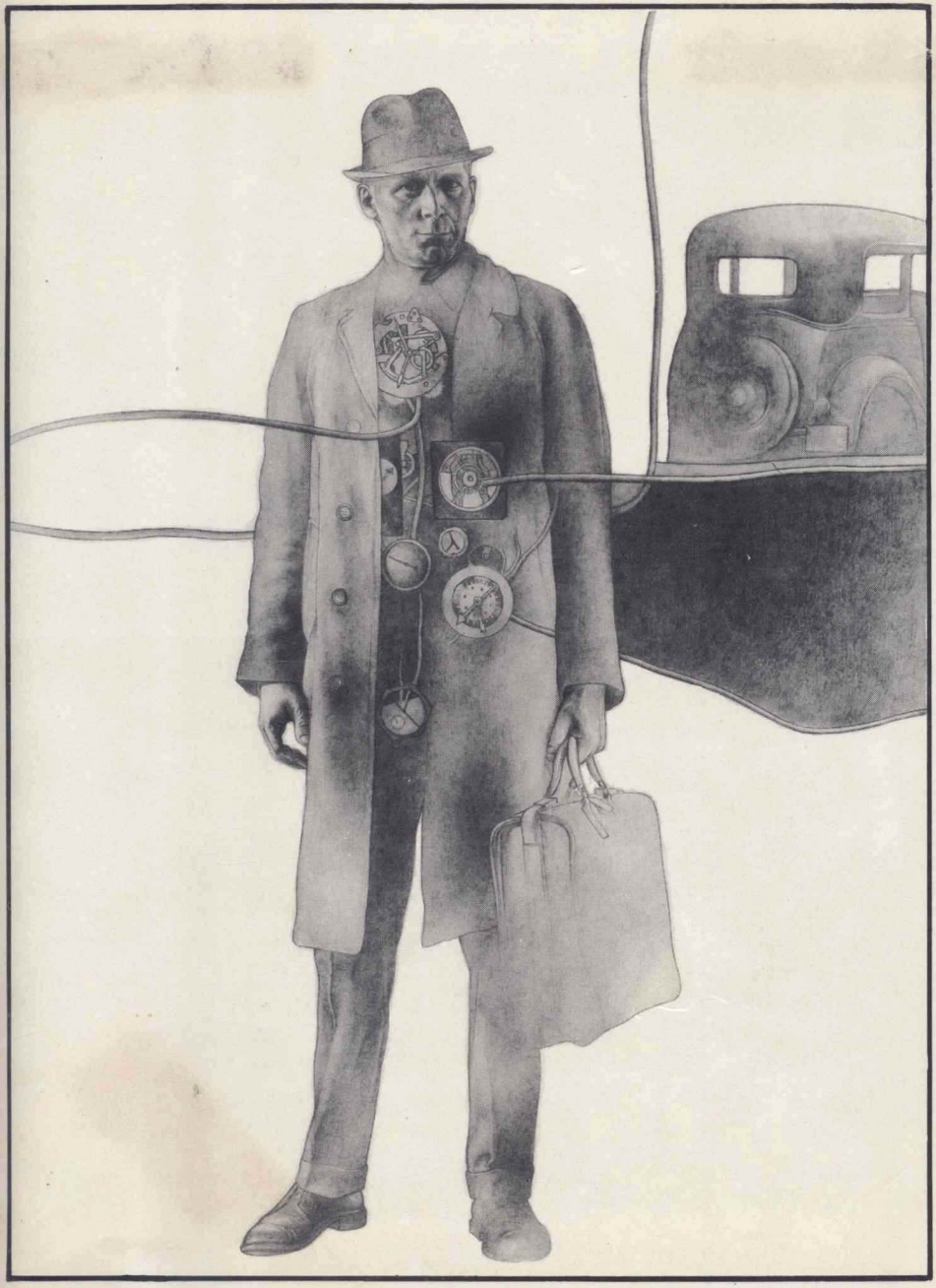
The Eleventh Galaxy Reader

Edited by Frederik Pohl

Doubleday Science Fiction



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The Eleventh Galaxy Reader

Edited by Frederik Pohl

From one of the liveliest, most respected science-fiction magazines of all, comes an unusual selection of the best stories of the year—as selected by both the magazine's noted editor, Frederik Pohl, and by a survey conducted with the magazine's readers. The result is a collection whose componants are as notable for their uniqueness as for their quality.

The stories include:

THE SHARING OF THE FLESH, *by Poul Anderson:* a tale of Atrocity versus Society set against an interstellar civilization.

(continued on back flap)

(continued from front flap)

NIGHTWINGS, *by Robert Silverberg:* a lyrical and lilting evocation of the fall of Earth to alien beings.

WHEN I WAS VERY JUNG, *by Brian W. Aldiss:* a comitragic story about the flat acceptance of the terrors of starvation—by the well-fed—a hundred years from now.

ONE STATION OF THE WAY, *by Fritz Leiber:* a fable of galactic religious inspiration and its fomentors.

And six others.

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THE ELEVENTH GALAXY READER

BOOKS BY FREDERIK POHL

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THE ELEVENTH
GALAXY READER

Edited by FREDERIK POHL

DOUBLEDAY & COMPANY, INC.
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CONTENTS

Introduction *by Frederik Pohl*	1
The Time Trawlers *by Burt Filer*	5
The Sharing of Flesh *by Poul Anderson*	24
Nightwings *by Robert Silverberg*	63
Among the Bad Baboons *by Mack Reynolds*	124
Behind the Sandrat Hoax *by Christopher Anvil*	169
One Station of the Way *by Fritz Leiber*	196
Sweet Dreams, Melissa *by Stephen Goldin*	211
When I Was Very Jung *by Brian W. Aldiss*	217
Jinn *by Joseph Green*	223
Find the Face *by Ross Rocklynne*	238

THE ELEVENTH GALAXY READER

Introduction: How to Spot the Good Ones

Theodore Sturgeon, no slouch of a science-fiction writer himself, once pointed out that the trouble with describing science fiction to people who don't know much about it is this: The reason they don't know much about science fiction is that they've probably come across some, and hated it, because it was very bad. Ninety percent of science fiction, he said, let's face it, *is* bad. But that's not surprising, he went on, elaborating what has since become known as Sturgeon's Law. After all, 90 percent of *everything* is bad.

If anything, of course, the 90 percent figure is immeasurably too low. You lucky readers out there never see any of the *atrociously* bad stories. They don't get printed in the first place. (*Galaxy*, for instance, receives some four thousand stories submitted each year, out of which we are lucky to be able to buy a hundred or so that we like well enough to print.)

Still, even though we are immoderately pleased with ourselves about what good stories we print, we must confess that even among the ones we do print there are some which are . . . well . . . not *bad*, exactly, but certainly *less good* than others. (We will not even touch upon those unspeakable efforts which sometimes disgrace other publications. Shameful! Disgusting! How can they be so blind!)

Of course, none of this should be astonishing in any way, since obviously no matter how high or low the average is, certainly some of the component pieces that make the average must be above it, and others below it. One of the purposes of anthologies like this one is to sort out the average

and below-average pieces and discard them, leaving you only the cream of the cream to enhance your reading enjoyment.

This is a worthy plan. Sometimes it even works. Sometimes it does not. It's not as easy as it sounds, because there are technical problems (lengths, rights, duplication of authors) which limit the absolute freedom of choice that most people think editors have, and editors are all too well aware they lack. But still probably anthologies are somewhat better in quality, taken all in all, than the periodicals from which they draw their contents.

Or are they?

One reason why they may not always be quite that is that anthologies, like magazines, are edited by human beings. Human beings make mistakes. Human beings have special personal preferences, and considerable personal blind spots.

I like to think that I know what mine are, of course. But I'm probably wrong. And though I assure you that I spend a lot of time trying to find objective measures of quality by which to choose between stories, I know perfectly well in my heart that any such measure is nonsense. It isn't what a story "is" that matters. What matters is what it "does"—specifically, what it does to the average common sensual reader, in terms of how it interacts with his background, sensuality and habits.

All the previous *Galaxy* anthologies, then, have been reflective most of all of the taste of two men—me, in the case of the last few; my esteemed predecessor, Horace L. Gold, in the case of the earlier ones. What's good about them shows our good taste; what's bad shows our built-in blunders.

This one, however, is different.

In 1968 *Galaxy* tried an experiment, and it worked so well that we wonder why we never tried it before. We assembled random lists of subscribers and queried them as to

their favorite stories; tallied their votes, and awarded prizes to the ones that came in on top.

Apart from serials, the *Galaxy* stories that most pleased the largest number of readers are the ones that appear in this volume.

I won't conceal from you that if I had been assembling this volume myself it would not have contained exactly these stories. Robert Silverberg's *Nightwings* would surely have been in it; so would Burt Filer's *The Time Trawlers;* so would one or two others. There is no story in the volume that I would have resolved *not* to include; but there are a few stories which did relatively poorly in the voting that, in terms of my own special built-in personality quirks, would have made their way into the book, and therefore some of the stories you see herein might well have been excluded for reasons of space.

But just this once, just as an experiment, just so that anyone who is interested can see what these reader-rated stories are like—here are *Galaxy's* top from 1968, exactly as chosen by groups of readers of no special expertise or factional interest, just people who like science fiction very much.

Actually, I think they have very good taste!

FREDERICK POHL

THE TIME TRAWLERS

By Burt Filer

Kearney sat up in Orestes' bow, one eye on his net, the other on the stars. He was a big kid with quiet eyes, hard arms and the knack. The fishing boat rocked beneath him as fishing boats have done for millennia, but with differences. For the tang of fish in salt air was substituted for the thin reek of warm insulation; for the lap of waves and gull cries there was the white star-hiss of quiet headphones and the sixty-cycle hum of machinery.

The ship herself was as homely as her task, a symmetrical cucumber all lumpy with warts. Each of these carried a net and its netman, except one large blister on the port side that was the bridge. Orestes dragged her skein through space behind her, flapping empty since they'd so far caught nothing.

The net that Kearney plied so skillfully was a strange thing; a ribbon of light that wasn't light at all, but the shimmering boundary between present and future. For Orestes was a time trawler. She fished thirty gigayears into the future for raw materials to feed the hungry galaxy of the present.

Kearney hadn't had netwatch by himself until this trip; he'd just recently been qualified. But only the rulebook had held him back this long because, as everyone knew, he had the knack. Something behind those dark eyes could read the stars. Computers were all right for the ordinary netman, but nothing beat the knack if you had it, and Kearney had it in spades.

How did he know where a star was going to be in thirty

billion years? Or more exactly thirty one point 976,034,762, which was their present trawling depth? Well, he looked at them, talked to them a little. In a way he wooed them, loved them, asked them where they were going and couldn't he come along? After sitting there an hour or two, watching their slow, syncopated dance, he got an idea of things. Gavotte, twist, sometimes a just free ballet, all for grace. Kearney followed the dance.

Old ones went nova, and he knew there'd be a space there pretty soon, deep in time or shallower, depending on their size. So they wouldn't pull their little trains of followers or get in the way of others, after a while.

Kearney could even pick out those which danced awkwardly, encumbered by a system of planets, an even more valuable part of his knack. The trawlers called these the big ones, because the smallest planet was worth more commercially than the largest sun.

It's hard to tell if Kearney thought of the stars as stars. It's more likely he regarded them as birds or ghosts. Bodecs, down in centcomm, said he sometimes heard the kid humming to himself, talking to them, even answering, "Hey little jobber, where the hell have you been?" and stuff like that. He said, "Yes," a lot too, which was weirder still.

But whatever Bodecs or the rest of them thought, they kept it to themselves, even the skipper. Kearney had the knack, and that was enough. They'd go home with a fat catch because of it. It was only a matter of time before the kid tracked down a biggy and earned them all a bonus.

So Kearney sat up in the bow bubble and talked to the stars. He spun his nets down in the future and sang to himself. He knew where they'd be, the biggies, *and he systematically avoided them.* Nobody knew that, of course.

His problem, if you want to call it that, was scruples. Big ones were valuable because of their planets. While the raw energy of stars had to be processed down to matter, planets

were matter to begin with. The processing was ten times easier and cheaper, so the trawlers got ten times the normal price for them at Port Pluto. But planets often had the unsettling property of supporting life, and processing them down to raw materials was a little rough on the natives. Which turned Kearney completely off.

It would only have been a matter of time before his otherwise bountiful net would become conspicuous for its lack of big ones; but that time never came because something else happened first.

Kearney was probing when he felt the vibes.

He locked on. Something down there. To centcomm he said, "Bodecs? Hey Bodecs, I've got something. Little but heavy."

"Need help?"

"No, my net'll take it. But wake up the winch crew."

Seen from a few miles off, the Orestes netlifting operations were slow and unspectacular. A few lights went on, making odd blotches beneath her translucent skin. All the other nets flickered off so as not to foul Kearney's, and to leave more power for the winch. Kearney's beam grew more intense, and the veins of blue began to writhe in its milky light. The fishing ship herself swung around to tug the net in along the line of her keel. For almost an hour, nothing else happened. They towed their catch up through the thirty-billion-year quarantined layer.

The reason for the layer was obvious. You didn't want to deplete the near future to feed the present. You might end up hurting yourself, in a sense killing your grandson so that your son could be born.

The layer was more than an inconvenience, since the deepest a good net would go was only thirty-two gigayears. So fishermen were restricted to skimming a very thin layer of the future, which made for maximum work and competition, minimum profit.

Up it came, Kearney's catch. It bobbed into the visible portion of his net beam and stayed there, shimmering. It was a starship.

Kearney let out his breath until there was no more air and then wrung his lungs out even further. He'd done it; he'd put the Orestes on the track of a biggy. The mother system of that little round ship was lying down on the bottom somewhere nearby. He sat there and quietly hated himself. In his earphones, there was jubilation. The skipper told Kearney to swing his catch back along their ship to where the grappling beams could stuff it into the skein, and he did what he was told. Even as he worked, half a dozen netbeams swept downtime near where his prize had emerged.

They got it. Six fat nets locked on, intensified, veined and pulled. In the earphones came a babble of orders and cheers and a mild congratulation from the skipper himself. Well done! Then more orders. It would take time. It was a Sol-sized star with four planets. One was a neo-Venus, obviously the home of the starship. Some one calculated that she'd bring a three-thou bonus to every man aboard. Hey-y-y's came in a chorus, with more verbal pats on the back for Kearney.

Kearney switched off his net, slumped in the bubble and ran thoughtful fingers through his adolescent beard. Then, moving slowly so as not to draw a conspicuous amount of power, he swivelled his netgun's focus to the throat of the busy nets outside. He fingered power mode to repulsion, and waited. It would wreck six beam generators, maybe the ship, cost a million solars and his own life—but baby, that was going to be the big one that got away.

As the edge of their neo-Sol broke surface, Kearney triggered his netbeam and gave the power knob a vicious twist. His beam flared for a fraction of a second and went out. He'd overdone it, and the circuit breaker had blown. Even so, the six-beam net that meshed around the big one grew duller, then brighter in a series of power oscillations that rocked the Orestes. Bedlam sounded in the phones.

"What was that? . . . Damned if I know . . . Do you suppose the natives . . . Naww . . . power failure? . . . Engine room, how's the secondary? . . . Four-oh, Skipper, I swear it. There was this big surge and . . ."

So nobody knew. Kearney was prepared to blow his skin for success, but not failure. He swung his netbeam back to where it belonged, moded for normal power, reset the breaker, and left the bubble.

The passageways were dark, all power going to the nets. He fumbled along, aided only by his pocket torch, found the crew's wardroom, and drew some blacko. The first cup shook in his hand. The second didn't, and he could think again. He'd been foolish to think they wouldn't find out. A rerun of the engineering logs—after they were done with the hectic routine of reeling in the nets—would surely give him away.

It didn't even take that long. The wardroom was a large space and, except for Kearney, empty. It echoed when the PA went on and the skipper's voice boomed, "Netman Joseph Kearney, to my cabin, on the double."

The skipper's cabin was a square room with hologram murals of Tennessee hills on two walls. It was brightly lit even now, well furnished, greenly carpeted, and the oxygen was at full earth pressure, not the gaspy eighteen-six of the crew's quarters. Except for the furious little man behind the desk, it was a very nice place indeed. Skipper Macklin had a strip of logtape in his hand, and he shook it in Kearney's face.

"Just what in hell is this all about?"

"I tried to cut the nets."

Macklin's jaw dropped, then shut to form a wince that came with lemon sucking. "Why?"

"The natives."

"I don't believe it!" There was a long pause, ending with a sigh. "Yes, I do. Damn shame, too. You were good." Macklin stared disgustedly up at him, then got to his feet.

"Okay, out. If I see that baby face of yours for the rest of

the cruise, I'll put a foot in it. Stay off the nets, you're through."

"Yes, sir."

"And Kearney."

"Yes?"

"You're lucky you're such a kid. Otherwise, I'd kill you."

Kearney reeled back to crew's quarters in a daze. For perhaps twenty minutes he felt lucky to be alive. But for the rest of the cruise he felt rotten, and they were out the full four months.

He spent a lot of time staring out the stern bubble at the skein. Though they caught several planetoids and one neo-Uranus-sized free planet, Kearney's biggy dwarfed them all, tugging the skeinbeams tight around her. There was even a little fear on board that she'd burst the skein, which was tantamount to having a fusion bomb go off on the back porch. But it held.

The big one had been netted up intact, with even her rotation and energy balance preserved. It was likely the natives were still alive, possibly even unaware that they traveled in a temporal pocket thirty billion years in the past.

Kearney gazed on. Men had overrun the galaxy or there would not have been any time trawlers in the first place. Quadrillions of human beings scattered among the near stars, running out of food, metal, everything. The future opened before them like a tantalizing cornucopia. If the nets reached deeper, they could catch enough other material to toss back the big ones. But as it stood, the planets were altogether necessary, even inhabited ones.

That was the problem, and there wasn't any answer. When the Orestes finally anchored half a dozen parsecs off Port Pluto, Kearney went below and stayed. He didn't want to see the processing. He didn't want to see the awful explosion when Orestes dropped her shield and the neo-Venus found herself thirty gigayears displaced in time, her sun slowly

going out, her orbit wavering, her floods, her freezing, her loss of air. But most of all, Kearney didn't want to see the planet rent and ground to elements by the mining beams, or the endless line of space trucks that bore off the fragments like titanic hearses.

It was about this time that Kearney had a thought. It was a good thought, and he decided to devote the rest of his life to it.

He'd aged twenty years. The beard was fuller, the hair on his head thinner. Kearney still carried himself well, and though the springy grace of youth had gone, it had been replaced by the ponderous strength of a shot-putter. What few friends he had admired him.

But at thirty-eight Kearney had very few friends indeed. It was bad enough to trawl for a living, but he seemed to trawl for pleasure as well. He hadn't seen earth for six years, and only went into Port Pluto to sell his fish. Kearney was a loner.

After old Macklin had fired him, things had been difficult. He'd been blackballed. Fortunately the reputation of his knack went along with his reputation as a maverick, and commercial fishermen were a practical lot. He found work. In the course of four years on the boats out of Pluto he'd only turned up one more biggy. Lots of asteroids and suns, but only one biggy.

Then he'd bought his own boat, a leaky old smack with her name stenciled on the stern: *Limpet*. Somewhere along the line a crank had switched the final 't' to an 'r,' and none of her long string of owners had since seen fit to change it.

It was then that Kearney began his project. Alone on the Limper, he changed his tactics from avoiding the big ones to seeking them out. With his knack it wasn't difficult, either; he could have been a rich man. Yet the wholesalers to whom Kearney sold his catch had yet to record his bringing in a big one.

The biggy kicking in his nets right now was his fortieth. As he locked in the winch beams, Kearney hummed in self-congratulation: forty in sixteen years. Leaving the Limper to finish hauling in by herself, he crawled out of the bubble and into his cramped combined bridge and cabin.

Out came the thick notebook, of which thirty-nine pages were littered with notes, dates, calculations. It was quite like an anthropologist's fieldbook: thirty families of monkeys in their wild habitats. Discovered at different times. Habits noted. Notes of later visits. Each family had been given a toy—or was it a tool?—on an early visit, and their use of it observed on subsequent dates. There were gigayears between observations, sometimes. Some pages had stars, some x's, at least fifteen were crossed out blackly, failures for one reason or another. Nine were blank because there had been no monkeys at all.

Kearney flipped to a blank page and put (40) in the upper left corner. Then:

Big one Forty. Spatial location 790 x 328 x 237 *Temporal location: September* 11, 3181—*plus* 31.089,468,973.

Then he dropped the pen into the crotch of the binding to mark his place and went over to the locker. He got out his diving suit, then sat down where he could see the netbeam reeling its catch up through the millennia, and waited.

It bobbed to the surface an hour later: small, high intensity sun ringed by no less than seventeen planets. He took readings and immediately wrote off the first six and the last four as uninhabitable. Of the middle seven, the fifth looked most inviting, and he decided to hit her first. Kearney went aft to where the diving sled rested in her davits, sealed his helmet and shut the pressure lock behind him. A few minutes later the port opened and he aimed the little skiff out into space.

There was a saying that old sailors got used to the sensation of time-diving, and Kearney was an old sailor. Going from

the near-perfect vacuum of space, through the side of the netbeam and into the absolute vacuum of non-time was hardly noticeable at first. But after thirty or forty seconds inside, your nose and kneecaps began to wander all over your body. A torrent of false sensations played over you like colors running through an acid head. Two minutes of it would have been unbearable, but it was usually all over in one. Kearney had long since found out that old sailors were liars.

He filtered back into real—although future—time and found himself orbiting Forty's sun in roughly the same orbit as her fifth planet. He wheeled the sled into the smaller body's gravity well and let her pull it down, saving power, another trick only a man with a knack would dare. As he broke through the clouds and got his first good look, it was obvious that he'd guessed correctly.

Forty-dash-Five was a water-world, the driest areas just sandy marshes full of brilliantly blue weeds. With a symmetry that only intelligence could produce, canals mazed through them. Tetrahedral domes of jelly lined the canals.

Kearney picked the largest dome in view and landed next to it. Inside, four heads each with an eye and nine arms, stared hostilely out at him. Each arm held a spear. Kearney fought the urge to vomit, deciding then and there that he'd make no attempt to communicate.

He put the wheel and crossbow, plus a dozen other mind-benders into the hatch and ejected them. Next, a barrel-sized sphere of stainless steel went out. In it was a world of information—including his own biography and a promise to return.

When he took off again, some two dozen spears glanced off his hull. If he came back in a hundred years they'd be bullets, he hoped. But judging by their present state of evolution, he made a mental note to hold off for at least a few hundred thousand.

