress between Pharis and Messenia. Peisander, the Messenian general, was something of an innovator. Cleombrotus of Pharis was conservative, relying upon his hoplites to smash through the Messenian lines, and his casualties, under the heavy fire of the Messenian archers, were heavy. There were those who maintained that the bow should be classed as a firearm and its use forbidden to the ordinary soldiery, those not in the Police Battalion. Of course, if the hoplites, with their spears and swords, got loose among the archers, there would be slaughter. Against that, the archers, lightly armored, far less encumbered, could run much faster. The commentator, hovering above the battlefield, made this same comment, and Brasidus congratulated himself upon his grasp of military principles.

Following the news came a coverage of the games at Helos. Brasidus watched the wrestling

bouts for a while, then got up and left the hall. After all, the games were no more than a substitute for war—and war, to every Spartan worth his salt, was the only sport for a man. Nonlethal sports were only for helots.

Finding the duty orderly, the Sergeant gave instructions to be called at 2330 hours.

He was almost at the crèche when he saw a slight form ahead of him. He quickened his pace, overtook the other pedestrian. As he had thought it would be, it was Achron.

The nurse was pleased to see him. He said, "I rang the barracks, Brasidus, and they told me that you were on duty all day."

"I was, but I'm off the hook now."

"You were at the spaceport, weren't you? Is it true that this ship is from *outside*, with a crew of monsters?"

"Just a ship," Brasidus told him.

"But the *monsters?*"

"What monsters?"

"Horribly deformed beings from outer space. *Mutants.*"

"Well, Diomedes and myself were entertained on board by the commander, and he's human enough."

"More than you can say for Diomedes," commented Achron spitefully. "I used to like him *once*, but not any more. Not after what he *did.*"

"What did he do?"

"I'll tell you sometime. Are you coming in, Brasidus?"

"Why not?"

"Telemachus will be pleased. He was saying to

me what a fine example you are to the average Spartan."

"Back again, Sergeant?" the old man greeted him. "I shall soon think that you would welcome a return to the bad old days of budding."

"Hardly," said Brasidus, trying to visualize the difficulties that would be experienced in the use of weapons when encumbered by undetached offspring.

"And were you out at the spaceport today, Brasidus?"

"Yes."

"What are they *really* like, these monsters?"

"Captain Diomedes bound us all to secrecy."

"A pity. A pity. If you were to tell me what you saw, it would never go beyond the walls of this building."

"I'm sorry, Telemachus. You'll just have to wait until the news is released by the Council."

"The Council." The old man laughed bitterly. "In *my* day there were men of imagination serving on it. But now . . . " He looked up at the wall clock. "Well, in you go. Phillip is waiting for his relief. He was *most* unpleasant when he discovered that *I* had detained you this time yesterday."

Brasidus followed his friend to the ward where he was on duty. This time Phillip was in a better mood—and he, too, tried to pump the Sergeant about the day's events at the spaceport. Finally he gave up and left the two friends. As before, Brasidus allowed himself to be led to the sons who might be his own. Yet again he was unable to detect any real resemblance. And then—it was what he had been waiting for—all the babies awoke.

He retreated hastily, as any normal man would have done, leaving Achron to cope. But he did not go to the door by which he had entered, but to the farther doorway. He waited there for a minute or so, thinking that Doctor Heraklion or one of his colleagues might be attracted by the uproar—but, after all, such noises were common enough in the crèche.

But neither Heraklion nor anybody else appeared in the long, dimly lit corridor, and Brasidus decided to venture further afield. He was barefooted, so could walk silently. He was wearing a civilian tunic, which was advantageous. Should anybody who did not know him see him, his appearance would be less likely to cause alarm than if he was in uniform.

Cautiously he advanced along the corridor. His own was the only movement. If there were any sounds, he could not hear them for the bawling behind him. On either side of the corridor there were numbered doors. Storerooms? Laboratories? Cautiously he tried one. It was locked.

He continued his prowl. It was a long corridor, and he did not wish to get too far from the ward —yet this was a golden opportunity to find something out. He came to a cross passageway, hesitated. He saw that a chair was standing just inside the left-hand passage. Presumably it had just been evacuated—there was a book open, face down, on the seat, a flagon and a mug beside it. A guard? If so, not a very good one. No doubt he had some pressing reason for deserting his post—but he would never have done so, at no matter what cost to personal dignity, had he been a member of the military caste. A helot, then—or even a doctor?

Heraklion? Brasidus did not know what the man's hours of duty were, but they could coincide with or overlap Achron's.

He picked up the book, looked at the title, *Galactic Spy*, by Delmar Brudd. Yet another of those odd double names. He turned to the title page, saw that the novel had been published by the Phoenix Press, Latterton, on the planet of Latterhaven. So this was a sample of the manufactured goods exported by that planet. But why should these books not be put into general circulation? If it were a question of freight, large editions could easily be printed here on Sparta.

He was suddenly aware that a door was opening. He heard someone say, "I must leave you, dear. After all, it *is* my turn for sentry duty."

A strange voice replied. It was too high-pitched, held an odd, throaty quality. Yet it was oddly familiar. What—*who*—did it remind Brasidus of? Even as he slid silently back around the corner—but not before he had replaced the book as he had found it—he had the answer. It sounded like the voice of the Arcadian, Margaret Lazenby. It was certainly not the voice of any native of Sparta.

Still, Brasidus was reluctant to retreat. He continued to peer around the corner, ready to jerk back in a split second. "I prefer you to the others, Heraklion," the Arcadian was saying.

"I'm flattered, Sally. But you shouldn't have come to me. It's very dangerous. If Orestes found that I'd deserted my post, there'd be all hell let loose. And besides . . ."

"Besides what?"

"Only last night—or, rather, yesterday morning—that revolting young pansy Achron

had his boyfriend with him in the ward—and this same boyfriend is a police sergeant. A dumb one, luckily. Even so, we have to be careful."

"Buy why, Heraklion, why? You're priests as well as doctors. You control this planet. It would be easy for you to engineer a rough parity of the numbers of men and women—and then just let Nature take its course."

"You don't understand . . ."

"That's what you're always saying. But you saw to it that we were educated and drew some far-fetched analogy between ourselves and the hetaerae of ancient Greece. I know that we're petted and pampered—but only within these walls. We've never seen outside them. Is that how women live on Latterhaven, on Terra, on all the Man-colonized plaents?"

"You don't understand, Sally."

"No. Of course not. I'm only a woman. And it's obvious that you don't want me, so I'm getting back to my own quarters. To the *harem*." This final word, dripping contempt, was strange to Brasidus.

"As you will."

"And the next time you come to *me*, I shall be busy."

The door opened properly, but still Brasidus did not withdraw his head. The couple who emerged from the storeroom or whatever it was had their backs to him. The shorter of the pair was dressed in a brief, black tunic woven from some transparent material. His lustrous, auburn hair hung to his smooth, gleaming shoulders and his rounded buttocks gleamed through the flimsy garment. He walked with a peculiarly provocative

swing of the hips. Brasidus stared after him—and so, luckily, did Heraklion. Before the doctor could turn, Brasidus withdrew, hurried silently back along the corridor. There were no shouts, no pursuit. The only noise came from the ward, where Achron—*and what was a pansy?*—still had not pacified his charges.

Conquering his repugnance, Brasidus went in. "Can I help?" he asked the nurse.

"Oh, you're still here, Brasidus. I thought you'd have run away *ages* ago. Bring me some bottles from the dispenser, will you? You know how."

Brasidus obeyed. While he was so engaged, Doctor Heraklion strode through the doorway. "Really, Sergeant," he snapped, "I can't have this. This is the second time that you've come blundering in here, disturbing our charges. I shall have to complain to your superior."

"I'm sorry, Doctor."

"That isn't good enough, Sergeant. Leave, please. At once."

Brasidus left. He would gain nothing by staying any longer. And perhaps he should telephone Diomedes to tell him what he had learned. But what had he learned? That there was a nest of Arcadian spies already on Sparta? Spies—or infiltrators? Infiltrators—and the doctors working in collusion with them?

And how did that tie in with the visit of *Seeker III*, a vessel with Arcadians in its own crew?

Very well indeed, Brasidus told himself. *Very well indeed.*

He rang Diomedes from the first telephone booth he came to, but there was no answer. He rang again from the barracks, and there was still

no answer. He looked at the time, shrugged his shoulders, went to his cubicle and turned in.

While he was having his breakfast, prior to going out to the spaceport, Captain Lycurgus sent for him. "Sergeant," he said, "I've received a complaint. About you. From Doctor Heraklion, at the crèche. In future, leave his nurses alone in duty hours."

"Very good, sir."

"And one more thing, Brasidus . . ."

"Yes, sir?"

"I shall pass the Doctor's complaint on to Captain Diomedes. I understand that he gives you your real orders these days."

Chapter Ten

DIOMEDES SENT HIS car round to the barracks in the morning to pick up Brasidus. It was another fine day, and the drive out to the spaceport was pleasant. The driver was not disposed to talk, which suited Brasidus. He was turning over and over in his mind what he would tell Diomedes and was wondering what conclusions Diomedes would draw from the events in the crèche. Meanwhile, there was the morning air to enjoy, still crisp, not yet tainted by the pungency from the spice fields on either side of the road.

Above the spaceport the ships of the Air Navy still circled and, as the car neared the final approaches, Brasidus noted that heavy motorized artillery as well as squadrons of armored cavalry had been brought up. Whatever John Grimes had in mind, the Police Battalion would be ready for him. But Brasidus did not regret that he had not, as a recruit, been posted to a mechanized unit. A hoplite such as himself was always fully employed, the armored cavalry, but rarely, the artillery, almost never.

The main gates opened as the car, without slackening speed, approached them. The duty guard saluted smartly—the vehicle rather than

himself, Brasidus guessed. There was a spectacular halt in a column of swirling dust outside the Security office. Diomedes was standing in the doorway. He sneezed, glared at the driver, withdrew hastily into the building. Brasidus waited until the dust had subsided before getting out of the car.

"That Agis!" snarled the Captain as he sketchily acknowledged Brasidus' salute, "I'll have him transferred to the infantry!"

"I've seen him do the same when he's been driving you, sir."

"Hmph! That's different, young man. Well, he got you here in good time. Just as well, as I've instructions for you."

"And I've a report for you, sir."

"Already, Brasidus? You've wasted no time." He smiled greasily. "As a matter of fact, I've already had a call from Captain Lycurgus, passing on a complaint from Doctor Heraklion. What did you learn?"

Brasidus, who possessed a trained memory, told his superior what he had seen and heard. Diomedes listened intently. Then he asked, "And what do you think, Brasidus?"

"That Arcadians were already on Sparta before *Seeker* landed, sir."

"Arcadians? Oh, yes. The twin-turreted androids. Did you hear that rumor, too? And how do you think they got here?"

"There could have been secret landings, sir. Or they could have been smuggled in aboard *Latterhaven Venus* and *Latterhaven Hera*."

"And neither of these theories throws Security in a very good light, does it? And the smuggling

one rather reflects upon the spaceport guards."

"They needn't be smuggled in as adults, sir. Children could be hidden in some of those crates discharged by the Latterhaven ships. They could be drugged, too, so that they couldn't make any noise."

"Ingenious, Brasidus. Ingenious. But I've been aboard the *Venus* and the *Hera* often enough and, believe me, it would be impossible for either ship to carry more than her present complement. Not even children. They're no more than cargo boxes with a handful of cubicles, cells that we should consider inadequate for our criminals, perched on top of them."

"The cargo holds?"

"No. You can't have a man—or a child—living in any confined space without his leaving traces."

"But they didn't just . . . *happen*, sir. The Arcadians, I mean."

"Of course not. They either budded from their fathers or came out of a birth machine." Diomedes seemed to find this amusing. "No, they didn't just happen. They were either brought here or came here under their own power. But *why?*"

"Heraklion seemed to *like* the one that he was with last night. It was . . . unnatural."

"And what were *your* feelings toward him? Or *it?*"

Brasidus blushed. He muttered, "As you said yourself, sir, these beings possess a strange, evil power."

"So they do. So they do. That's why we must try to foil any plot in which they're engaged." He looked at his watch. "Meanwhile, my own original plan still stands. The Council has approved my suggestion that *Seeker's* personnel be allowed

to leave their ship. Today you will, using my car and driver, escort Lieutenant Commander Grimes and Doctor Lazenby to the city, where an audience with the King and the Council has been arranged for them. You will act as guide as well as escort, and—you are armed—also as guard."

"To protect them, sir?"

"Yes. I suppose so. But mainly to protect the King. How do we know that when they are in his presence they will not pull a weapon of some kind? You will be with them; you will be situated to stop them at once. Of course, there will be plenty of my own men in the Council Chamber, but you would be able to act without delay if you had to."

"I see, sir."

"All right. Now we are to go aboard the ship to tell them that everything has been organized."

A junior officer met them in the airlock, escorted them up to the commander's quarters. Grimes was attired in what was obviously ceremonial uniform—*and very hot and uncomfortable it must be,* thought Brasidus. Professionally he ran his eye over the spaceman for any evidence of weapons. There was one, in full sight, but not a very dangerous one. It was a sword, its hilt gold-encrusted, in a gold-trimmed sheath at his left side. More for show than use, was Brasidus' conclusion.

John Grimes grinned at his two visitors. "I hate this rig," he confided, "but I suppose I have to show the flag. Doctor Lazenby is lucky. Nobody has ever gotten around to designing full dress for women officers."

There was a tap at the door and Margaret

Lazenby entered. He was dressed as he had been the previous day, although the clothing itself, with its bright braid and buttons, was obviously an outfit that was worn only occasionally. He said pleasantly, "Good morning, Captain Diomedes. Good morning, Sergeant. Are *you* coming with us, Captain?"

"Unfortunately, no. I have urgent business here at the spaceport. But Brasidus will be your personal escort. Also, I have detailed two chariots to convoy you into the city."

"*Chariots?* Oh, you mean those light tanks that we've been watching from the control room."

"*Tanks?*" repeated Diomedes curiously. "A tank is something you keep fluids in."

"There are tanks *and* tanks. Where we come from, a tank can be an armored vehicle with caterpillar tracks."

"And what does 'caterpillar' mean?"

Grimes said, "Over the generations new words come into the language and old words drop out. Obviously there are no caterpillars on Sparta, and so the term is meaningless. However, Captain Diomedes, you are welcome to make use of our microfilm library; I would suggest the *Encyclopedia Galactica.*"

"Thank you, Lieutenant Commander." Diomedes looked at his watch. "But may I suggest that you and Doctor Lazenby proceed now to your audience?"

"And will the rest of my crew be allowed ashore?"

"That depends largely upon the impression that you make upon the King and his Council."

"Where's my fore-and-aft hat?" muttered

Grimes. He got up, went through one of the curtained doorways. He emerged wearing an odd, gold-braided, black cloth helmet. He said, "Lead on, MacDuff."

"It should be 'Lay on, MacDuff,' " Margaret Lazenby told him.

"I know, I know."

"And who is MacDuff?" asked Diomedes.

"He's dead. He was the Thane of Cawdor."

"And where is Cawdor?"

Grimes sighed.

Brasidus, although he could not say why he did so, enjoyed the ride to the city. He, Grimes and Margaret Lazenby were in the back seat of the car, with the Arcadian (it was as good a label as any) sitting between the two humans. He was stirred by the close proximity of this strange being, almost uncomfortably so. When Margaret Lazenby leaned across him to look at a medusa tree swarming with harpies, he realized that those peculiar fleshy mounds, which even the severe uniform could not hide, were deliciously soft. So much for the built-in weapon theory. "What fantastic birds!" exclaimed the Arcadian.

"They are harpies," said Brasidus.

"Those round bodies do look like human heads, don't they? They could be straight out of Greek mythology."

"So you have already made a study of our legends?" asked Brasidus, interested.

"Of course." Margaret Lazenby smiled. (His lips against the white teeth were very red. Could it be natural?) "But they aren't just *your* legends. They belong to all Mankind."

"I suppose they do. Admiral Latterus must have carried well-stocked libraries aboard his ships."

"Admiral Latterus?" asked Margaret Lazenby curiously.

"The founder of Latterhaven. I am surprised that you have not heard of him. He was sent from Sparta to establish the colony, but he made himself King of the new world and never returned."

"What a beautiful history," murmured the Arcadian. "Carefully tailored to fit the facts. Tell me, Brasidus, did you ever hear of the Third Expansion, or of Captain John Latter, master of the early timejammer *Utah*? Come to that, did you ever hear of the First Expansion?"

"You talk in riddles, Margaret Lazenby."

"And you and your world are riddles that must be solved, Brasidus."

"Careful, Peggy," warned John Grimes.

The Arcadian turned to address his commander—and, as he did so, Brasidus was acutely conscious of the softness and resilience of the rump under the uniform kilt. "They'll have to be told the truth some time, John—and I'm sure that Brasidus will forgive me for using him as the guinea pig for the first experiment. But I am a little drunk, I guess. All this glorious fresh air after weeks of the canned variety. And look at those houses! With architecture like that, there should be *real* chariots escorting us, not these hunks of animated ironmongery. Still, apart from his sidearms, Brasidus is dressed properly."

"The ordinary hoplites," said Brasidus with some pride, "those belonging to the subject city-states, are armed only with swords and spears."

"They didn't have wristwatches in ancient

Sparta," Grimes pointed out.

"Oh, be practical, John. He could hardly wear an hourglass or a sundial on his arm, could he?"

"It's . . . phony," grumbled Grimes.

"It should be as phony as all hell, but it's not," Margaret Lazenby told him. "I wish I'd known just how things are here, though. I'd have soaked up Hellenic history before we came here. . . . What are those animals, Brasidus? They look almost like a sort of hairless wolf."

"They are the scavengers. They keep the streets of the city clean. There is a larger variety, wild, out on the hills and plains. *They* are the wolves."

"But that one, there. Look! It's Siamese twins. It seems to be in pain. Why doesn't somebody *do* something about it?"

"But why? It's only budding. Don't *you* reproduce like us—or like we used to, before Lacedaemon invented the birth machine?" He paused. "But I suppose you have birth machines, too."

"We do," said Grimes—and Margaret Lazenby reddened. It was obviously a private joke of some kind.

"The glory that was Greece, the grandeur that was Rome," murmured the Arcadian after a long pause. "But this isn't—forgive me, Brasidus—quite as glorious as it should be. There's a certain . . . untidiness in your streets. And this absence of women seems . . . odd. As I recall it, the average Greek housewife was nothing much to write home about, but the hetaerae must have been ornamental."

"Did they have hetaerae in Sparta?" asked Grimes. "I thought that it was only in Athens."

We do have hetaerae in Sparta, Brasidus thought but did not say, recalling what he had seen and heard in the crèche. Sally (another queer name!) had admitted to being one. But what were hetaerae, anyhow?

"They had women," said Margaret Lazenby. "And some of them must have been reasonably good-looking, even by our standards. But Sparta was more under masculine domination than the other Greek states."

"Is that the palace ahead, Brasidus?" asked Grimes.

"It is, sir."

"Then be careful, Peggy. Watch your step—and your tongue."

"Aye, aye, Cap'n."

"And I suppose that you, Brasidus, will report everything that you've heard to Captain Diomedes?"

"Of course, sir."

"And so he should," Margaret Lazenby said. "When it gets around, these pseudo-Spartans might realize all that they are missing."

"And is the fact that they're missing it grounds for commiseration or congratulation?" asked Grimes quietly.

"Shut up!" snapped his officer mutinously.

Chapter Eleven

IT WAS NOT the first time that Brasidus had been inside the palace, but, as always, he was awed (although he tried not to show it in front of the foreigners) by the long, colonnaded, high-ceilinged halls, each with its groups of heroic statuary, each with its vivid murals depicting scenes of warfare and the chase. He marched along beside his charges (who, he was pleased to note, had fallen into step), taking pride in the rhythmic, martial clank of the files of hoplites on either side of them, the heralds, long, brazen trumpets already upraised, ahead of them. Past the ranks of Royal Guards—stiff and immobile at attention, tiers of bright-headed spears in right alignment—they progressed. He realized, with disapproval, that John Grimes and Margaret Lazenby were talking in low voices.

"More anachronisms for you, Peggy. Those guards. Spears in hand—and projectile pistols at the belt . . ."

"And look at those murals, John. Pig-sticking—those animals aren't unlike boars — on motorcycles. But these people do have good painters and sculptors."

"I prefer my statues a little less agressively mas-

culine. In fact, I prefer them nonmasculine."

"You would. I find them a pleasant change from the simpering nymphs that are supposed to be decorative on most planets."

"You would."

Brasidus turned his head. "Quiet, please, sirs. We are approaching the throne."

There was a sharp command from the officer in charge of the escort. The party crashed to a halt. The heralds put the mouthpieces of their instruments to their lips, sounded a long, discordant blast, then another. From a wide, pillared portal strode a glittering officer. "Who comes?" he demanded.

In unison the heralds chanted, "John Grimes, master of the star ship *Seeker*. Margaret Lazenby, one of his officers."

"Enter, John Grimes. Enter, Margaret Lazenby."

Again a command from the leader of the escort, and with a jangle of accouterments, the march resumed, although at a slower pace. Through the doorway they passed, halted again. There was another prolonged blast from the heralds' trumpets, a crash of grounded spear butts.

There was the King, resplendent in gold armor (which made the iron crown somehow incongruous), bearded (the only man on Sparta to be so adorned), seated erect on his high, black throne. There, ranged behind him on marble benches, was the Council—the doctors in their scarlet robes, the engineers in purple, the philosophers in black, the generals in brown and the admirals in blue. There was a small group of high-ranking helots—agronomists robed in green, industrialists in gray. All of them stared curiously at the

men from the ship, from whom the guards had fallen away. But, Brasidus noted, there was more than curiosity on the faces of the scarlet-robed doctors as they regarded Margaret Lazenby. There was recognition, puzzlement and . . . guilt?

Grimes, at heel-clicking attention, saluted smartly.

"You may advance, Lieutenant Commander," said the King.

Grimes did so, once again drawing himself to attention when within two paces from the throne.

"You may relax, John Grimes. At ease." There was a long pause, then, "We have been told that you come from another world—another world, that is, beyond our polity of Sparta and Latterhaven. We have been told that you represent a government calling itself the Interstellar Federation. Assuming that there is such an entity, what is your business on Sparta?"

"Your Majesty, my mission is to conduct a census of the Man-colonized planets in this sector of space."

"The members of our Council concerned with such matters will be able to give you all the information you need. But we are told that you and your officers wish to set foot on this world—a privilege never accorded to the crews of Latterhaven ships. May we inquire as to your motives?"

"Your Majesty, in addition to the census, we are conducting a survey."

"A survey, Lieutenant Commander?"

"Yes, Your Majesty. There are worlds, such as yours, about which little is known. There are worlds—and yours is one of them—about which much more should be known."

"And this Federation of yours" — Brasidus, watching the King's face, could see that he had not been surprised by any of Grimes' answers, that he accepted the existence of worlds other than Sparta and Latterhaven without demur, that even the mention of this fantastic Federation had been no cause for amazement—"it has considerable military strength?"

"Considerable strength, Your Majesty. My ship, for example, is but a small and unimportant unit of our fleet."

"Indeed? And your whereabouts are known?"

"The movements of all vessels are plotted by Master Control."

"And so . . . and so, supposing that some unfortunate accident were to happen to your ship and your crew on Sparta, we might, just possibly, expect a visit from one or more of your big battleships?"

"That is so, Your Majesty."

"And we could deal with them, sire!" interpolated a portly, blue-robed Council member.

The King swiveled around in his throne. "Could we, Admiral Phileus? Could we? We wish that we possessed your assurance. But we do not. It does not matter how and by whom the planets of this Federation were colonized—what does matter is that they own spaceships, which we do not, and even space warships, which even Latterhaven does not. We, a mere monarch, hesitate to advise you upon naval tactics, but we remind you that a spaceship can hang in orbit, clear of the atmosphere—and therefore beyond reach of your airships—and, at the same time, release its shower of bombs upon our cities. Consider it, Phileus." He turned back to Grimes. "So, Lieuten-

ant Commander, you seek permission for you and your men to range unhindered over the surface of our world?"

"I do, Your Majesty."

"Some of our ways and customs may be strange to you. You will not interfere. And you will impart new knowledge only to those best qualified to be its recipients."

"That is understood, Your Majesty."

"Sire!" This time it was one of the doctors. "I respectfully submit that permission to leave this outworld ship be extended only to *human* crew members."

"And what is your reason, Doctor? Let Margaret Lazenby advance so that we may inspect him."

The Arcadian walked slowly toward the King. Looking at his face, Brasidus could see that the being had lost some of his cockiness. But there was a certain defiance there still. *Should this attitude result in punishment ordered by the King,* thought Brasidus, *there will be a large measure of injustice involved.* The major portion of the blame would rest with Grimes who, after all, had so obviously failed to maintain proper disciplinary standards aboard his siip.

Cresphontes, King of All Sparta, looked long and curiously at the alien spaceman. He said at last, "They tell us that you are an Arcadian."

"That is so, Your Majesty."

"And you are a member of a space-faring race."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"Turn around, please. Slowly."

Margaret Lazenby obeyed, his face flushing.

"So . . ." mused the King. "So . . ." He swiveled in his throne so that he faced the Council. "You have all seen. You have all seen that this Arcadian

is smaller than a true man, is more slightly built. Do you think that he would be a match for one of our warriors, or even for a helot? A thousand of these creatures, armed, might be a menace. But . . . " He turned to address Grimes. "How many of them are there in your crew, Lieutenant Commander?"

"A dozen, Your Majesty."

"A mere dozen of these malformed weaklings, without arms. . . . No, there can be no danger. Obviously, since they are members of *Seeker's* crew, they can coexist harmoniously with men. So, we repeat, there is no danger."

"Sire!" It was the doctor who had raised the objection. "You do not know these beings. You do not know how treacherous they can be."

"And do you, Doctor Pausanias? And if you do know, *how do you know?*"

The Councilman paled. He said, lamely, "We are experienced, sire, in judging who is to live and who is not to live among the newborn. There are signs, reliable signs. *She*"—he pointed an accusing finger at Margaret Lazenby—"exhibits them."

"Indeed, Doctor Pausanias? We admit that a child emerging from the birth machine with such a deformed chest would be among those exposed, but how is that deformity an indication of character?"

"It is written in her face, sire."

"In *her* face? Have you suddenly learned a new language, Doctor?"

"Sire, it was a slip of the tongue. *His* face."

"So . . . Face us, Margaret Lazenby. Look at us." The King's right hand went up to and stroked his short beard. "We read no treachery in your

countenance. There is a softness, better suited to a children's nurse than to a warrior, but there is courage, and there is honesty."

"Sire!" Pausanius was becoming desperate. "Do not forget that sh—that he is an alien being. Do not forget that in these cases expression is meaningless. A woods boar, for example, will smile, but not from amiability. He smiles when at his most ferocious."

"And so do men at times." The King grinned, his teeth very white in his dark, bearded face. "We become ferocious, and we smile, when councilmen presume to tell us our business." He raised his voice. "Guards! Remove this man."

"But, sire . . ."

"Enough."

There was a scuffle at the back of the chamber as the doctor was hustled out by four hoplites. Brasidus noticed, with grim satisfaction, that none of the man's scarlet-robed colleagues made any move to defend him. He thought, *Crespontes knows where his real strength lies. With us, the military.*

"Lieutenant Commander Grimes!"

"Your Majesty?"

"We have decided that you may carry out your survey. You and your officers and men, both human and Arcadian, may leave your ship—but only as arranged with our Captain Diomedes, and only under escort. Is that quite clear?"

"Quite clear, Your Majesty. We shall see only what we are allowed to see."

"You have made a correct assessment of the situation. And now, as we have matters of import to discuss with out Council, you are dismissed."

Grimes saluted and then, slowly, he and Margaret Lazenby backed from the royal presence. Brasidus accompanied them. Beyond the door to the throne room the escort fell in about them.

As they marched out of the palace to the waiting car, Grimes asked, "Brasidus, what will happen to that doctor? The one who was dragged out of the chamber?"

"He will be beheaded, probably. But he is lucky."

"*Lucky?*"

"Yes. If he were not a doctor and a councilman, he could have his arms and legs lopped off before being exposed on the hillside with the defective children."

"You're joking, Brasidus!" exclaimed Margaret Lazenby.

"Joking? Of course not."

The Arcadian turned to Grimes. "John, can't we *do* something?"

Grimes shook his head. "Anything that we could do would mean the death of more than one man. Besides, our strict orders are not to interfere."

"It is expedient," said Margaret Lazenby bitterly, "that one man should die for the good of the people."

"Careful, Peggy. This place may be bugged. Remember that *we* aren't members of the Council."

"Spoken like a true naval officer of these decadent days. I often think that the era of gunboat diplomacy had much to recommend it."

Chapter Twelve

THEY RODE BACK to the spaceport almost in silence. Brasidus realized that the two foreigners had been shocked when told of the probable fate of Pausanius. But why should they be? He could not understand it. Surely on their world, on any word, insolence toward the King himself must result in swift and drastic punishment. To make their reaction even stranger, the doctor had spoken against them, not for them.

They sped through the streets of the city, one chariot rattling ahead of the hovercar, the second astern of it. There were more people abroad now, more sightseers; word must have gotten around that aliens from the ship were at large. Citizen and helot, every man stared with avid curiosity at the Arcadian.

Margaret Lazenby shuddered. He muttered, "John, I don't like this planet at all, at all. I'd have said once that to be one woman in a world of men would be marvelous. But it's not. I'm being undressed by dozens of pairs of eyes. Do you know, I was afraid that the King was going to order me to strip."

"That shouldn't worry an Arcadian," John Grimes told him. "After all, you're all brought up as nudists."

"And I don't see why it should worry him," Brasidus put in, "unless he is ashamed of his deformities."

Margaret Lazenby flared, "To begin with, Sergeant, I'm not deformed. Secondly, the correct pronouns to use insofar as *I* am concered are 'she' and 'her.' Got it?"

"And are those pronouns to be used when talking of the other spacemen who are similarly . . . malformed?" asked Brasidus.

"Yes. But, as a personal favor, will you, please, stop making remarks about the shape of my body?"

"All right." Then he said, meaning no offense, "On Sparta nobody is deformed."

"Not *physically*," remarked Margaret Lazenby nastily, and then it was the Sergeant's turn to lapse into a sulky silence, one that remained unbroken all the rest of the way to the ship.

Brasidus left the spacemen at the barrier, then reported to Spaceport Security. Diomedes was seated in his inner office, noisily enjoying his midday meal. He waved the Sergeant to a bench, gestured toward the food and drink on the table. "Help yourself, young man. And how did things go? Just the important details. I already know that the King has agreed to let Grimes carry out some sort of survey, and I've just received word that Pausanius has lost his head. But what were *your* impressions?"

Deliberately Brasidus filled a mug with beer. Officers were allowed stronger liquor than the lower-ranking hoplites, even those with the status of sergeant. He rather hoped that the day would

soon come when he would be able to enjoy this tipple in public. He gulped pleasurably. Tben he said, "It must be a funny world that they come from. To begin with, they didn't seem to have any real respect for the King. Oh, they were correct enough, but . . . I could sense, somehow, they they were rather looking down on him. And *then* . . . they were shocked, sir, really shocked when I told them what was going to happen to Pausanius. It's hard to credit."

"In my job I'm ready and willing to credit anything. But go on."

"This Margaret Lazenby, the Arcadian. She seems to have a terror of nudity."

"She, Brasidus?"

"Yes, sir. She told me to refer to her as 'she.' Do you know, it sounds and feels *right*, somehow."

"Go on."

"You'll remember, sir, that we saw a picture in Lieutenant Commander Grimes' cabin of what seemed to be a typical beach scene on Arcadia. Everybody was naked."

"H'm. But you will recall that in that picture humans and Arcadians were present in roughly equal numbers. To know that one is in all ways inferior is bad enough. To be inferior *and* in the minority—that's rather much. His—or her—attitude as far as this world is concerned makes sense, Brasidus. But how did it come up?"

"She said, when we were driving back through the city, that she felt as though she were being undressed by the eyes of all the people looking at her. (Why should she have that effect on humans? I'm always wondering myself what she is like under her uniform.) And she said that she was

afraid that King Cresphontes was going to order her to strip in front of him and the Council."

"Men are afflicted by peculiar phobias, Brasidus. You've heard of Teleclus, of course?"

"The Lydian general, sir?"

"The same. A brave man, a very brave man, as his record shows. But let a harpy get into his tent and he's a glibbering coward." He picked up a meaty bone, gnawed on it meditatively. "So don't run away with the idea that this Arcadian is outrageously unhuman in his—or 'her'—reactions." He smiled greasily. "She may be more human than you dream."

"What are you getting at, sir? What do you *know*?"

Diomedes waved the bone playfully at Brasidus. "Only what my officers tell me. Apart from that—I'm Security, so nobody tells me anything. Which reminds me, there's something I must tell you. Your little friend Achron has been ringing this office all morning, trying to get hold of you." He frowned. "I don't want you to drop him like a hot cake now that you've acquired a new playmate."

"*What* new playmate, sir?"

"Oh, never mind, never mind. Just keep in with Achron, that's all. We still want to find out what's going on at the crèche, alien ships or no alien ships. As I've said—and I think you'll agree—it seems to tie in."

"But sir, wouldn't it be simple just to stage a raid?"

"I like my job, Brasidus—but I like the feel of my head on my shoulders much better. The doctors are the most powerful branch of the priest-

hood. This Pausanius, do you think that the King would have acted as he did if he hadn't known that he, Pausanius, was in bad with his own colleagues? All that happened was that he got himself a public execution instead of a very private one."

"It all seems very complicated, Captain."

"You can say that again, Brasidus." Diomedes tossed his bone into the trash basket. "Now . . ." He picked up a sheaf of crumpled, grease-stained papers from the untidy table. "We have to consider your future employment. You'll not be required for escort duties this afternoon. I shall be arranging his itinerary with Lieutenant Commander Grimes. And tomorrow the bold space commander and his Arcadian sidekick will not be escorted by yourself."

"And why not, sir?"

"Because you'll be working—working with your hands. You've plainclothes experience. You can mix with helots as one of them and get away with it. This afternoon you pay a call on Alessis, who is both an engineer and—but let it go no further—on our payroll. Tomorrow Alessis with a gang of laborers will carry out the annual overhaul of the refrigerating machinery in the Andronicus warehouse. You will be one of the laborers."

"But I don't know anything about refrigeration, sir."

"Alessis should be able to teach you all that a common laborer should know this afternoon."

"But the other helots, sir. They'll know that I'm not a regular member of the gang."

"They won't. Alessis has just recruited green

labor from at least half a dozen outlying villages. You'll be the one big-city boy in the crowd. Oh, this will please you. Your friend Heraklion will not be in the crèche. He has been called urgently to his estate. It seems that a fire of unknown origin destroyed his farm outbuildings."

"Unknown origin, sir?"

"Of course."

"But what has the Andronicus warehouse to do with the crèche?"

"I don't know yet. But I hope to find out."

Brasidus returned to the barracks in Diommedes' car, changed there into civilian clothes. He had been given the address of Alessis' office, walked there briskly. The engineer—a short, compact, man in a purple-trimmed tunic—was expecting him. He said, "Be seated, Lieutenant. And I warn you now that tomorrow, on the job, I shall be addressing you as 'Hey, you!' "

"I'm used to plainclothes work, sir."

"As a helot?"

"Yes. As a helot."

"As a *stupid* helot?"

"If that is what's required."

"It will be. You're going to wander off by yourself and get lost. You'll be tracing the gas-supply main—that will be your story if anybody stumbles on you. I was supposed to be giving you an afternoon's tuition in refrigeration techniques, but that will not be necessary. All I ask of my helots is that they lift when I tell them to lift, put down when I tell them to put down, and so on and so forth. They're the brawn and I'm the brain. Get it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good. Can you read a plan?"

"I can."

"Splendid." Alessis got up, opened a drawer of his desk and pulled out a large roll of tough paper. He flattened it out. "Now, this is the basement of the Andronicus warehouse. Power supply comes in *here*," his stubby forefinger jabbed, "through a conduit. Fans here, compressors here—all the usual. The odd chambers are all on the floor above—with the exception of this one. Deep freeze—very deep freeze, in fact."

"There's no reason why it shouldn't be in the basement."

"None at all. And there's no reason why it shouldn't be up one floor, with the other chambers. But it's not its location that's odd."

"Then what is?"

"It's got two doors, Brasidus. One opening into the basement, the other one right at the back. I found this second door, quite by chance, when I was checking the insulation."

"And where does it lead to?"

"That is the question. I think, although I am not sure, that there is a tunnel behind it. And I think that the tunnel runs to the crèche."

"But why?"

Alessis shrugged. "That's what our mutual friend Diomedes wants to find out."

Chapter Thirteen

A BLACK, WINDOWLESS cube, ugly, forbidding, the Andronicus warehouse stood across the cobbled street from the gracefully proportioned crèche complex. To its main door, a few minutes before 0800 hours, slouched the gang of workmen employed by Alessis, among them Brasidus. He was wearing dirty, ill-fitting coveralls, and he was careful not to walk with a military stride, proceeded with a helot's shamble.

The other men looked at him, and he looked at them. He saw a bunch of peasantry from the outlying villages, come to the city to (they vaguely hoped) better themselves. They saw a man like themselves, but a little cleaner, a little better fed, a little more intelligent. There were grunted self-introductions. Then, "You'll be the foreman?" asked one of the workmen.

"No," admitted Brasidus. "He'll be along with Alessis."

The engineer arrived in his hovercar, his foreman riding with him. They got out of the vehicle and the foreman went to the doorway, pressed the bell push set to one side of it. Then he said, "Jump to it. Get the tools out of the car." Brasidus—his years of training were not easily sloughed off—

took the lead, swiftly formed an efficient little working party to unload spanners, hammers, gas cylinders and electrical equipment. He heard the foreman say to his employer, "Who's that new man, sir? We could use a few more like him."