Kearney found life on none of the other six planets. About average, he sighed. Quite tired now, he headed back toward

the apex of the net beam, and Limper. The last thing he did before turning in was to set up a rep shield around Forty.

A few months later, Kearney headed into Port Pluto to drop his catch and pick up some fuel and supplies. The Limper towed laboriously at her skeinful of fish. Actually, she didn't tow them: her skeinbeams displaced their spatial coordinates of the future with those of the present. But this took energy—of which Limper had little—and she moved slowly.

Kearney anchored out at the processing station and cut the skein field. The displaced hydrogen of real space parted with a bang to accept two suns and an asteroid out of the future, and for a few seconds the fireworks were quite impressive. The wholesaler Androsias cheated him as usual, and as usual Kearney didn't stop to haggle. He left Limper at the piers and took a shuttle into Pluto. He needed supplies, and a night off.

The city was built on the inside surface of the hollowed-out planet. She was spun by external means—ion beams up on her frozen outside surface—and centrifugal force kept things attached to the inside shell with about half their normal weight. In essence it was an inside-out little place, quite unsettling until you got used to looking up and seeing down on the other side of the world, beyond the bluish artificial sun that was hung right in the middle by guywires.

Like most of the other buildings there, Pulaski's Bar was a hole in the ground. Kearney descended the widening spiral of steps that ran down the cone-shaped walls from above, then walked across thirty feet of flat floor to the circular bar in the middle.

Pulaski was alone. When he glanced out from under his hologlasses he merely said, "Oh, howsa."

"Okay. What's on?"

"Nothin' much. News." He took off the glasses, blinked. "Anverse?"

"If it's fresh." It wasn't, but Kearney sipped the murky euphoric and stared into the holomurals. Pulaski put his glasses back on and returned to his slouch against the back of the bar. The Alps and the Pacific were superimposed to give old earth a grander scene than she was ever mother of; that was one segment of the mural. On the other was a scene from the docks of New Orleans, circa 1890. Wherever did they dig these up. The Anverse began its work, and Kearney built a lifedream around the high-breasted crinoline creature in the foreground.

Customers came and went, one or two at a time, but Kearney dreamed on. He had a second glass and considered redreaming the same thing with slight changes, decided against it and ordered an anti. He was almost unbent again when Bobby Macklin and his crew rolled in. They weren't on anverse. Alky and plenty of it was what they ordered, and obviously had been ordering for some time.

Bobby Macklin was Skipper Macklin's son. When the old skipper died, Bobby had taken over. Kearney knew the man slightly and avoided him. It was not out of malice to the father, either, but simply because the son was an unpleasant sort, not worth the time.

Bobby, however, avoided no one. Peering across Pulaski's thin shoulder, he muttered a question thickly to one of his mates. Then, eyes widening, he answered the question himself. "Damn! It's him!" The fleshy finger pointed, and Kearney found himself looking into four pairs of slightly incredulous but very hostile eyes. As a man, the quartet got up and came around to take seats beside him.

"Hello, Bobby."

Thick hand on his shoulder, thick breath in his face. "Why, hi there old buddy. How's the sabotaging business, these days?" Feeling Kearney's muscles tighten under his hand, Bobby removed it quickly, sat up, went on in a louder voice.

"Guess what the boys and I found out in the Grand Banks last month?"

"I couldn't."

"Well, we found a little old radiobuoy that was signaling 'J. S. Kearney, FGS Limpet, No. Eleven.' So, I say to the boys, gee-whiz but our old buddy Kearney has staked himself a claim over there, and maybe there's others nearby. Because everybody knows what a knack old Kearney's got. That's what I said, right guys?"

Murmurs, nods, leers. Two customers started down the stairs, took one look at what was shaping up and fled.

"So you came over to raid my claim," Kearney said evenly. Like every other time trawler, he had claim buoys all over space, marking catches that were inconvenient to haul in or else so low in yield they might not pay their own way in skein energy. But Kearney had some others, too, special ones, forty of them.

Bobby ignored the accusation. "Anyway, we were fishing close by when guess what?"

Yes, it had been one of the forty, Kearney decided. "You fouled your nets?" he said, dropping his foot from the rung of the barstool to the floor.

"Fouled?" the gross man shouted. "Fouled? Burnt to a crisp! Blew two beamguns right off my ship, punctured two lazarettes. And I said, that's just like Kearney. He did it to my old man and he'd do it to anyone. Sabotaging a buoy. A repulsor shield, a goddamn repulsor shield!"

Kearney rose to his feet, his chin inches from Bobby's upraised face. "People who don't steal don't get into trouble." Bobby had his back to the bar, and Kearney pressed him against it lightly with the palm of his right hand, chucked him mockingly under the chin with the other. The fat man's cheeks went as red as his eyes and he was literally speechless. The pulpy mouth opened and for a second all that came out was a stammering hiss. But it ended. "Get him!"

Kearney pushed hard, sending Bobby careening over the bar. At the same time, he swung his head down and to the left, pivoting out of the clinch on his left foot. A bottle and the edge of a knuckly hand whistled through the air where his head had been and crashed on the table.

But the third of Macklin's netmen stayed with him, and before Kearney could straighten up from the dodge he felt hands in his beard and saw a knee coming up toward his face. All he had time to do was turn his head, and the sledgehammer hit his ear. He exploded backward from the force of it, so hard that his opponent was left holding two handfuls of whiskers.

Pain brings fury to some men. One must be careful when beating such a man not to hurt without maiming. Hair tearing, unfortunately, imparts maximum pain, does minimum damage. When Kearney got back on his feet, he was so incensed he wasn't even human.

He was back at his antagonist in one step. Planting his left foot, he executed a perfect punt on the other's chin with the right. It made a messy sound and left the man with loose gravel for teeth.

The first two were right behind, and one grabbed Kearney's foot, twisted and heaved. Kearney cartwheeled across the room and smashed into the wall. Half a breath later, Bobby's man came at him head down in a ram rush designed to spread Kearney's guts all over the flint glass mural screen. Kearney sidestepped. Bash! The man groaned when he hit; but, just to make sure, Kearney chopped twice at the thick neck before he hit the floor.

There was one left. Kearney came at him in a storm of knuckles. The man made a high sound in the back of his throat and fled. Kearney chased him halfway up the stairs, ran out of breath, and came dizzily down. He'd had it; that first headblow was getting to him.

Pulaski's hands appeared over the edge of the bar, followed

by the upper half of his apprehensive face, a perfect Kilroy. Then they disappeared and when he re-emerged, Pulaski was hauling a still windknocked Bobby Macklin to his feet.

"You broke four bottles," he said accusingly to Kearney, pointing to a mess of stains and broken glass on Bobby's backside.

"I'll pay. Got any water?" He dragged Bobby back on the customer's side of the bar and propped him up on a stool. Kearney took a long gulp from the glass Pulaski offered and threw the rest in Bobby's face.

"So you raided my buoy. What'd you do with the fish?"

"Nothing, we couldn't bring her in."

"You know what I'd have done if you had?" Kearney rapped him ungently on the windpipe.

"I can guess," he wheezed.

Kearney fought an urge to beat the man systematically to jelly. But he went over and retrieved what was left of his torn jacket from where it had come off near the wall. Then he paid Pulaski and went out.

Forty minutes later, Kearney had ordered a shuttle load of supplies and was on his way out to the Limper. No telling what Bobby had done to biggy Eleven when he'd dropped his nets on it. Wailing in protest at the throttle Kearney fed her, Limper was on her way to the Grand Banks within the hour.

Not surprisingly, the buoy had been destroyed, but there was considerable debris floating nearby to mark the place. Kearney grinned. He anchored and reached down the notebook.

Inhabited system Eleven. Spatial location 473 x 492 x 845. Temporal location: August 14, 3169—plus 31.085,672,-909. G-type, probably from Westover's Galaxy. One planet, two satellites, forty-hour day, twenty-seven month year. Natives semi-aquatic, scaled quadrupeds. IQ's around twenty. Left a complete set of plans. Give them about a quarter gigayear for development, and they should be ready.

Kearney made another entry describing Bobby's raid. Then he coded off the rep shield that had saved his fish from Bobby and went about trawling for her himself. In two hours he was in the sled, riding his terminal orbit around Eleven-dash-one.

Although the last time he'd been there was by local reckoning three hundred million years earlier, most of the landscape was fairly familiar. By landscape one meant topography; the scenery itself was vastly different. Eleven-one had gone from prehistoric ferns to solid city. She was just as crowded as the planets of Kearney's own time.

The largest city in view had a peculiar geometry. Some powerful planner had laid a mile-broad letter K on the countryside and built his roads to suit it. True, the interplaited cross streets were rarely symmetrical, but it had a certain beauty. Kearney felt godlike. At the intersection of the K was a park, wide green, waterlaced. A swamp, in fact. He drifted the sled for it, hit somewhere near the middle.

The woman—or so he judged her—who met him was greenish and reptilian, but rather pretty. Six or seven newts clustered fearfully around her as Kearney's sled settled into the tall grass, not twenty yards from their picnic table. Kearney stepped out, prepared to go through the take-me-to-your-leader bit; but she shortstopped the whole thing with four words.

"By Kearney," she whispered. "It's Kearney."

The ride through town to Super's palace gave him a chance to see what he'd wrought. Obviously he'd induced terrestrial evolution on what was basically an aquatic species, but they seemed none the worse for it. Doorknobs for webbed hands were the size of footballs and softly textured. Perambulators for newtlets were water filled. But everyone had the look of well-being that only a sophisticated use of science and democratic philosophy could bring about. So somehow he felt he hadn't left them too bad a legacy, three gigs earlier.

Super had the tall careful awkwardness of a Lincoln. He was worn-scaled and gray-green, the lighter shade apparently owing to age. And like the rest of them, his completely smooth body gave no reason for him to have been other than unclad. Behind his wide wooden desk lay the shell of a seed Kearney had shown three gigayears earlier.

"Kearney. So you're not a legend after all."

"Oh, I'm real."

"Well, thanks for this," Super said, waving a webbed hand at the steel capsule. "We've used it all. We've even got time trawlers of our own, now."

"You're welcome. Ready to pay for it?"

Super looked startled. "Pay?"

"Look, I came across your system by time trawling myself. You could easily have been reeled back to my own time and reduced to raw materials. As a matter of fact you still can."

Moisture glistened around Super's gill slits. "Extortion, Kearney?"

"Mildly, yes. I want a promise. Now you're time trawling yourself. You have the same power over future systems that I've had over you. I want you to promise to treat them as I've treated you. In other words, throw back the big ones. And educate them."

Super looked relieved.

"In addition," Kearney began—

Sunlight through the tall window faded, grew to double brilliance, then settled back to normal. Super cried, "What?" Kearney, smacking his forehead with a palm, said, "Murder! It must be Bobby."

After Kearney had left him in the debris of Pulaski's bottles and his own crewmen, Bobby Macklin was a frightened man. But back on his own ship he got braver. Orestes was twenty times the size of Limper, and could eat the little ship and spit out the bones before Kearney knew what hit him. That was Bobby's plan. He was quite sure Kearney would go out

to that pet biggy of his and check on things. So, not two hours after Kearney left, Bobby was hot behind him.

"I've got him on visual, Skipper. Looks like he's got that biggy up the surface."

"Good, he's saved us the trouble. Anchor, and get him on the Y band. Bobby settled contentedly back in the skipper's couch and leered out the port at Kearney's defenseless ship.

"Can't raise him—oh, wait, his autopilot's putting out a Standard Three. He's left the ship and gone diving down in the biggy."

Bobby grinned. "And that's where he'll stay. Send a crew over and transfer the fish from his net to ours. And have them bring back his diving phone. I want to say good-bye to dear old Kearney."

Down on Eleven-one, Kearney and Super sat in the latter's office.

"You're sure he'll call?" the green man asked.

"Yes, soon. It'd be his style to gloat. The blink in the sunlight was caused by his shifting us from one net to the other. Which means—"

"Which means, if I may quote, we're in the fire."

"Where'd you get that expression?"

"From the same encyclopedia that you both blessed and burdened us with willy-nilly three gigs ago."

"Come on, Super. Until now you were grateful."

"Until now. Agreed, you're the best of your type, Kearney; but men are a race of exploiters, pure and simple. Your friend would just as soon process us as—"

"My what? Now look, I have told you how this was supposed to work out. Bobby's just—"

"*Hey, Kearney,*" tinned a voice inside his helmet.

"Yeah, Bobby, hello."

"*Got you now, baby.*" There was a nasty snicker. "*When they run you through the processor you'll probably come out looking like—*"

"Okay, okay. Look, I want to buy my way out."

"With what? I've already got your ship. And this biggy."

"Peanuts. I can give you twice that."

"From where?"

"Let me up, and I'll tell you."

The snicker expanded to a laugh. *"Squirm, baby. You're never getting out."* Bobby clicked off.

"What now?" Super asked hopelessly. Even as they spoke the sun blinked again, indicating that their captor had shifted them to his skein.

Kearney shrugged. "We've got—let's see—probably ten of your days to come up with something."

Bobby Macklin called down into the skein in hopes of pulling a few more legs off his flies, but the flies wouldn't give him that satisfaction. He had the growing suspicion that something was brewing down there, and so he had ordered Orestes back to Port Pluto as fast as she could tow her load. The sooner he'd reduced Kearney to a handful of minerals, the better. But he wasn't quick enough. They were still four days off Pluto when his after netman called in.

"Skipper, there's something going on out in the skein."

Macklin rushed aft and peered out the stern bubble. There certainly was something going on. The sack of woven energy squirmed like the belly of a pregnant mare. It became bloated. Through its translucent walls Bobby and his crew saw now only one big one with her planet and moons, but four other stars.

"Quick, try and get Kearney." He was handed the phone. "Hey, Kearney, what gives?"

"Your skein, if you don't drop us."

"Where're you getting . . ."

"The future, our future. Sixty-five gigs from you. Listen, fathead, drop us or else. You know what a burst skein'll do to your ship."

"Yeah, louse," he clicked off. "Cut the skein. He's got us."

The beams flickered out, and Kearney, Super biggy Eleven's entire system and baggage dropped down through the eons to its own time.

Bobby Macklin rebuilt the skein, then headed disgustedly back to the Grand Banks for four months of fishing, legitimate, this time. Consequently, when he returned to Port Pluto he found himself one of the last to hear.

Kearney had headed for Port Pluto as soon as he'd gotten back to his ship. He'd gone to Galcouncil with a weird looking alien in tow, and made his pitch.

It was quite simple. What one did was throw back the big ones and teach them to time trawl themselves. For this the fishermen received two percent of the big one's own catch.

In a sense, Super had been right. Kearney's was a race of exploiters. But it took an honestly humane man like Kearney to dream up a cycle of exploitation where nobody lost. Under his plan the future did indeed open like an infinite cornucopia—of both raw materials and manpower—a huge cone whose base lay gigagigayears in the future. Each layer had only to go out and educate the next, then take their nominal two percent. But two percent of infinity is infinity, and each layer had more than enough supporters on the next to sustain it. Not only was it infinitely easier all around, but no big ones would ever have to be processed.

Bobby Macklin, returning from his four-month cruise, was among the last to know. The law had been in effect just about three days when he brought in the catch of his career and had it processed. A big one, his first and his last. Anyone's last.

THE SHARING OF FLESH

By Poul Anderson

Moru understood about guns. At least the tall strangers had demonstrated to their guides what the things that each of them carried at his hip could do in a flash and a flameburst. But he did not realize that the small objects they often moved about in their hands, while talking in their own language, were audiovisual transmitters. Probably he thought they were fetishes.

Thus, when he killed Donli Sairn, he did so in full view of Donli's wife.

That was happenstance. Except for prearranged times at morning and evening of the planet's twenty-eight-hour day, the biologist, like his fellows, sent only to his computer. But because they had not been married long and were helplessly happy, Evalyth received his 'casts whenever she could get away from her own duties.

The coincidence that she was tuned in at that one moment was not great. There was little for her to do. As militech of the expedition—she being from a half barbaric part of Kraken where the sexes had equal opportunities to learn arts of combat suitable to primitive environments—she had overseen the building of a compound; and she kept the routines of guarding it under a close eye. However, the inhabitants of Lokon were as cooperative with the visitors from heaven as mutual mysteriousness allowed. Every instinct and experience assured Evalyth Sairn that their reticence masked nothing except awe, with perhaps a wistful hope of friendship.

Captain Jonafer agreed. Her position having thus become rather a sinecure, she was trying to learn enough about Donli's work to be a useful assistant after he returned from the lowlands.

Also, a medical test had lately confirmed that she was pregnant. She wouldn't tell him, she decided, not yet, over all those hundreds of kilometers, but rather when they lay again together. Meanwhile, the knowledge that they had begun a new life made him a lodestar to her.

On the afternoon of his death she entered the bio-lab whistling. Outside, sunlight struck fierce and brass-colored on dusty ground, on prefab shacks huddled about the boat which had brought everyone and everything down from the orbit where *New Dawn* circled, on the parked flitters and gravsleds that took men around the big island that was the only habitable land on this globe, on the men and the women themselves. Beyond the stockade, plumy treetops, a glimpse of mud-brick buildings, a murmur of voices and mutter of footfalls, a drift of bitter woodsmoke, showed that a town of several thousand people sprawled between here and Lake Zelo.

The bio-lab occupied more than half the structure where the Saims lived. Comforts were few, when ships from a handful of cultures struggling back to civilization ranged across the ruins of empire. For Evalyth, though, it sufficed that this was their home. She was used to austerity anyway. One thing that had first attracted her to Donli, meeting him on Kraken, was the cheerfulness with which he, a man from Atheia, which was supposed to have retained or regained almost as many amenities as Old Earth knew in its glory, had accepted life in her gaunt grim country.

The gravity field here was 0.77 standard, less than two-thirds of what she had grown in. Her gait was easy through the clutter of apparatus and specimens. She was a big young woman, good-looking in the body, a shade too strong in the

features for most men's taste outside her own folk. She had their blondness and, on legs and forearms, their intricate tattoos; the blaster at her waist had come down through many generations. Otherwise she had abandoned Krakener costume for the plain coveralls of the expedition.

How cool and dim the shack was! She sighed with pleasure, sat down, and activated the receiver. As the image formed, three-dimensional in the air, and Donli's voice spoke, her heart sprang a little.

"—appears to be descended from a clover."

The image was of plants with green trilobate leaves, scattered low among the reddish native pseudo-grasses. It swelled as Donli brought the transmitter near so that the computer might record details for later analysis. Evalyth frowned, trying to recall what . . . Oh, yes. Clover was another of those life forms that man had brought with him from Old Earth, to more planets than anyone now remembered, before the Long Night fell. Often they were virtually unrecognizable; over thousands of years, evolution had fitted them to alien conditions, or mutation and genetic drift had acted on small initial populations in a nearly random fashion. No one on Kraken had known that pines and gulls and rhizobacteria were altered immigrants, until Donli's crew arrived and identified them. Not that he, or anybody from this part of the galaxy, had yet made it back to the mother world. But the Atheian data banks were packed with information, and so was Donli's dear curly head—

And there was his hand, huge in the field of view, gathering specimens. She wanted to kiss it. *Patience, patience,* the officer part of her reminded the bride. *We're here to work. We've discovered one more lost colony, the most wretched one so far, sunken back to utter primitivism. Our duty is to advise the Board whether a civilizing mission is worthwhile, or whether the slender resources that the Allied Planets can spare had better be used elsewhere, leaving these people in their misery for another two or three hundred years. To make*

an honest report, we must study them, their cultures, their world. That's why I'm in the barbarian highlands and he's down in the jungle among out-and-out savages.

Please finish soon, darling.

She heard Donli speak in the lowland dialect. It was a debased form of Lokonese, which in turn was remotely descended from Anglic. The expedition's linguists had unraveled the language in a few intensive weeks. Then all personnel took a brain-feed in it. Nonetheless, she admired how quickly her man had become fluent in the woodsrunners' version, after mere days of conversation with them.

"Are we not coming to the place, Moru? You said the thing was close by our camp."

"We are nearly arrived, man-from-the-clouds."

A tiny alarm struck within Evalyth. What was going on? Donli hadn't left his companions to strike off alone with a native, had he? Rogar of Lokon had warned them to beware of treachery in those parts. But, to be sure, only yesterday the guides had rescued Haimie Fiell when he tumbled into a swift-running river . . . at some risk to themselves. . . .

The view bobbed as the transmitter swung in Donli's grasp. It made Evalyth a bit dizzy. From time to time, she got glimpses of the broader setting. Forest crowded about a game trail, rust-colored leafage, brown trunks and branches, shadows beyond, the occasional harsh call of something unseen. She could practically feel the heat and dank weight of the atmosphere, smell the unpleasant pungencies. This world—which no longer had a name, except World, because the dwellers upon it had forgotten what the stars really were—was ill suited to colonization. The life it had spawned was often poisonous, always nutritionally deficient. With the help of species they had brought along, men survived marginally. The original settlers doubtless meant to improve matters. But then the breakdown came—evidence was that their single town had been missiled out of existence, a ma-

jority of the people with it—and resources were lacking to rebuild; the miracle was that anything human remained except bones.

"Now here, man-from-the-clouds."

The swaying scene grew steady. Silence hummed from jungle to cabin. "I do not see anything," Donli said at length.

"Follow me. I show."

Donli put his transmitter in the fork of a tree. It scanned him and Moru while they moved across a meadow. The guide looked childish beside the space traveler, barely up to his shoulder; an old child, though, near-naked body seamed with scars and lame in the right foot from some injury of the past, face wizened in a great black bush of hair and beard. He, who could not hunt but could only fish and trap to support his family, was even more impoverished than his fellows. He must have been happy indeed when the flitter landed near their village and the strangers offered fabulous trade goods for a week or two of being shown around the countryside. Donli had projected the image of Moru's straw hut for Evalyth—the pitiful few possessions, the woman already worn out with toil, the surviving sons who, at ages said to be about seven or eight, which would equal twelve or thirteen standard years, were shriveled gnomes.

Rogar seemed to declare—the Lokonese tongue was by no means perfectly understood yet—that the lowlanders would be less poor if they weren't such a vicious lot, tribe forever at war with tribe. *But really,* Evalyth thought, *what possible menace can they be?*

Moru's gear consisted of a loinstrap, a cord around his body for preparing snares, an obsidian knife, and a knapsack so woven and greased that it could hold liquids at need. The other men of his group, being able to pursue game and to win a share of booty by taking part in battles, were noticeably better off. They didn't look much different in person, how-

ever. Without room for expansion, the island populace must be highly inbred.

The dwarfish man squatted, parting a shrub with his hands. "Here," he grunted, and stood up again.