Slowly the door opened. It was thick, Brasidus noted. It appeared to be armored. It looked capable of withstanding a chariot charge, or even the fire of medium artillery. It would have been more in keeping with a fortress than a commercial building. In it stood a man dressed in the gray tunic of an industrialist. That made him a helot, although one of a superior class. Nonetheless, his salutation of Alessis was not that of an inferior to a superior. There could even have been a hint of condescension.

The maintenance gang filed into the building—the engineer and his foreman unhampered, Brasidus and the others carrying the gear. So far there was little to be seen—just a long, straight corridor between featureless metal walls, terminating in yet another door. But it was all so clean, so sterile, impossibly so for Sparta. It reminded Brasidus of the interior of John Grimes' ship, but even that, by comparison, had a lived-in feel to it.

The farther door was heavily insulated. Beyond it was a huge room, crowded with machinery, the use of which Brasidus could only guess. Pumps, perhaps, and compressors, and dozens of white-faced gauges. Nothing was in motion; every needle rested at zero.

"Have you everything you want, Alessis?" asked the industrialist.

"I think so. Nothing's been giving any trouble since the last overhaul?"

"No. I need hardly tell you that the deep freeze is, as always, top priority. But *Hera's* not due for another couple of months."

"Not to worry, what's the hurry?" quipped the engineer. Then, to his foreman, "O.K., Cimon, you can start taking the main compressor down. One of you"—he looked over his workmen carefully as though making a decision—"come with me to the basement to inspect the deep freeze. You'll do, fellow. Bring a hammer and a couple of screwdrivers. And a torch."

Brasidus opened the hatch in the floor for Alessis and then, as he followed the engineer down to the lower level, managed to shut it after himself. It was not difficult; the insulation, although thick, was light. In the basement there was more machinery seeming, thought Brasidus, to duplicate the engines on the floor above. It, too, was silent. And there was the huge, insulated door that he, as instructed by Alessis, opened.

The chamber beyond it was not cooled, but a residual chill seemed to linger in the still air. Physical or psychological? Or psychic? There was . . . something, some influence, some subtle emanation, that resulted in a slight, involuntary shudder, a sudden, prickly gooseflesh. It was as though there were a million voices—subsonic? supersonic? on the verge of audibility—crying out to be heard, striving, in vain, to impart a message. The voices of the dead? Brasidus must have spoken aloud, for Alessis said, "Or the not yet born."

"What do you mean?" demanded Brasidus. "What do you mean?"

"I . . . I don't know, Lieutenant. It seemed that

the words were spoken to me by someone, by *something* outside."

"But this is only a deep-freeze chamber, sir."

"It is only a deep-freeze chamber—but it has too many doors."

"I can't see the second one."

"No. It is concealed. I found it only by accident. You see that panel? Take your screwdriver and remove the holding screws."

In spite of his unfamiliarity with power tools, with tools of any kind, Brasidus accomplished the job in a few seconds. Then, with Alessis' help, he pried the insulated panel out from the wall, lifted it to one side. There was a tunnel beyond it, high enough so that a tall man could walk without stooping, wide enough so that bulky burdens could be carried along it with ease. There were pipes and conduits on the roof of the tunnel, visible in the light of the torches.

"An alternative freezing system," explained Alessis. "Machinery in the crèche itself. I'm not supposed to know about it. The tunnel's insulated, too—and I've no doubt that when it's in use it can be brought down to well below zero."

"And what am I supposed to do?" Brasidus asked.

"You take your orders from Captain Diomedes, not from me. You're supposed to snoop—that's all that I know. And if you *are* caught, I risk *my* neck by providing you with some sort of a cover story. You thought—and I thought—that all these wires and pipes are supposed to be doing something. As, in fact, they are. Well, you'll find another door at the end, a proper one, and with dogs that can be operated from either side." His hand rested briefly

on Brasidus' upper forearm. "I don't like this business. It's all too hasty; there's far too much last-minute improvisation. So be careful."

"I'll try," Brasidus told him. He stuck the hammer and the screwdriver into his belt—after all, he was supposed to be a workman, and if it came to any sort of showdown they would be better than no weapons at all—and, without a backward glance, set off along the tunnel.

The door at the far end was easy enough to open, and the screw clamps were well greased and silent. With the thick, insulated valve the slightest crack ajar, Brasidus listened. He could hear nothing. Probably there was nobody on the farther side. He hoped. The door opened away from him into whatever space there was on the other side. It was a pity, as anybody waiting there—the possibility still had not been ruled out—would be hidden from Brasidus as he emerged. But if the door were flung open violently, he would be not only hidden, but trapped.

Brasidus flung the door open violently, catching it just before it could thud noisily against the wall of the corridor.

So far, so good.

But what was there to see? Across the corridor there was yet another door, looking as though it, too, were insulated. And it was locked. To his left stretched a long, long passageway, soft ceiling lights reflected in the polished floor. To his right stretched a long, long passageway, similarly illuminated. On both sides there were doors, irregularly spaced, numbered.

Brasidus stood, silent and motionless, every sense tuned to a high pitch of sensitivity. There

was the faintest hint of perfume in the air, merged with other hints—antiseptics, machinery, cooking—noticeable only by reason of its unusualness. A similar fragrance had lingered around Margaret Lazenby. And, remembered Brasidus, around that other Arcadian in this very building—Sally. And, oddly enough, around Heraklion. (Normally the only odors associated with doctors were those of the various spirits and lotions of their trade.)

So, he thought, *there are Arcadians here.*

So, he told himself, *I knew that already.*

So what?

His hearing was abnormally keen, and he willed himself to ignore the mutter of his own heartbeats, the susurus of his respiration. From somewhere, faint and faraway, drifted a murmur of machinery. There were voices, distant, and a barely heard tinkle of that silvery laughter he already associated with the Arcadians. There was a whisper of running water, evocative of a hillside rill rather than city plumbing.

He did not want to stray too far from the door, but realized that he would learn little, if anything, by remaining immobile. He turned to his left, mainly because that was the direction from which the Arcadian laughter and the faint splashing sounds were coming. He advanced slowly and cautiously, his hand hovering just clear of the haft of his hammer.

Suddenly a door opened. The man standing there was dressed in a long, soft, enveloping robe. He had long, blonde hair, and the fine features and the wide, red mouth of an Arcadian. There was about him—about *her,* Brasidus corrected himself—more than just a hint of that disturbing

perfume. "Hello," she said in a high, pleasantly surprised voice. "Why, hello! A fresh face, as I live and breath! And what are you doing in this abode of love?"

"I'm checking the refrigeration, sir."

"Sir!" There was the tinkling laughter, amused but not unkind. "Sir! That's a giveaway, fellow. You don't belong here, do you?"

"Why, sir, no."

The Arcadian sighed. "Such a handsome brute—and I have to chase you off. But it's getting on for the time when our learned lovers join us for . . . er . . . aquatic relaxation in the pool. And if *they* find you wandering around where you shouldn't be . . ." She drew the edge of her hand across her throat in an expressive gesture. "It's happened before—and, after all, who misses a helot? But where did you come from? Of, yes, I see. You could be a refrigeration mechanic. . . . My advice to you is to get back into your hole and to pull it shut after you." Then she said, as Brasidus started to turn to retreat to the tunnel, "No so fast, buster. Not so fast." A slim hand, with red-painted nails, caught his right shoulder to swing him so that he faced her; the other hand came up to rest upon his left shoulder. Her face was very close to his, the lips parted.

As though it were the most natural thing in the world, Brasidus kissed her. *Unnatural,* said a voice in his mind, flatly and coldly. *Unnatural, to mate with a monster from another world, even to contemplate such a sterile coupling. Unnatural. Unnatural.*

But his own arms were about her and he was returning her kiss—hotly, avidly, clumsily. That censor in his mind was, at the moment, talking

only to itself. He felt the mounds of flesh on her chest pressing against him, was keenly aware of the softness of her thighs against his own.

Suddenly, somehow, her hands were between their upper bodies, pushing him away. With a twist of her head she disengaged her mouth. "Go, you fool!" she whispered urgently. "Go! If *they* find you, they'll kill you. Go. Don't worry—I'll say nothing. And if you have any sense, you'll not say anything either."

"But . . ."

"Go!"

Reluctantly, Brasidus went. Just as he closed the door he heard footsteps approaching along the alleyway.

But there was no alarm raised; his intrusion had been undetected.

Back in the deep-freeze chamber, Alessis looked at him curiously. "Have you been in a fight? Your mouth . . . there's blood."

Brasidus examined the back of his investigatory hand. "No," he said. "It's not blood. I don't know what it is."

"But what happened?"

"I don't know," replied Brasidus truthfully. Still he was not feeling the shame, the revulsion that should have been swamping him. "I don't know. In any case, I have to make my reports only to Captain Diomedes."

Chapter Fourteen

"SO IT WAS not the same one that you saw before?" asked Diomedes.

"No, Captain. At least, I don't think so. Her voice was different."

"H'm. There must be an absolute nest of Arcadians in that bloody crèche. . . . And all . . . she did was to talk to you and warn you to make yourself scarce before any of the doctors came on the scene?"

"That was all, Captain."

"You're lying, Brasidus."

"All right." Brasidus' voice was sullenly defiant. "I kissed him, her, it. And it—or she—kissed me back."

"You *what?*"

"You heard me, sir. Your very vague instructions to me were that I should find out all that I could. And that was one way of doing it."

"Indeed? And what did you find out?"

"That these Arcadians, as you have said, exercise a sort of hypnotic power, especially when there is physical contact."

"Hypnotic power? So the touch of mouth to mouth almost put you to sleep?"

"That wasn't the way I meant it, sir. But I did

feel that, if I weren't very careful, I should be doing just what she wanted."

"And what did she want?"

"Do I have to spell it out for you, sir? Oh, I know that intercourse with an alien being must be *wrong*—but that was what she wanted."

"And you?"

"All right. I wanted it, too."

"Brasidus, Brasidus. . . . You know that what you have just told me could get you busted down to helot. Or worse. But in *our* job, as you are learning, we often have to break the law in order to enforce it."

"As a policeman, sir, I am reasonably familiar with the law. I cannot recall that it forbids intercourse with aliens."

"Not yet, Brasidus. Not yet. But you will recall that contact with the crews of visiting ships is prohibited. And I think that the preliminaries to making love may be construed as contact."

"But are these Arcadians in the crèche crew members of visiting ships?"

"What else can they be? They must have got here somehow." Diomedes looked long and hard at Brasidus, but there was no censure in his regard. "However, I am not displeased by the way in which things are turning out. You are getting to know something about these . . . *things*. These Arcadians. And I think that you are strong enough to resist their lure. . . . Now, what have we for you? This evening, I think, you will visit your friend Achron at the crèche. Keep your eyes and ears open, but don't stick your neck out. Tomorrow I have an assignment for you that you should find interesting. This Margaret Lazenby wishes to

make a sightseeing trip, and she especially asked for you as her escort."

"Will Lieutenant Commander Grimes be along, sir?"

"No. He'll be consorting with the top brass. After all, he *is* the commander of *Seeker* and, to use spaceman's parlance, seems to pile on rather more Gs than the master of a merchantman. . . . Yes, Brasidus, have yourself a nice visit with your boyfriend, and then report to me here tomorrow morning at 0730 hours, washed behind the ears and with all your brasswork polished."

Brasidus spent the evening with Achron before the latter reported for duty. It was not the first time that he had been a guest at the nurse's Club—but it was the first time that he had felt uncomfortable there. Apart from his own feelings, it was no different from other occasions. There were the usual graceful, soft-spoken young men, proud and happy to play host to the hoplites who were their visitors. There was the usual food—far better cooked and more subtly seasoned than that served in the army messes. There was the usual wine—a little too sweet, perhaps, but chilled and sparkling. There was music and there was dancing—not the strident screaming of brass and the boom and rattle of drums, not the heavy thud of bare feet on the floor, but the rhythmic strumming of lutes and, to it, the slow gyrations of willowy bodies.

But . . .

But there was something lacking.

But what could be lacking?

"You are very thoughtful tonight, Brasidus," remarked Achron wistfully.

"Am I?"

"Yes. You . . . you're not with us, somehow."

"No?"

"Brasidus, I have to be on duty soon. Will you come with me to my room?"

The Sergeant looked at his friend. Achron was a pretty boy, prettier than most, but he was not, he could never be, an Arcadian. . . .

What am I thinking? he asked himself, shocked. *Why am I thinking it?*

He said, "Not tonight, Achron."

"But what is wrong with you, Brasidus? You never used to be like this." Then, with a sort of incredulous bitterness, "It can't be one of the men from the ship, can it? No, not possibly. Not one of those great, hairy brutes. As well consort with one of those malformed aliens they've brought with them!" Achron laughed at the absurdity of the idea.

"No," Brasidus told him. "Not one of the men from the ship."

"Then it's all right."

"Yes, it's all right. But I shall have a heavy day tomorrow."

"You poor dear. I suppose that the arrival of this absurd spaceship from some uncivilized world has thrown a lot of extra work on you."

"Yes. It has."

"But you'll walk with me to the crèche, won't you?"

"Yes. I'll do that."

"Oh, thank you. You can wait here while I get changed. There's plenty of wine left."

Yes, there was plenty of wine left, but Brasidus was in no mood for it. He sat in silence, watching the dancers, listening to the slow, sensuous

thrumming. Did the Arcadians dance? And how would *they* look dancing, stripped for performance, the light gleaming on their smooth, golden skins? And why should the mere thought of it be so evocative of sensual imaginings?

Achron came back into the hall, dressed in his white working tunic. Brasidus got up from the bench, walked with him out into the night. The two friends made their way through the streets in silence at first, but it was not the companionable silence to which they had become used. Finally Brasidus spoke, trying to keep any display of real interest out of his voice.

"Wouldn't it be better if you nurses lived in at the crèche? The same as we do in the barracks."

"Then we shouldn't have these walks, Brasidus."

"You could visit me."

"But I don't *like* your barracks. And your Club's as bad."

"I suppose that the cooking could be improved in both. Just who *does* live in at the crèche?"

"All the doctors, of course. And there are some engineers who look after the machinery."

"No helots?"

"No. Of course not." Achron was shocked at the idea.

"Even *we*—but, after all, Brasidus, we are helots—have to live outside. But you know all that. Why are you asking me?"

That was a hard counterquestion to answer. At last Brasidus said, "There have been rumors . . ."

"Rumors of what?"

"Well, it's a very large building. Even allowing for the wards and the birth machine, there must be

ample space inside. Do you think that the staff doctors and engineers could have . . . friends living with them?"

It was Achron's turn to hesitate. "You could be right, Brasidus. There are so many rules telling us that we must not stray away from our wards. Now that you raise the point, I can see that there has always been an atmosphere of . . . of secrecy . . ."

"And have you ever seen or heard anything?"

"No."

"And do the staff doctors and engineers have any friends among the nurses?"

"They wouldn't look as us." Resentment was all too evident in Achron's voice. "They're too high and mighty. Keep themselves to themselves, that's what *they* do. And their own accommodation, I've heard, the King himself might envy. They've a heated swimming pool, even. I've never seen it, but I've heard about it. And I've seen the food and the wine that come in. Oh, they do themselves well—far better than us, who do all the work."

"There might be inquiries being made," said Brasidus cautiously.

"There are always inquiries being made. That Captain Diomedes wanted me to work for him. But he's not . . . he's not a gentleman. We didn't get on. Why should I help him?"

"Would you help *me*?"

"And how can I, Brasidus?"

"Just look and listen. Let me know of anything out of the ordinary in the crèche."

"But the doctors can do no wrong," said Achron. "And even if they *did*, they *couldn't*. You know what I mean."

"In your eyes, you mean?"

"In my eyes," admitted the nurse. "But for you, and only for you, I'll . . . I'll look and listen. Does it mean promotion for you?"

"It does," said Brasidus.

"Are you coming in?" asked Achron as they reached the entrance to the crèche.

"No. I shall have a long and wearing day tomorrow."

"You . . . you don't give me much inducement to help you, do you? If I do, will things be the same between us again?"

"Yes," lied Brasidus.

Chapter Fifteen

BRASIDUS DROVE OUT to the spaceport in the car that had been placed at his disposal. He realized that he was looking forward to what he had told Achron would be a long and wearing day. He enjoyed the freshness of the morning air, looked up with appreciation at the Spartan Navy still, in perfect formation, circling the landing field. But now he did not, as he had done so many times in the past, envy the airmen. He was better off as he was. If he were up there, a crew member of one of the warships, even the captain of one of them, he would not be meeting the glamorous, exotic spacefarers—and most certainly would not, in the course of duty, be spending the entire day with one of the them.

Margaret Lazenby was already ashore, was waiting in Diomedes' office, was engaged in conversation with the Security captain. Brasidus heard his superior say, "I'm sorry, Doctor Lazenby, but I cannot allow you to carry weapons. The cameras and recording equipment—yes. But not that pistol. Laser, isn't it?"

"It is. But, damn it all, Diomedes, on this cockeyed world of yours my going about unarmed degrades me to the status of a helot."

"And the Arcadians are not helots?"

"No. It should be obvious, even to a Security officer. Would a helot hold commissioned rank in the Federation's Survey Service?"

"Then if you possess warrior's status, your being let loose with a weapon of unknown potentialities is even worse insofar as we are concerned." The fat man, facing Margaret Lazenby's glare with equanimity, allowed himself to relent. "All right. Leave your pistol here, and I'll issue you with a stun gun."

"I shall not leave my weapon *here*. Will you be so good as to put me through to the ship so that I can tell the duty officer to send somebody ashore to pick it up?"

"All right." Diomedes punched a few buttons on his board, picked up the handset, spoke into it briefly, then handed it to the Arcadian. He turned to Brasidus. "So you've arrived. Attention!" Brasidus obeyed with a military crash and jangle. "Let's look at you. H'm, brass not too bad, but your leatherwork could do with another polish. . . . But you're not going anywhere near the palace, so I don't suppose it matters. At ease! Stand easy! In fact, relax."

Meanwhile, Margaret Lazenby had finished speaking into the telephone. She returned the instrument to its rest. She stood there, looking down at the obese Diomedes sprawled in his chair—and Brasidus looked at her. She was not in uniform, but was wearing an open-necked shirt with a flaring collar cut from some soft, brown material, and below it a short kilt of the same color. Her legs were bare, and her slim feet were thrust into serviceable-looking sandals. At her belt was a

holstered weapon of unfamiliar design. The cross straps from which depended her equipment — camera, sound recorder, binoculars — accentuated the outthrusting fleshy mounds on her chest that betrayed her alien nature.

She was, obviously, annoyed, and when she spoke it was equally obvious that she was ready and willing to transfer her annoyance to Brasidus. "Well, Brasidus," she demanded. "Seen enough? Or would you like me to go into a song and dance routine for you?"

"I . . . I was interested in that weapon of yours."

"Is *that* all?" For some obscure reason Brasidus' reply seemed to annoy her still further. And then a junior officer from *Seeker* came in, and Margaret Lazenby unbuckled the holstered pistol from her belt, handed it to the young spaceman. She accepted the stun gun from Diomedes, unholstered it, looked at it curiously. "Safety catch? Yes. Firing stud? H'm. We have similar weapons. Nonlethal, but effective enough. Oh, range?"

"Fifty feet," said Diomedes.

"Not very good. Better than nothing, I suppose." She clipped the weapon to her belt. "Come on, Brasidus. We'd better get out of here before he has me stripped to a peashooter and you polishing your belt and sandals."

"Your instructions, sir?" Brasidus asked Diomedes.

"Instructions? Oh, yes. Just act as guide and escort to Doctor Lazenby. Show her what you can of the workings of our economy—fields, factories. . . . You know. Answer her questions as long as there's no breach of security involved. And keep your own ears flapping."

"Very good, sir. Oh, expenses . . ."

"Expenses, Brasidus?"

"There may be meals, an occasional drink. . . ."

Diomedes sighed, pulled a bag of coins out of a drawer, dropped it with a clank on to the desk. "I know just how much is in this and I shall expect a detailed account of what you spend. Off with you. And, Doctor Lazenby, I expect you to bring Brasidus, here, back in good order and condition."

Brasidus saluted, then followed the spaceman out through the doorway.

She said, as soon as they were outside the building, "Expenses?"

"Yes, Doctor . . ."

"Call me Peggy."

"I have rations for the day in the car, Peggy, but I didn't think they were . . . suitable. Just bread and cold meat and a flagon of wine from the mess at the barracks."

"And so . . . and so you want to impress me with something better?"

"Why, yes," admitted Brasidus with a certain surprise. "Yes." (And it was strange, too, that he was looking forward to buying food and drink for this alien, even though the wherewithal to do so came out of the public purse. On Sparta every man was supposed to pay for his own entertainment, although not always in cash. In this case, obviously, there could be no reciprocation. *Or could there be?* But it did not matter.)

And then, with even greater surprise, Brasidus realized that he was helping Margaret Lazenby into the hovercar. Even burdened as she was, she

did not need his assistance, but she accepted it as her due. Brasidus climbed in after her, took his seat behind the control column. "Where to?" he asked.

"That's up to you. I'd like a good tour. No, not the city—I shall be seeing plenty of that when I accompany John—Commander Grimes—on his official calls. What about the countryside and the outlying villages? Will that be in order?"

"It will, Peggy," Brasidus said. (And why should the use of that name be so pleasurable?)

"And if you'll explain things to me as you drive . . ."

The car lifted on its air cushion in a flurry of dust, moved forward, out through the main gateway, and for the first few miles headed toward the city.

"The spice fields," explained Brasidus with a wave of his hand. "It'll soon be harvest time, and then the two ships from Latterhaven will call for the crop."

"Rather . . . overpowering. The smell, I mean. Cinnamon, nutmeg, almond, but more so. . . . And a sort of mixture of sage and onion and garlic. But those men working in the fields with hoes and rakes, don't you have mechanical cultivators?"

"But why should we? I suppose that machines could be devised, but such mechanical tools would throw the helots out of employment."

"But you'd enjoy vastly increased production and would be able to afford a greater tonnage of imports from Latterhaven."

"But we are already self-sufficient."

"Then what *do* you import from Latterhaven?"

Brasidus creased his brows. "I . . . I don't know,

Peggy," he admitted. "We are told that the ships bring manufactured goods."

"Such as?"

"I don't know." Then he recalled the strange book that he had seen in the crèche. "Books, perhaps."

"What sort of books?"

"I don't know, Peggy. The doctors keep them for themselves. But we turn off here. We detour the city and run through the vineyards."

The road that they were now following was little more than a track, running over and around the foothills, winding through the terraced vineyards on either side. As far as the eye could see the trellises were sagging under the weight of the great, golden fruit, each at least the size of a man's head, the broad, fleshy leaves. Brasidus remarked, "This has been a good year for grapes."

"*Grapes?* Are those things grapes?"

"What else could they be?" Brasidus stopped the car, got out, scrambled up the slope to the nearest vine. With his knife he hacked through a tough stem, then carried the ripe, glowing sphere back to Peggy. She took it, hefted it in her two hands, peered at it closely, sniffed it. "Whatever this is," she declared, "it ain't no grape—not even a grapefruit. Something indigenous, I suppose. Is it edible?"

"No. It has to be . . . processed. Skinned, trodden out, exposed to the air in open vats. It takes a long time, but it gets rid of the poison."

"Poison? I'll take your word for it." She handed the fruit back to Brasidus, who threw it onto the bank. "Oh, I should have kept that, to take to the ship for analysis."

"I'll get it again for you."

"Don't bother. Let the biochemist do his own fetching and carrying. But have you any of the . . . the finished product? You did say that you had brought a flagon of wine with you."

"Yes, Peggy." Brasidus reached into the back of the car, brought up the stone jug, pulled out the wooden stopper.

"No glasses?" she asked with a lift of the eyebrows.

"Glasses?"

"Cups, goblets, mugs—things you drink out of."

"I . . . I'm sorry. I never thought . . ."

"You have a lot to learn, my dear. But show me how you manage when you haven't any women around to exercise a civilizing influence."

"Women?"

"People like me. Go on, show me."

Brasidus grinned, lifted the flagon in his two hands, tilted it over his open mouth, clear of his lips. The wine was rough, tart rather than sweet, but refreshing. He gulped happily, then returned the jug to an upright position. He swallowed, then said, "Your turn, Peggy."

"You can't expect me to drink like that. You'll have to help me."

You wouldn't last five minutes on Sparta, thought Brasidus, not altogether derisively. He turned around in his seat, carefully elevated the wine flagon over Peggy's upturned face. He was suddenly very conscious of her red, parted lips, her white teeth. He tilted, allowing a thin trickle of the pale yellow fluid to emerge. She coughed and spluttered, shook her head violently. Then

she gasped, "Haven't the knack of it—although I can manage a Spanish wineskin. Try again."

And now it was Brasidus who had to be careful, very careful. He was acutely aware of her physical proximity, her firm softness. "Ready?" he asked shakily.

"Yes. Fire at will."

This time the attempt was more successful. When at last she held up her hand to signal that she had had enough she must have disposed of at least a third of the flagon. From a pocket in her skirt she pulled a little square of white cloth, wiped her chin and dabbed at her lips with it. "That's not a bad drink," she stated. "Sort of dry sherry and ginger . . . but more-ish. No—that's enough. Didn't you ever hear the saying, 'Candy is dandy, but liquor is quicker'?"

"What is candy?" asked Brasidus. "And liquor is quicker for what?"

"Sorry, honey. I was forgetting that you have yet to learn the facts of life. Come to that, there're quite a few facts of life that I have to learn about this peculiar fatherland of yours. What is home without a mother?" She laughed. "Of course, you're lucky. You don't know *how* lucky. A pseudo-Hellenic culture and nary an Oedipus complex among the whole damn boiling of you!"

"Peggy, please speak Greek."

"Speak English, you mean. But I was using words and phrases that have dropped out of your version of our common tongue." She had slipped a little tablet into her mouth from a tube that she had extracted from her pocket. Suddenly her enunciation was less slurred. "Sorry, Brasidus, but this local tipple of yours is rather potent. Just

as well that I brought along some soberer-uppers."

"But why do you need them? Surely one of the pleasures of drinking — *the* pleasure of drinking — is the effect; the . . . the loosening up."

"And the drunken brawl?"

"Yes," he said firmly.

"You mean that you'd like to . . . to brawl with me?"

Brasidus glimpsed a vivid mental picture of such an encounter and, with no hesitation, said, once again, "Yes."

"Drive on," she told him.

Chapter Sixteen

THEY DROVE ON, through and over the foothills, always climbing, the snowcapped peak of Olympus ever ahead, until, at last, Brasidus brought the car to a halt in the single street of a tiny village that clung precariously to the mountainside.

"Kilkis," he announced. "The tavern here could be worse. We halt here for our midday meal."

"Kilkis." The Arcadian repeated the name, gazed around her at the huddle of low but not ungraceful buildings, and then to the boulder-strewn slopes upon which grazed flocks of slow-moving, dun-colored beasts, many of them almost ready to reproduce by fission. "Kilkis," she repeated. "And how do the people here make a living? Do they take in each other's washing?"

"I don't understand, Peggy."

"Sorry, Brasidus. What are those animals?"

"Goats," he explained. "The major source of our meat supply." He went on, happy to be upon more familiar ground, "The only helots allowed to carry arms are the goatherds—see, there's one by that rock. He has a horn to summon assistance, and a sword, and a spear."

"Odd-looking goats. And why the weapons? Against rustlers?"

"Rustlers?"

"Cattle thieves. Or goat thieves."

"No. Goat raiding is classed as a military operation, and, in any case, none of the other city-states would dare to violate *our* borders. We have the Navy, of course, and firearms and armored chariots. They do not. But there're still the wolves, Peggy, and they're no respecters of frontiers."

"H'm. Then I think that you should allow your goatherds to carry at least a rifle. Is it a hazardous occupation?"

"It is, rather. But the schools maintain a steady flow of replacements, mainly from among those who have just failed to make the grade as hoplites."

"I see. Failed soldiers rather than passed veterinarians."

They got out of the car and walked slowly into the inn, into a long room with rush-strewn floor, tables and benches, low, raftered ceiling, and a not unpleasant smell of sour wine and cookery. At one end of the room there was an open fire, upon which simmered a huge iron cauldron. The half dozen or so customers—rough-looking fellows, leather-clad, wiry rather than muscular—got slowly to their feet at the sight of Brasidus' uniform, made reluctant and surly salutation. And then, as they got a proper look at his companion, there was more than a flicker of interest on their dark, seamed faces.

"You may be seated," Brasidus told them curtly.

"Thank you, Sergeant," replied one of them, his voice only just short of open insolence.

The taverner—fat, greasy, obsequious—waddled from the back of the room. "Your pleasure, lords?" he asked.

"A flagon of your best wine. And," added Brasidus, "two of your finest goblets to drink it from. What have you to eat?"

"Only the stew, lord. But it is made from a fine, fat young goat, just this very morning cast off from its father. Or we have sausage—well-ripened and well-seasoned."

"Peggy?" said Brasidus, with an interrogative intonation.

"The stew will do very nicely, I think. It smells good. And it's been boiled, so it should be safer . . ."

The innkeeper stared at her. "And may I be so impertinent as to inquire if the lord is from the strange spaceship?"

"You've already done so," Margaret Lazenby told him, then relented. "Yes. I am from the ship."

"You must find our world very beautiful, lord."

"Yes. It is beautiful. And interesting."

Roughly, Brasidus pulled out a bench from a vacant table, almost forced Peggy down onto the seat. "What about that wine?" he growled to the innkeeper.

"Yes, lord. Coming, lord. At once."

One of the goatherds whispered something to his companions, then chuckled softly. Brasidus glared at the men, ostentiously loosened the flap of the holster of his projectile pistol. There was an uneasy silence, and then, one by one, the goatherds rose to their feet and slouched out of the room. The Arcadian complained, "I had my recorder going." She did something to the controls

of one of the instruments slung at her side. An amplified voice said loudly, "Since when has the Army been playing nurse to offworld monsters?"

"Insolent swine!"

"Don't be silly. They're entitled to their opinions."

"They're not. They insulted me." Then, as an afterthought, "And you."

"I've been called worse things than 'offworld monster' in my time. And you've ruined their lunchtime session, to say nothing of my chances of making a record of a typical tavern conversation."

Reluctantly, "I'm sorry."

"So you damn well should be."

The innkeeper arrived with a flagon and two goblets. They were mismatched, and they could have been cleaner, but they were of glass, not of earthenware or metal, and of a standard surprising in an establishment such as this. He placed them carefully on the rough surface of the table, then stood there, wine jug in hand, awaiting the word to pour.

"Just a minute," Margaret Lazenby said. She picked up one of the drinking vessels, examined it. "H'm. Just as I thought."

"And what did you think, Peggy?"

"Look," she said, and her pointed, polished fingernail traced the design of the crest etched into the surface of the glass. "A stylized Greek helmet. And under it, easy enough to read after all these years, 'I.T.T.S. DORIC.' "

"I.T.T.S.?"

"Interstellar Transport Commission's Ship."

"But I thought that your ship belonged to the

Interstellar Federation's Survey Service."

"It does."

"But apart from the Latterhaven freighters, no ships but yours have ever called here."

"Somebody must have. But what about getting these . . . these antiques filled?"

Brasidus gestured to the innkeeper, who, after a second's hesitation, filled the Arcadian's glass first. One did not have to be a telepath to appreciate the man's indecision. Here was a sergeant—and a sergeant in the Police Battalion of the Army at that. Here was an alien, in what might be uniform and what might be civilian clothing. Who ranked whom?

Brasidus lifted his goblet. "To your good health, Peggy."

"And to yours." She sipped. "H'm. Not at all bad. Of course, in this setting it should be *retsina*, and there should be *feta* and black olives to nibble . . ."

"You will speak in riddles, Peggy."

"I'm sorry, Brasidus. It's just that you're so . . . so human in spite of everything that I keep forgetting that your world has been in isolation for centuries. But suppose we just enjoy the meal?"

And they did enjoy it. Brasidus realized that his own appreciation of it was enhanced by the Arcadian's obvious delight in the—to her—unfamiliar food and drink. They finished their stew, and then there were ripe, red, gleaming apples—"Like no apples that I've ever seen or tasted," commented Peggy, "but they'll do. Indeed they will"—and another flagon of wine. When they were done, save for the liquor remaining in the jug, Brasidus wiped his mouth on the back of his right hand,

watched with tolerant amusement as his companion patted her lips with a little square of white cloth that she brought from one of her pockets.

She said, "That was *good*, Brasidus." From a packet that she produced from a shoulder pouch she half shook two slim brown cylinders. "Smoke?"

"Is this the same stuff that Commander Grimes was burning in that wooden thing like a little trumpet?"

"It is. Yours must be about the only Man-colonized world that hasn't tobacco. Commander Grimes likes his pipe; I prefer a cigarillo. See—this is the striking end. Just a tap—so. Put the other end in your mouth." She showed him how, then remarked, as she exhaled a fragrant blue cloud, "I hope that the same doesn't happen to us as happened to Sir Walter Raleigh."

"And what did happen?" Brasidus inhaled, then coughed and spluttered violently. He hastily dropped the little cylinder onto his plate. Probably this Sir Walter Raleigh, whoever he was, had been violently ill.

"Sir Walter Raleigh was the Elizabethan explorer who first introduced tobacco into a country called England. He was enjoying his pipe after a meal in an inn, and the innkeeper thought that he was on fire and doused him with a bucket of water."

"This fat flunkey had better not try it on you!" growled Brasidus.

"I doubt if he'd dare. From what I've observed, a sergeant on this planet piles on more Gs than a mere knight in the days of Good Queen Bess." She laughed through the wreathing, aromatic fumes

— then, suddenly serious, said, "We have company."

Brasidus swung round, his right hand on the butt of his pistol. But it was only the village corporal—a big man in slovenly uniform, his leather unpolished, his brass tarnished. His build, his broad, heavy face were indicative of slowness, both physical and mental, but the little gray eyes under the sandy thatch of the eyebrows were shrewd enough.

"Sergeant!" he barked, saluting and stiffening to attention.

"Corporal—at ease! Be seated."

"Thank you, Sergeant."

"Some wine, Corporal?"

The corporal reached out a long arm to one of the other tables, grabbed an earthenware mug, filled it from the flagon. "Thank you, Sergeant. Your health, Sergeant. And yours, sir." He drank deeply and noisily. "Ah, that was good. But, Sergeant, my apologies. I should have been on hand to welcome you and . . ." he stared curiously at the Arcadian. "You and your . . . guest?"

"Doctor Lazenby is one of the officers of the starship *Seeker*."

"I thought that, Sergeant. Even here there are stories." The man, Brasidus realized, was staring at the odd mounds of flesh that were very obvious beneath the thin shirt worn by the alien.

"They aren't concealed weapons," remarked the Arcadian wryly. "And, in the proper circumstances, they are quite functional."

The corporal flushed, looked away and addressed himself to his superior. "I was absent from the village, Sergeant, as today is Exposure

Day. I had to supervise. But as soon as I was told of your arrival, I hastened back."

"Exposure Day?" asked Margaret Lazenby sharply.

"Yes," Brasidus told her. "One of the days on which the newly born—those newly born who are sickly or deformed, that is—are exposed on the mountainside."

"*And what happens to them?*"

"Usually the wolves finish them off. But without food or water they'd not last long."

"You're joking." It was an appeal rather than a statement or a question.

"But why should I joke, Peggy? The purity of the race must be maintained."

She turned to the corporal, her face white, her eyes blazing. "You. Had the wolves come when you left the . . . the Exposure?"

"No, sir. But they're never long in hearing the cries and winding the scent."

She was on her feet, pushing her bench away so violently that it toppled with a crash. "Get a move on, Brasidus. If we hurry, we may still be in time."

Brasidus was sickened by her reactions, by her words. Exposure was necessary, but it was not something to take pictures of, to make records of. As well join the scavengers in their filth-eating rounds of the city streets.

"Come *on!*" she flared.

"No," he said stubbornly. "I'll not help you to make a film that you and your shipmates can gloat over."

"Make a film?" Her voice was incredulous. "You fool. We may be in time to save them."

And then it was Brasidus' turn to experience a wave of incredulity.

Chapter Seventeen

"No!" SAID BRASIDUS.

"*Yes!*" she contradicted him. But, incongruously, it was not the borrowed pistol that she was leveling at the two men, but a camera. Brasidus laughed—and then the slim hands holding the seemingly innocuous instrument twitched ever so slightly, and from the lens came an almost invisible flicker of light and, behind the policemen, something exploded. There was a sudden, acrid stench of flash-boiled wine, of burning wood.

That deadly lens was looking straight at Brasidus again.

"Laser," he muttered.

"Laser," she stated.

"But . . . but you were supposed to leave all your weapons behind."

"I'm not altogether a fool, honey. And, oddly enough, this *is* a camera, with flash attachment. Not a very good one, but multipurpose tools are rarely satisfactory. Now, are you going to drive me out to the Exposure?"

She'll have to bring along the corporal, thought Brasidus. *And the two of us should be able to deal with her.*

And now the deadly camera was in her left hand only, and the borrowed stun gun was out of its holster. She fired left-handed, and at this short range she could hardly miss. The corporal gasped, made one tottering step forward, then crashed untidily to the floor. The belled muzzle swung slightly and she fired again. There was the sound of another heavy fall behind Brasidus. That, he guessed, would be the inkeeper. There would be no telephone calls made to the city for several hours. The goatherds were notorious for their reluctance to assist the forces of law and order.

"Get into the car," she said. "I'll ride behind. And make it snappy."

He walked out of the inn, into the afternoon sunlight, deliberately not hurrying. He consoled himself with the thought that, even though he was falling down on the job as a sergeant of Police, he was earning his keep as a lieutenant of Security. He had been told to find out what made these aliens tick—and he was finding out. In any case, if the wolf packs were as ravenous as usual, there would be nothing left but a scatter of well-gnawed bones.

He climbed into the driver's seat, thought briefly about making a dash for it, then thought better of it. He could never get out of range in time. He heard her clambering in behind him. He wished that he knew which way that so-called camera was pointing—and then he succeeded in catching a glimpse of it in the rear mirror. If the firing stud were accidentally pressed, it would drill a neat, cauterized hole through his head. Or would the water content of his brains explode? In that case, it would not be so tidy.

"Get going," she said. And then, as an afterthought, "I suppose you know the way."

"I know the way," he admitted. The car lifted on its air cushion and proceeded.