Evalyth knew well the eagerness that kindled in Donli. Nevertheless he turned around, smiled straight into the transmitter, and said in Atheian: "Maybe you're watching, dearest. If so, I'd like to share this with you. It may be a bird's nest."

She remembered vaguely that the existence of birds would be an ecologically significant datum. What mattered was what he had just said to her. "Oh, yes, oh, yes!" she wanted to cry. But his group had only two receivers with them, and he wasn't carrying either.

She saw him kneel in the long, ill-colored vegetation. She saw him reach with the gentleness she also knew, into the shrub, easing its branches aside.

She saw Moru leap upon his back. The savage wrapped legs about Donli's middle. His left hand seized Donli's hair and pulled the head back. The knife flew back in his right.

Blood spurted from beneath Donli's jaw. He couldn't shout, not with his throat gaping open; he could only bubble and croak while Moru haggled the wound wider. He reached blindly for his gun. Moru dropped the knife and caught his arms; they rolled over in that embrace, Donli threshed and flopped in the spouting of his own blood. Moru hung on. The brush trembled around them and hid them, until Moru rose red and dripping, painted, panting, and Evalyth screamed into the transmitter beside her, into the universe, and she kept on screaming and fought them when they tried to take her away from the scene in the meadow where Moru went about his butcher's work, until something stung her with coolness and she toppled into the bottom of the universe whose stars had all gone out forever.

*

Haimie Fiell said through white lips: "No, of course we didn't know till you alerted us. He and that—creature—were several kilometers from our camp. *Why* didn't you let us go after him right away?"

"Because of what we'd seen on the transmission," Captain Jonafer replied. "Sairn was irretrievably dead. You could've been ambushed, arrows in the back or something, pushing down those narrow trails. Best stay where you were, guarding each other, till we got a vehicle to you."

Fiell looked past the big gray-haired man, out the door of the command hut, to the stockade and the unpitying noon sky. "But what that little monster was doing meanwhile—" Abruptly he closed his mouth.

With equal haste, Jonafer said: "The other guides ran away, you have told me, as soon as they sensed you were angry. I've just had a report from Kallaman. His team flitted to the village. It's deserted. The whole tribe's pulled up stakes. Afraid of our revenge, evidently. Though it's no large chore to move, when you can carry your household goods on your back and weave a new house in a day."

Evalyth leaned forward. "Stop evading me," she said. "What did Moru do with Donli that you might have prevented if you'd arrived in time?"

Fiell continued to look past her. Sweat gleamed in droplets on his forehead. "Nothing, really," he mumbled. "Nothing that mattered . . . once the murder itself had been committed."

"I meant to ask you what kind of services you want for him, Lieutenant Sairn," Jonafer said to her. "Should the ashes be buried here, or scattered in space after we leave, or brought home?"

Evalyth turned her gaze full upon him. "I never authorized that he be cremated, Captain," she said slowly.

"No, but— Well, be realistic. You were first under anesthesia, then heavy sedation, while we recovered the body.

Time had passed. We've no facilities for, um, cosmetic repair, nor any extra refrigeration space, and in this heat—"

Since she had been let out of sickbay, there had been a kind of numbness in Evalyth. She could not entirely comprehend the fact that Donli was gone. It seemed as if at any instant yonder doorway would fill with him, sunlight across his shoulders, and he would call to her, laughing, and console her for a meaningless nightmare she had had. That was the effect of the psycho-drugs, she knew and damned the kindliness of the medic.

She felt almost glad to feel a slow rising anger. It meant the drugs were wearing off. By evening she would be able to weep.

"Captain," she said, "I saw him killed. I've seen deaths before, some of them quite messy. We do not mask the truth on Kraken. You've cheated me of my right to lay my man out and close his eyes. You will not cheat me of my right to obtain justice. I demand to know exactly what happened."

Jonafer's fists knotted on his desktop. "I can hardly stand to tell you."

"But you shall, Captain."

"All right! All right!" Jonafer shouted. The words leaped out like bullets. "We saw the thing transmitted. He stripped Donli, hung him up by the heels from a tree, bled him into that knapsack. He cut off the genitals and threw them in with the blood. He opened the body and took heart, lungs, liver, kidneys, thyroid, prostate, pancreas, and loaded them up too, and ran off into the woods. Do you wonder why we didn't let you see what was left?"

"The Lokonese warned us against the jungle dwellers," Fiell said dully. "We should have listened. But they seemed like pathetic dwarfs. And they did rescue me from the river. When Donli asked about the birds—described them, you know, and asked if anything like that was known—Moru said yes, but they were rare and shy; our gang would scare them

off; but if one man would come along with him, he could find a nest and they might see the bird. A house he called it, but Donli thought he meant a nest. Or so he told us. It'd been a talk with Moru when they happened to be a ways offside, in sight but out of earshot. Maybe that should have alerted us, maybe we should have asked the other tribesmen. But we did not see any reason to—I mean, Donli was bigger, stronger, armed with a blaster. What savage would dare attack him? And anyway, they *had* been friendly, downright frolicsome after they got over their initial fear of us, and they'd shown as much eagerness for further contact as anybody here in Lokon has, and—" His voice trailed off.

"Did he steal tools or weapons?" Evalyth asked.

"No," Jonafer said. "I have everything your husband was carrying, ready to give you."

Fiell said: "I don't think it was an act of hatred. Moru must have had some superstitious reason."

Jonafer nodded. "We can't judge him by our standards."

"By whose, then?" Evalyth retorted. Supertranquilizer or no, she was surprised at the evenness of her own tone. "I'm from Kraken, remember. I'll not let Donli's child be born and grow up knowing he was murdered and no one tried to do justice for him."

"You can't take revenge on an entire tribe," Jonafer said.

"I don't mean to. But, Captain, the personnel of this expedition are from several different planets, each with its characteristic societies. The articles specifically state that the essential mores of every member shall be respected. I want to be relieved of my regular duties until I have arrested the killer of my husband and done justice upon him."

Jonafer bent his head. "I have to grant that," he said low.

Evalyth rose. "Thank you, gentlemen," she said. "If you will excuse me, I'll commence my investigation at once."

—While she was still a machine, before the drugs wore off.

*

In the drier, cooler uplands, agriculture had remained possible after the colony otherwise lost civilization. Fields and orchards, painstakingly cultivated with neolithic tools, supported a scattering of villages and the capital town Lokon.

Its people bore a family resemblance to the forest dwellers. Few settlers indeed could have survived to become the ancestors of this world's humanity. But the highlanders were better nourished, bigger, straighter. They wore gaily dyed tunics and sandals. The well-to-do added jewelry of gold and silver. Hair was braided, chins kept shaven. Folk walked boldly, without the savages' constant fear of ambush, and talked merrily.

To be sure, this was only strictly true of the free. While *New Dawn's* anthropologists had scarcely begun to unravel the ins and outs of the culture, it had been obvious from the first that Lokon kept a large slave class. Some were sleek household servants. More toiled meek and naked in the fields, the quarries, the mines, under the lash of overseers and the guard of soldiers whose spearheads and swords were of ancient Imperial metal. But none of the space travelers was unduly shocked. They had seen worse elsewhere. Historical data banks described places in olden time called Athens, India, America.

Evalyth strode down twisted, dusty streets, between the gaudily painted walls of cubical, windowless adobe houses. Commoners going about their tasks made respectful salutes. Although no one feared any longer that the strangers meant harm, she did tower above the tallest man, her hair was colored like metal and her eyes like the sky, she bore lightning at her waist and none knew what other godlike powers.

Today soldiers and noblemen also genuflected, while slaves went on their faces. Where she appeared, the chatter and clatter of everyday life vanished; the business of the market plaza halted when she passed the booths; children ceased their games and fled; she moved in silence akin to the silence in her soul. Under the sun and the snowcone of Mount

Burus, horror brooded. For by now Lokon knew that a man from the stars had been slain by a lowland brute; and what would come of that?

Word must have gone ahead to Rogar, though, since he awaited her in his house by Lake Zelo next to the Sacred Place. He was not king or council president or high priest, but he was something of all three, and it was he who dealt most with the strangers.

His dwelling was the usual kind, larger than average but dwarfed by the adjacent walls. Those enclosed a huge compound, filled with buildings, where none of the outworlders had been admitted. Guards in scarlet robes and grotesquely carved wooden helmets stood always at its gates. Today their number was doubled, and others flanked Rogar's door. The lake shone like polished steel at their backs. The trees along the shore looked equally rigid.

Rogar's major-domo, a fat elderly slave, prostrated himself in the entrance as Evalyth neared. "If the heaven-borne will deign to follow this unworthy one, *Klev* Rogar is within—" The guards dipped their spears to her. Their eyes were wide and frightened.

Like the other houses, this turned inward. Rogar sat on a dais in a room opening on a courtyard. It seemed doubly cool and dim by contrast with the glare outside. She could scarcely discern the frescos on the walls or the patterns on the carpet; they were crude art anyway. Her attention focused on Rogar. He did not rise, that not being a sign of respect here. Instead, he bowed his grizzled head above folded hands. The major-domo offered her a bench, and Rogar's chief wife set a bombilla of herb tea by her before vanishing.

"Be greeted, *Klev*," Evalyth said formally.

"Be greeted, heaven-borne." Alone now, shadowed from the cruel sun, they observed a ritual period of silence.

Then: "This is terrible what has happened, heaven-borne,"

Rogar said. "Perhaps you do not know that my white robe and bare feet signify mourning as for one of my own blood."

"That is well done," Evalyth said. "We shall remember."

The man's dignity faltered. "You understand that none of us had anything to do with the evil, do you not? The savages are our enemies too. They are vermin. Our ancestors caught some and made them slaves, but they are good for nothing else. I warned your friends not to go down among those we have not tamed."

"Their wish was to do so," Evalyth replied. "Now my wish is to get revenge for my man." She didn't know if this language included a word for justice. No matter. Because of the drugs, which heightened the logical faculties while they muffled the emotions, she was speaking Lokonese quite well enough for her purposes.

"We can get soldiers and help you kill as many as you choose," Rogar offered.

"Not needful. With this weapon at my side I alone can destroy more than your army might. I want your counsel and help in a different matter. How can I find him who slew my man?"

Rogar frowned. "The savages can vanish into trackless jungles, heaven-borne."

"Can they vanish from other savages, though?"

"Ah! Shrewdly thought, heaven-borne. Those tribes are endlessly at each other's throats. If we can make contact with one, its hunters will soon learn for you where the killer's people have taken themselves." His scowl deepened. "But he must have gone from them, to hide until you have departed our land. A single man might be impossible to find. Lowlanders are good at hiding, of necessity."

"What do you mean by necessity?"

Rogar showed surprise at her failure to grasp what was obvious to him. "Why, consider a man out hunting," he said. "He cannot go with companions after every kind of game, or

the noise and scent would frighten it away. So he is often alone in the jungle. Someone from another tribe may well set upon him. A man stalked and killed is just as useful as one slain in open war."

"Why this incessant fighting?"

Rogar's look of bafflement grew stronger. "How else shall they get human flesh?"

"But they do not live on that!"

"No, surely not, except as needed. But that need comes many times as you know. Their wars are their chief way of taking men; booty is good too, but not the main reason to fight. He who slays, owns the corpse, and naturally divides it solely among his close kin. Not everyone is lucky in battle. Therefore these who did not chance to kill in a war may well go hunting on their own, two or three of them together hoping to find a single man from a different tribe. And that is why a lowlander is good at hiding."

Evalyth did not move or speak. Rogar drew a long breath and continued trying to explain: "Heaven-borne, when I heard the evil news, I spoke long with men from your company. They told me what they had seen from afar by the wonderful means you command. Thus it is clear to me what happened. This guide—what is his name? Yes, Moru—he is a cripple. He had no hope of killing himself a man except by treachery. When he saw that chance, he took it."

He ventured a smile. "That would never happen in the highlands," he declared. "We do not fight wars, save when we are attacked, nor do we hunt our fellowmen as if they were animals. Like yours, ours is a civilized race." His lips drew back from startlingly white teeth. "But, heaven-borne, your man was slain. I propose we take vengeance, not simply on the killer if we catch him, but on his tribe, which we can certainly find as you suggested. That will teach all the savages to beware of their betters. Afterward we can share the flesh, half to your people, half to mine."

Evalyth could only know an intellectual astonishment. Yet she had the feeling somehow of having walked off a cliff. She stared through the shadows, into the grave old face, and after a long time she heard herself whisper: "You . . . also . . . here . . . eat men?"

"Slaves," Rogar said. "No more than required. One of them will do for four boys."

Her hand dropped to her gun. Rogar sprang up in alarm. "Heaven-borne," he exclaimed, "I told you we are civilized. Never fear attack from any of us! We—we—"

She rose too, high above him. Did he read judgment in her gaze? Was the terror that snatched him on behalf of his whole people? He cowered from her, sweating and shuddering. "Heaven-borne, believe me, you have no quarrel with Lokon—no, now, let me show you, let me take you into the Sacred Place, even if you are no initiate . . . for surely you are akin to the gods, surely the gods will not be offended—Come, let me show you how it is, let me prove we have no will and no *need* to be your enemies—"

There was the gate that Rogar opened for her in that massive wall. There were the shocked countenances of the guards and loud promises of many sacrifices to appease the Powers. There was the stone pavement beyond, hot and hollowly resounding underfoot. There were the idols grinning around a central temple. There was the house of the acolytes who did the work and who shrank in fear when they saw their master conduct a foreigner in. There were the slave barracks.

"See, heaven-borne, they are well treated, are they not? We do have to crush their hands and feet when we choose them as children for this service. Think how dangerous it would be otherwise, hundreds of boys and young men in here. But we treat them kindly unless they misbehave. Are they not fat? Their own Holy Food is especially honorable, bodies of men of all degree who have died in their full strength. We teach them that they will live on in those for whom they are slain. Most are content with that, believe me, heaven-borne.

Ask them yourself . . . though remember, they grow dull-witted, with nothing to do year after year. We slay them quickly, cleanly, at the beginning of each summer—no more than we must for that year's crop of boys entering into manhood, one slave for four boys, no more than that. And it is a most beautiful rite, with days of feasting and merry-making afterward. Do you understand now, heaven-borne? You have nothing to fear from us. We are not savages, warring and raiding and skulking to get our man-flesh. We are civilized—not godlike in your fashion, no, I dare not claim that, do not be angry—but civilized—surely worthy of your friendship, are we not? Are we not, heaven-borne?"

*

Chena Darnard, who headed the cultural anthropology team, told her computer to scan its data bank. Like the others, it was a portable, its memory housed in *New Dawn*. At the moment the spaceship was above the opposite hemisphere, and perceptible time passed while beams went back and forth along the strung-out relay units.

Chena leaned back and studied Evalyth across her desk. The Krakener girl sat so quietly. It seemed unnatural, despite the drugs in her bloodstream retaining some power. To be sure, Evalyth was of aristocratic descent in a warlike society. Furthermore, hereditary psychological as well as physiological differences might exist on the different worlds. Not much was known about that, apart from extreme cases like Gwydion—or this planet? Regardless, Chena thought, it would be better if Evalyth gave way to simple shock and grief.

"Are you quite certain of your facts, dear?" the anthropologist asked as gently as possible. "I mean, while this island alone is habitable, it's large, the topography is rugged, communications are primitive, my group has already identified scores of distinct cultures."

"I questioned Rogar for more than an hour," Evalyth replied in the same flat voice, looking out of the same flat eyes as before. "I know interrogation techniques, and he was badly rattled. He talked.

"The Lokonese themselves are not as backward as their technology. They've lived for centuries with savages threatening their borderlands. It's made them develop a good intelligence network. Rogar described its functioning to me in detail. It can't help but keep them reasonably well informed about everything that goes on. And, while tribal customs do vary tremendously, the cannibalism is universal. That is why none of the Lokonese thought to mention it to us. They took for granted that we had our own ways of providing human meat."

"People have, m-m-m, latitude in those methods?"

"Oh, yes. Here they breed slaves for the purpose. But most lowlanders have too skimpy an economy for that. Some of them use war and murder. Among others, they settle it within the tribe by annual combats. Or— Who cares? The fact is that, everywhere in this country, in whatever fashion it may be, the boys undergo a puberty rite that involves eating an adult male."

Chena bit her lip. "What in the name of chaos might have started it? Computer! Have you scanned?"

"Yes," said the machine voice out of the case on her desk. "Data on cannibalism in man are comparatively sparse, because it is a rarity. On all planets hitherto known to us it is banned and has been throughout their history, although it is sometimes considered forgiveable as an emergency measure when no alternative means of preserving life is available. Very limited forms of what might be called ceremonial cannibalism have occurred, as for example the drinking of minute amounts of each other's blood in pledging oath brotherhood among the Falkens of Lochlanna—"

"Never mind that," Chena said. A tautness in her throat

thickened her tone. "Only here, it seems, have they degenerated so far that— Or is it degeneracy? Reversion, perhaps? What about Old Earth?"

"Information is fragmentary. Aside from what was lost during the Long Night, knowledge is under the handicap that the last primitive societies there vanished before interstellar travel began. But certain data collected by ancient historians and scientists remain.

"Cannibalism was an occasional part of human sacrifice. As a rule, victims were left uneaten. But in a minority of religions, the bodies, or selected portions of them, were consumed, either by a special class, or by the community as a whole. Generally this was regarded as theophagy. Thus, the Aztecs of Mexico offered thousands of individuals annually to their gods. The requirement of doing this forced them to provoke wars and rebellions, which in turn made it easy for the eventual European conqueror to get native allies. The majority of prisoners were simply slaughtered, their hearts given directly to the idols. But in at least one cult the body was divided among the worshippers.

"Cannibalism could be a form of magic, too. By eating a person, one supposedly acquired his virtues. This was the principal motive of the cannibals of Africa and Polynesia. Contemporary observers did report that the meals were relished, but that is easy to understand, especially in protein-poor areas.

"The sole recorded instance of systematic non-ceremonial cannibalism was among the Carib Indians of America. They ate man because they preferred man. They were especially fond of babies and used to capture women from their tribes for breeding stock. Male children of these slaves were generally gelded to make them docile and tender. In large part because of strong aversion to such practices, the Europeans exterminated the Caribs to the last man."

The report stopped. Chena grimaced. "I can sympathize with the Europeans," she said.

Evalyth might once have raised her brows; but her face stayed as wooden as her speech. "Aren't you supposed to be an objective scientist?"

"Yes. Yes. Still, there is such a thing as value judgment. And they did kill Donli."

"Not they. One of them. I shall find him."

"He's nothing but a creature of his culture, dear, sick with his whole race." Chena drew a breath, struggling for calm. "Obviously, the sickness has become a behavioral basic," she said. "I daresay it originated in Lokon. Cultural radiation is practically always from the more to the less advanced peoples. And on a single island, after centuries, no tribe has escaped the infection. The Lokonese later elaborated and rationalized the practice. The savages left its cruelty naked. But highlander or lowlander, their way of life is founded on that particular human sacrifice."

"Can they be taught differently?" Evalyth asked without real interest.

"Yes. In time. In theory. But—well, I do know enough about what happened on Old Earth, and elsewhere, when advanced societies undertook to reform primitive ones. The entire structure was destroyed. It had to be.

"Think of the result, if we told these people to desist from their puberty rite. They wouldn't listen. They couldn't. They *must* have grandchildren. They *know* a boy won't become a man unless he has eaten part of a man. We'd have to conquer them, kill most, make sullen prisoners of the rest. And when the next crop of boys did in fact mature without the magic food . . . what then? Can you imagine the demoralization, the sense of utter inferiority, the loss of that tradition which is the core of every personal identity? It might be kinder to bomb this island sterile."

Chena shook her head. "No," she said harshly, "the single decent way for us to proceed would be gradually. We could send missionaries. By their precept and example, we could start the natives phasing out their custom after two or three

generations . . . And we can't afford such an effort. Not for a long time to come. Not with so many other worlds in the galaxy, so much worthier of what little help we can give. I am going to recommend this planet be left alone."

Evalyth considered her for a moment before asking: "Isn't that partly because of your own reaction?"

"Yes," Chena admitted. "I cannot overcome my disgust. And I, as you pointed out, am supposed to be professionally broad-minded. So even if the Board tried to recruit missionaries, I doubt if they'd succeed." She hesitated. "You yourself, Evalyth—"

The Krakener rose. "My emotions don't matter," she said. "My duty does. Thank you for your help." She turned on her heel and went with military strides out of the cabin.

*

The chemical barriers were crumbling. Evalyth stood for a moment before the little building that had been hers and Donli's, afraid to enter. The sun was low, so that the compound was filling with shadows. A thing leathery-winged and serpentine cruised silently overhead. From outside the stockade drifted sounds of feet, foreign voices, the whine of a wooden flute. The air was cooling. She shivered. Their home would be too hollow.

Someone approached. She recognized the person glimpsewise, Alsabeta Mondain from Nuevamerica. Listening to her well-meant foolish condolences would be worse than going inside. Evalyth took the last three steps and slid the door shut behind her.

Donli will not be here again. Eternally.

But the cabin proved not to be empty to him. Rather, it was too full. That chair where he used to sit, reading that worn volume of poetry which she could not understand and teased him about, that table across which he had toasted her and tossed kisses, that closet where his clothes hung, that

scuffed pair of slippers, that bed—it screamed of him. Evalyth went fast into the laboratory section and drew the curtain that separated it from the living quarters. Rings rattled along the rod. The noise was monstrous in twilight.

She closed her eyes and fists and stood breathing hard. *I will not go soft,* she declared. *You always said you loved me for my strength—among numerous other desirable features, you'd add with your slow grin, but I remember that yet—and I don't aim to let slip anything that you loved.*

I've got to get busy, she told Donli's child. *The expedition command is pretty sure to act on Chena's urging and haul mass for home. We've not many days to avenge your father.*

Her eyes snapped open. *What am I doing,* she thought, bewildered, *talking to a dead man and an embryo?*

She turned on the overflow fluoro and went to the computer. It was made no differently from the other portables. Donli had used it. But she could look away from the unique scratches and bumps on that square case, as she could not escape his microscope, chemanalyzers, chromosome tracer, biological specimens . . . She seated herself. A drink would have been very welcome, except that she needed clarity. "Activate!" she ordered.

The On light glowed yellow. Evalyth tugged her chin, searching for words. "The objective," she said at length, "is to trace a lowlander who has consumed several kilos of flesh and blood from one of this party, and afterward vanished into the jungle. The killing took place about sixty hours ago. How can he be found?"