"Faster. Faster."

"This is only a goat track," he grumbled. "And this isn't an armored chariot we're riding in."

Even so, deliberately taking the risk of fouling the fan casings on projecting stones, he managed to increase speed. Rather to his disappointment, the vehicle still rode easily, sped over the rough terrain without making any crippling contacts.

And then, ahead of them, seemingly from just over the next rise, sounded the ominous howling and snarling of the wolf pack, and with it, almost inaudible, a thin, high screaming.

"Hurry!" Margaret Lazenby was shouting. "Hurry!"

They were over the rise now. Once before, Brasidus had watched an Exposure, and the spectacle had sickened him, even though he had realized the necessity for it, and appreciated the essential justice of allowing Nature to erase its own mistakes in its own way. But to rescue one or more of these mewling, subhuman creatures—that was unthinkable.

The car was over the rise.

And then it was bearing down on the snarling, quarreling pack, on the carnivores too engrossed in their bloody business to notice the approach of potential enemies. But perhaps they heard the whine of the ducted fans and, even so, remembered that, on these occasions, Men never interfered with them.

The car was sweeping down the slope toward

the melee, and Margaret Lazenby was firing. Brasidus could feel the heat of the discharges, cursed as the hair on the right side of his head crisped and smoldered. But he maintained a steady course nonetheless, and experienced the inevitable thrill of the hunt, the psychological legacy from Man's savage ancestors. Ahead there was a haze of vaporized blood; the stench of seared flesh was already evident. The howling of the pack rose to a frenzied crescendo but the animals stood their ground, red eyes glaring, slavering, crimsoned jaws agape. Then—an evil, gray, stormy tide—they began to surge up the hillside to meet their attackers.

Brasidus was shooting now, the control column grasped in his left hand, the bucking projectile pistol in his right. Between them, he and Margaret Lazenby cleared a path for their advance, although the car rocked and lurched as it passed over the huddle of dead and dying bodies. Then—"Stop!" she was crying. "Stop! There's a baby there! I saw it move!"

Yes, there among the ghastly litter of scattered bones and torn flesh, was a living child, eyes screwed tight shut, bawling mouth wide open. It would not be living much longer. Already two of the wolves, ignoring the slaughter of their companions, were facing each other over the tiny, feebly struggling body, their dreadful teeth bared as they snarled at each other.

Margaret Lazenby was out of the car before Brasidus could bring it to a halt. Inevitably she lost her balance and fell, rolling down the slope, almost to where the two carnivores were disputing over their prey. She struggled somehow to her

knees just as they saw her, just as they abandoned what was no more than a toothsome morsel for a satisfying meal. Somehow, awkwardly, she managed to bring her camera-gun into firing position, but the weapon must have been damaged by her fall. She cried out and threw it from her, in a smoking, spark-spitting arc that culminated in the main body of the pack. Even as it exploded in a soundless flare of raw energy she was tugging the borrowed stun gun from its holster.

Once she fired, and once only, and one of the two wolves faltered in the very act of leaping, slumped to the ground. The other one completed its spring and was on her, teeth and taloned hind paws slashing. Brasidus was out of the car, running, a pistol in each hand. But he could not use his guns—animal and alien formed together a wildly threshing tangle, and to fire at one would almost certainly mean hitting the other. But the Arcadian was fighting desperately and well, as yet seemed to be undamaged. Her hands about the brute's neck were keeping those slavering jaws from her throat, and her knee in the wolf's belly was still keeping those slashing claws at a distance. But she was tiring. It would not be long before sharp fangs found her jugular or slashing talons opened her up from breastbone to groin.

Dropping his weapons, Brasidus jumped. From behind he got his own two hands around the furry throat, his own knee into the beast's back. He exerted all of his strength, simultaneously pulled and thrust. The animal whined, then was abruptly silent as the air supply to the laboring lungs was cut off. But it was still strong, was still resisting desperately, was striving to turn so that it could

face this fresh enemy. Margaret Lazenby had fallen clear of the fight, was slowly crawling to where she had dropped her pistol.

She never had to use it. Brasidus brought his last reserves of strength into play, heard the sharp snap of broken vertebrae. The fight was over.

He got groggily to his feet, ready to face and to fight a fresh wave of carnivores. But, save for the Arcadian, the squalling child and himself, the hillside was bare of life. There were charred bodies, human and animal, where the laser weapon had exploded; the other wolves, such of them as had survived, must have fled. The stench of burning flesh was heavy in the air.

At a tottering run, Margaret Lazenby was hurrying to the child, the only survivor of the Exposure. More slowly, Brasidus followed, looked down at the little naked body. He said, "It would have been kinder to let it die. What sort of life can it expect with that deformity?"

"Deformity? What the hell do you mean?"

Wordlessly he pointed to the featureless scissure of the baby's thighs.

"Deformity? This, you fool, is a perfectly formed female child."

She got down to her knees and tenderly picked up the infant. And, as she did so, it became somehow obvious that the odd mounds of flesh on her chest, fully revealed now that her shirt had been torn away, were, after all, functional. The baby stopped crying, groped greedily for an erect pink nipple.

Peggy laughed shakily. "No, darling, no. I'm sorry, but the milk bar's not open for business. I'll make up a bottle for you when we get back to the ship."

"So," muttered Brasidus at last, "so it is one of your race."

"Yes."

"And those . . . lumps are where you fission from."

She said, "You've still a lot to learn. And now give me your tunic, will you."

"My tunic?"

"Yes. Don't just stand there, looking as though you've never seen a woman before."

Brasidus silently stripped off his upper garment, handed it to her. He expected that she would put the child back on the ground while she covered her own seminudity. But she did not. Instead, she wrapped the baby in the tunic, cooing to it softly. "There, there. You were cold, weren't you? But Mummy will keep you warm, and Mummy will see that you're fed." She straightened, then snapped in a voice of command, "Take me back to the ship, as fast as all the Odd Gods of the Galaxy will let you!"

Chapter Eighteen

SO THEY DROVE back to the ship swiftly, bypassing Kilkis—Brasidus had no desire to meet again the village corporal—taking roads that avoided all centers of population, however small. Peggy was in the back of the car, making soft, soothing noises to the querulous infant. *Achron,* thought Brasidus sullenly, *would have appreciated this display of paternal solicitude–but I do not.* And what did he feel? Jealousy, he was obliged to admit, resentment at being deprived of the Arcadian's company. Perverts the doctors in the crèche might be, but these aliens could and did exert a dangerous charm. But when it came to a showdown, as now, they had no time for mere humans, lavished their attentions only upon their own kind.

Suddenly the child was silent. The car was speeding down a straight stretch of road, so Brasidus was able to risk turning his head to see what was happening. Peggy had the stopper out of the wine flask, was dipping a corner of her handkerchief into it, then returning the soaked scrap of rag to the eager mouth of the baby. She grinned ruefully as she met Brasidus' stare. "I know it's all wrong," she said. "But I haven't a feeding bottle. Too, it will help if the brat is sound asleep when we get back to the spaceport."

"And why will it help?" demanded Brasidus, turning his attention back to the road ahead.

She said, "It's occurred to me that *we* have probably broken quite a few laws. Apart from anything else, armed assault upon the person of a police officer must be illegal."

"It is. But *you* carried out the armed assault. *We* did not."

She laughed. "Too true. But what about *our* interference with the Exposure? It will be better for both of us if your boss doesn't know that the interference was a successful one."

"I must make my report," said Brasidus stiffly.

"Of course." Her voice was soft, caressing. "But need it be a *full* report? We got into a fight with the wolf pack—there's too much evidence littered around on the hillside for us to lie our way out of that. I've a few nasty scratches on my back and my breasts."

"So that's what they're called. I was wondering."

"Never mind that now. I've got these scratches, so it's essential that I get back on board as soon as possible for treatment by our own doctor."

"I thought that you were the ship's doctor."

"I'm not. I have a doctorate in my own field, which is not medicine. But let me finish. We had this fight with these four-legged sharks you people call wolves. I fell out of the car, and you jumped out and saved my life, although not before I was mauled a little. And that's near enough to the truth, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Now, the child. She'll fit nicely into the hamper you brought the provisions in. The poor

little tot will be in a drugged stupor by the time we get to the spaceport, so she'll be quiet enough. And with your tunic spread over her, who will know?"

"I don't like it," said Brasidus.

"That makes two of us, my dear. I don't like having to conceal the evidence of actions that, on any world but this, would bring a public commendation."

"But Diomedes will know."

"How can he know? We were there, he was not. And we don't even have to make sure that we tell the same story, exact in every detail. He can question you, but he can't question *me*."

"Don't be so sure about that, Peggy."

"Oh, he'd like to, Brasidus. He'd like to. But he knows that at all times there are sufficient officers and ratings aboard *Seeker* to handle the drive and main and secondary armaments. He knows that we could swat your gasbags out of the sky in a split second, and then raze the city in our own good time." There was a long silence. Then, "I'm sorry to have gotten you into quite a nasty mess, Brasidus, but you realize that I had no choice."

"Like calls to like," he replied with bitter flippancy.

"You could put it that way, I suppose, but you're wrong. Anyhow, I'm sure that I shall be able to persuade John—Commander Grimes—to offer you the sanctuary of our ship if you're really in a jam."

"I'm a Spartan," he said.

"With all the Spartan virtues, I suppose. Do *you* have that absurd legend about the boy who let the fox gnaw his vitals rather than cry out? No matter.

Just tell Captain Diomedes the truth, but not the whole truth. Say that it was all my fault, and that you did your best to restrain me. Which you did—although it wasn't good enough. Say that you saved me from the wolves."

They drove on in silence while Brasidus pondered his course of action. What the Arcadian had said was true, what she had proposed might prevent an already unpleasant situation from becoming even more unpleasant. In saving Peggy's life, he had done no more than his duty; in helping to save the life of the deformed—deformed?—child he, an officer of the law, had become a criminal. And why had he done this? With the destruction of the laser-camera the alien had lost her only advantage.

And why had he *known*, why did he still *know* that his part in the rescue operations had been essentially *right*?

It was this strange awareness of rightness that brought him to full agreement with his companion's propositions. Until now, he had accepted without question the superior intellectual and moral stature of those holding higher rank than himself, but it was obvious that aboard *Seeker* there were officers, highly competent technicians with superbly trained men and fantastically powerful machinery at their command, whose moral code varied widely from the Spartan norm. (Come to that, what about the doctors, the top-ranking aristocrats of the planet, whose own morals were open to doubt? What about the doctors, and their perverse relations with the Arcadians?)

Peggy's voice broke into his thoughts. "She's

sleeping now. Out like a light. Drunk as a fiddler's bitch. I think that we shall be able to smuggle her on board without trouble." She went on, "I appreciate this, Brasidus. I do. I wish . . ." He realized that she must be standing up in the back of the car, leaning toward him. He felt her breasts against the bare skin of his back. The contact was like nothing that he had ever imagined. He growled, "Sit down, damn you. Sit down—if you want this wagon to stay on the road!"

Chapter Nineteen

THEY ENCOUNTERED NO delays on their way back to the spaceport, but, once they were inside the main gates, it was obvious that their return had been anticipated. Diomedes, backed by six armed hoplites, was standing, glowering, outside his office. A little away from him was John Grimes—and it was not a ceremonial sword that depended from his belt but two holstered pistols. And there was another officer from the ship with him, wearing a walky-talky headset. The Commander glared at Brasidus and his companion with almost as much hostility as did Diomedes.

Diomedes raised an imperious arm. Brasidus brought the car to a halt. Grimes said something to his officer, who spoke into the mouthpiece of his headset. Brasidus, looking beyond the young man to the ship, saw that the turrets housing her armament were operational, the long barrels of weapons, fully extruded, waving slowly like the questing antennae of some giant insect.

"Brasidus." Diomedes' voice was a high-pitched squeal, a sure sign of bad temper. "I have received word from the village corporal at Kilkis. I demand your report—and *your* report, Doctor Lazenby—immediately. You will both come into my office."

"Captain Diomedes," said Grimes coldly, "you have every right to give orders to your own officers, but none whatsoever to issue commands to my personnel. Doctor Lazenby will make her report to me, aboard my ship."

"I have means of enforcing my orders, Commander Grimes."

As one man, the six hoplites drew their stun guns.

Grimes laughed. "My gunnery officer has his instructions, Captain Diomedes. He's watching us from the control room through very high-powered binoculars and, furthermore, he is hearing everything that is being said."

"And what are his instructions, Commander?"

"There's just one way for you to find out, Captain. I shouldn't advise it, though."

"All right." With a visible effort, Diomedes brought himself under control. "All right. I request, then, Commander, that you order your officer to accompany Brasidus into my office for questioning. You, and as many of your people as you wish, may be present."

Grimes obviously was giving consideration to what Diomedes had said. It was reasonable enough. Brasidus knew that, if he were in Grimes' shoes, he would have agreed. But suppose that somebody decided to investigate the contents of that food hamper on the back seat, some thirsty man hopeful that a drink of wine might remain in the flagon. Or suppose that the effects of the alcohol on the presently sleeping baby suddenly wore off.

Margaret Lazenby took charge. She stood up in the back of the car—and the extent of her dishevelment was suddenly obvious. The men

stared at her, and Grimes, his fists clenched, took a threatening step toward Brasidus, growling, "You bastard."

"Stop it, John!" The Arcadian's voice was sharp. "Brasidus didn't do this."

"Then who did?"

"Damn it all! Can't you see that I want at least another shirt, as well as medical attention for these scratches? But if you must know, I made Brasidus take me to watch the Exposure."

"So the village corporal told me," put in Diomedes. "And between you, the pair of you slaughtered an entire wolf pack."

"We went too close, and they attacked us. They pulled me out of the car, but Brasidus saved me. And now, Captain Diomedes, I'd like to get back on board as soon as possible for an antibiotic shot and some fresh clothing." Before leaving the car, she stopped to lift the hamper from the back seat, handed it to Grimes' officer.

"What's in that basket?" demanded Diomedes.

"Nothing that concerns you!" she flared.

"I'll decide that," Grimes stated. "Here, Mister Taylor. Let me see."

The officer turned to face his captain, with his body hiding the hamper from Diomedes and his men. It was not intentional—or *was it?* Grimes, his face emotionless, lifted Brasidus' torn tunic from the open top of the wickerwork container. He said calmly, "One wine flagon. About six inches of gnarled sausage. The heel of a loaf of crusty bread. *You* decide, Captain, what may be brought off the ship onto your world, *I* decide what may be brought from your world onto my ship. Mister Taylor, take this hamper to the

biochemist so that its contents may be analyzed. And you, Doctor Lazenby, report at once to the surgeon. I'll receive your report later."

"Commander Grimes, I insist that I inspect that hamper." Three of the hoplites stepped forward, began to surround Mister Taylor.

"Captain Diomedes, if any of your men dare to lay hands upon my officer the consequences will be serious."

Diomedes laughed incredulously. "You'd open fire over a mug of wine and a couple of scraps of bread and sausage?"

"Too right I would."

Diomedes laughed again. "You aliens . . ." he said contemptuously. "All right, you can have your crumbs from the sergeants' mess. And I'd like a few words with your Doctor Lazenby as soon as she can spare me the time. And I'll have rather more than a few words with *you*, Brasidus, *now!*"

Reluctantly Brasidus got out of the car.

"And you let her threaten you with a laser weapon—and, furthermore, one that you had allowed her to carry. . . ."

Brasidus, facing Diomedes, who was lolling behind his desk, said rebelliously, "You, sir, checked her equipment. And she told me herself that the thing did function as a camera."

"All right. We'll let that pass. You allowed her to use a stun gun on the village corporal and the innkeeper, and then you drove her out to the Exposure. Why, Brasidus, did you have to stop at Kilkis, of all villages, on this day, of all days?"

"Nobody told me not to, sir. And, as you know,

the dates of the Exposures are never advertised. You might have been informed, but I was not."

"So you drove her out to see the Exposure. And you got too close. And the wolves attacked you, and pulled her out of the car."

"That is correct, sir."

"Surely she could have used this famous laser-camera to defend herself."

"It was damaged, sir. She had to throw it away in a hurry. It blew up."

"Yes. I've been told that there's an area on the hillside that looks as though some sort of bomb had been exploded." He leaned back in his chair, looked up at the standing Brasidus. "You say that the wolves attacked her. Are you sure that it wasn't you?"

"And why should it have been me, sir?"

"Because it should have been. You let an alien order you around at gun point, and then you ask me why you should have attacked her! And now . . ." the words came out with explosive violence, "*What was in the hamper?*"

"Wine, sir. Bread. Sausage."

"And what was your tunic doing there?"

"I lent it to her, sir, to replace her own shirt."

"So, instead of wearing it, she put it in the hamper."

"The air was warm, sir, when we got down from the mountains. She asked me if she could have it so that the fibers from which it is woven could be analyzed by the . . . the biochemist."

"H'm. All in all, Brasidus, you did not behave with great brilliance. Were it not for the fact that these aliens—or one alien in particular—seem to like you, I should dispense with your services. As

it is, you are still useful. Now, just what were this Margaret Lazenby's reactions when she learned of the Exposure?"

Lying, Brasidus knew, would be useless. The village corporal at Kilkis would have made a full report. He said, "She was shocked. She wanted to get to the site in time to rescue the deformed and defective children."

"You were not in time, of course."

"No, sir. We were not in time." He added virtuously, "I made sure of that."

"How, Brasidus?"

"I knew the way, she did not. I was able to make a detour."

The answer seemed to satisfy Diomedes. He grunted, "All right. You may sit down." For a few seconds he drummed on the desktop with his fingertips. "Meanwhile, Brasidus, the situation in the city is developing. Commander Grimes allowed his Arcadians, as well as the human members of his crew, shore leave. There was an unfortunate occurrence in the Tavern of the Three Harpies. An Arcadian, accompanied by a human spaceman, went in there. They got drinking with the other customers."

"Not the sort of place that I'd drink in by choice," Brasidus said, the other's silence seeming to call for some sort of comment.

"They were not so fortunate as to have a guide, such as yourself, to keep them out of trouble." (*You sarcastic swine,* thought Brasidus.) "Anyhow, there was the usual crowd in there. Helots of the laboring class, hoplites not fussy about the company they keep. It wouldn't have been so bad if the two spacemen had just taken one drink and

then walked out, but they stayed there, drinking with the locals, and allowed themselves to be drawn into an argument. And you know how arguments in the Three Harpies usually finish."

"There was a fight, sir?"

"Brilliant, Brasidus, brilliant. There was a fight, and the human spaceman was laid out, and the Arcadian was beaten up a little, and then stripped. There was, you will understand, some curiosity as to what her body was like under her uniform."

"That was bad, sir."

"There's worse to follow. At least four hoplites had sexual intercourse with her by force."

"So it is possible, sir, in spite of the malformation."

Diomedes chuckled obscenely. "It's possible, all right. Everybody in the tavern would have had her if the other spaceman hadn't come round and started screaming for help on a little portable transceiver he wore on his wrist. A dozen men from the ship rushed in, real toughs—and I wish that my own personnel could learn *their* techniques of unarmed combat. Then the police condescended to intervene and laid everybody out with their stun guns, and then Commander Grimes, who'd heard about it somehow, came charging into my office threatening to devastate the city, and . . . and . . .

"Anyhow, you can see why I had to handle this Lazenby creature with kid gloves. Even though Grimes admits that his own crew were at fault—he had issued strict orders that no sightseeing party was to consist of fewer than six people—he was furious about the 'rape,' as he called it. You saw how he reacted when he thought that you had

been doing something of the kind. He demanded that the rapists be punished most severely."

"But they were hoplites, sir, not helots. They had the right . . ."

"I know, I know. When I need instruction in the finer points of Spartan law I'll come to you. The conduct was discourteous rather than criminal. The culprits will, by this time, have been reprimanded by their commanding officer, and will, in all probability, be back in the Three Harpies, telling anybody who cares to listen what intercourse is like with an Arcadian. It is, I gather, quite an experience. Are you quite sure that you didn't . . . ?"

"Quite sure, sir."

"That's your story, and you stick to it." Again there was a pause, and the muffled drumming of Diomedes' fingers on the top of his desk. Then he went on, "Even on Sparta we have experienced occasional mutiny, infrequent rebellion. Tell me, Brasidus, what are the prime causes of mutiny?"

"Discontent, sir. Overly strict discipline. Unjust punishments . . ."

"And . . . ?"

"That's about all, sir."

"What about envy, Brasidus?"

"No, sir. We all know that if we show ability we shall become officers, with all the privileges that go with rank."

"But what if there's a privilege out of reach to everybody except a few members of one aristocratic caste?"

"I don't see what you mean, sir."

"Brasidus, Brasidus, what do you use for brains? What about that nest of Arcadians in the

crèche? What do you suppose the doctors use them for?"

"I . . . I can guess."

"And so they have something that the rest of us haven't. And so"—Diomedes' voice dropped almost to a whisper—"the power that they've enjoyed for so long, for too long, may be broken."

"And *you*," said Brasidus, "envy them that power."

For long seconds the Captain glared at him across the desk. Then, "All right, I do. But it is for the good of the State that I am working against them."

Perhaps, thought Brasidus. *Perhaps.* But he said nothing.

Chapter Twenty

CLAD IN A LABORING Helot's drab, patched tunic, his feet unshod and filthy, his face and arms liberally besmeared with the dirt of the day's toil, Brasidus sat hunched at one of the long tables in the Tavern of the Three Harpies. There were hoplites there as well as manual workers, but there was little chance that any of them would recognize him. Facial similarities were far from uncommon on Sparta.

He sat there, taking an occasional noisy gulp from his mug and listening.

One of the hoplites was holding forth to his companions. "Yes, it was on this very table that I had him. Or *it*. Good it was. You've no idea unless you've tried it yourself."

"Must've been odd. Wrong, somehow."

"It was odd, all right. But wrong nohow. This face-to-face business. And those two dirty great cushions for your chest to rest on . . ."

"Is *that* what they're for?"

"Must be. Pity the doctors can't turn out some of those creatures from their birth machine."

"But they do. Yes. They do."

Everybody turned to stare at the man who had just spoken. He was a stranger to Brasidus, but his

voice and his appearance marked him for what he was. This was not the sort of inn that the nurses from the crèche usually frequented—in an establishment such as this they would run a grave risk of suffering the same fate as the unfortunate Arcadian from the ship. "They do," he repeated in his high-pitched sing-song, and looked straight at Brasidus. There was something in his manner that implied, *And you know, too.*

So this was the fellow agent whom Diomedes had told him that he would find in the tavern, the operative to whom he was to render assistance if necessary.

"And what do *you* know about it, dearie?" demanded the boastful hoplite.

"I'm a nurse . . ."

"That's obvious, sweetie pie."

"I'm a nurse, and I work at the crèche. We nurses aren't supposed to stray from our wards, but . . ."

"But with a snout like yours, you're bound to be nosy," said the hoplite, laughing.

The nurse stroked his overlong proboscis with his right index finger, grinned slyly. "How right you are, dearie. I admit it. I *like* to know what's going on. Oh, those doctors! They live in luxury, all right. You might think that practically all of the crèche is taken up by wards and machinery and the like, but it's not. More than half the building is *their* quarters. And the things they have! A heated swimming pool, even."

"Decadent," grunted a grizzled old sergeant.

"But nice. Especially in midwinter. Not that I've ever tried it myself. There's a disused storeroom, and this pool is on the other side of its back wall. There're some holes in the wall, where

there used to be wiring or pipes or something. Big enough for a camera lens." The nurse fished a large envelope from inside the breast of his white tunic, pulled from it a sheaf of glossy photographs.

"Lemme see. Yes, those are Arcadians, all right. Topheavy, ain't they, when you see them standing up. Wonder how they can walk without falling flat on their faces."

"If they did, they'd bounce."

"Look sort of unfinished lower down, don't they?"

"Let *me* see!"

"Here, pass 'em round, can't you?"

Briefly, Brasidus had one of the prints in his possession. He was interested more in the likeness of the man standing by the pool than in that of his companion. Yes, it was Heraklion, all right, Heraklion without his robe but still, indubitably, the supercilious doctor.

"Must have come in that ship," remarked somebody.

"No," the nurse told him. "Oh, no. They've been in the crèche for *years*."

"You mean your precious doctors have *always* had them?"

"Yes. Nothing but the best for the guardians of the purity of our Spartan stock, dearie. But who are we to begrudge them their little comforts?"

"Soldiers, that's who. It's we who should be the top caste of this world, who should have the first pickings. After all, the King's a soldier."

"But the doctors *made* him, dearie. They made all of us."

"Like hell they did. They just look after the

birth machine. And if there wasn't a machine, we'd manage all right, just as the animals do."

"We might have to," the nurse said. "I heard two of the doctors talking. They were saying that the people were having it too soft, that for the good of the race we should have to return to the old ways. They're thinking of shutting the machine down."

"What! How can you be a fighting man if you have to lug a child around with you?"

"But you said that we could manage all right without the doctors."

"Yes. But that's different. No, the way *I* see it is this: These doctors are getting scared of the military, but they know that if most of us are budding we shan't be much good for fighting. Oh, the cunning swine! They just want things all their way all the time instead of for only most of the time."

"But you can't do anything about it," the nurse said.

"Can't we? Who have the weapons and the training to use 'em? Not your doctors, that's for certain. With no more than the men in this tavern, we could take the crèche—and get our paws on to those Arcadians they've got stashed away there."

"More than our paws!" shouted somebody.

"You're talking mutiny and treason, hoplite," protested the elderly sergeant.

"Am I?" The man was on his feet now, swaying drunkenly. "But the King himself had one of the doctors executed. That shows how much *he* thinks of 'em!" He paused, striving for words. They came at last. "Here, on Sparta, it's fair shares for all—excepting you poor damn helots, of course. But for the rest of us, the rulers, it should

be share an' share alike. Oh, I know that the colonel gets better pay, better grub an' better booze than I do—but in the field he lives the same as his men, an' all of us can become colonels ourselves if we put ourselves to it, an', come to that, generals. But the colonels an' the generals an' the admirals don't have Arcadians to keep their beds warm. Not even the King does. An' now there's some of us who know what it's like. An' there's some of us who want more of it."

"They're plenty of Arcadians aboard the spaceship," somebody suggested.

"I may be drunk, fellow, but I'm not *that* drunk. The spaceship's a battlewagon, and I've heard that the captain of her has already threatened to use his guns and missiles. No, the crèche'll be *easy* to take."

"Sit down, you fool!" ordered the elderly sergeant. "You got off light after you assaulted the Arcadian spaceman, but he was only a foreigner. Now you're inciting to riot, mutiny, and the gods alone know what else. The police will use more than stun guns on you this time."

"Will they, old-timer? Will they? And what if they do? A man can die only once. What I did to that Arcadian has done something to me, to *me*, do you hear? I have to do it again, even though I get shot for it." The man's eyes were crazy and his lips, foam-flecked. "You don't know what it was like. You'll never know, until you do it. Don't talk to me about boys, or about soft, puling nurses like our long-nosed friend here. The doctors have the best there is, the best that there can ever be, and they should be made to share it!"

"The police . . . " began the sergeant.

"Yes. The police. Now let me tell you, old-timer, that I kept my ears flapping while they had me in their barracks. Practically every man has been called out to guard the spaceport—the *spaceport*, do you hear? That alien captain's afraid that there'll be a mob coming out to take *his* pretty Arcadians by force, and fat old Captain Diomedes is afraid that the space commander'll start firing off in all directions if his ship and his little pets are menaced. By the time that the police get back to the city, every Arcadian in the crèche'll know what a *real* man is like, an' we shall all be tucked up in our cots in our quarters sleeping innocently."

"I didn't see a single policeman on my way here," contributed the nurse. "I wondered why." And then, in spurious alarm, "But you can't. You mustn't. You mustn't attack the crèche!"

"And who says I mustn't? You, you feeble imitation of a . . . a . . ."

He concluded triumphantly, "of an alien monster! Yes, that's a point. All this talk of them as alien monsters. It was only to put us off. But now we *know*. Or some of us know. Who's with me?"

The fools, thought Brasidus, *the fools!* as he listened to the crash of overturned benches, as he watched almost all the customers of the tavern, helots as well as hoplites, jump to their feet.

"The fools," he muttered aloud.

"And you would have been with them," whispered the nurse, "if I hadn't slipped a capsule into your drink." And then Brasidus saw the thin wisp of almost invisible vapor that was still trickling from the envelope in which the photographs had been packed. "I have access to certain drugs," said

the man smugly, "and this one is used in our schoolrooms. It enhances the susceptibility of the students."

"Students," repeated Brasidus disgustedly.

"They have a lot to learn, Lieutenant," the nurse told him.

"And so have I. I want to see what happens."

"Your orders were to protect me."

"There's nobody here to protect you from, except that old sergeant. But why wasn't *he* affected?"

"Too old," said the nurse.

"Then you're quite safe."

Brasidus made his way from the tavern out into the street.

Chapter Twenty-One

HE WOULD HAVE retreated to the safety of the inn, but he was given no opportunity to do so. A roaring torrent of men swept along the street, hoplites and helots, shouting, cursing and screaming. He was caught up by the human tide, buffeted and jostled, crying out with pain himself when a heavy, military sandal smashed down on one of his bare feet. He was sucked into the mob, made part of it, became just one tiny drop of water in the angry wave that was rearing up to smash down upon the crèche.

At first,he was fighting only to keep upright, to save himself from falling, from being trampled underfoot. And then—slowly, carefully and, at times, viciously—he began to edge out toward the fringe of the living current. At last he was able to stumble into a cross alley where he stood panting, recovering his breath, watching the rioters stream past.

Then he was able to think.

It seemed obvious to him that Diomedes must have planted his agents in more than one tavern. It was obvious, too, that Diomedes, ever the opportunist, had regarded the unfortunate incident in the Three Harpies as a heaven-sent opportunity for rabble-rousing—and as an excuse for the withdrawal of all police from the city. And that is

all that it was—an excuse. It was doubtful, thought Brasidus, that Grimes had demanded protection. The spaceman was quite capable of looking after himself and his own people—and if the situation got really out of hand he could always lift ship at a second's notice.

But there were still puzzling features in the situation. The military police were under the command of General Rexenor, with the usual tally of colonels and majors subordinate to him. Diomedes was only a captain. How much power did the man wield? How much backing had he? Was he—and this seemed more than likely—answerable only to the palace?

The mob was thinning out now; there were only the stragglers half-running, stumbling over the cobblestones. And already the first of the scavengers were emerging from their hiding places, sniffing cautiously at the crumpled bodies of those who had been crushed and trampled. Brasidus fell in with the tattered rearguard, kept pace with a withered, elderly man in rough and dirty working clothes.

"Don't . . . know . . . why . . . we . . . bother . . ." grunted this individual between gasping breaths. "Bloody . . . hoplites . . . 'll . . . be . . . there . . . first. All . . . the . . . bloody . . . pickings . . . as . . . bloody . . . usual."

"What pickings?"

"Food . . . wine . . . Those . . . bloody . . . doctors . . . worse . . . 'n . . . bloody . . . soldiers. . . . Small . . . wonder . . . the . . . King . . . has . . . turned . . . against . . . 'em."

"And . . . the Arcadians?"

"Wouldn't . . . touch . . . one . . . o' . . . them . . . wi'

. . . barge . . . pole. Unsightly . . . monsters."

Ahead, the roar of the mob had risen to an ugly and frightening intensity. There were flames, too, leaping high, a billowing glare in the night sky. The crowd had broken into a villa close by the crèche, the Club House of the senior nursing staff. They had dragged furniture out into the roadway and set fire to it. Some of its unfortunate owners fluttered ineffectually about the blaze and, until one of them had the sense to organize his mates into a bucket party, were treated with rough derision only. And then the crowd turned upon the firemen, beating them, even throwing three of them into the bonfire. Two of them managed to scramble clear and ran, screaming, their robes ablaze. The other just lay there, writhing and shrieking.

Brasidus was sickened. There was nothing that he could do. He was alone and unarmed—and most of the soldiers among the rioters carried their short swords and some them were already using them, hacking down the surviving nurses who were still foolish enough to try to save their property. There was nothing at all that he could do—and he should have been in uniform, not in these rags, and armed, with a squad of men at his command, doing his utmost to quell the disorder.

Damn Diomedes! he thought. He knew, with sudden clarity, where his real loyalties lay—to the maintenance of law and order and, on a more personal level, to his friend Achron, on duty inside the crèche and soon, almost inevitably, to be treated as had been these hacked and incinerated colleagues of his.

The Andronicus warehouse . . .

Nobody noticed him as he crossed the road to that building; the main body of the rioters was attempting to force the huge door of the crèche with a battering ram improvised from a torn-down streetlamp standard. And then, looking at the massive door set in the black, featureless wall of the warehouse, he realized that he was in dire need of such an implement himself. He could, he knew, enlist the aid of men on the fringes of the crowd eager for some violence in which they, themselves, could take part—but that was the last thing that he wanted. He would enter the crèche alone, if at all.

But how?

How?

Overhead, barely audible, there was a peculiar throbbing noise, an irregular beat. He thought, *So the Navy is intervening*, then realized that the sound was not that of an airship's engines. He looked up, saw flickering, ruddy light reflected from an oval surface. And then, in a whisper that seemed to originate only an inch from his ear, a familiar voice asked, "Is that you, Brasidus?"

"Yes."

"I owe you plenty. We'll pick you up and take you clear of this mess. I had to promise not to intervene—I'm just observing and recording—but I'll always break a promise to help a friend."

"I don't want to be picked up, Peggy."

"Then what the hell do you want?"

"I want to get into this warehouse. But the door is locked, and there aren't any windows, and I haven't any explosives."

"You could get your friends to help. Or don't you want to share the loot?"

"I'm not looting. And I want to get into the crèche by myself, not with a mob."

"I wouldn't mind a look inside myself, before it's too late. Hold on, I'll be right with you." Then, in a fainter voice, she was giving orders to somebody in the flying machine. "I'm going down, George. Get the ladder over, will you? Yes, yes, I know what Commander Grimes said, but Brasidus saved my life. And you just keep stooging around in the pinnace, and be ready to come a-runnin' to pick us up when I yell for you. . . . Yes, yes. Keep the cameras and the recorders running."

"Have you a screwdriver?" asked Brasidus.

"*A screwdriver?*"

"If you have, bring it."

"All right."

A light, flexible ladder snaked down from the almost invisible hull. Clad in black coveralls, Peggy Lazenby was herself almost invisible as she rapidly dropped down it. As soon as she was standing on the ground the pinnace lifted, vanished into the night sky.

"What now, love?" she asked. "What now?"

"That door," Brasidus told her, pointing.

"With a *screwdriver*? Are you quite mad?"

"We shall need that later. But I was sure that you'd have one of your laser-cameras along."

"As it happens, I haven't. But I do have a laser pistol—which, on low intensity, is a quite useful electric torch." She pulled the weapon from its holster, made an adjustment, played a dim beam on the double door. "H'm. Looks like a conventional enough lock. And I don't think that your little friends will notice a very brief and discreet fireworks display."

She made another adjustment, and the beam

became thread thin and blinding. There was a brief coruscation of sparks, a spatter of incandescent globules of molten metal.

"That should be it. Push, Brasidus."

Brasidus pushed. There was resistance that suddenly yielded, and the massive valves swung inwards.

Nobody noticed them enter the warehouse—the entire attention of the mob was centered on the door of the crèche, which was still holding. When they were inside, Brasidus pushed the big doors shut. Then he asked, "How did you find me?"

"I wasn't looking for you. We knew about the riot, of course, and I persuaded John to let me take one of the pinnaces so that I could observe the goings-on. Our liftoff coincided with a test firing of the auxiliary rocket drive—even your Captain Diomedes couldn't blame Commander Grimes for wanting to be all ready for a hasty getaway. And the radar lookout kept by your Navy must be very lax—although, of course, our screen was operating. Anyhow, I was using my infrared viewer, and when I saw a solitary figure slink away from the main party, I wondered what mischief *he* was up to. I focused on him, and, lo and behold, it was you. Not that I recognized you at first. I much prefer you in uniform. Now, what is all this about?"

"I wish that I knew. But the mob's trying to break into the crèche, and I've at least one friend in there whom I'd like to save. Too . . . oh, damn it all, I am a policeman, and I just can't stand by doing nothing."

"What about your precious Diomedes? What

part is he playing in all this?"

"Come on," he snarled. "Come *on*. We've wasted enough time already." He found the light switch just inside the door, pressed it, then led the way to the hatch in the floor. They went through it, down into the basement, and then to the big chamber. Peggy helped him to open the door, followed him to the far insulated wall. Yes, that was the panel beyond which lay the tunnel—the slots of the screwheads glittered with betraying bright metal.

At the far end of the tunnel the door into the crèche was not secured and opened easily.

Chapter Twenty-Two

IT WAS QUIET in the passageway, but, dull and distant, the ominous thudding of the battering ram could be heard. And there was the sound of crying, faint and faraway, the infants in the wards screaming uncontrollably.

"Which way?" Peggy was asking. "Which way?"

"This way, I think." He set off at a run along the corridor, his bare feet noiseless on the polished floor. She followed at the same pace, her soft-soled shoes making an almost inaudible shuffle. They ran on, past the closed, numbered doors. At the first cross alleyway Brasidus turned right without hesitation—as long as he kept the clangor of forcible entry as nearly ahead as possible, he could not go far wrong.

And then one of the doors opened. From it stepped the tall, yellow-haired Arcadian whom Brasidus had encountered during his first trespass. She was dressed, this time, in a belted tunic, and her feet were shod in heavy sandals. And she carried a knife that was almost a short sword.

"Stop!" she ordered. "Stop!"

Brasidus stopped, heard Margaret Lazenby slither to a halt behind him.

"Who are you? What are you doing here?"

"Brasidus. Lieutenant, Police Battalion of the Army. Take us to whoever's in charge here."

"Oh, I recognize you—that painfully shy workman who strayed in from the warehouse . . . *But who are you?*"

"I'm from the ship."

"What I thought." The blonde stood there, juggling absently with her knife. *And she'll be able to use it,* thought Brasidus. "What I thought," repeated the woman. "So, at long last, the Police and the outworld space captain are arriving in the nick of time to save us all from a fate worse than death."