The least hum answered her. She imagined the links; to the maser in the ferry, up past the sky to the nearest orbiting relay unit, to the next, to the next, around the bloated belly of the planet, by ogre sun and inhuman stars, until the pulses reached the mother ship; then down to an unliving brain that routed the question to the appropriate data bank; then to the scanners, whose resonating energies flew from

molecule to distorted molecule, identifying more bits of information than it made sense to number, data garnered from hundreds or thousands of entire worlds, data preserved through the wreck of Empire and the dark ages that followed, data going back to an Old Earth that perhaps no longer existed. She shied from the thought and wished herself back on dear stern Kraken. *We will go there,* she promised Donli's child. *You will dwell apart from these too many machines and grow up as the gods meant you should.*

"Query," said the artificial voice. "Of what origin was the victim of this assault?"

Evalyth had to wet her lips before she could reply: "Atheian. He was Donli Sairn, your master."

"In the event, the possibility of tracking the desired local inhabitant may exist. The odds will now be computed. In the interim, do you wish to know the basis of the possibility?"

"Y-yes."

"Native Atheian biochemistry developed in a manner quite parallel to Earth's," said the voice, "and the early colonists had no difficulty in introducing terrestrial species. Thus they enjoyed a friendly environment, where population soon grew sufficiently large to obviate the danger of racial change through mutation and/or genetic drift. In addition, no selection pressure tended to force change. Hence the modern Atheian human is little different from his ancestors of Earth, on which account his physiology and biochemistry are known in detail.

"This has been essentially the case on most colonized planets for which records are available. Where different breeds of men have arisen, it has generally been because the original settlers were highly selected groups. Randomness, and evolutionary adaptation to new conditions, have seldom produced radical changes in biotype. For example, the robustness of the average Krakener is a response to comparatively high gravity; his size aids him in resisting cold, his fair com-

plexion is helpful beneath a sun poor in ultraviolet. But his ancestors were people who already had the natural endowments for such a world. His deviations from their norm are not extreme. They do not preclude his living on more Earth-like planets or interbreeding with the inhabitants of these.

"Occasionally, however, larger variations have occurred. They appear to be due to a small original population or to unterrestroid conditions or both. The population may have been small because the planet could not support more, or have become small as the result of hostile action when the Empire fell. In the former case, genetic accidents had a chance to be significant; in the latter, radiation produced a high rate of mutant births among survivors. The variations are less apt to be in gross anatomy than in subtle endocrine and enzymatic qualities, which affect the physiology and psychology. Well known cases include the reaction of the Gwydiona to nicotine and certain indoles, and the requirement of the Ifrians for trace amounts of lead. Sometimes the inhabitants of two planets are actually intersterile because of their differences.

"While this world has hitherto received the sketchiest of examinations—" Evalyth was yanked out of a reverie into which the lecture had led her. "—certain facts are clear. Few terrestrial species have flourished; no doubt others were introduced originally, but died off after the technology to maintain them was lost. Man has thus been forced to depend on autochthonous life for the major part of his food. This life is deficient in various elements of human nutrition. For example, the only Vitamin C appears to be in immigrant plants; Sairn observed that the people consume large amounts of grass and leaves from those species, and that fluoroscopic pictures indicate this practice has measurably modified the digestive tract. No one would supply skin, blood, sputum, or similar samples, not even from corpses." *Afraid of magic,* Evalyth thought drearily, *yes, they're back to that too.* "But

intensive analysis of the usual meat animals shows these to be under-supplied with three essential amino acids, and human adaptation to this must have involved considerable change on the cellular and sub-cellular levels. The probable type and extent of such change are computable."

"The calculations are now complete." As the computer resumed, Evalyth gripped the arms of her chair and could not breathe. "While the answer is subject to fair probability of success. In effect, Atheian flesh is alien here. It can be metabolized, but the body of the local consumer will excrete certain compounds, and these will import a characteristic odor to skin and breath as well as to urine and feces. The chance is good that it will be detectable by neo-Freeholder technique at distances of several kilometers, after sixty or seventy hours. But since the molecules in question are steadily being degraded and dissipated, speed of action is recommended."

I am going to find Donli's murderer. Darkness roared around Evalyth.

"Shall the organisms be ordered for you and given the appropriate search program?" asked the voice. "They can be on hand in an estimated three hours."

"Yes," she stammered. "Oh, please— Have you any other . . . other . . . advice?"

"The man ought not to be killed out of hand, but brought here for examination, if for no other reason, than in order that the scientific ends of the expedition may be served."

That's a machine talking, Evalyth cried. *It's designed to help research. Nothing more. But it was his.* And its answer was so altogether Donli that she could no longer hold back her tears.

*

The single big moon rose nearly full, shortly after sundown. It drowned most stars; the jungle beneath was cobbled

with silver and dappled with black; the snowcone of Mount Burus floated unreal at the unseen edge of the world. Wind slid around Evalyth where she crouched on her gravsled; it was full of wet acrid odors, and felt cold though it was not, and chuckled at her back. Somewhere something screeched, every few minutes, and something else cawed reply.

She scowled at her position indicators, aglow on the control panel. Curses and chaos, Moru had to be in this area! He could not have escaped from the valley on foot in the time available, and her search pattern had practically covered it. If she ran out of bugs before she found him, must she assume he was dead? They ought to be able to find his body regardless, ought they not? Unless it was buried deep. Here. She brought the sled to hover, took the next phial off the rack, and stood up to open it.

The bugs came out many and tiny, like smoke in the moonlight. Another failure?

No! Wait! Were not those motes dancing back together, into a streak barely visible under the moon, and vanishing downward? Heart thuttering, she turned to the indicator. Its neurodetector antenna was not aimlessly wobbling, but pointed straight west-northwest, declination thirty-two degrees below horizontal. Only a concentration of the bugs could make it behave like that. And only the particular mixture of molecules to which the bugs had been presensitized, in several parts per million or better, would make them converge on the source.

"Ya-a-ah!" She couldn't help the one hawk-yell. But thereafter she bit her lips shut—blood trickled unnoticed down her chin—and drove the sled in silence.

The distance was a mere few kilometers. She came to a halt above an opening in the forest. Pools of scummy water gleamed in its rank growth. The trees made a solid-seeming wall around. Evalyth clapped her night goggles down off her helmet and over her eyes. A lean-to became visible. It was

hastily woven from vines and withes, huddled against a pair of the largest trees to let their branches hide it from the sky. The bugs were entering.

Evalyth lowered her sled to a meter off the ground and got to her feet again. A stun pistol slid from its sheath into her right hand. Her left rested on the blaster.

Moru's two sons groped from the shelter. The bugs whirled around them, a mist that blurred their outlines. *Of course,* Evalyth realized, nonetheless shocked into a higher hatred. *I should have known they did the actual devouring.* More than ever did they resemble gnomes—skinny limbs, big heads, the pot bellies of undernourishment. Krakener boys of their age would have twice their bulk and be noticeably on the way to becoming men. These nude bodies belonged to children, except that they had the grotesqueness of eld.

The parents followed them, ignored by the entranced bugs. The mother wailed. Evalyth identified a few words. "What is the matter, what are those things—oh, help—" But her gaze was locked upon Moru.

Limping out of the hutch, stooped to clear its entrance, he made her think of some huge beetle crawling from an offal heap. But she would know that bushy head though her brain were coming apart. He carried a stone blade, surely the one that had hacked up Donli. *I will take it away from him, and the hand with it,* Evalyth wept. *I will keep him alive while I dismantle him with these my own hands, and in between times he can watch me flay his repulsive spawn.*

The wife's scream broke through. She had seen the metal thing, and the giant that stood on its platform, with skull and eyes shimmering beneath the moon.

"I have come for you who killed my man," Evalyth said.

The mother screamed anew and cast herself before the boys. The father tried to run around in front of her, but his lame foot twisted under him, and he fell into a pool. As he struggled out of its muck, Evalyth shot the woman. No sound

was heard; she folded and lay moveless. "Run!" Moru shouted. He tried to charge the sled. Evalyth twisted a control stick. Her vehicle whipped in a circle, heading off the boys. She shot them from above, where Moru couldn't quite reach her.

He knelt beside the nearest, took the body in his arms and looked upward. The moonlight poured relentlessly across him. "What can you now do to me?" he called.

She stunned him too, landed, got off and quickly hogtied the four of them. Loading them aboard, she found them lighter than she had expected.

Sweat had sprung forth upon her, until her coverall stuck dripping to her skin. She began to shake, as if with fever. Her ears buzzed. "I would have destroyed you," she said. Her voice sounded remote and unfamiliar. A still more distant part wondered why she bothered speaking to the unconscious, in her own tongue at that. "I wish you hadn't acted the way you did. That made me remember what the computer said, about Donli's friends needing you for study.

"You're too good a chance, I suppose. After your doings, we have the right under Allied rules to make prisoners of you, and none of his friends are likely to get maudlin about your feelings.

"Oh, they won't be inhuman. A few cell samples, a lot of tests, anesthesia where necessary, nothing harmful, nothing but a clinical examination as thorough as facilities allow.

"No doubt you'll be better fed than at any time before, and no doubt the medics will find some pathologies they can cure for you. In the end, Moru, they'll release your wife and children."

She stared into his horrible face.

"I am pleased," she said, "that to you, who won't comprehend what is going on, it will be a bad experience. And when they are finished, Moru, I will insist on having you at least, back. They can't deny me that. Why, your tribe itself has, in effect, cast you out. Right? My colleagues won't let

me do more than kill you, I'm afraid, but on this I will insist."

She gunned the engine and started toward Lokon, as fast as possible, to arrive while she felt able to be satisfied with that much.

*

And the days without him and the days without him.

The nights were welcome. If she had not worked herself quite to exhaustion, she could take a pill. He rarely returned in her dreams. But she had to get through each day and would not drown him in drugs.

Luckily, there was a good deal of work involved in preparing to depart, when the expedition was short-handed and on short notice. Gear must be dismantled, packed, ferried to the ship, and stowed. *New Dawn* herself must be readied, numerous systems recommissioned and tested. Her militechnic training qualified Evalyth to double as mechanic, boat jockey, or loading gang boss. In addition, she kept up the routines of defense in the compound.

Captain Jonafer objected mildly to this. "Why bother, Lieutenant? The locals are scared blue of us. They've heard what you did—and this coming and going through the sky, robots and heavy machinery in action, floodlights after dark—I'm having trouble persuading them not to abandon their town!"

"Let them," she snapped. "Who cares?"

"We did not come here to ruin them, Lieutenant."

"No. In my judgment, though, Captain, they'll be glad to ruin us if we present the least opportunity. Imagine what special virtues *your* body must have."

Jonafer sighed and gave in. But when she refused to receive Rogar the next time she was planetside, he ordered her to do so and to be civil.

The *Klev* entered the biolab section—she would not have him in her living quarters—with a gift held in both hands, a

sword of Imperial metal. She shrugged; no doubt a museum would be pleased to get the thing. "Lay it on the floor," she told him.

Because she occupied the single chair, he stood. He looked little and old in his robe. "I came," he whispered, "to say how we of Lokon rejoice that the heaven-borne has won her revenge."

"Is winning it," she corrected.

He could not meet her eyes. She stared moodily at his faded hair. "Since the heaven-borne could . . . easily . . . find those she wished . . . she knows the truth in the hearts of us of Lokon, that we never intended harm to her folk."

That didn't seem to call for an answer.

His fingers twisted together. "Then why do you forsake us?" he went on. "When first you came, when we had come to know you and you spoke our speech, you said you would stay for many moons, and after you would come others to teach and trade. Our hearts rejoiced. It was not alone the goods you might someday let us buy, nor that your wisemen talked of ways to end hunger, sickness, danger, and sorrow. No, our jubilation and thankfulness were most for the wonders you opened. Suddenly the world was made great, that had been so narrow. And now you are going away. I have asked, when I dared, and those of your men who will speak to me say none will return. How have we offended you, and how may it be made right, heaven-borne?"

"You can stop treating your fellow men like animals," Evalyth got past her teeth.

"I have gathered . . . somewhat . . . that you from the stars say it is wrong what happens in the Sacred Place. But we only do it once in our lifetimes, heaven-borne, and because we must!"

"You have no need."

Rogar went on his hands and knees before her. "Perhaps the heaven-borne are thus," he pleaded, "but we are merely

men. If our sons do not get the manhood, they will never beget children of their own, and the last of us will die alone in a world of death, with none to crack his skull and let the soul out—" He dared glance up at her. What he saw made him whimper and crawl backwards into the sun-glare.

Later Chena Darnard sought Evalyth. They had a drink and talked around the subject for a while, until the anthropologist plunged in: "You were pretty hard on the sachem, weren't you?"

"How'd you— Oh." The Krakener remembered that the interview had been taped, as was done whenever possible for later study. "What was I supposed to do, kiss his man-eating mouth?"

"No." Chena winced. "I suppose not."

"Your signature heads the list, on the official recommendation that we quit this planet."

"Yes. But—now I don't know. I was repelled. I am. However—I've been observing the medical team working on those prisoners of yours. Have you?"

"No."

"You should. The way they cringe and shriek and reach to each other when they're strapped down in the lab and cling together afterward in their cell."

"They aren't suffering any pain or mutilation, are they?"

"Of course not. But they can believe it when their captors say they won't. They can't be tranquilized while under study, you know, if the results are to be valid. Their fear of the absolutely unknown— Well, Evalyth, I had to stop observing. I couldn't take any more." Chena gave the other a long stare. "You might, though."

Evalyth shook her head. "I don't gloat. I'll shoot the murderer because my family honor demands it. The rest can go free, even the boys. Even in spite of what they ate." She poured herself a stiff draught and tossed it off in a gulp. The liquor burned on the way down.

"I wish you wouldn't," Chena said. "Donli wouldn't have liked it. He had a proverb that he claimed was very ancient—he was from my city, don't forget, and I have known . . . I did know him longer than you, dear. I heard him say, twice or thrice, *Do I not destroy my enemies if it make them my friends?*"

"Think of a venomous insect," Evalyth replied. "You don't make friends with it. You put it under your heel."

"But a man does what he does because of what he is, what his society has made him." Chena's voice grew urgent; she leaned forward to grip Evalyth's hand, which did not respond. "What is one man, one lifetime, against all who live around him and all who have gone before? Cannibalism wouldn't be found everywhere over this island, in every one of these otherwise altogether different groupings, if it weren't the most deeply rooted cultural imperative this race has got."

Evalyth grinned around a rising anger. "And what kind of race are they to acquire it? And how about according me the privilege of operating on my own cultural imperatives? I'm bound home, to raise Donli's child away from your gutless civilization. He will not grow up disgraced because his mother was too weak to exact justice for his father. Now if you will excuse me, I have to get up early and take another boatload to the ship and get it inboard."

That task required a while. Evalyth came back toward sunset of the next day. She felt a little more tired than usual, a little more peaceful. The raw edge of what had happened was healing over. The thought crossed her mind, abstract but not shocking, not disloyal: *I'm young. One year another man will come. I won't love you the less, darling.*

Dust scuffed under her boots. The compound was half stripped already, a corresponding number of personnel berthed in the ship. The evening reached quiet beneath a yellowing sky. Only a few of the expedition stirred among the machines and remaining cabins. Lokon lay as hushed as

it had lately become. She welcomed the thud of her footfalls on the steps into Jonafer's office.

He sat waiting for her, big and unmoving behind his desk. "Assignment completed without incident," she reported.

"Sit down," he said.

She obeyed. The silence grew. At last he said, out of a stiff face: "The clinical team has finished with the prisoners."

Somehow it was a shock. Evalyth groped for words. "Isn't that too soon? I mean, well, we don't have a lot of equipment, and just a couple of men who can see the advanced stuff, and then without Donli for an expert on Earth biology—Wouldn't a good study, down to the chromosomal level if not further—something that the physical anthropologists could use—wouldn't it take longer?"

"That's correct," Jonafer said. "Nothing of major importance was found. Perhaps something would have been, if Uden's team had any inkling of what to look for. Given that, they could have made hypotheses and tested them in a whole-organism context and come to some understanding of their subjects as functioning beings. You're right, Donli Sairn had the kind of professional intuition that might have guided them. Lacking that, and with no particular clues, and no cooperation from those ignorant, terrified savages, they had to grope and probe almost at random. They did establish a few digestive peculiarities—nothing that couldn't have been predicted on the basis of ambient ecology."

"Then why have they stopped? We won't be leaving for another week at the earliest."

"They did so on my orders, after Uden had shown me what was going on and said he'd quit regardless of what I wanted."

"What—? Oh." Scorn lifted Evalyth's head. "You mean the psychological torture."

"Yes. I saw that scrawny woman secured to a table. Her head, her body were covered with leads to the meters that clustered around her and clicked and hummed and flickered.

She didn't see me; her eyes were blind with fear. I suppose she imagined her soul was being pumped out. Or maybe the process was worse for being something she couldn't put a name to. I saw her kids in a cell, holding hands. Nothing else left for them to hold onto, in their total universe. They're just at puberty; what'll this do to their psychosexual development? I saw their father lying drugged beside them, after he'd tried to batter his way straight through the wall. Uden and his helpers told me how they'd tried to make friends and failed. Because naturally the prisoners know they're in the power of those who hate them with a hate that goes beyond the grave."

Jonafer paused. "There are decent limits to everything, Lieutenant," he ended, "including science and punishment. Especially when, after all, the chance of discovering anything else unusual is slight. I ordered the investigation terminated. The boys and their mother will be flown to their home area and released tomorrow."

"Why not today?" Evalyth asked, foreseeing his reply.

"I hoped," Jonafer said, that you'd agree to let the man go with them."

"No."

"In the name of God—"

"Your God." Evalyth looked away from him. "I won't enjoy it, Captain. I'm beginning to wish I didn't have to. But it's not as if Donli'd been killed in an honest war or feud—or he was slaughtered like a pig. That's the evil in cannibalism; it makes a man nothing but another meat animal. I won't bring him back, but I will somehow even things, by making the cannibal nothing but a dangerous animal that needs shooting."

"I see." Jonafer too stared long out of the window. In the sunset light his face became a mask of brass. "Well," he said finally, coldly, "under the Charter of the Alliance and the articles of this expedition, you leave me no choice. But we will not have any ghoulish ceremonies, and you will not deputize what you have done. The prisoner will be brought to

your place privately after dark. You will dispose of him at once and assist in cremating the remains."

Evalyth's palms grew wet. *I never killed a helpless man before!*

But he *did,* it answered. "Understood, Captain," she said.

"Very good, Lieutenant. You may go up and join the mess for dinner if you wish. No announcements to anyone. The business will be scheduled for—" Jonafer glanced at his watch, set to local rotation. "—2600 hours."

Evalyth swallowed around a clump of dryness. "Isn't that rather late?"

"On purpose," he told her. "I want the camp asleep." His glance struck hers. "And want you to have time to reconsider."

"No!" She sprang erect and went for the door.

His voice pursued her. "Donli would have asked you for that."

*

Night came in and filled the room. Evalyth didn't rise to turn on the light. It was as if this chair, which had been Donli's favorite, wouldn't let her go.

Finally she remembered the psychodrugs. She had a few tablets left. One of them would make the execution easy to perform. No doubt Jonafer would direct that Moru be tranquilized—now, at last—before they brought him here. So why should she not give herself calmness?

It wouldn't be right.

Why not?

I don't know. I don't understand anything any longer.

Who does? Moru alone. He knows why he murdered and butchered a man who trusted him. Evalyth found herself smiling wearily into the darkness. *He has superstition for his sure guide. He's actually seen his children display the first signs of maturity. That ought to console him a little.*

Odd, that the glandular upheaval of adolescence should

have commenced under frightful stress. One would have expected a delay instead. True, the captives had been getting a balanced diet for a change, and medicine had probably eliminated various chronic low-level infections. Nonetheless the fact was odd. Besides, normal children under normal conditions would not develop the outward signs beyond mistaking in this short a time. Donli would have puzzled over the matter. She could almost see him, frowning, rubbing his forehead, grinning one-sidedly with the pleasure of a problem.

"I'd like to have a go at this myself," she heard him telling Uden over a beer and a smoke. "Might turn up an angle."

"How?" the medic would have replied. "You're a general biologist. No reflection on you, but detailed human physiology is out of your line."

"Um-m-m . . . yes and no. My main job is studying species of terrestrial origin and how they've adapted to new planets. By a remarkable coincidence, man is included among them."

But Donli was gone, and no one else was competent to do his work—to be any part of him, but she fled from that thought and from the thought of what she must presently do. She held her mind tightly to the realization that none of Uden's team had tried to apply Donli's knowledge. As Jonafer remarked, a living Donli might well have suggested an idea, unorthodox and insightful, that would have led to the discovery of whatever was there to be discovered, if anything was. Uden and his assistants were routineers. They hadn't even thought to make Donli's computer ransack its data banks for possibly relevant information. Why should they, when they saw their problem as strictly medical? And, to be sure, they were not cruel. The anguish they were inflicting had made them avoid whatever might lead to ideas demanding further research. Donli would have approached the entire business differently from the outset.

Suddenly the gloom thickened. Evalyth fought for breath. Too hot and silent here; too long a wait; she must do some-

thing or her will would desert her and she would be unable to squeeze the trigger.

She stumbled to her feet and into the lab. The fluoro blinded her for a moment when she turned it on. She went to his computer and said: "Activate!"

Nothing responded but the indicator light. The windows were totally black. Clouds outside shut off moon and stars.

"What—" The sound was a curious croak. But that brought a releasing gall: *Take hold of yourself, you blubbering idiot, or you're not fit to mother the child you're carrying.* She could then ask her question. "What explanations in terms of biology can be devised for the behavior of the people on this planet?"

"Matters of that nature are presumably best explained in terms of psychology and cultural anthropology," said the voice.

"M-m-maybe," Evalyth said. "And maybe not." She marshalled a few thoughts and stood them firm amidst the others roiling in her skull. "The inhabitants could be degenerate somehow, not really human." *I want Moru to be.* "Scan every fact recorded about them, including the detailed clinical observations made on four of them in the past several days. Compare with basic terrestrial data. Give me whatever hypotheses look reasonable." She hesitated. "Correction. I mean possible hypotheses—anything that does not flatly contradict established facts. We've used up the reasonable ideas already."

The machine hummed. Evalyth closed her eyes and clung to the edge of the desk. *Donli, please help me.*

At the other end of forever, the voice came to her:

"The sole behavioral element which appears to be not easily explicable by postulates concerning environment and accidental historical developments, is the cannibalistic puberty rite. According to the anthropological computer, this might well have originated as a form of human sacrifice. But that

computer notes certain illogicalities in the idea, as follows.

"On Old Earth, sacrificial religion was normally associated with agricultural societies, which were more vitally dependent on continued fertility and good weather than hunters. Even for them, the offering of humans proved disadvantageous in the long run, as the Aztec example most clearly demonstrates. Lokon has rationalized the practice to a degree, making it a part of the slavery system and thus minimizing its impact on the generality. But for the lowlanders it is a powerful evil, a source of perpetual danger, a diversion of effort and resources that are badly needed for survival. It is not plausible that the custom, if ever imitated from Lokon, should persist among every one of those tribes. Nevertheless it does. Therefore it must have some value and the problem is to find what.