"I'm afraid not," Peggy Lazenby told her. "Our respective lords and masters have yet to dedigitate. We're here in our private capacities."

"But you're hung around with all sorts of interesting-looking hardware, dearie. And I can lend Brasidus a meat chopper if he wants it."

Brasidus said that he did. It was not his choice of weapons, but it was better than nothing. The Arcadian went back through the door, through which drifted the sound of excited, high-pitched voices, returned with the dull-gleaming implement. Brasidus took it. The haft fitted his right hand nicely, and the thing had a satisfying heft to it. Suddenly he felt less helpless, less naked.

"And what's your name, by the way?" the blonde Arcadian was asked.

"Lazenby. Peggy Lazenby."

"You can call me Terry. Short for Theresa, not that it matters. Come on."

With her as a guide, they found their way to the vestibule without any delays, bypassing the wards which the infants were making hideous

with their screams. But the noise in this entrance hall was deafening enough; it was like being inside a lustily beaten bass drum. Furniture had been piled inside the door, but with each blow of the battering ram, some article would crash to the floor.

There were doctors there, white-faced but, so far, not at the point of panic. There were nurses there, no braver than their superiors, but no more cowardly. They were armed, all of them, after a fashion. Sharp, dangerous-looking surgical instruments gleamed in tight-clenched fists, rude clubs, legs torn from furniture, dangled from hands that had but rarely performed rougher work than changing a baby's diaper.

"Heraklion!" Terry was calling, shouting to make herself heard above the tumult. "Heraklion!"

The tall doctor turned to face her. "What are you doing here, Terry? I thought I told you women to keep out of harm's way." Then he saw Brasidus and Peggy. "Who the hell are these?" He began to advance, the scalpel in his right had extended menacingly.

"Lieutenant Brasidus. Security."

"Looks like a helot to me," muttered somebody. "Kill the bastard!"

"Wait. Brasidus? Yes, it could be . . ."

"It is, it is!" One of the nurses broke away from his own group, ran to where Heraklion was standing. "It is. Of course, it's Brasidus!"

"Thank you, Achron. You should know. But who are you, madam?"

"Doctor Margaret Lazenby, of the starship *Seeker*."

Heraklion's eyes dwelt long and lovingly on the

weapons at her belt. "And have you come to help us?"

"I let myself get talked into it."

"I knew you'd come," Achron was saying to Brasidus. "I *knew* you'd come." And Brasidus was uncomfortably aware of Peggy Lazenby's ironic regard. He said to Heraklion, more to assert himself than for any other reason, "And what is happening, Doctor?"

"*You* ask *me* that, young man? You're Security, aren't you? You're Captain Diomedes' right-hand man, I've heard. What *is* happening?"

Brasidus looked slowly around at the little band of defenders with their makeshift armament. He said, "I know what *will* happen: massacre, with ourselves at the receiving end. That door'll not hold for much longer. Is there anywhere to retreat to?"

"Retreat?" demanded Heraklion scornfully. "Retreat, from a mob of hoplites and helots?"

"They—the hoplites—have weapons, sir. And they know how to use them."

"Your Doctor Lazenby has weapons—*real* weapons."

"Perhaps I have," she said quietly. "But ethology happens to be my specialty. I've studied the behavior of mobs. A machine gun is a fine weapon to use against them—but a hand gun, no matter how deadly, only infuriates them."

"There's the birth-machine room," suggested somebody. "I've heard said that it would withstand a hydrogen-bomb blast."

"Impossible!" snapped Heraklion. "Nobody here is sterile, and to take the time to scrub up and break out robes at this time . . . "

"The birth machine won't be much use with nobody around to operate it," said Brasidus.

Heraklion pondered this statement, and while he was doing so a heavy desk crashed from the top of the pile of furniture barricading the door. Half-heartedly, three of the nurses struggled to replace it, and dislodged a table and a couple of chairs. "All right," he said suddenly. "The B-M room it is. Terry, run along and round up the other women and get them there at once. Doctor Hermes, get along there yourself with all these people."

"And what about the children?" Achron, in his agitation, was clutching Heraklion's sleeve. "What about the children?"

"H'm. Yes. I suppose that somebody had better remain on duty in each ward."

"No, Doctor," said Brasidus. "It won't do at all. Those wild animals out there hate the nurses as much as they hate you. To the hoplites, they're helots who live better than soldiers do. To the helots, they're overprivileged members of their own caste. Those nurses with the villa outside and the crèche have all been killed. I saw it happen."

"But the *children* . . ." Achron's voice was a wail.

"They'll be safe enough. They might miss a meal or a diaper change, but it won't kill 'em."

"And if there's no other way out of it," put in Peggy Lazenby, "we'll make them our personal charge." She winced as an uproar from the nearer ward almost drowned out the heavy thudding of the battering ram. "I sincerely hope that it never comes to that!"

One of the nurses screamed. The pile of furni-

ture was tottering. The men below it tried to shore it with their bodies, but not for long. A spear probed through the widening gap between the two valves, somehow found its mark in soft human flesh. There was another scream, of pain, this time, not terror. There were other spearheads thrusting hopefully and not altogether blindly. There was a scurrying retreat from the crumbling barricade. Suddenly it collapsed, burying the wounded man, and the great valves edged slowly and jerkily inwards, all the pressure of the mob behind them, pushing aside and clearing a way through the wreckage. And through the widening aperture gusted the triumphant howling and shouting, and a great billow of acrid smoke.

The mob leaders were through, scrambling over the broken furniture, their dulled weapons at the ready. There were a half dozen common soldiers, armed with swords. There was a fat sergeant, some kind of pistol in his right hand. He fired, the report sharp in spite of the general uproar. He fired again.

Beside Brasidus, Peggy Lazenby gasped, caught hold of him with her left hand as she staggered. Then her own pistol was out, and the filament of incandescence took the sergeant full in the chest. But he came on, still he came on, still firing, the hoplites falling back to allow him passage, while the Arcadian fumbled with her gun, trying to transfer it from her right hand to her left. He came on, and Brasidus ducked uselessly as two bullets whined past his head in quick succession.

Then he fell to his knees as Achron shoved him violently to one side. The nurse's frail body jerked and shuddered as the projectiles thudded into

him, but he, like the sergeant, refused to die. He lifted the table leg with which he had armed himself, brought it smashing down with all his strength onto the other's head. The wood splintered, but enough remained for a second blow, and a third. No more were necessary. The sergeant sagged to the floor, and Achron, with a tired sigh, collapsed on top of the gross body.

"He's dead." muttered Brasidus, kneeling beside his friend. "He's dead."

But mourning would have to wait. Hastily he shifted Achron's body to one side so that he could get at the sergeant's pistol. And then he saw the face of the dead man, recognizable in spite of the blood that had trickled down it.

It was Diomedes.

He got to his feet, ready to use the pistol. But he did not have to. Firing left-handed, Peggy Lazenby had shot down the other mob leaders, then used the weapon to ignite the tangle of wrecked furniture and the floor itself.

"That should hold 'em," she muttered. "Now lead us out of here, Doctor."

"But you're wounded," Brasidus cried, looking for telltale patches of wetness on the dark material of her clothing.

"Just bruised. I'm wearing my bulletproof undies. But come on, you two. Hurry!"

Chapter Twenty-Three

SUDDENLY THE SPRINKLERS came on, saturating the air of the vestibule with aqueous mist and choking, acrid steam. But this was a help to the retreating defenders, a hindrance to the mob. Frightened, the rioters drew back. They had been ready enough to charge barefooted through and over blazing wreckage; now (but too briefly) the automatic firefighting system instilled in them the fear of the unknown. *An acid spray,* they must have thought, *or some lethal gas.* When their shouts made it obvious that they were inside the crèche, Heraklion and his party were already halfway along the first of the lengthy corridors.

The Doctor, it was obvious, knew his way. Without him, Brasidus and Peggy Lazenby would have been hopelessly lost. He turned into cross alleyways without hesitation, finally led them up a ramp, at the head of which was a massive door. It was shut, of course. Heraklion cursed, wrestled with the hand wheel that obviously actuated the securing device. It refused to budge.

Peggy Lazenby pulled out her laser pistol. Heraklion stared at her ironically. "Sure," he said. "Go ahead—if you've all day to play around in. But long before you've made even a faint impres-

sion, you'll wish that you'd kept the charge in that weapon for something more useful."

The mob was closer now. They did not know the direction their quarry had taken, but they were spreading through the vast building, looting and smashing. Sooner or later some of them would stumble upon the ramp leading up to the room housing the birth machine. *Sooner*, thought Brasidus, *rather than later.* He examined the pistol that he had taken from Diomedes. It was a standard officers' model Vulcan. One round up the spout, four remaining in the magazine. He regretted having dropped the cleaver that Terry had found for him.

"Here they are," announced Peggy unemotionally. She fired down the ramp, a slashing beam that scarred the paint work of the walls at the foot of the incline. There was a scream, and, shockingly, here was the rapid, vicious chatter of a machine carbine. But whoever was using it was not anxious to expose himself, and the burst buried itself harmlessly in the ceiling.

"I thought that only *your* people were allowed firearms," said Heraklion bitterly to Brasidus. Brasidus said nothing. If Diomedes, armed, had been among the mob leaders, how many of his trusted lieutenants were also involved?

Still Heraklion wrestled with the hand wheel, and still Peggy and Brasidus, pistols ready, kept their watch for hostile activity. But everything was quiet, too quiet—until at last, from the alleyway that ran athwart the foot of the ramp, there came an odd shuffling, scraping sound. Slowly, slowly the source of it edged into view. It was a heavy shield mounted on a light trolley. Whoever

had constructed it had known something about modern weaponry; a slab of concrete, torn up from a floor somewhere, was its main component. Of course, it could not withstand laser fire indefinitely, but long before it crumbled and disintegrated, the riflemen behind it would have disposed of the laser weapon and its user.

There was a small, ragged hole roughly in the center of the slab. Brasidus nudged Peggy, drew her attention to it. She nodded. Suddenly something metallic protruded from the aperture, something that flared and sputtered as the laser beam found it. But Brasidus, at the last moment, switched his own attention from the decoy to the rim of the shield, loosed off two hasty but accurate shots at the carbine that was briefly exposed, at the hands holding it.

Then Heraklion cried out. Under his hands the wheel had moved, was moving of its own accord. The enormously thick door was opening. The Doctor grabbed his companions, pulled them through the slowly widening gap, pushed them clear of the narrow entrance as a deadly hail of bullets splattered around it. Then he turned on the colleague who had, at last, admitted them. "Shut it! At once!" And, as the man obeyed, he demanded coldly. "You were a long time opening up. Why?"

"We had to be sure that it was you. We couldn't get the closed-circuit TV working."

"Even on this primitive planet," commented Peggy Lazenby, "one can find oneself at the mercy of a single fuse."

The little crowd of refugees, with their nervous

chatter, seemed out of place in these surroundings. There was an air of mystery—of holy mystery, even—that could not be dispelled by the intrusion. Tier upon tier towered the vats, empty now, but spotlessly clean and gleaming. Mile after convoluted mile ran the piping—glittering glass, glowing plastic, bright-shining metal. Bank upon bank stood the pumps, silent now, but ready, in perfect order, awaiting the touch of a switch to carry out their functions as mechanical hearts and lungs and excretory organs.

"There's no place like womb," remarked Margaret Lazenby.

"What was that, Peggy?"

"Never mind. You're too young to understand." Then, crisply official, "Doctor Heraklion, what now?"

"I . . . I don't know, Doctor Lazenby."

"You're in charge. Or are you?"

"I . . . I suppose that I am. I'm the senior doctor present."

"And Brasidus is the senior Security officer present, and I'm the senior Interstellar Federation's Survey Service officer present. And what about you, Terry? Are you the senior anything?"

"I don't know. But the other girls usually do what I tell them to."

"So we're getting some place. But where? Where? That's the sixty-four-dollar question." She took two nervous strides forward, two nervous strides back. "I suppose that this glorified incubator is on the phone, Doctor Heraklion?"

"It is, Doctor Lazenby. Unluckily the main switchboard for the crèche is just off the vestibule."

"A pity. I was thinking that you might get through to the military. Or even to the palace itself."

"We tried that as soon as we were warned that the mob was heading our way. But we got no satisfaction. In fact, we gained the impression that the top military brass was having its own troubles."

"They could be, at that," contributed Brasidus. "That sergeant who was leading the rioters, the one with the pistol—it was Diomedes."

"*What!*"

Heraklion was incredulous, Margaret Lazenby was not. She said, "It makes sense, of a kind. This wouldn't be the first time that an ambitious, comparatively junior officer has organized a coup. And I think I know what makes him tick—or made him tick. There was the lust for power, of course. But, with it, there was a very deep and very real patriotism. I'm a woman, and I had to meet him officially. I could tell, each time, how much he hated me and feared me. No, not personally, but as a member of the opposite sex.

"There are some men—and he was one of them—to whom a world like yours would be the ultimate paradise. *Men Only*. There are some men to whom this stratified social system of yours—cribbed, with improvements, from the *real* Spartans—would seem the only possible way of running a planet.

"But . . .

"But, Doctor Heraklion, there are other men, such as you, who would find the monosexual, homosexual setup rather unsatisfying. And you, my good Doctor, were in a position to do something about it."

Heraklion smiled faintly. "It's been going on for a very long time, Doctor Lazenby. It all started long before I was born."

"All right. The doctors were able to do something about it. I still don't *know* how this birth machine of yours works, but I can guess. I suppose that all approved Spartans make contributions of sperm cells."

"That is so."

"And the most important contribution—correct me if I am wrong—will be the annual shipments made by the aptly named *Latterhaven Venus* and *Latterhaven Hera*. Venus and Hera were Greek goddesses, by the way, Brasidus. Women—like me, and like Terry and the other playmates. How did the ships get their names, Heraklion?"

"We have always suspected the Latterhaveneers of a warped sense of humor."

"I wonder what the mob is doing?" asked somebody anxiously.

"We're safe enough here," said Heraklin curtly.

Are we? thought Brasidus, suddenly apprehensive. *Are we?* It seemed to him that the floor under his bare soles had become uncomfortably warm. He shifted his stance. Yes, the floor *was* heating up. He looked down, saw a crack in the polished surface. Surely it had not been there before. And if it had been, there had not been a thin wisp of smoke trickling from it.

He was about to tell Heraklion when a device on Peggy Lazenby's wrist—it looked like a watch but obviously was not—buzzed sharply. She raised her forearm to her face. "Doctor Lazenby here."

"Captain here. What the hell are you doing? Where are you?"

"Quite safe, John. I'm holed up in the crèche, in the birth-machine room."

"The crèche is an inferno. Admiral Ajax requested my aid to evacuate the children and to restore order in the city. We're on the way now."

The floor tilted, slightly but sharply. One of the vats shattered loudly and the piping dependent from it swung, clattering and tinkling, against the vessels in the tier below, breaking them. The smell of smoke was suddenly very strong.

"Is there only one way out of this place?" demanded Peggy sharply.

"No. There's a hatch in the roof. Through the records room." Heraklion told her.

"Then that's the way that we have to go to escape from this alleged H-bombproof shelter of yours." Into her wrist transceiver she said, "You'll have to pick us off the roof, John. And while you're about it, you can send a squad of Marines down to save the firm's books. No, I'm not joking."

Luckily the hatch was clear, and luckily the ladder was readily available. Through the little room they passed—the women, the surviving nurses and doctors, then, last of all, Heraklion, Peggy and Brasidus. Brasidus had almost to pull her away from the shelves of microfilmed records, and from the glass case in which was displayed the big, flat book on the cover of which, in tarnished gold, were the words, *Log of Interstellar Colonization Ship DORIC. First Captain Deems Harris.*

They were on the roof then—the tilting, shuddering roof, swept by scorching eddies and black, billowing smoke. The night sky above them was alive with the noise of engines, and from below

sounded, ever louder and more frightening, the roar of the fire. Cautiously Heraklion made his way down the listing surface to the low parapet. Brasidus followed him. The two men cautiously peered over, flinching back when a sudden gust of flame seared their faces, crisping their hair and eyebrows.

Grimes had sent down a landing party. Disciplined, uniformed men and women were handling chemical fire extinguishers, others, in a chain, were passing the children out of the blazing building. And still others had set up weapons to protect the rescuers; the rattle of heavy automatic fire was loud and insistent above the other noises.

Peggy Lazenby had joined the two men. "Intervention," she murmured. "Armed intervention. Poor John. He'll be in the soup over this. But what else could he do? He couldn't let those babies burn to death . . ."

"As we shall do," stated Heraklion grimly, "unless your captain does something about it, and fast." As he spoke the roof tilted another few degrees.

But the peculiar, irregular throbbing of the inertial drive was louder now, was deafening. Directly overhead, the glare of the fire reflected from the burnished metal of her hull, *Seeker* dropped through the vortex of smoke and sparks. Lower she sagged, and lower, until men and women cried out in fear and ran in panic to escape from the inexorably descending pads of her vaned landing gear. Lower she sagged, and lower—and from her open main airlock the boarding ramp was suddenly extruded, the lower end of it scant

millimeters only from the heaving, cracking surface of the roof. Even Brasidus knew that he was privileged to watch an exhibition of superb spacemanship.

Down the extended ramp ran six men. Peggy Lazenby met them, cried, "This way!" and led them to the still open hatchway. And a vastly amplified voice was booming from the ship, "Board at once, please! Board at once!"

Heraklion hustled his people into some sort of order, got them onto the gangway, the women first. He stayed with Brasidus, making sure that the evacuation proceeded in an orderly manner. Still the two men waited, although the loudspeaker was blaring. "Get a move on, there! Get a move on!"

At last the six men and Peggy Lazenby were emerging from the hatch, she last of all. They were heavily burdened, all of them, and she, clasping it to her as tenderly as she had clasped the rescued child, carried the antique log book.

"What are you waiting here for?" she demanded of Heraklion.

He said, "We have no spaceships, but we have read books. We know of the traditions. This crèche is my ship, and I shall be the last to leave."

"Have it your own way," she told him.

She and Brasidus went up the ramp after the six marines. Heraklion followed them. Just as he reached the airlock, a geyser of flame erupted from the open hatch and the once flat surface of the roof cracked and billowed and, as *Seeker* hastily lifted, collapsed.

"That *was* my ship," whispered the Doctor.

"You can build another," Peggy told him.

"No," he said. "No. No longer do we have any excuse not to revert to the old ways."

"And *your* old ways," she said, "are not the old ways of Diomedes and his party. That is why he hated and feared you. But can you do it?"

"With your help," he said.

"That," she said, "is a matter for the politicians back home. But let's get out of this damned airlock and into the ship, before we fall out. It's a long way down."

Brasidus, looking at the burning building far below, shuddered and drew back hastily, It was, as she had said, a long way down.

Chapter Twenty-Four

THE NIGHT OF the Long Knives was over, the Night of the Long Knives and the four action packed days and nights that had followed. The power had fallen into the streets, and Admiral Ajax, warned by his own intelligence service of the scheduled assassinations of himself and his senior captains, had swooped down from the sky to pick it up. The birth machine was destroyed, the caste system had crumbled, and only the patrolling airships of the Navy kept Sparta safe from the jealous attentions of the other city-states. Cresphontes—a mere figurehead—skulked in his palace, dared make no public appearances.