"The method of obtaining victims varies widely, but the requirement always appears to be the same. According to the Lokonese, one adult male body is necessary and sufficient for the maturation of four boys. The killer of Donli Sairn was unable to carry off the entire corpse. What he did take of it is suggestive.

"Hence a dipteroid phenomenon may have appeared in man on this planet. Such a thing is unknown among higher animals elsewhere, but is conceivable. A modification of the Y chromosome would produce it. The test for that modification, and thus the test of the hyphothesis, is easily made."

The voice stopped. Evalyth heard the blood slugging in her veins. "What are you talking about?"

"The phenomenon is found among lower animals on several worlds," the computer told her.

"It is uncommon and so is not widely known. The name derives from the Diptera, a type of dung fly on Old Earth."

Lightning flickered. "Dung fly—good, yes!"

The machine went on to explain.

*

Jonafer came along with Moru. The savage's hands were tied behind his back, and the spaceman loomed enormous over him. Despite that and the bruises he had inflicted on himself, he hobbled along steadily. The clouds were breaking and the moon shone ice-white. Where Evalyth waited, outside her door, she saw the compound reach bare to the saw-topped stockade and a crane stand above like a gibbet. The air was growing cold—the planet spinning toward an autumn —and a small wind had arisen to whimper behind the dust devils that stirred across the earth. Jonafer's footfalls rang loud.

He noticed her and stopped. Moru did likewise. "What did they learn?" she asked.

The captain nodded. "Uden got right to work when you called," he said. "The test is more complicated than your computer suggested—but then, it's for Donli's kind of skill, not Uden's. He'd never have thought of it unassisted. Yes, the notion is true."

"How?"

Moru stood waiting while the language he did not understand went to and fro around him.

"I'm no medic." Jonafer kept his tone altogether colorless. "But from what Uden told me, the chromosome defect means that the male gonads here can't mature spontaneously. They need an extra supply of hormones—he mentioned testosterone and androsterone, I forget what else—to start off the series of changes which bring on puberty. Lacking that, you'll get eunuchism. Uden thinks the surviving population was tiny after the colony was bombed out, and so poor that it resorted to cannibalism for bare survival, the first generation or two. Under those circumstances, a mutation that would otherwise have eliminated itself got established and spread to every descendant."

Evalyth nodded. "I see."

"You understand what this means, I suppose," Jonafer said. "There'll be no problem to ending the practice. We'll

simply tell them we have a new and better Holy Food, and prove it with a few pills. Terrestrial-type meat animals can be reintroduced later and supply what's necessary. In the end, no doubt our geneticists can repair that faulty Y chromosome."

He could not stay contained any longer. His mouth opened, a gash across his half-seen face, and he rasped: "I should praise you for saving a whole people. I can't. Get your business over with, will you?"

Evalyth trod forward to stand before Moru. He shivered but met her eyes. Astonished, she said: "You haven't drugged him."

"No," Jonafer said. "I wouldn't help you." He spat.

"Well, I'm glad." She addressed Moru in his own language: "You killed my man. Is it right that I should kill you?"

"It is right," he answered, almost as levelly as she. "I thank you that my woman and my sons are to go free." He was quiet for a second or two. "I have heard that your folk can preserve food for years without it rotting. I would be glad if you kept my body to give to your sons."

"Mine will not need it," Evalyth said. "Nor will the sons of your sons."

Anxiety tinged his words: "Do you know why I slew your man? He was kind to me, and like a god. But I am lame. I saw no other way to get what my sons must have; and they must have it soon, or it would be too late and they could never become men."

"He taught me," Evalyth said, "how much it is to be a man."

She turned to Jonafer, who stood tense and puzzled. "I had my revenge," she said in Donli's tongue.

"What?" His question was a reflexive noise.

"After I learned about the dipteroid phenomenon," she said. "All that was necessary was for me to keep silent. Moru, his children, his entire race would go on being prey

for centuries, maybe forever. I sat for half an hour, I think, having my revenge."

"And then?" Jonafer asked.

"I was satisfied and could start thinking about justice," Evalyth said.

She drew a knife. Moru straightened his back. She stepped behind him and cut his bonds. "Go home," she said. "Remember him."

NIGHTWINGS

By Robert Silverberg

I

Roum is a city built on seven hills. They say it was a capital of man in one of the earlier cycles. I do not know of that, for my guild is Watching, not Remembering; but as I had my first glimpse of Roum, coming upon it from the south at twilight, I could see that in former days it must have been of great significance. Even now it was a mighty city of many thousands of souls.

Its bony towers stood out sharply against the dusk. Lights glimmered appealingly. On my left hand the sky was ablaze with splendor as the sun relinquished possession. Streaming bands of azure and violet and crimson folded and writhed about one another in the nightly dance that brings the darkness. To my right blackness had already come. I attempted to find the seven hills, and failed, and still I knew that this was that Roum of majesty toward which all roads are bent, and I felt awe and deep respect for the works of our bygone fathers.

We rested by the long straight road, looking up at Roum. I said, "It is a goodly city. We will find employment there."

Beside me, Avluela fluttered her lacy wings. "And food?" she asked in her high, fluty voice. "And shelter? And wine?"

"Those too," I said. "All of those."

"How long have we been walking, Watcher?" she asked.

"Two days. Three nights."

"If I had been flying it would have been more swift."

"For you," I said. "You would have left us far behind and never seen us again. Is that your desire?"

She came close to me and rubbed the rough fabric of my sleeve, and then she pressed herself at me the way a flirting cat might do. Her wings unfolded into two broad sheets of gossamer through which I could still see the sunset and the evening lights, blurred, distorted, magical. I sensed the fragrance of her midnight hair. I put my arms to her and embraced her slender, boyish body.

She said, "You know it is my desire to remain with you always, Watcher. Always!"

"Yes, Avluela."

"We will be happy," I said, and released her.

"Shall we go in to Roum now?"

"I think we should wait for Gormon," I said, shaking my head. "He'll be back soon from his explorations." I did not want to tell her of my weariness. She was only a child, seventeen summers old; what did she know of weariness or of age? And I am old. Not as old as Roum, but old enough.

"While we wait," she said, "may I fly?"

"Fly, yes."

I squatted beside out cart and warmed my hands at the throbbing generator while Avluela prepared to fly. First she removed her garments, for her wings have little strength and she cannot lift such extra baggage. Lithely, deftly, she peeled the glassy bubbles from her tiny feet, she wriggled free of her crimson jacket and of her soft, furry leggings. The vanishing light in the west sparkled over her slim form. Like all Fliers, she carried no surplus body tissue: her breasts were mere bumps, her buttocks flat, her thighs so spindly that there was a span of inches between them when she stood. Could she have weighed more than a quintal? I doubt it. Looking at her, I felt as always gross and earthbound, a thing of loathesome flesh, and yet I am not a heavy man.

By the roadside she genuflected, knuckles to the ground,

head bowed to knees, as she said whatever ritual it is that the Fliers say. Her back was to me. Her delicate wings fluttered, filled with life, rose about her like a cloak whipped up by the breeze. I could not comprehend how such wings could possibly lift even so slight a form as Avluela's. They were not hawk-wings but butterfly-wings, veined and transparent, marked here and there with blotches of pigment, ebony and turquoise and scarlet. A sturdy ligament joined them to the two flat pads of muscle beneath her sharp shoulderblades; but what she did not have was the massive breastbone of a flying creature, the bands of corded muscle needed for flight. Oh, I know that the Fliers use more than muscle to get aloft, that there are mystical disciplines in their mystery. Even so, I who am of the Watchers remain skeptical of the more fantastic guilds.

Avluela finished her words. She rose; she caught the breeze with her wings; she ascended several feet. There she remained, suspended between earth and sky, while her wings beat frantically. It was not yet night, and Avluela's wings were merely nightwings. By day she could not fly, for the terrible pressure of the solar wind would hurl her to the ground. Now, midway between dusk and dark, it was still not the best time for her to go up. I saw her thrust toward the east by the remnant of light in the sky. Her arms as well as her wings thrashed; her small pointed face was grim with concentration; on her thin lips were the words of her guild. She doubled her body and shot it out, head going one way, rump the other, and abruptly she hovered horizontally, looking groundward, her wings thrashing against the air. Up, Avluela! Up!

Up it was, as by will alone she conquered the vestige of light that still glowed.

With pleasure I surveyed her naked form against the darkness. I could see her clearly, for a Watcher's eyes are keen. She was five times her own height in the air, now, and her wings spread to their full expanse, so that the towers of Roum

were in partial eclipse for me. She waved. I threw her a kiss and offered words of love. Watchers do not marry, nor do they engender children, but Avluela was as a daughter to me, and I took pride in her flight. We had traveled together a year, now, since we had come together in Agupt, and it was as though I had known her all my long life. From her I drew a renewal of strength. I do not know what it was she drew from me. Security? Knowledge? A continuity with the days before her birth? I hoped only that she loved me as I loved her.

Now she was far aloft. She wheeled, soared, dived, pirouetted, danced. Her long black hair streamed from her scalp. Her body seemed only an incidental appendage to those two great wings, which glistened and throbbed and gleamed in the night. Up she rose, glorying in her freedom from gravity, making me feel all the more leadenfooted, and like some slender rocket she shot abruptly away in the direction of Roum. I saw the soles of her feet, the tips of her wings; then I saw her no more.

I sighed. I thrust my hands into the pits of my arms to keep them warm. How is it that I felt a winter chill and the girl Avluela could soar joyously bare through the sky?

It was now the twelfth of the twenty hours, and time once again for me to do the Watching. I went to the cart, opened my cases, prepared the instruments. Some of the dial-covers were yellowed and faded; the indicator needles had lost their luminous coating; sea-stains defaced the instrument housings, a relic of the time that pirates had assailed me in Earth Ocean. The worn and cracked levers and nodes responded easily to my touch as I entered the preliminaries. First one prays for a pure and perceptive mind; then one creates the affinity with one's instruments; then one does the actual Watching, searching the starry heavens for the enemies of man. Such is my skill and my craft. I grasped handles and knobs, thrust things from my mind, prepared myself to become an extension of my cabinet of devices.

I was only just past my threshold and into the first phase

of Watchfulness when a deep and resonant voice said behind me, "Well, Watcher, how goes it?"

II

I sagged against the cart. There is a physical pain in being wrenched so unexpectedly from one's work. For a moment I felt claws clutching at my heart. My face grew hot; my eyes would not focus; the saliva drained from my throat. As soon as I could, I took the proper protective measures to ease the metabolic drain and severed myself from my instruments. Hiding my trembling as much as possible, I turned around.

Gormon, the other member of our little band, had appeared and stood jauntily beside me, grinning, amused at my distress. I could not feel angry with him. One does not show anger at a guildless person no matter what the provocation.

Tightly, with effort, I said, "Did you spend your time rewardingly?"

"Very. Where's Avluela?"

I pointed heavenward. Gormon nodded.

"What have you found?" I asked.

"That this city is definitely Roum."

"There never was doubt of that."

"For me there was. But now I have proof."

"Yes?"

"In the overpocket. Look!"

From his tunic he drew his overpocket, set it on the pavement beside me, and expanded it so that he could insert his hand in its mouth. Grunting a little, he began to pull something heavy from the pouch, something heavy, of white stone, a long marble column, I now saw, fluted, pocked with age.

"From a temple of Imperial Roum!" Gormon exulted.

"You shouldn't have taken that."

"Wait!" he cried, and reached into the overpocket once more. He took from it a handful of circular metal plaques

and scattered them jingling at my feet. "Coins! Money! Look at them, Watcher! The faces of the Caesars!"

"Of whom?"

"The ancient rulers. Don't you know your history of past cycles?"

I peered at him curiously. "You claim to have no guild, Gormon. Could it be you are a Rememberer and are concealing it from me?"

"Look at my face, Watcher. Could I belong to any guild? Would a Changeling be taken?"

"True enough," I said, eyeing the golden hue of him, the thick waxen skin, the red-pupiled eyes, the jagged mouth. Gormon had been weaned on teratogenetic drugs. He was a monster—handsome in his way, but a monster nevertheless, a Changeling, outside the laws and customs of man as they are practiced in the Third Cycle of civilization. And there is no guild of Changelings.

"There's more," Gormon said. The overpocket was infinitely capacious; the contents of a world, if need be, could be stuffed in its shriveled gray maw, and still it would be no larger than a man's hand. Gormon took from it bits of machinery, reading spools, an angular thing of brown metal that might have been an ancient tool, three squares of shining glass, five slips of paper—paper!—and a host of other relics of antiquity. "See?" he said. "A fruitful stroll, Watcher! And not just random booty. Everything recorded, everything labeled, stratum, estimated age, position when *in situ*. Here we have ten thousand years of Roum."

"Should you have taken these things?" I asked doubtfully.

"Why not? Who is to miss them? Who of this cycle cares for the past?"

"The Rememberers."

"They don't need solid objects to help them do their work."

"Why do you want these things, though?"

"The past interests me, Watcher. In my guildless way I

have my scholarly pursuits. Is that wrong? May not even a monstrosity seek knowledge?"

"Certainly, certainly. Seek what you wish. Fulfill yourself in your own way. This is Roum. At dawn we enter. I hope to find employment here."

"You may have difficulties."

"How so?"

"There are many Watchers already in Roum, no doubt. There will be little need for your services."

"I'll seek the favor of the Prince of Roum," I said.

"The Prince of Roum is a hard and cold and cruel man."

"You know of him?"

Gormon shrugged. "Somewhat." He began to stuff his artifacts back in the overpocket. "Take your chances with him, Watcher. What other choice do you have?"

"None," I said, and Gormon laughed, and I did not.

He busied himself with his ransacked loot of the past. I found myself deeply depressed by his words. He seemed so sure of himself in an uncertain world, this guildless one, this mutated monster, this man of inhuman look. How could he be so cool, so casual? He lived without concern for calamity and mocked those who admitted to fear. Gormon had been traveling with us for nine days, now, since we had met him in the ancient city beneath the volcano, to the south by the edge of the sea. I had not suggested that he join us. He had invited himself along, and at Avluela's bidding I accepted. The roads are dark and cold at this time of year, and dangerous beasts of many species abound, and an old man journeying with a girl might well consider taking with him a brawny one like Gormon. Yet there were times I wished he had not come with us, and this was one.

Slowly I walked back to my equipment.

Gordon said, as though first realizing it, "Did I interrupt you at your Watching?"

I said mildly, "You did."

"Sorry. Go and start again. I'll leave you in peace." And he

gave me his dazzling lopsided smile, so full of charm that it took the curse off the easy arrogance of his words.

I touched the knobs, made contact with the nodes, monitored the dials. But I did not enter Watchfulness, for I remained aware of Gormon's presence and fearful that he would break into my concentration once again at a painful moment, despite his promise. At length I looked away from the apparatus. Gormon stood at the far side of the road, craning his neck for some sight of Avluela. The moment I turned to him he became aware of me.

"Something wrong, Watcher?"

"No. The moment's not propitious for my work. I'll wait."

"Tell me," he said. "When Earth's enemies really do come from the stars, will your machines let you know it?"

"I trust they will."

"And then?"

"Then I notify the Defenders."

"After which your life's work is over?"

"Perhaps," I said.

"Why a whole guild of you, though? Why not one master center where the Watch is kept? Why a bunch of itinerant Watchers drifting endlessly from place to place?"

"The more vectors of detection," I said, "the greater the chance of early awareness of the invasion."

"Then an individual Watcher might well turn his machines on and not see anything, with an invader already here."

"It could happen. Therefore we practice redundancy."

"You carry it to an extreme, I sometimes think." Gormon laughed. "Do you actually believe an invasion is coming?"

"I do," I said stiffly. "Else my life was a waste."

"And why should the star people want Earth? What do we have here besides the remnants of old empires? What would they do with miserable Roum? With Perris? With Jorslem? Rotting cities! Idiot princes! Come, Watcher, admit it: the

invasion's a myth, and you go through meaningless motions three times a day. Eh?"

"It is my craft and my science to Watch. It is yours to jeer. Each of us to our specialty, Gormon."

"Forgive me," he said with mock humility. "Go, then, and Watch."

"I shall."

Angrily I turned back to my cabinet of instruments, determined now to ignore any interruption, no matter how brutal. The stars were out; I gazed at the glowing constellations, and automatically my mind registered the many worlds. Let us Watch, I thought. Let us keep our vigil despite the mockers.

I entered the state of full Watchfulness.

I clung to the grips and permitted the surge of power to rush through me. I cast my mind to the heavens and searched for hostile entities. What ecstasy! What incredible splendor! I who had never left this small planet roved the black spaces of the void, glided from star to burning star, saw the planets spinning like tops. Faces stared back at me as I journeyed, some without eyes, some with many eyes, all the complexity of the many-peopled galaxy accessible to me. I spied out possible concentrations of inimical force. I inspected drilling-grounds and military encampments. I sought, as I had sought four times daily for all my adult life, for the invaders who had been promised us, the conquerors who at the end of days were destined to seize our tattered world.

I found nothing, and when I came up from my trance, sweaty and drained, I saw Avluela descending.

Feather-light she landed. Gormon called to her, and she ran, bare, her little breasts quivering, and he enfolded her smallness in his powerful arms, and they embraced, not passionately but joyously. When he released her she turned to me.

"Roum," she gasped. "*Roum!*"

"You saw it?"

"Everything! Thousands of people! Lights! Boulevards! A market! Broken buildings many cycles old! Oh, Watcher, how wonderful Roum is!"

"Your flight was a good one, then," I said.

"A miracle!"

"Tomorrow we go to dwell in Roum."

"No, Watcher, tonight, tonight!" She was girlishly eager, her face bright with excitement. "It's just a short journey more! Look, it's just over there!"

"We should rest first," I said. "We do not want to arrive weary in Roum."

"We can rest when we get there," Avluela answered. "Come! Pack everything! You've done your Watching, haven't you?"

"Yes. Yes."

"Then let's go. To Roum! To Roum!"

I looked in appeal at Gormon. Night had come; it was time to make camp, to have our few hours of sleep.

For once Gormon sided with me. He said to Avluela, "The Watcher's right. We can all use some rest. We'll go into Roum at dawn."

Avluela pouted. She looked more like a child than ever. Her wings drooped; her underdeveloped body slumped. Petulantly she closed her wings until they were mere fist-sized humps on her back and picked up the garments she had scattered on the road. She dressed while we made camp. I distributed food tablets; we entered our receptacles; I fell into troubled sleep and dreamed of Avluela limned against the crumbling moon and Gormon flying beside her. Two hours before dawn I arose and performed my first Watch of the new day, while they still slept. Then I aroused them, and we went onward toward the fabled imperial city, onward toward Roum.

III

The morning's light was bright and harsh, as though this were some young world newly created. The road was all but empty. People do not travel much in these latter days unless, like me, they are wanderers by habit and profession.

Occasionally we stepped aside to let a chariot of some member of the guild of Masters go by, drawn by a dozen expressionless neuters harnessed in series. Four such vehicles went by in the first two hours of the day, each shuttered and sealed to hide the Master's proud features from the gaze of such common folk as we. Several rollerwagons passed us, laden with produce, and a number of floaters soared overhead. Generally we had the road to ourselves, however.

The environs of Roum showed vestiges of antiquity: isolated columns, the fragments of an aqueduct transporting nothing from nowhere to nowhere, the portals of a vanished temple. That was the oldest Roum we saw, but there were accretions of the later Roums of subsequent cycles, the huts of peasants, the domes of power drains, the hulls of dwelling-towers. Infrequently we met with the burned-out shell of some ancient airship. Gorman examined everything, taking samples from time to time. Avluela looked, wide-eyed, saying nothing. We walked on, until the walls of the city loomed before us.

They were of a blue glossy stone, neatly joined, rising to a height of perhaps eight men. Our road pierced the wall through a corbelled arch. The gate stood open. As we approached the gate a figure came toward us, hooded, masked, a man of extraordinary height wearing the somber garb of the guild of Pilgrims. One does not approach such a person one's self, but one heeds him if he beckons. The Pilgrim beckoned.

Through his speaking grill he said, "Where from?"

"The south. I lived in Agupt a while, then crossed Land Bridge to Talya," I replied.

"Where bound?"

"Roum, a while."

"How goes the Watch?"

"As customary."

"You have a place to stay in Roum?" the Pilgrim asked.

I shook my head. "We trust to the kindness of the Will."

"The Will is not always kind," said the Pilgrim absently. "Nor is there much need of Watchers in Roum. Why do you travel with a Flier?"

"For company's sake. And because she is young and needs protection."

"Who is the other one?"

"He is guildless, a Changeling."

"So I can see. But why is he with you?"

"He is strong and I am old, and so we travel together. Where are you bound, Pilgrim?"

"Jorslem. Is there another destination for my guild?"

I conceded the point with a shrug.

The Pilgrim said, "Why do you not come to Jorslem with me?"

"My road lies north now. Jorslem is in the south, close by Agupt."

"You have been to Agupt and not to Jorslem?" he said, puzzled.

"Yes. The time was not ready for me to see Jorslem."

"Come now. We will walk together on the road, Watcher, and we will talk of the old times and of the times to come, and I will assist you in your Watching and you will assist me in my communions with the Will. Is it agreed?"

It was a temptation. Before my eyes flashed the image of Jorslem the Golden, its holy buildings and shrines, its place of renewal where the old are made young, its spires, its tabernacles. Even though I am a man set in his ways, I was

willing at the moment to abandon Roum and go with the Pilgrim to Jorslem.

I said, "And my companions—"

"Leave them. It is forbidden for me to travel with the guildless, and I do not wish to travel with a female. You and I, Watcher, will go to Jorslem together."

Avluela, who had been standing to one side frowning through all this colloquy, shot me a look of sudden terror.

"I will not abandon them," I said.

"Then I go to Jorslem alone," said the Pilgrim. Out of his robe stretched a bony hand, the fingers long and white and steady. I touched my fingers reverently to the tips of his and the Pilgrim said, "Let the Will give you mercy, friend Watcher. And when you reach Jorslem, search for me."

He moved on down the road without further conversation.

Gormon said to me, "You would have gone with him, wouldn't you?"

"I considered it."

"What could you find in Jorslem that isn't here? That's a holy city and so is this. Here you can rest a while. You're in no shape for more walking now."

"You may be right," I conceded, and with the last of my energy strode toward the gate of Roum.

Watchful eyes scanned us from slots in the wall. When we were at midpoint in the gate a fat, pockmarked Sentinel with sagging jowls halted us and asked our business in Roum. I stated my guild and purpose, and he gave a snort of disgust.

"Go elsewhere, Watcher! We need only useful men here."

"Watching has its uses," I said mildly.

"No doubt. No doubt." He squinted at Avluela. "Who's this? Watchers are celebates, no?"

"She is nothing more than a traveling companion."

The Sentinel guffawed coarsely. "It's a route you travel often, I wager! Not that there's much to her. What is she, thirteen, fourteen? Come here, child. Let me check you for contraband." He ran his hands quickly over her, scowling as

he felt her breasts, then raising an eyebrow as he encountered the mounds of her wings below her shoulders. "What's this? What's this? More in back than in front! A Flier, are you? Very dirty business, Fliers consorting with foul old Watchers." He chuckled and put his hand on Avluela's body in a way that sent Gormon starting forward in fury, murder in his fire-circled eyes. I caught him in time and grasped his wrist with all my strength, holding him back lest he ruin the three of us by an attack on the Sentinel. He tugged at me, nearly pulling me over; then he grew calm and subsided, icily waiting as the fat one finished checking Avluela for "contraband."

At length the Sentinel turned in distaste to Gormon and said, "What kind of thing are you?"

"Guildless, your mercy," Gormon said in sharp tones. "The humble and worthless product of teratogenesis, and yet nevertheless a free man who desires entry to Roum."

"Do we need more monsters here?"

"I eat little and work hard."

"You'd work harder still if you were neutered," said the Sentinel.

Gormon glowered. I said, "May we have entry?"

"A moment." The Sentinel donned his thinking cap and narrowed his eyes as he transmitted a message to the memory tanks. His face tensed with the effort; then it went slack, and moments later came the reply. We could not hear the transaction at all, but from his disappointed look it appeared evident that no reason had been found to refuse us admission to Roum.

"Go on in," he said. "The three of you. Quickly!"

We passed beyond the gate.

Gormon said, "I could have split him open with a blow."

"And be neutered by nightfall. A little patience, and we've come into Roum."

"The way he handled her—!"

"You take a very possessive attitude toward Avluela," I said. "Remember that she's a Flier, and not sexually available to the guildless."

Gormon ignored my thrust. "She arouses me no more than you do, Watcher. But it pains me to see her treated that way. I would have killed him if you hadn't held me back."

Avluela said, "Where shall we stay, now that we're in Roum?"

"First let me find the headquarters of my guild," I said. "I'll register at the Watchers' Inn. After that perhaps we'll hunt up the Fliers' Lodge for a meal."

"And then," said Gormon drily, "we'll go to the Guildless Gutter and beg for coppers."

"I pity you because you are a Changeling," I told him, "but I find it ungraceful of you to pity yourself. Come."

We walked up a cobbled, winding street away from the gate and into Roum itself. We were in the outer ring of the city, a residential section of low, squat houses topped by the unwieldy bulk of defense installations. Within lay the shining towers we had seen from the fields the night before; the remnant of ancient Roum, carefully preserved across ten thousand years or more; the market; the factory zone; the communications hump; the temples of the Will; the memory tanks; the sleepers' refuges; the out-worlders' brothels; the governmental buildings; the headquarters of the various guilds.

At the corner, beside a Second Cycle building with walls of some rubbery texture, I found a public thinking cap and slipped it on my forehead. At once my thoughts raced down the conduit until they came to the interface that gave them access to one of the storage brains of a memory tank. I pierced the interface and saw the wrinkled brain itself, pale gray against the deep green of its housing. A Rememberer once told me that in cycles past men built machines to do their thinking for them, although these machines were hellishly expensive and required vast amounts of space and drank

power like gluttons. That was not the worst of our forefathers' follies; but why build artificial brains when death each day liberates scores of splendid natural ones to hook into the memory tanks? Was it that they lacked the knowledge to use them? I find that hard to believe.

I gave the brain my guild identification and asked the coordinates of our inn. Instantly I received them, and we set out, Avluela on one side of me, Gormon on the other, myself wheeling as always the cart in which my instruments reside.

The city was crowded. I had not seen such throngs in sleepy, heat-fevered Agupt, nor at any other point on my northward journey. The streets were full of Pilgrims, secretive and masked. Jostling through them went busy Rememberers and glum Merchants and now and then the litter of a Master. Avluela saw a number of Fliers, but was barred by the tenets of her guild from greeting them until she had undergone her ritual purification. I regret to say that I spied many Watchers, all of whom looked upon me disdainfully and without welcome. I noted a good many Defenders and ample representation of such lesser guilds as Vendors, Servitors, Manufactories, Scribes, Communicants and Transporters. Naturally, a host of neuters went silently about their humble business, and numerous outworlders of all descriptions flocked the streets, most of them probably tourists, some here to do what business could be done with the sullen, poverty-blighted people of Earth. I noticed many Changelings limping furtively through the crowd, not one of them as proud of bearing as Gormon beside me. He was unique among his kind; the others, dappled and piebald and asymmetrical, limbless or overlimbed, deformed in a thousand imaginative and artistic ways, were slinkers, squinters, shufflers, hissers, creepers; they were cut-purses, brain-drainers, organ-peddlers, repentance-mongers, gleam-buyers, but none held himself upright as though he thought he were a man.

The guidance of the brain was exact, and in less than an hour of walking we arrived at the Watchers' Inn. I left Gormon and Avluela outside and wheeled my cart within.

Perhaps a dozen members of my guild lounged in the main hall. I gave them the customary sign, and they returned it languidly. Were these guardians on whom Earth's safety depended? Simpletons and weaklings!

"Where may I register?" I asked.

"New? Where from?"

"Agupt was my last place of registry."

"Should have stayed there. No need of Watchers here."

"Where may I register?"

A foppish youngster indicated a screen in the rear of the great room. I went to it, pressed my fingertips against it, was interrogated and gave my name, which a Watcher may utter only to another Watcher and within the precincts of an inn. A panel shot open, and a puffy-eyed man who wore the Watcher emblem on his right cheek and not on the left, signifying his high rank in the guild, spoke my name and said, "You should have known better than to come to Roum. We're over our quota."

"I claim lodging and employment nonetheless."

"A man with your sense of humor should have been born into the guild of Clowns," he said.

"I see no joke."

"Under laws promulgated by our guild in the most recent session an inn is under no obligation to take new lodgers once it has reached its assigned capacity. We are at our assigned capacity. Farewell, my friend."

I was aghast. "I know of no such regulation! This is incredible! For a guild to turn away a member from its own inn—when he arrives footsore and numb, a man of my age, having crossed Land Bridge out of Agupt, here as a stranger and hungry in Roum—"

"Why did you not check with us first?"

"I had no idea it would be necessary."

"The new regulations—"

"May the Will shrivel the new regulations!" I shouted. "I demand lodging! For one who has Watched since before you were born to be turned away—"

"Easy, brother, easy."

"Surely you have some corner where I can sleep—some crumbs to let me eat—"

Even as my tone had changed from bluster to supplication, his expression softened from indifference to mere disdain. "We have no room, we have no food. These are hard times for our guild, you know. There is talk that we will be disbanded altogether, as a useless luxury, a drain upon the Will's resources. We are very limited in our abilities. Because Roum has a surplus of Watchers, we all are on short rations as it is, and if we admit you our rations will be all the shorter."

"But where will I go? What shall I do?"

"I advise you," he said blandly, "to throw yourself upon the mercy of the Prince of Roum."

IV

Outside, I told that to Gormon, and he doubled with laughter, guffawing so furiously that the striations on his lean cheeks blazed like bloody stripes. "The mercy of the Prince of Roum!" he repeated. "The mercy—of the Prince of Roum—!"

"It is customary for the unfortunate to seek the aid of the local ruler," I said coldly.

"The Prince of Roum knows no mercy," Gormon told me. "The Prince of Roum will feed you your own limbs to ease your hunger!"

"Perhaps," Avluela put in, "we should try to find the Fliers' Lodge. They'll feed us there."

"Not Gormon," I observed. "We have obligations to one another."

"We could bring food out to him," she said.

"I prefer to visit the court first," I insisted. "Let us make sure of our status. Afterward we can improvise living arrangements, if we must."

She yielded, and we made our way to the palace of the Prince of Roum, a massive building fronted by a colossal column-ringed plaza, on the far side of the river that splits the city. In the plaza we were accosted by mendicants of many sorts, some not even Earthborn. Something with ropy tendrils and a corrugated noseless face thrust itself at me and jabbered for alms until Gormon pushed it away, and moments later a second creature equally strange, its skin pocked with luminescent craters and its limbs studded with eyes, embraced my knees and pleaded in the name of the Will for my mercy. "I am only a poor Watcher," I said, indicating my cart, "and am here to gain mercy myself." But the being persisted, sobbing out its misfortunes in a blurred feathery voice, and in the end, to Gormon's immense disgust, I dropped a few food tablets into the shelflike pouch on its chest. Then we muscled on toward the doors of the palace. At the portico a more horrid sight presented itself: a maimed Flier, fragile limbs bent and twisted, one wing half unfolded and severely cropped, the other missing altogether. The Flier rushed upon Avluela, called her by a name not hers, moistened her leggings with tears so copious that the fur of them grew matted and stained. "Sponsor me to the lodge," he appealed. "They have turned me away because I am crippled, but if you sponsor me—" Avluela explained that she could do nothing, that she was a stranger to this lodge. The broken Flier would not release her, and Gormon with great delicacy lifted him like the bundle of dry bones that he was, and set him aside. We stepped up onto the portico and at once were confronted by a trio of soft-faced neuters, who asked our business and admitted us quickly to the next line

of barrier, which was manned by a pair of wizened Indexers. Speaking in unison, they queried us.

"We seek audience," I said. "A matter of mercy."

"The day of audience is four days hence," said the Indexer on the right. "We will enter your request on the rolls."

"We have no place to sleep!" Avluela burst out. "We are hungry! We—"

I hushed her. Gormon, meanwhile, was groping in the mouth of his overpocket. Bright things glimmered in his hand: pieces of gold, the eternal metal, stamped with hawk-nosed bearded faces. He had found them grubbing in the ruins. He tossed one coin to the Indexer who had refused us. The man snapped it from the air, rubbed his thumb roughly across its shining obverse, and dropped it instantly into a fold of his garment. The second Indexer waited expectantly. Smiling, Gormon gave him his coin.

"Perhaps," I said, "we can arrange for a special audience within."

"Perhaps you can," said one of the Indexers. "Go through."

And so we passed into the nave of the palace itself, and stood in that great echoing space, looking down the central aisle toward the shielded throne chamber at the apse. There were more beggars in here—licensed ones, holding hereditary concessions—and also throngs of Pilgrims, Communicants, Rememberers, Musicians, Scribes and Indexers. I heard muttered prayers: I smelled the scent of spicy incense; I felt the vibration of subterranean gongs. In cycles past this building had been a shrine of one of the old religions—the Christers, Gormon told me, making me suspect once more that he was a Rememberer masquerading as a Changeling—and it still maintained something of its holy character even though it served as Roum's seat of secular government. But how were we to get to see the Prince?

To my left I saw a small ornate chapel to which a line of prosperous-looking Merchants and Land-holders was slowly

entering. Peering past them, I noted three skulls mounted on an interrogation fixture—a memory-tank input—and beside them a burly Scribe. Telling Gormon and Avluela to wait for me in the aisle, I joined the line.

It moved infrequently, and nearly an hour passed before I reached the interrogation fixture. The skulls glared sightlessly at me; within their sealed crania nutrient fluids bubbled and gurgled, caring for the dead yet still functional brains whose billion billion synaptic units now served as incomparable mnemonic devices. The Scribe seemed aghast to find a Watcher in this line, but before he could challenge me I blurted, "I come as a stranger to claim the Prince's mercy. I and my companions are without lodging. My own guild has turned me away. What shall I do? How may I gain an audience?"

"Come back in four days."

"I've slept on the road for more days than that. Now I must rest."

"A public inn—"

"But I am guilded!" I protested. "The public inns would not admit me while my guild maintains an inn here, and my guild refuses me because of some new regulation, and—you see my predicament?"

In a wearied voice the Scribe said, "You may make application for a special audience. It will be denied. But you may apply."

"Where?"

"Here. State your purpose."

I identified myself to the skulls by my public designation, listed the names and status of my two companions, and explained my case. All this was absorbed and transmitted to the ranks of brains mounted somewhere in the depths of the city, and when I was done the Scribe said, "If the application is approved, you will be notified."

"Meanwhile where shall I stay?"

"Close to the palace, I would suggest."

I understood. I could join that legion of unfortunates packing the plaza. How many of them had requested some special favor of the Prince and were still there, months or years later, waiting to be summoned to the Presence? Sleeping on stone, begging for crusts, living in foolish hope—

But I had exhausted my avenues. I returned to Gormon and Avluela, told them of the situation, and suggested that we now attempt to hunt whatever accommodations we could. Gormon, guildless, was welcome at any of the squalid public inns maintained for his kind; Avluela could probably find residence at her own guild's lodge; only I would have to sleep in the streets, not for the first time. But I hoped that we would not have to separate. I had come to think of us as a family, strange thought though that was for a Watcher.

As we moved toward the exit my timepiece told me softly that the hour of Watching had come round again. It is my obligation and my privilege to tend to my Watching wherever I may be, regardless of the circumstances, whenever my hour comes round; and so I halted, opened the cart, activated the equipment. Gormon and Avluela stood beside me.

I saw smirks and open mockery on the faces of those who passed in and out of the palace. Watching is not held in very high repute, for we have Watched so long, and the promised enemy has never come. One has one's duties, comic though they may seem to others. What is a hollow ritual to some is a life's work to others. Doggedly I forced myself into a state of Watchfulness. The world melted away from me, and I plunged into the heavens. The familiar joy engulfed me; and I searched the familiar places, and some that were not so familiar, my amplified mind leaping through the galaxies in wild swoops. Was an armada massing? Were troops drilling for the conquest of Earth? Four times a day I watched, and the other members of my guild did the same, each at slightly different hours, so that no moment went by without some

vigilant mind on guard. I do not believe that that is a foolish calling.

When I came up from my trance a brazen voice was crying, "—for the Prince of Roum! Make way for the Prince of Roum!"

I blinked and caught my breath and fought to shake off the last strands of my concentration. A gilded palanquin had emerged from the rear of the palace and was proceeding down the nave toward me, borne by a phalanx of neuters. Four men in the ornate costumes and brilliant masks of the guild of Masters flanked the litter, and it was preceded by a trio of Changelings, squat and broad, whose throats were so modified as to imitate the sounding-boxes of bullfrogs. They emitted a trumpet-like boom of majestic sound as they advanced.

It struck me as most strange that a prince would admit Changelings to his service, even ones as gifted as these.

My cart was blocking the progress of this magnificent procession, and hastily I struggled to close it and move it aside before the parade swept down upon me. Age and fear made my fingers tremble, and I could not make the sealings properly; while I fumbled in increasing clumsiness the strutting Changelings drew so close that the blare of their throats was deafening, and Gormon attempted to aid me, forcing me to hiss at him that it is forbidden for anyone not of my guild to touch the equipment. I pushed him away; and an instant later a vanguard of neuters descended on me and prepared to scourge me from the spot with sparkling whips.

"In the Will's name," I cried, "I am a Watcher!"

And in antiphonal response came the deep, calm, enormous reply, "Let him be. He is a Watcher."

All motion ceased. The Prince of Roum had spoken.

The neuters drew back. The Changelings halted their music. The bearers of the palanquin eased it to the floor. All those in the nave of the palace had pulled back, save only

Gormon and Avluela and myself. The shimmering chain-curtains of the palanquins parted. Two of the Masters hurried forward and thrust their hands through the sonic barrier within, offering aid to their monarch. The barrier died away with a whimpering buzz.

The Prince of Roum appeared.

He was so young! He was nothing more than a boy, his hair full and dark, his face unlined. But he had been born to rule, and for all his youth he was as commanding as anyone I had ever seen. His lips were thin and tightly compressed; his aquiline nose was sharp and aggressive; his eyes, deep and cold, were infinite pools. He wore the jeweled garments of the guild of Dominators, but incised on his cheek was the double-barred cross of the Defenders, and around his neck he carried the dark shawl of the Rememberers. A Dominator may enroll in as many guilds as he pleases, and it would be a strange thing for a Dominator not also to be a Defender; but it startled me to find this prince a Rememberer as well. That is not normally a guild for the fierce.

He looked at me with little interest and said, "You choose an odd place to do your Watching, old man."

"The hour chose the place, sire," I replied. "I was there, and my duty compelled me. I had no way of knowing that you were about to come forth."

"Your Watching found no enemies?"

"None, sire."

I was about to press my luck, to take advantage of the unexpected appearance of the Prince to beg for his aid; but his interest in me died like a guttering candle as I stood there, and I did not dare call to him when his head had turned. He eyed Gormon a long moment, frowning and tugging at his chin. Then his gaze fell on Avluela. His eyes brightened. His jaw-muscles flickered. His delicate nostrils widened. "Come up here, little Flier," he said, beckoning. "Are you this Watcher's friend?"

She nodded, terrified.

The Prince held out a hand to her and grasped; she floated up onto the palanquin, and with a grin so evil it seemed a parody of wickedness the young Dominator drew her through the curtain. Instantly a pair of Masters restored the sonic barrier, but the procession did not move on. I stood mute. Gormon beside me was frozen, his powerful body rigid as a rod. I wheeled my cart to a less conspicuous place. Long moments passed. The courtiers remained silent, discreetly looking away from the palanquin.

At length the curtain parted once more. Avluela came stumbling out, her face pale, her eyes blinking rapidly. She looked dazed. Streaks of sweat gleamed on her cheeks. She nearly fell, and a neuter caught her and swung her down to floor level. Beneath her jacket her wings were partly erect, giving her a hunchbacked look and telling me that she was in great emotional distress. In ragged sliding steps she came to us, quivering, wordless; she darted a glance at me and flung herself against Gormon's chest.

The bearers lifted the palanquin. The Prince of Roum went out from his palace.

When he was gone, Avluela stammered hoarsely, "The Prince has granted us lodging in the royal hostelry!"

V

The hostelkeepers, of course, would not believe us.

Guests of the Prince are housed in the royal hostelry, which is to the rear of the palace in a small garden of frostflowers and blossoming ferns. The usual inhabitants of such a hostelry are Masters and an occasional Dominator; sometimes a particularly important Rememberer on an errand of research will win a niche there, or some highly placed Defender visiting for purposes of strategic planning. To house a Flier in a royal hostelry would be distinctly odd; to admit a Watcher would be unlikely; to take in a Changeling or

some other guildless person would be improbable beyond comprehension. When we presented ourselves, therefore, we were met by Servitors whose attitude was at first one of high humor at our joke, then of irritation, finally of scorn. "Get away," they told us ultimately. "Scum! Rabble!"

Avluela said in a grave voice, "The Prince has granted us lodging here, and you may not refuse us."

"Away! Away!"

One snaggletoothed Servitor produced a neural truncheon and brandished it in Gormon's face, passing a foul remark about his guildlessness. Gormon slapped the truncheon from his grasp, oblivious to the painful sting, and kicked the man in his gut, so that he coiled and fell over, puking. Instantly a throng of neuters came rushing from within the hostelry. Gormon seized another of the Servitors and hurled him into the midst of them, turning them into a muddled mob. Wild shouts and angry cursing cries attracted the attention of a venerable Scribe who waddled to the door, bellowed for silence, and interrogated us. "That's easily checked," he said, when Avluela had told the story. To a Servitor he said contemptuously, "Send a think to the Indexers fast!"

In time the confusion was untangled, and we were admitted. We were given separate but adjoining rooms. I had never known such luxury before, and perhaps never shall again. The rooms were long, high, and deep. One entered them through telescopic pits keyed to one's own thermal output, to assure privacy. Lights glowed at the resident's merest nod, for hanging from ceiling globes and nestling in cupolas on the walls were spicules of slavelight from one of the Brightstar worlds, trained through suffering to obey such commands. The windows came and went at the dweller's whim. When not in use they were concealed by streamers of quasi-sentient outworld gauzes, which not only were decorative in their own right but functioned as monitors to produce delightful scents according to requisitioned patterns. The rooms were equipped with individual thinking caps con-

nected to the main memory banks. They likewise had conduits that summoned Servitors, Scribes, Indexers or Musicians as required. Of course, a man of my own human guild would not deign to make use of other human beings that way, out of fear of their glowering resentment. But in any case I had little need of them.

I did not ask of Avluela what had occurred in the Prince's palanquin to bring us such bounty. I could well imagine, as could Gormon, whose barely suppressed inner rage was eloquent of his never-admitted love for my pale, slender little Flier.

We settled in. I placed my cart beside the window, draped it with gauzes, and left it in readiness for my next period of Watching. I cleaned my body of grime while entities mounted in the wall sang me to peace. Later I ate. Afterwards Avluela came to me, refreshed, relaxed, and sat beside me in my room as we talked quietly of our recent experiences.

Gormon did not appear for hours. I thought that perhaps he had left this hostelry altogether, finding the atmosphere too rarefied for him, and had sought company among his own guildless kind. But at twilight Avluela and I walked in the cloistered courtyard of the hostelry and mounted a ramp to watch the stars emerge in Roum's sky, and Gormon was there. With him was a lanky and emaciated man in a Rememberer's shawl; they were talking in low tones.

Gormon nodded to me and said, "Watcher, I want you to meet my new friend."

The emaciated one fingered his shawl. "I am the Rememberer Basil," he intoned, in a voice as thin as a fresco that has been peeled from its wall. "I have come from Perris to delve into the mysteries of Roum. I shall be here many years."

"The Rememberer has fine stories to tell," said Gormon. "He is among the foremost of his guild. As you approached,

he was describing to me the techniques by which the past is revealed. They drive a trench through the strata of Third Cycle deposits, you see, and with vacuum cores they lift the molecules of earth to lay bare the ancient layers."

"We have found," Basil said, "the catacombs of Imperial Roum, and the rubble of the Time of Sweeping, and books inscribed on slivers of white metal, written toward the close of the Second Cycle. All these go to Perris for examination and classification and decipherment; then they return. Does the past interest you, Watcher?"

"To some extent." I smiled. "This Changeling here shows much more fascination for it. I sometimes suspect his authenticity. Would you recognize a Rememberer in disguise?"

Basil scrutinized Gormon, lingering over the bizarre features, the excessively muscular frame. "He is no Rememberer," he said at length. "But I agree that he has antiquarian interests. He has asked me many profound questions."

"Such as?"

"He wishes to know the origin of guilds. He asks the name of the genetic surgeon who crafted the first true-breeding Fliers. He wonders why there are Changelings, and if they are truly under the curse of the Will."