Grimes and his *Seeker* had played little active part in quelling the disturbances, but always the spaceship had been there, hanging ominously in the clouds, always her pinnaces had darted from one trouble spot to another, her Marines acting as ambulance men and firemen—but ambulance men and firemen backed by threatening weaponry to ensure that they carried out their tasks unmolested.

Brasidus had rejoined his own police unit, and, to his surprise, had found that greater and greater power and responsibilities were being thrust

upon him. But it made sense. He knew the spacemen, had worked with them—and it was obvious to all that, in the final analysis, they and the great Federation that they represented were the most effective striking force on the planet. They did not strike, they were careful not to fire a single gun or loose a single missile, but they were there, and where they had come from there were more and bigger ships with even heavier armaments.

The universe had come to Sparta, and the Spartans, in spite of centuries of isolationist indoctrination, had accepted the fact. Racial memory, Margaret Lazenby had said, long and deep-buried recollections of the home world, of the planet where men and women lived and worked together in amity, where the womb was part of the living female body and not a complex, inorganic machine.

And then there was the last conference in John Grimes' day cabin aboard *Seeker*. The Lieutenant Commander sat behind his paper-littered desk, making a major production of filling and lighting his pipe. Beside him was Margaret Lazenby, trim and severe in uniform. In chairs facing the desk were the rotund little Admiral Ajax, the tall, saturnine Heraklion, and Brasidus. A stewardess brought coffee, and the four men and the woman sipped it appreciatively.

Then Grimes said, "I've received my orders, Admiral. Somewhat garbled, as messages by psionic radio too often are, but definite enough. I have to hand over to the civil authorities and then get the hell out." He smiled bleakly. "I've done enough damage already. I fear that I shall have to do plenty of explaining to my lords Commissioners."

"No, Commander." Heraklion's voice was firm, definite. "You did not do the damage. The situation, thanks to Diomedes, was already highly explosive. You were only the . . . the . . ."

"The detonator," supplied Ajax.

"Just how explosive was it?" inquired Grimes. "I'd like to know. After all, I shall have a report to make." He switched on a small recorder that stood among the litter on his desk.

"Very explosive. Some of us at the crèche had decided to make women, not only for ourselves, but for every man on Sparta. We had decided to revert to the old ways. Diomedes knew of this. I still think that he was actuated by patriotism—a perverted patriotism, but patriotism nonetheless."

Peggy Lazenby laughed scornfully. "Fine words, Doctor. But what about the female baby who was exposed, the one that Brasidus and I rescued?"

"Yes, the Exposure. *That* was a custom that we intended to stamp out. But the unfortunate child, as well as being female, was mentally subnormal. She'd have been better off dead."

"So you say. But you forget that the planets of the Federation have made great strides in medical science during the centuries that you have been stagnating."

"Enough, Peggy. Enough," said Grimes tiredly. He put his pipe into a dirty ashtray, began to sort his papers. "As I told you, my orders are to hand over to the civil authorities. Who are they? The King? The Council?" The Spartans smiled scornfully. "All right. I suppose that you gentlemen will have to do. You, Doctor Heraklion, and you, Admiral Ajax, and you—just what rank *do* you

hold these days? I've rather lost track, Brasidus. But before I hand over, I want to be sure that the Admiral and friend Brasidus know what it's all about. Heraklion knows, of course, but even the most honest of us is liable to bend the facts.

"This ship, as you know, is a unit of the fleet of the Federation's Survey Service. As such she carries, on microfilm, a most comprehensive library. One large section of it is devoted to colonizing ships that are missing. We're still stumbling upon what are called the Lost Colonies, and it's helpful if we have more than a vague idea as to their origin. This Sparta of yours is, of course, a Lost Colony. We've been able to piece together your history both from our own reference library and from the records salvaged from the crèche.

"So far, the history of colonization comes under three headings, the First Expansion, the Second Expansion and the Third Expansion. The First Expansion was initiated before there was a practicable FTL—faster than light—drive. The Second Expansion was carried out by vessels fitted with the rather unreliable Ehrenhaft Drive, the so-called gaussjammers. The Third Expansion made use of timejammers, ships with the almost foolproof Mannschenn Drive.

"The vessels of the First Expansion, the deep-freeze ships, went a long way in a long time, a very long time. They carried at least three full crews—captains, watch-keeping officers, maintenance engineers and the like. The colonists, men and women, were in stasis, just refrigerated cargo, in effect. The crews spent their off-duty months in stasis. But there was, of course, always one full crew on duty.

"As a result of some incredible stupidity on

somebody's part, the crews of many of the early ships were all male. In the later ones, of course, the balance of the sexes was maintained. *Doric*—the ship from which this Lost Colony was founded—had an all male crew, under First Captain—he was the senior of the four masters—Deems Harris. This same Captain Harris was, probably, a misogynist, a woman hater, when the voyage started. If he were not, what happened probably turned him into one.

"Third Captain Flynn seems to have exercised little control over his offiers—or, perhaps, he was the ringleader. Be that as it may, Flynn decided, or was persuaded, to alleviate the monotony of his tour of duty by reviving a dozen of the more attractive colonist girls. It seems to have been quite a party while it lasted—so much so that normal ship's routine went by the board, vitally important navigational instruments, such as the Very Long Range Radar, were untended, ignored. The odds against encountering a meteoric swarm in deep space are astronomical—but *Doric* encountered one. Whether or not she would have been able to take avoiding action is doubtful, but with some warning *something* could have been done to minimize the effects of the inevitable collision. A collision there was—and the sphere in which the female colonists were housed was badly damaged, so badly damaged that there were no survivors. I should have explained before that these deep-freeze ships didn't look anything like a vessel such as this one; they consisted of globes held together by light girders. They were assembled in orbit and were never intended to make a landing on any planetary surface.

"Anyhow, Captain Flynn aroused Captain Harris and the other masters and their officers after the damage had been done. Captain Harris, understandably, took a somewhat dim view of his junior and formed the opinion that if Flynn had not awakened those women the collision would not have occurred. Oddly enough, as his private journal indicates, he blamed the unfortunate wenches even more than he blamed Flynn. He despised Flynn for his weakness and irresponsibility — but those poor girls he *hated*. They were thrown into some sort of improvised brig.

"Meanwhile, *Doric* was far from spaceworthy. Apart from the slow leakage of precious atmosphere, much of her machinery was out of kilter, the automated 'farm,' upon which the crew depended for their food and their atmospheric regeneration, especially. Although the world that you know as Sparta was not the ship's original objective—oddly enough, long-range instrumental surveys had missed it—*Doric's* quite excellent equipment picked it up, made it plain to Captain Harris that he could reach it before air and food and water ran out. So, putting all hands save himself and one officer back into stasis, he adjusted his trajectory and ran for this only possible haven.

"His troubles were far from over. The shuttles — relatively small rocket craft used as ferries between the big ship in orbit and the world below—had all been ruined by that meteoric shower. Nonetheless—it was a remarkable feat of spacemanship—he succeeded in getting that unhandy, unspaceworthy and unairworthy near wreck down through the atmosphere to a relatively soft landing.

"At first glance, the survivors were not too badly off. The planet was habitable. The fertilized ova of various animals—sheep, pigs, cattle, dogs and cats, even—had all been destroyed by the crash landing, but the local fauna was quite edible. And the ship had carried a large stock of seed grain. There was a decided imbalance of the sexes—the only women were Captain Flynn's hapless ones, and there were all of five thousand men — but even that would right itself in time. The ship—as did all ships of that era—carried equipment that was the prototype of your birth machine, and there were supplies of deep-frozen sperm and ova sufficient to populate a dozen worlds.

"But . . .

"Twelve women, and five thousand and forty-eight men.

"Rank, said Captain Flynn and some of the other officers, should have its privileges. It most certainly should not, said the colonists—among them, of course, the twelve men whose wives the women had been.

"There was trouble, starting off with a few isolated murders, culminating in a full-scale revolt against the officers and those loyal to them. Somehow the twelve girls were . . . eliminated. Deems Harris doesn't say as much in his journal, but I gained the impression that he was behind it.

"Now, this Deems Harris. It is hard for us in this day and age of quick passages to get inside the skins, the minds of those old-time space captains. Probably none of them was quite sane. Most of them were omnivorous, indiscriminating readers, although some of them specialized. This Deems

Harris seems to have done so. In history. By this time, with his colony off to a disastrous beginning, he seems to have hankered after some sort of culture in which women played a very small part—or no part at all. One such culture was that of Sparta, one of the ancient Greek city-states back on Earth. Greek women were little more than childbearing, housekeeping machines—and the Spartan women suffered the lowest status of them all. Sparta was the state that specialized in all the so-called manly virtues—and little else. Sparta was *the* military power. Furthermore, the original Spartans were a wandering tribe called Dorians. Dorians—*Doric*–See the tie-up? And their first King was Aristodemus. Aristodemus—Deems Harris.

"The first Aristodemus, presumably, kept women in their proper place—down, well down. This latter-day Aristodemus would go one better. He would do without women at all." Grimes looked at Margaret Lazenby. "At times I think that he had something."

"He didn't have women, that's for certain. But go on."

"All right. Aristodemus—as we shall call him now—was lucky enough to command the services of like-minded biochemists. The sperm, of course, was all neatly classified—male and female being among the classifications. Soon that first birth machine was turning out a steady stream of fine, bouncing baby boys. When the adult populace started to get a bit restive, it was explained that the stock of female sperm had been destroyed in the crash. And somebody made sure that the stock *was* destroyed."

"But," Brasidus interrupted, "but we used to reproduce by fission. Our evolution from the lower animals has been worked out in detail."

"Don't believe everything you read," Peggy Lazenby told him. "Your biology textbooks are like your history textbooks—very cunningly constructed fairy tales."

"Yes," said Grimes. "Fairy tales. Aristodemus and his supporters were able to foist an absolutely mythical history upon the rising generations. It seems fantastic, but remember that there was no home life. They—like you, Brasidus, and like you, Admiral—knew only the Spartan state as a parent. There were no fathers and mothers, no grandfathers and no grandmothers to tell them stories of how things used to be. Also, don't forget that the official history fitted the facts very neatly. It should have done—after all, it was tailor-made.

"And so it went on, for year after year, for generation after generation, until it became obvious to the doctors in charge of the birth machine that it couldn't go on for much longer. That bank of male sperm was near exhaustion. This first crisis was surmounted—ways and means were devised whereby every citizen made his contribution to the plasm bank. A centrifuge was used to separate X-chromosome-bearing sperm cells from those carrying the Y-chromosome. Then the supply of ova started to run out. But still the race was in no real danger of extinction. All that had to be done was to allow a few female children to be born. In fact, this did happen now and again by accident—but such unfortunates had always been exposed on the hillside as defective infants. Even so, the doctors of those days were reluctant to

admit female serpents into this all-male paradise.

"And now Latterhaven comes into the story. I'm sorry to have to disappoint you all, but there never was a villainous Admiral Latterus. And, apart from the ill-fated *Doric*, there never were any spaceships owned by Sparta. But while Aristodemus was building his odd imitation of the original, Terran Sparta, the First Expansion ran its course. Then, with the perfection (not that it ever was perfect) of the Ehrenhaft Drive came the Second Expansion. Finally, there was the Third Expansion, and there was the star ship *Utah*, commanded by Captain Amos Latter. It was Latter and his people who founded the colony—one run on rather more orthodox lines than yours—on Latterhaven, a world only a couple of light years from this one.

"The Latterhaveneers made explorations of the sector of space around their new home. One such expedition stumbled upon Sparta. The explorers were lucky not to be slaughtered out of hand—the records indicate that they almost met such a fate—but they were not, and they dickered with the Spartan top brass, and all parties eventually signed a trade agreement. In return for the spice harvest, Latterhaven would send two ships each Spartan year with consignments of unfertilized ova.

"The situation could have continued indefinitely if we hadn't come in—or if Diomedes hadn't found out about the doctors' secret harem."

"The situation would not have continued," stated Heraklion. "As I've told you, Commander, it was our intention to introduce a reversion to the normal way of birth."

"That's your story and you stick to it. It could be true, I suppose; it would account for the way that Diomedes hated you." He refilled and relit his pipe. "The question is, what happens now?"

"What does happen?" asked Admiral Ajax.

"To begin with, I've been recalled to base. I shall have to make my report. It is possible that the Federation will replace your birth machine—although, come to that, you should be able to import materials and technicians from Latterhaven. You might even be able to build a new one for yourselves. But . . .

"But the Federation is apt to be a little intolerant of transplanted human cultures that deviate too widely from the norm. Your monosexual society, for example—and, especially, your charming custom of Exposure. This is your world and, as far as I'm concerned, you're welcome to it. I'm a firm believer in the fifth freedom—the freedom to go to hell your own way. But you've never heard a politician up on his hind legs blathering about the Holy Spirit of Man. If you want to reconstruct your society in your own way, in your own time, you'll have to fight—not necessarily with swords and spears, with guns and missiles—for the privilege.

"I advise strongly that you send a representative with us, somebody who'll be able to talk sense with my lords and masters, somebody who'll be able to take a firm line."

"There's Brasidus," said Peggy Lazenby softly, looking directly at him. *You and I have unfinished business,* her eyes said.

"Yes. There's Brasidus," agreed Grimes. "After all, he knows us."

And he'll get to know us better. The unspoken

words, her unuttered thought, sounded like a caressing voice in Brasidus' mind.

"But we need him," said Heraklion.

"A first-class officer," confirmed Ajax. "He has what's left of the Police eating out of his hand."

"I think that one of *my* colleagues would be a better choice as emissary," said Heraklion.

"So," murmured Grimes. "So . . ." He looked steadily across his desk at the Spartans. "It's up to you, Lieutenant or Colonel or whatever you are. It's up to you. I'm sure that Admiral Ajax will be able to manage without you—on the other hand, I'm sure that Doctor Heraklion's friend will prove a quite suitable envoy.

"It's up to you."

It's up to me, Brasidus thought. He looked at the woman sitting beside the space commander—and suddenly he was afraid. Diomedes' words about the frightening powers wielded by this sex lingered still in his mind. But, in the final analysis, it was not fear that prompted his answer, but a strong sense of responsibility, of loyalty to his own world. He knew—as the aliens did not, could never know—how precarious still was the balance of power. He knew that, with himself in command—effective if not titular—of the ground forces, peace might be maintained, the reconstruction be commenced.

"It's up to you," said Peggy Lazenby.

He said firmly, "I'd better stay."

She laughed, and Brasidus wondered if he alone were aware of the tinkling malice that brought an angry flush to his face. "Have it your own way, sweet. But I warn you, when those tough, pistol-toting biddies of the Galactic Peace

Corps get here, you'll wonder what's struck you."

"That will do, Peggy." Grimes' voice snapped with authority. "That will do. Now, gentlemen, you must excuse us. We have to see our ship secured for space. How soon can you get your envoy here, Doctor Heraklion?"

"About an hour, Commander."

"Very good. We shall lift ship as soon as he's on board." He got to his feet, shook hands with the three Spartans. "It's been a pleasure working with you. It's a great pity that it was not in pleasanter circumstances."

This was dismissal. Ajax in the lead, the three men walked out of Grimes' cabin. Brasidus, bringing up the rear, heard Peggy Lazenby say softly, "The poor bastard!"

And he heard Grimes reply, in a voice that held an unexpected bitterness, "I don't know. I don't know. He could be lucky."

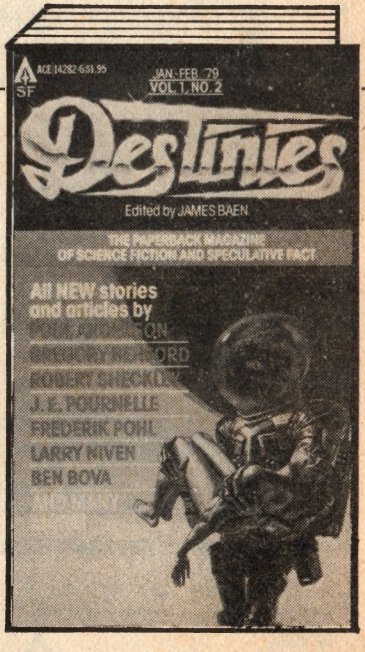
For a long while Brasidus wondered what they meant, but the day came at last when he found out.

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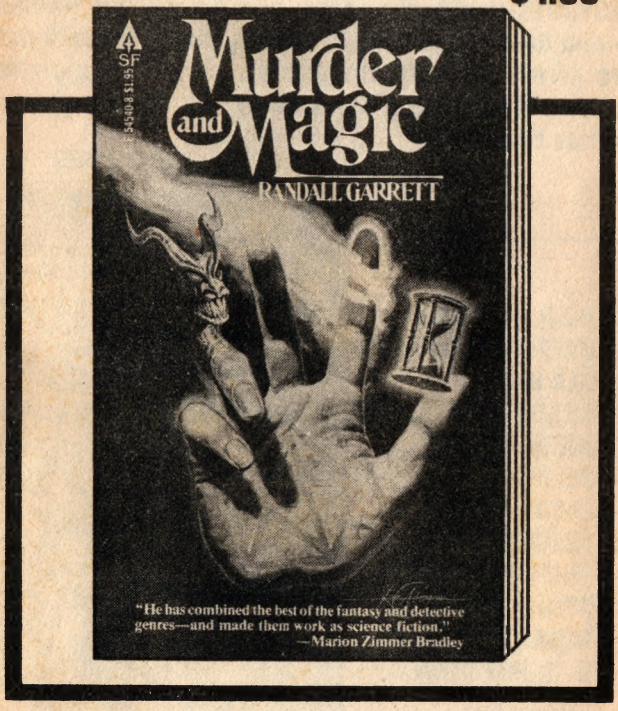
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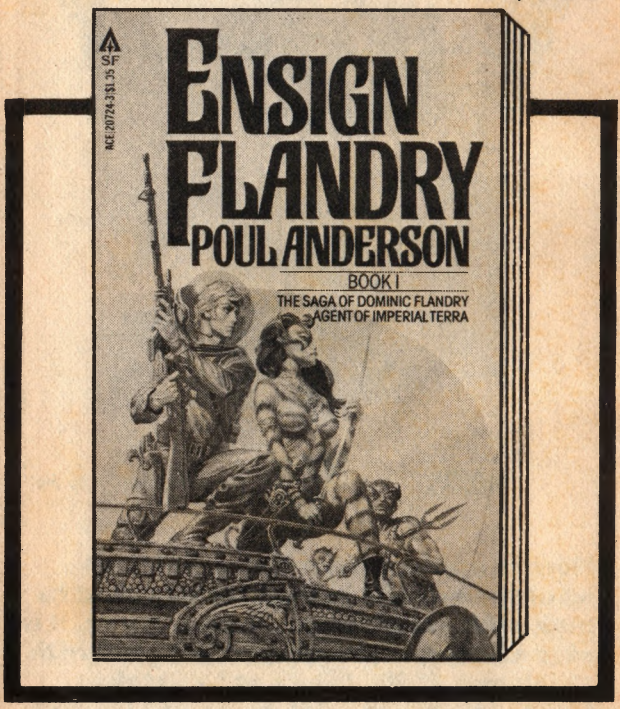
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