"And do you have answers for these?" I asked.

"For some," said Basil. "For some."

"The origin of guilds?"

"To give structure and meaning to a society that has suffered defeat and destruction," said the Rememberer. "At the end of the Second Cycle all was in flux. No man knew his rank nor his purpose. Through our world strode haughty outworlders who looked upon us all as worthless. It was necessary to establish fixed frames of reference by which one man might know his value beside another. So the first guilds appeared: Dominators, Masters, Merchants, Manufactories, Vendors and Servitors. Then came Scribes, Musi-

cians, Clowns and Transporters. Afterwards Indexers became necessary, and then Watchers and Defenders. When the years of Magic gave us Fliers and Changelings, those guilds were added, and then the guildless ones, the neuters, were produced, so that—"

"But surely the Changelings are guildless too!" said Avluela.

The Rememberer looked at her for the first time. "Who are you?"

"Avluela of the Fliers. I travel with this Watcher and this Changeling."

Basil said, "As I have been telling the Changeling here, in the early days his kind was guilded. The guild was dissolved a thousand years ago by order of the Council of Dominators after an attempt by a disreputable Changeling faction to seize control of the holy places of Jorslem. Since that time Changelings have been guildless, ranking only above neuters."

"I never knew that," I said.

"You are no Rememberer," said Basil smugly. "It is our craft to uncover the past."

"True. True."

Gormon said, "And today, how many guilds there are?"

Discomfited, Basil replied vaguely, "At least a hundred, my friend. Some are quite small; some are local. I am concerned only with the original guilds and their immediate successors; what has happened in the past few hundred years is in the province of others. Shall I requisition an information for you?"

"Never mind," Gormon said. "It was only an idle question."

"Your curiosity is well developed," said the Rememberer.

"I find the world and all it contains extremely fascinating. Is this sinful?"

"It is strange," said Basil. "The guildless rarely look beyond their own horizons."

VI

A Servitor appeared. With a mixture of awe and contempt he genuflected before Avluela and said, "The Prince has returned. He desires your company in the palace at this time."

Terror glimmered in Avluela's eyes. But to refuse was inconceivable. "Shall I come with you?" she asked.

"Please. You must be robed and perfumed. He wishes you to come to him with your wings open, as well."

Avluela nodded. The Servitor led her away.

We remained on the ramp a while longer. The Rememberer Basil talked of the old days of Roum, and I listened, and Gormon peered into the gathering darkness. Eventually, his throat dry, the Rememberer excused himself and moved solemnly away. A few moments later, in the courtyard below us, a door opened and Avluela emerged, walking as though she was of the guild of Somnambulists, not of Fliers.

She was nude, and her fragile body gleamed ghostly white in the starbeams. Her wings were spread and fluttered slowly in a somber systole and diastole. One Servitor grasped each of her elbows; they seemed to be propelling her toward the palace as though she were but a dreamed facsimile of herself and not a real woman.

"Fly, Avluela, fly," Gormon whispered. "Escape while you can!"

She disappeared into a side entrance of the palace.

The Changeling looked at me. "She has sold herself to the Prince to provide lodging for us."

"So it seems."

"I could smash down that palace!"

"You love her?"

"It should be obvious."

"Cure yourself," I advised. "You are an unusual man, but still a Flier is not for you. Particularly a Flier who has shared the bed of the Prince of Roum."

"She goes from my arms to his."

I was staggered. "You've known her?"

"More than once," he said, smiling sadly. "At the moment of ecstasy her wings thrash like leaves in a storm."

I gripped the railing of the ramp so that I would not tumble into the courtyard. The stars whirled overhead; the old moon and its two blank-faced consorts leaped and bobbed. I was shaken without fully understanding the cause of my emotion. Was it wrath that Gormon had dared to violate a canon of the law? Was it a manifestation of those pseudo-parental feelings I had toward Avluela? Or was it mere envy of Gormon for daring to commit a sin beyond my capacity, though not beyond my desires?

I said, "They could burn your brain for that. They could mince your soul. And now you make me an accessory."

"What of it? That Prince commands, and he gets—but others have been there before him. I had to tell someone."

"Enough. Enough."

"Will we see her again?"

"Princes tire quickly of their women. A few days, perhaps a single night—then he will throw her back to us. And perhaps then we shall have to leave this hostelry." I sighed. "At least we'll have known it a few nights more than we deserved."

"Where will you go then?" Gormon asked.

"I will stay in Roum a while."

"Even if you sleep in the streets? There does not seem to be much demand for Watchers here."

"I'll manage," I said. "Then I may go toward Perris."

"To learn from the Rememberers?"

"To see Perris. What of you? What do you want in Roum?"

"Avluela."

"Stop that talk!"

"Very well," he said, and his smile was bitter. "But I will stay here until the Prince is through with her. Then she will be mine, and we'll find ways to survive. The guildless are resourceful. They have to be. Maybe we'll scrounge lodgings

in Roum a while, and then follow you to Perris. If you're willing to travel with monsters and faithless Fliers."

I shrugged. "We'll see about that when the time comes."

"Have you ever been in the company of a Changeling before?"

"Not often. Not for long."

"I'm honored." He drummed on the parapet. "Don't cast me off, Watcher. I have reason for wanting to stay with you."

"Which is?"

"To see your face on the day your machines tell you that the invasion of Earth has begun."

I let myself sag forward, shoulders drooping. "You'll stay with me a long time, then."

"Don't you believe the invasion is coming?"

"Some day. Not soon."

Gormon chuckled. "You're wrong. It's almost here."

"You don't amuse me."

"What is it, Watcher? Have you lost your faith? It's been known for a thousand years: another race covets Earth and owns it by treaty and will some day come to collect. That much was decided at the end of the Second Cycle."

"I know all that, and I am no Rememberer." Then I turned to him and spoke words I never thought I would say aloud. "For twice your lifetime, Changeling, I've listened to the stars and done my Watching. Something done that often loses meaning. Say your own name ten thousand times and it will be an empty sound. I have Watched, and Watched well, and in the dark hours of the night I sometimes think I Watch for nothing, that I have wasted my life. There is a pleasure in Watching, but perhaps there is no real purpose."

His hand encircled my wrist. "Your confession is as shocking as mine. Keep your faith, Watcher. The invasion comes!"

"How could you possibly know?"

"The guildless also have their skills."

The conversation distressed me. I said, "Is it painful to be guildless?"

"One grows reconciled. And there are certain freedoms to compensate for the lack of status. I may speak freely to all."

"I notice."

"I move freely. I am always sure of food and lodging, though the food may be rotten and the lodging poor. Women are attracted to me despite all prohibitions. Because of them, perhaps, I am untroubled by ambitions."

"Never desire to rise above your rank?"

"Never."

"You might have been happier as a Rememberer."

"I am happy now. I can have a Rememberer's pleasures without his responsibility."

"How smug you are!" I cried. "To make a virtue of guildlessness!"

"How else does one endure the weight of the Will?" He looked toward the palace. "The humble rise. The mighty fall. Take this as prophesy, Watcher: that lusty Prince in there will know more of life before summer comes. I'll rip out his eyes for taking her!"

"Strong words. You bubble with treason tonight."

"Take it as prophesy."

"You can't get close to him," I said. Then, irritated for taking his foolishness seriously, I added, "And why blame him? He does only as princes do. Blame the girl for going to him. She might have refused."

"And lost her wings. Or died. No, she had no choice. I do!" In a sudden terrible gesture the Changeling held out thumb and forefinger, double-jointed, long-nailed, and plunged them forward into imagined eyes. "Wait," he said. "You'll see!"

In the courtyard two Chronomancers appeared, set up the apparatus of their guild and lit tapers by which to read the shape of tomorrow. A sickly odor of pallid smoke rose to my nostrils. I had lost further desire to speak with the Changeling now.

"It grows late," I said. "I need rest, and soon I must do my Watching."

"Watch carefully," Gormon told me.

VII

In my chamber by night I performed my fourth and last Watch of that long day, and for the first time in my life I detected an anomaly. I could not interpret it. It was an obscure sensation, a mingling of tastes and sounds, a feeling of being in contact with some colossal mass. Worried, I clung to my instruments far longer than usual, but perceived no more clearly at the end of my seance than at its commencement.

Afterward I wondered about my obligations.

Watchers are trained from childhood to be swift to sound the alarm; and the alarm must be sounded when the Watcher judges the world in peril. Was I now obliged to notify the Defenders? Four times in my life the alarm had been given, on each occasion in error; and each Watcher who had thus touched off a false mobilization had suffered a fearful loss of status. One had contributed his brain to the memory banks; one had become a neuter out of shame; one had smashed his instruments and gone to live among the guildless; and one, vainly attempting to continue in his profession, had discovered himself mocked by all his comrades. I saw no virtue in scorning one who had delivered a false alarm; for was it not preferable for a Watcher to cry out too soon than not at all? But those were the customs of our guild, and I was constrained by them.

I evaluated my position and decided that I did not have valid grounds for an alarm.

I reflected that Gormon had placed suggestive ideas in my mind that evening. I might possibly be reacting only to his peering talk of imminent invasion.

I could not act. I dared not jeopardize my standing by hasty outcry. I mistrusted my own emotional state.

I gave no alarm.

Seething, confused, my soul roiling, I closed my cart and let myself sink into a drugged sleep.

At dawn I woke and rushed to the window, expecting to find invaders in the streets. But all was still. A winter grayness hung over the courtyard, and sleepy Servitors pushed passive neuters about. Uneasily I did my first Watching of the day, and to my relief the strangeness of the night before did not return, although I had it in mind that my sensitivity is always greater at night than upon arising.

I ate and went to the courtyard. Gormon and Avluela were already there. She looked fatigued and downcast, depleted by her night with the Prince of Roum, but I said nothing to her about it. Gormon, slouching disdainfully against a wall embellished with the shells of radiant mollusks, said to me, "Did your Watching go well?"

"Well enough."

"What of the day?"

"Out to roam Roum," I said. "Will you come? Avluela? Gormon?"

"Surely," he said, and she gave a faint nod, and, like the tourists we were, we set off to inspect the splendid city of Roum.

Gormon acted as our guide to the jumbled pasts of Roum, belying his claim never to have been here before. As well as any Rememberer he described the things we saw as we walked the winding streets. All the scattered levels of thousands of years were exposed. We saw the power domes of the Second Cycle, and the Colosseum where at an unimaginably early date man and beast contended like jungle creatures. In the broken hull of that building of horrors Gormon told us of the savagery of that unimaginably ancient time. "They fought," he said, "naked before huge throngs. With bare

hands men challenged beasts called lions, great hairy cats with swollen heads; and when the lion lay in its gore the victor turned to the Prince of Roum and asked to be pardoned for whatever crime it was that had cast him into the arena. And if he had fought well, the Prince made a gesture with his hand, and the man was freed." Gormon made the gesture for us: a thumb upraised and jerked backward over the right shoulder several times. "But if the man had shown cowardice, or if the lion had distinguished itself in the manner of its dying, the Prince made another gesture, and the man was condemned to be slain by a second beast." Gormon showed us that gesture too: the middle finger jutting upward from a clenched fist and lifted in a short sharp thrust.

"How are these things known?" Avluela asked, but Gormon pretended not to hear her.

We saw the line of fusion pylons built early in the Third Cycle to draw energy from the world's core, and still functioning, although stained and corroded. We saw the shattered stump of a Second Cycle weather machine, still a mighty column at least twenty men high. We saw a hill on which white marble relics of First Cycle Roum sprouted like pale clumps of winter death-flowers. Penetrating toward the inner part of the city, we came upon the embankment of defensive amplifiers waiting in readiness to hurl the full impact of the Will against invaders. We viewed a market where visitors from the stars haggled with peasants for excavated fragments of antiquity. Gormon strode into the crowd and made several purchases. We came to a flesh house for travelers from afar, where one could buy anything from quasi-life to mounds of passion-ice. We ate at a small restaurant by the edge of the river Tver, where guildless ones were served without ceremony, and at Gormon's insistence we dined on mounds of a soft doughy substance.

Afterward we passed through a covered arcade in whose many aisles plump Vendors peddled star-goods, costly trin-

kets from Afreek and the flimsy constructs of the local Manufactories. Just beyond we emerged in a plaza that contained a fountain in the shape of a boat, and to the rear of this rose a flight of cracked and battered stone stairs ascending to a zone of rubble and weeds. Gormon beckoned, and we scrambled into this dismal area, passing rapidly through it to a place where a sumptuous palace, by its looks early Second Cycle or even First, brooded over a sloping vegetated hill.

"They say this is the center of the world," Gormon declared. "In Jorslem one finds another place that also claims the honor. They mark the spot here by a map."

"How can the world have one center," Avluela asked, "when it is a sphere?"

Gormon laughed. We went in. Within, in wintry darkness, there stood a colossal jeweled globe lit by some inner glow.

"Here is your world," said Gormon, gesturing grandly.

"Oh!" Avluela gasped. "Everything! Everything is here!"

The map was a masterpiece of craftsmanship. It showed natural contours and elevations; its seas seemed deep liquid pools; its deserts were so parched as to make thirst spring in one's mouth; its cities swirled with vigor and life. I beheld the continents, Eyrop, Afreek, Ais, Stralya. I saw the vastness of Earth Ocean. I traversed the golden span of Land Bridge, which I had crossed so toilfully on foot not long before. Avluela rushed forward and pointed to Roum, to Agupt, to Jorslem, to Perris. She tapped the globe at the high mountains north of Hind and said softly, "This is where I was born, where the ice lives, where the mountains touch the moons. Here is where the Fliers have their kingdom." She ran a finger westward toward Pars and beyond it into the terrible Arban Desert, and on to Agupt. "This is where I flew. By night, when I left my girlhood. We all must fly, and I flew here. A hundred times I thought I would die. Here, here in the desert, sand in my throat as I flew, sand beating against my wings—I was forced down, I lay naked on the hot

sand for days, and another Flier saw me, he came down to me and pitied me, and lifted me up, and when I was aloft my strength returned, and we flew on toward Agupt. And he died over the sea. His life stopped, though he was young and strong, and he fell down into the sea, and I flew down to be with him, and the water was hot even at night. I drifted, and morning came, and I saw the living stones growing like trees in the water, and the fish of many colors, and they came and pecked at his flesh as he floated with his wings outspread on the water, and I left him, I thrust him down to rest there, and I rose, and I flew on to Agupt, alone, frightened, and there I met you, Watcher." Timidly she smiled to me. "Show us the place where you were young, Watcher."

Painfully, for I was suddenly stiff at the knees, I hobbled to the far side of the globe. Avluela followed me. Gormon hung back, as though not interested at all. I pointed to the scattered islands rising in two long strips from Earth Ocean —the remnants of the Lost Continents.

"Here," I said, indicating my native island in the west. "I was born here."

"So far away!" Avluela cried.

"And so long ago," I said. "In the middle of the Second Cycle, it sometimes seems to me."

"No! That is not possible!" But she looked at me as though it might just be true that I was thousands of years old.

I smiled and touched her satiny cheek. "It only seems that way to me," I said.

"When did you leave your home?"

"When I was twice your age," I said. "I came first to here." I indicated the eastern group of islands. "I spent a dozen years as a Watcher on Palash. Then the Will moved me to cross Earth Ocean to Afreek. I came. I lived a while in the hot countries. I went on to Agupt. I met a certain small Flier." Falling silent, I looked a long while at the islands that had been my home, and within my mind my image changed

from the gaunt and eroded thing I am today, and I saw myself young and well fleshed, climbing the green mountains and swimming in the chill sea, and doing my Watching at the rim of a white beach hammered by surf.

While I brooded Avluela turned away from me to Gormon and said, "Now you. Show us where you come from, Changeling!"

Gormon shrugged. "The place does not appear to be on this globe."

"But that's *impossible!*"

"Is it?" he asked.

She pressed him, but he evaded her, and we passed through a side exit and into the streets.

VIII

I was growing tired, but Avluela hungered for this city, wishing to devour it all in an afternoon, and we went on through a maze of interlocking streets, through a zone of sparkling mansions of Masters and Merchants, and through a foul den of Servitors and Vendors that extended into subterranean catacombs, and to a place where Clowns and Musicians resorted, and to another where the guild of Somnambulists begged us to come inside and buy the truth that comes with trances. Avluela urged us to go, but Gormon shook his head and I smiled, and we moved on. Now we were at the edge of a park close to the city's core. Here the citizens of Roum promenaded with an energy rarely seen in hot Agupt, and we joined the parade.

"Look there!" Avluela said. "How bright it is!"

She pointed toward the shining arc of a dimensional sphere enclosing some relic of the ancient city. Shading my eyes, I could make out a weathered stone wall within, and a knot of people. Gormon said, "It is the Mouth of Truth."

"What is that?" Avluela asked.

"Come. See."

A line progressed into the sphere. We joined it and soon were at the lip of the interior, peering at the timeless region just across the threshold. Why this relic and so few others had been accorded such special protection I did not know, and I asked Gormon, whose knowledge was so unaccountably as profound as any Rememberer's, and he replied, "Because this is the realm of certainty, where what one says is absolutely congruent with what actually is the case."

"I don't understand," said Avluela.

"It is impossible to lie in this place," Gormon told her. "Can you imagine any relic more worthy of protection?" He stepped across the entry duct, blurring as he did so, and I followed him quickly within. Avluela hesitated. It was a long moment before she entered; she paused a moment on the very threshold, seemingly buffeted by the wind that blew along the line of demarcation between the outer world and the pocket universe in which we stood.

An inner compartment held the Mouth of Truth itself. The line extended toward it, and a solemn Indexer was controlling the flow of entry to the tabernacle. It was a while before we three were permitted to go in. We found ourselves before the ferocious head of a monster in high relief, affixed to an ancient wall pockmarked by time. The monster's jaws gaped; the open mouth was a dark and sinister hole. Gormon nodded, inspecting it, as though he seemed pleased to find it exactly as he had thought it would be.

"What do we do?" Avluela asked.

Gormon said, "Watcher, put your right hand into the Mouth of Truth."

Frowning, I complied.

"Now," said Gormon, "one of us asks a question. You must answer it. If you speak anything but the truth, the mouth will close and sever your hand."

"No!" Avluela cried.

I stared uneasily at the stone jaws rimming my wrist. A Watcher without both his hands is a man without a craft; in Second Cycle days one might obtain a prosthesis more artful than one's original hand, but the Second Cycle had long ago been concluded, and such niceties were not to be purchased on Earth nowadays.

"How is such a thing possible?" I asked.

"The Will is unusually strong in these precincts," Gormon replied. "It distinguishes sternly between truth and untruth. To the rear of this wall sleeps a trio of Somnambulists through whom the Will speaks, and they control the Mouth. Do you fear the Will, Watcher?"

"I fear my own tongue."

"Be brave. Never has a lie been told before this wall. Never has a hand been lost."

"Go ahead, then," I said. "Who will ask me a question?"

"I," said Gormon. "Tell me, Watcher: all pretense aside, would you say that a life spent in Watching has been a life spent wisely?"

I was silent a long moment, rotating my thoughts, eyeing the jaws.

At length I said, "To devote one's self to vigilance on behalf of one's fellow man is perhaps the noblest purpose one can serve."

"Careful!" Gormon cried in alarm.

"I am not finished," I said.

"Go on."

"But to devote one's self to vigilance when the enemy is an imaginary one is idle, and to congratulate one's self for looking long and well for a foe that is not coming is foolish and sinful. My life has been a waste."

The jaws of the Mouth of Truth did not quiver.

I removed my hand. I stared at it as though it had newly sprouted from my wrist. I felt suddenly several cycles old. Avluela, her eyes wide, her hands to her lips, seemed shocked

by what I had said. My own words appeared to hang congealed in the air before the hideous idol.

"Spoken honestly," said Gormon, "although without much mercy for yourself. You judge yourself too harshly, Watcher."

"I spoke to save my hand," I said. "Would you have had me lie?"

He smiled. To Avluela the Changeling said, "Now it's your turn."

Visibly frightened, the little Flier approached the Mouth. Her dainty hand trembled as she inserted it between the slabs of cold stone. I fought back an urge to rush toward her and pull her free of that devilish grimacing head.

"Who will question her?" I asked.

"I," said Gormon.

Avluela's wings stirred faintly beneath her garments. Her face grew pale; her nostrils flickered, her upper lip slid over the lower one. She stood slouched against the wall, staring in horror at the termination of her arm. Outside the chamber vague faces peered at us, lips moved in what no doubt were expressions of impatience over our lengthy visit to the Mouth; but we heard nothing. The atmosphere around us was warm and clammy, with a musty tang like that which would come from a well that was driven through the structure of Time.

Gormon said slowly, "This night past you allowed your body to be possessed by the Prince of Roum. Before that, you granted yourself to the Changeling Gormon, although such liaisons are forbidden by custom and law. Much prior to that you were the mate of a Flier, now deceased. You may have had other men, but I know nothing of them, and for the purposes of my question they are not relevant. Tell me this, Avluela: which of the three gave you the most intense physical pleasure, which of the three aroused your

deepest emotions, and which of the three would you choose as a mate, if you were choosing a mate?"

I wanted to protest that the Changeling had asked her three questions, not one, and so had taken unfair advantage. But I had no chance to speak, because Avluela replied unfalteringly, hand wedged deep into the Mouth of Truth, "The Prince of Roum gave me greater pleasure of the body than I had ever known before, but he is cold and cruel, and I despise him. My dead Flier I loved more deeply than any person before or since, but he was weak, and I would not have wanted a weakling as a mate. You, Gormon, seem almost a stranger to me even now, and I feel that I know neither your body nor your soul, and yet, though the gulf between us is so wide, it is you with whom I would spend my days to come."

She drew her hand from the Mouth of Truth.

"Well spoken!" said Gormon, though the accuracy of her words had clearly wounded as well as pleased him. "Suddenly you find eloquence, eh, when the circumstances demand it? And now the turn is mine to risk my hand."

He neared the Mouth. I said, "You have asked the first two questions. Do you wish to finish the job and ask the third as well?"

"Hardly," he said. He made a negligent gesture with his free hand. "Put your heads together and agree on a joint question."

Avluela and I conferred. With uncharacteristic forwardness she proposed a question; and since it was the one I would have asked, I accepted and told her to ask it.

She said, "When we stood before the globe of the world, Gormon, I asked you to show me the place where you were born, and you said you were unable to find it on the map. That seemed most strange. Tell me now: are you what you say you are, a Changeling who wanders the world?"

He replied, "I am not."

In a sense he had satisfied the question as Avluela had

phrased it; but it went without saying that his reply was inadequate, and without removing his hand from the Mouth of Truth he continued, "I did not show my birthplace to you on the globe because I was born nowhere on this globe, but on a world of a star I must not name. I am no Changeling in your meaning of the word, though by some definitions I am, for my body is somewhat disguised, and on my own world I wear a different flesh. I have lived here ten years."

"What was your purpose in coming to Earth?" I asked.

"I am obliged only to answer one question," said Gormon. Then he smiled. "But I give you an answer anyway: I was sent to Earth in the capacity of a military observer, to prepare the way for the invasion for which you have Watched so long and in which you have ceased to believe, and which will be upon you in a matter now of some hours."

"Lies!" I bellowed. "All *lies!*"

Gormon laughed. And drew his hand from the Mouth of Truth, intact, unharmed.

IX

Numb with confusion, I fled with my cart of instruments from that gleaming sphere and emerged into a street suddenly cold and dark. Night had come with winter's swiftness; it was almost the ninth hour, and almost the time for me to Watch once more.

Gormon's mockery thundered in my brain. He had arranged everything: he had maneuvered us into the Mouth of Truth, he had wrung a confession of lost faith from me and a confession of a different sort from Avluela, he had mercilessly volunteered information he need not have revealed, spoken words calculated to split me to the core.

Was the Mouth of Truth a fraud? Could Gormon lie and emerge unscathed?

Never since I first took up my tasks had I Watched at anything but my appointed hours. This was a time of crumbling

realities; I could not wait for the ninth hour to come round. Crouching in the windy street, I opened my cart, readied my equipment and sank like a diver into Watchfulness.

My amplified consciousness roared toward the stars.

Godlike I roamed infinity. I felt the rush of the solar wind, but I was no Flier to be hurled to destruction by that pressure, and I soared past it, beyond the reach of those angry particles of light, into the blackness at the edge of the sun's dominion. Down upon me there beat a different pressure.

Starships coming near.

Not the tourist lines, bringing sightseers to gape at our diminished world. Not the registered mercantile transport vessels, nor the scoopships that collect the interstellar vapors, nor the resort craft on their hyperbolic orbits.

These were military craft, dark, alien, menacing. I could not tell their number; I knew only that they sped Earthward at many lights, nudging a cone of deflected energies before them, and it was that cone that I sensed, that I had felt also the night before, booming into my mind through my instruments, engulfing me like a cube of crystal through which stress patterns play and shine.

All my life I had Watched for this.

I had been trained to sense it. I had prayed that I never would sense it, and then in my emptiness I had prayed that I *would* sense it, and then I had ceased to believe in it. And then by grace of the Changeling Gormon I had sensed it after all, Watching ahead of my hour, crouching in a cold Roumish street just outside the Mouth of Truth.

In his training a Watcher is instructed to break from his Watchfulness as soon as his observations are confirmed by a careful check, so that he can sound the alarm. Obediently I made my check, shifting from one channel to another to another, triangulating and still picking up that foreboding sensation of titanic force rushing upon Earth at unimaginable speed.

Either I was deceived, or the invasion was come. But I could not shake from my trance to give the alarm.

Lingeringly, lovingly, I drank in the sensory data for what seemed like hours. I fondled my equipment, draining from it the total affirmation of faith that my readings gave me. Dimly I warned myself that I was wasting vital time, that it was my duty to leave this lewd caressing of destiny and summon the Defenders.

And at last I burst free of Watchfulness and returned to the world I was guarding.

Avluela was beside me, dazed, terrified, her knuckles to her teeth, her eyes blank.

"Watcher! Watcher, do you hear me? What's happening? What's going to happen?"

"The invasion," I said. "How long was I under?"

"About half a minute. I don't know. Your eyes were closed. I thought you were dead."

"Gormon was speaking the truth! The *invasion* is almost here. Where is he? Where did he go?"

"He vanished as we came away from that place with the Mouth," Avluela whispered. "Watcher, I'm frightened. I feel everything collapsing. I have to fly—I can't stay down here now!"

"Wait," I said, clutching at her and missing her arm. "Don't go now. First I have to give the alarm, and then—"

But she was already stripping off her clothing. Bare to the waist, her pale body gleamed in the evening light, while about us people were rushing to and fro in ignorance of all that was about to occur. I wanted to keep Avluela beside me, but I could delay no longer in giving the alarm, and I turned away from her, back to my cart.

As though caught up in a dream born of overripe longings I reached for the node that I had never used, the one that would send forth a planetwide alert to the Defenders.

Had the alarm already been given? Had some other

Watcher sensed what I had sensed and, less paralyzed by bewilderment and doubt, performed a Watcher's final task?

No. No. For then I would be hearing the sirens' shriek reverberating from the orbiting loudspeakers above the city.

I touched the node. From the corner of my eye I saw Avluela, free of her encumbrances now, kneeling to say her words, filling her tender wings with strength. In a moment she would be in the air, beyond my grasp.

With a single swift tug I activated the alarm.

In that instant I became aware of a burly figure striding toward us. Gormon, I thought; and as I rose from my equipment I reached out to him, wanting to seize him and hold him fast. But he who approached was not Gormon but some officious dough-faced Servitor who said to Avluela, "Go easy, Flier, let your wings drop. The Prince of Roum sends me to bring you to his presence."

He grappled with her. Her little breasts heaved; her eyes flashed anger at him.

"Let go of me! I'm going to fly!"

"The Prince of Roum summons you," the Servitor said, enclosing her in his heavy arms.

"The Prince of Roum will have other distractions tonight," I said. "He'll have no need of her."

As I spoke the sirens began to sing from the skies.

The Servitor released her. His mouth worked noiselessly for an instant; he made one of the protective gestures of the Will; he looked skyward and grunted, "The alarm! Who gave the alarm? You, old Watcher?"

Figures rushed about insanely in the streets.

Avluela, freed, sped past me—on foot, her wings but half-furled—and was swallowed up in the surging throng. Over the terrifying sound of the sirens came booming messages from the public annunciators, giving instructions for defense and safety. A lanky man with the mark of the guild of Defenders upon his cheek rushed up to me, shouted words too

incoherent to be understood and sped on down the street. The world seemed to have gone mad.

Only I remained calm. I looked to the skies, half expecting to see the invaders' black ships already hovering above the towers of Roum. But I saw nothing except the hovering night-lights and the other objects one might expect overhead.

"Gormon?" I called. "Avluela?"

I was alone.

A strange emptiness swept over me. I had given the alarm. The invaders were on their way; I had lost my occupation. There was no need of Watchers now.

Almost lovingly I touched the worn cart that had been my companion for so many years. I ran my fingers over its stained and pitted instruments; and then I looked away, abandoning it, and went down the dark streets cartless, burdenless, a man whose life had found and lost meaning in the same instant. And about me raged chaos.

X

It was understood that when the moment of Earth's final battle arrived, all guilds would be mobilized, the Watchers alone exempted. We who had manned the perimeter of defense for so long had no part in the strategy of combat; we were discharged by the giving of a true alarm. Now it was the time of the guild of Defenders to show its capabilities. They had planned for half a cycle what they would do in time of war. What plans would they call forth now? What deeds would they direct?

My only concern was to return to the royal hostelry and wait out the crisis. It was hopeless to think of finding Avluela, and I pummelled myself savagely for having let her slip away like that, naked and without a protector, in that confused moment. Where would she go? Who would shield her?

A fellow Watcher, pulling his cart madly along, nearly collided with me. "Careful!" I snapped.

He looked up, breathless, stunned. "Is it true?" he asked. "The alarm?"

"Can't you hear?"

"But is it real?"

I pointed to his cart. "You know how to find that out."

"They say the man who gave the alarm was drunk, an old fool who was turned away from the inn yesterday?"

"It could be so," I admitted.

"But if the alarm is real—!"

Smiling, I said, "If it is, now we all may rest. Good day to you, Watcher."

"Your cart! Where's your cart?" he shouted at me.

But I had moved past him, toward the mighty carven stone pillar of some relic of Imperial Roum.

Ancient images were carved on that pillar: battles and victories, foreign monarchs marched in the chains of disgrace through the streets of Roum, triumphant eagles celebrating imperial grandeur. In my strange new calmness I stood a while before the column of stone, admiring its elegant engravings. Toward me rushed a frenzied figure whom I recognized as the Rememberer Basil; I hailed him, saying, "How timely you come! Do me the kindness of explaining these images, Rememberer. They fascinate me, and my curiosity is aroused."

"Are you insane? Can't you hear the alarm?"

"I gave the alarm, Rememberer."

"Flee, then! Invaders come! We must fight!"

"Not I, Basil. Now my time is over. Tell me of these images. These beaten kings, these broken emperors. Surely a man of your years will not be doing battle."

"All are mobilized now!"

"All but Watchers," I said. "Take a moment. Yearning for the past is born in me. Gormon has vanished; be my guide to these lost cycles."

The Rememberer shook his head wildly, circled around me,

and tried to get away. I made a lunge at him, hoping to seize his skinny arm and pin him to the spot; but he eluded me and I caught only his dark shawl, which pulled free and came loose in my hands. Then he was gone, his spindly limbs pumping madly as he fled down the street and left my view.

I shrugged and examined the shawl I had so unexpectedly acquired. It was shot through with glimmering threads of metal, arranged in intricate patterns that teased the eye: it seemed to me that each strand disappeared into the weave of the fabric, only to reappear at some improbable point, like the lineage of dynasties unexpectedly revived in distant cities. The workmanship was superb. Idly I draped the shawl about my shoulders.

I walked on.

My legs, which had been on the verge of failing me earlier in the day, now served me well. In renewed youthfulness I made my way through the chaotic city, finding no difficulties about choosing my route. I headed for the river, then crossed it and, on the Tver's far side, sought the palace of the Prince. The night had deepened, for most lights were extinguished under the mobilization orders, and from time to time a dull boom signaled the explosion of a screening bomb overhead, liberating clouds of murk that shielded the city from most forms of long-range scrutiny. There were fewer pedestrians in the streets. The sirens still cried out. Atop the buildings the defensive installations were going into action; I heard the bleeping sounds of repellors warming up and saw long spidery arms of amplification booms swinging from tower to tower as they linked for maximum output. I had no doubt now that the invasion actually was coming. My own instruments might have been fouled by inner confusion, but they would not have proceeded thus far with the mobilization if the initial report had not been confirmed by the findings of hundreds of other members of my guild.

As I neared the palace a pair of breathless Rememberers sped toward me, their shawls flapping behind them. They

called to me in words I did not comprehend—some code of their guild, I realized, recollecting that I wore Basil's shawl. I could not reply, and they rushed upon me, still gabbling; and switching to the language of ordinary men they said, "What is the matter with you? To your post! We must record! We must comment! We must observe!"

"You mistake me," I said mildly. "I keep this shawl only for your brother Basil, who left it in my care. I have no post to guard at this time."

"A Watcher," they cried in unison and cursed me separately and ran on. I laughed and went to the palace.

Its gates stood open. The neuters who had guarded the outer portal were gone, as were the two Indexers who had stood just within the door. The beggars that had thronged the vast plaza had jostled their way into the building itself to seek shelter; this had awakened the anger of the licensed hereditary mendicants whose customary stations were in that part of the building, and they had fallen upon the inflowing refugees with fury and unexpected strength. I saw cripples lashing out with their crutches held as clubs; I saw blind men landing blows with suspicious accuracy; meek penitents were wielding a variety of weapons ranging from stilettos to sonic pistols. Holding myself aloof from this shameless spectacle I penetrated to the inner recesses of the palace, peering into chapels where I saw Pilgrims beseeching the blessings of the Will and Communicants desperately seeking spiritual guidance as to the outcome of the coming conflict.

Abruptly I heard the blare of trumpets and cries of, "Make way! Make way!"

A file of sturdy Servitors marched into the palace, striding toward the Prince's chambers in the apse. Several of them held a struggling, kicking, frantic figure with half-unfolded wings: Avluela! I called out to her, but my voice died in the din, nor could I reach her. The Servitors shoved me aside. The procession vanished into the princely chambers. I caught

a final glimpse of the little Flier, pale and small in the grip of her captors, and then she was gone once more.

I seized a bumbling neuter who had been moving uncertainly.

"That Flier! Why was she brought here?"

"He—he—they—"

"Tell me!"

"The Prince—his woman—in his chariot—he—he—they—the invaders—"

I pushed the flabby creature aside and rushed toward the apse. A brazen wall ten times my own height confronted me. I pounded on it. "Avluela!" I shouted hoarsely. "Av . . . lu . . . ela . . . !"

I was neither thrust away nor admitted. I was ignored. The bedlam at the western doors of the palace had extended itself now to the nave and aisles, and as the ragged beggars boiled toward me I executed a quick turn and found myself passing through one of the side doors of the palace.

I stood in the courtyard that led to the royal hostelry, suspended and passive. A strange electricity crackled in the air. I assumed it was an emanation from one of Roum's defense installations, some kind of beam designed to screen the city from attack. But an instant later I realized that it presaged the actual arrival of the invaders.

Starships blazed in the heavens.

When I had perceived them in my Watching they had appeared black against the infinite blackness, but now they burned with the radiance of suns. A stream of bright, hard, jewel-like globes bedecked the sky; they were ranged side by side, stretching from east to west in a continuous band, filling all the celestial arch, and as they erupted simultaneously into being it seemed to me that I heard the crash and throb of an invisible symphony heralding the arrival of the conquerors of Earth.

I do not know how far above me the starships were, nor how many of them hovered there, nor any of the details of their design. I know only that in sudden massive majesty they were there. If I had been a Defender my soul would have withered instantly at the sight.

Across the heavens shot light of many hues. The battle had been joined. I could not comprehend the actions of our warriors, and I was equally baffled by the maneuvers of those who had come to take possession of our history-crusted but time-diminished planet. To my shame I felt not only out of the struggle but above the struggle, as though this were no quarrel of mine. I wanted Avluela beside me, and she was somewhere within the depths of the palace of the Prince of Roum. Even Gormon would have been a comfort now, Gormon the Changeling, Gormon the spy, Gormon the monstrous betrayer of our world.

Gigantic amplied voices bellowed, "Make way for the Prince of Roum! The Prince of Roum leads the Defenders in the battle for the fatherworld!"

From the palace emerged a shining vehicle the shape of a teardrop, in whose bright-metalled roof a transparent sheet had been mounted so that all the populace could see and take heart in the presence of the ruler. At the controls of the vehicle sat the Prince of Roum, proudly erect, his cruel, youthful features fixed in harsh determination; and beside him, robed like an empress, I beheld the slight figure of the Flier Avluela. She seemed in a trance.

The royal chariot soared upward and was lost in the darkness.

It seemed to me that a second vehicle appeared and followed its path, and that the Prince's reappeared, and that the two flew in tight circles, apparently locked in combat. Clouds of blue sparks wrapped both chariots now; and then they swung high and far and were lost to me behind one of the hills of Roum.

Was the battle raging all over the planet, now? Was Perris in jeopardy, and holy Jorslem, and even the sleepy isles of the Lost Continents? Did starships hover everywhere? I did not know. I perceived events in only one small segment of the sky over Roum, and even there my awareness of what was taking place was dim, uncertain and ill-informed. There were momentary flashes of light in which I saw battalions of Fliers streaming across the sky; and then darkness returned as though a velvet shroud had been hurled over the city. In fitful bursts I saw the great machines of our defense speaking from the tops of our towers; and yet I saw the starships untouched, unharmed, unmoved above. The courtyard in which I stood was deserted, but in the distance I heard voices, full of fear and foreboding, shouting in tinny tones that might have been the screeching of birds. Occasionally there came a booming sound that rocked all the city.

Once a platoon of Somnambulists was driven past where I was. In the plaza fronting the palace I observed what appeared to be an array of Clowns unfolding some sort of sparkling netting of a military look. By one flash of lightning I was able to see a trio of Rememberers soaring aloft on a gravity plate, making copious notes of all that elapsed. It seemed—I was not sure—that the vehicle of the Prince of Roum returned, speeding across the sky with its pursuer clinging close. "Avluela," I whispered, as the twin dots of lights left my sight. Were the starships disgorging troops? Did colossal pylons of force spiral down from those orbiting brightnesses to touch the surface of the Earth? Why had the Prince seized Avluela? Where was Gormon? What were our Defenders doing? Why were the enemy ships not blasted from the sky?

Rooted to the ancient cobbles of the courtyard, I observed the cosmic battle in total lack of understanding throughout the long night.

Dawn came. Strands of pale light looped from tower to tower. I touched fingers to my eyes, realizing that I must have

slept while standing. Perhaps I should apply for membership in the guild of Somnambulists, I told myself lightly. I put my hands to the Rememberer's shawl about my shoulders, wondering how I had managed to acquire it, and the answer came.

I looked toward the sky.

The alien starships were gone. I saw only the ordinary morning sky, gray with pinkness breaking through. I felt the jolt of compulsion and looked about for my cart, and reminded myself that I need do no more Watching, and I felt more empty than one would ordinarily feel at such an hour.

Was the battle over?

Had the enemy been conquered?

Were the ships of the invaders blasted from the sky and lying in charred ruin outside Roum?

All was silent. I heard no more celestial symphonies. Then, out of the eerie stillness there came a new sound, a rumbling noise as of wheeled vehicles passing through the streets of the city. And the invisible Musicians played one final note, deep and resonant, which trailed away jaggedly as though every string had been broken at once.

Over the speakers used for public announcements came quiet words:

"Roum is fallen. Roum is fallen."

XI

The royal hostelry was untended. Neuters and members of the servant guilds all had fled. Defenders, Masters and Dominators must have perished honorably in combat. Basil the Rememberer was nowhere about; likewise none of his brethren. I went to my room, cleansed and refreshed and fed myself, gathered my few possessions and bade farewell to the luxuries I had known so briefly. I regretted that I had had such a short time to visit Roum; but at least Gormon had

been a most excellent guide, and I had seen a great deal.

Now I proposed to move on.

It did not seem prudent to remain in a conquered city. My room's thinking cap did not respond to my queries, and so I did not know what the extent of the defeat was, here or in other regions, but it was evident to me that Roum at least had passed from human control, and I wished to depart quickly. I weighed the thought of going to Jorslem, as that tall Pilgrim had suggested upon my entry into Roum. But then I reflected and chose a westward route, toward Perris, which not only was closer but held the headquarters of the Rememberers.

My own occupation had been destroyed; but on this first morning of Earth's conquest I felt a sudden powerful and strange yearning to offer myself humbly to the Rememberers and seek with them knowledge of our more glittering yesterdays.

At midday I left the hostelry. I walked first to the palace, which still stood open. The beggars lay strewn about, some drugged, some sleeping, most dead; from the crude manner of their death I saw that they must have slain one another in their panic and frenzy. A despondent-looking Indexer squatted beside the three skulls of the interrogation fixture in the chapel. As I entered he said, "No use. The brains do not reply."

"How goes it with the Prince of Roum?"

"Dead. The invaders shot him from the sky."

"A young Flier rode beside him. What do you know of her?"

"Nothing. Dead, I suppose."

"And the city?"

"Fallen. Invaders are everywhere."

"Killing?"

"Not even looting," the Indexer said. "They are most gentle. They have *collected* us."

"In Roum alone, or everywhere?"

The man shrugged. He began to rock rhythmically back and forth. I let him be, and walked deeper into the palace. To my surprise, the imperial chambers of the Prince were unsealed. I went within, awed by the sumptuous luxury of the hangings, the draperies, the lights, the furnishings. I passed from room to room, coming at last to the royal bed, whose coverlet was the flesh of a colossal bivalve of the planet of another star, and as the shell yawned for me I touched the infinitely soft fabric under which the Prince of Roum had lain, and I recalled that Avluela too had lain here, and if I had been a younger man I would certainly have wept.

I left the palace and slowly crossed the plaza to begin my journey toward Perris.

As I departed I had my first glimpse of our conquerors. A vehicle of alien design drew up at the plaza's rim, and perhaps a dozen figures emerged.

They might almost have been human. They were tall and broad, deep-chested, as Gormon had been, and only the extreme length of their arms marked them instantly as alien. Their skins were of strange texture, and if I had been closer I suspect I would have seen eyes and lips and nostrils that were not of a human design. Taking no notice of me, they crossed the plaza, walking in a curious loose-jointed loping way that reminded me irresistibly of Gormon's stride, and entered the palace. They seemed neither swaggering nor belligerent.

Sightseers. Majestic Roum once more exerted its magnetism upon strangers.

Leaving our new masters to their amusement, I walked off, toward the outskirts of the city. The bleakness of eternal winter crept into my soul. I wondered: did I feel sorrow that Roum had fallen? Or did I mourn the loss of Avluela? Or was it only that I now missed three successive Watchings, and like an addict I was experiencing the pangs of withdrawal?

It was all of these that pained me, I decided. But mostly the last.

No one was abroad in the city as I made for the gates. Fear of the masters kept the Roumish in hiding, I supposed. From time to time one of the alien vehicles hummed past, but I was unmolested. I came to the city's western gate late in the afternoon. It was open, revealing to me a gently rising hill on whose breast rose trees with dark green crowns. I passed through, and saw a short distance beyond the gate the figure of a Pilgrim who was shuffling slowly away from the city.

His faltering, uncertain walk seemed strange to me, for not even his thick brown robes could hide the strength and youth of his body; he stood erect, his shoulders square and his back straight, and yet he walked with the hesitating, trembling step of an old man. When I drew abreast of him and peered under his hood I understood, for affixed to the bronze mask all Pilgrims wear was a reverberator, such as is used by blind men to warn them of obstacles and hazards. He became aware of me and said, "I am a sightless Pilgrim. I pray you do not molest me."

It was not a Pilgrim's voice. It was a strong and harsh and imperious voice.

I replied, "I molest no one. I am a Watcher who has lost his occupation this night past."

"Many occupations were lost this night past, Watcher."

"Surely not a Pilgrim's."

"No," he said. "Not a Pilgrim's."

"Where are you bound?"

"Away from Roum."

"No particular destination?"

"No," the Pilgrim said. "None. I will wander."

"Perhaps we should wander together," I said, for it is accounted good luck to travel with a Pilgrim, and, shorn of my

Flier and my Changeling, I would otherwise have traveled alone. "My destination is Perris. Will you come?"

"There as well as anywhere else," he said bitterly. "Yes. We will go to Perris together. But what business does a Watcher have there?"

"A Watcher has no business anywhere. I go to Perris to offer myself in service to the Rememberers."

"Ah."

"With Earth fallen, I wish to learn more of Earth in its pride."

"Is all Earth fallen, then, and not only Roum?"

"I think it is so," I said.

"Ah," replied the Pilgrim. "Ah!"

He fell silent, and we went onward. I gave him my arm, and now he shuffled no longer, but moved with a young man's brisk stride. From time to time he uttered what might have been a sigh or a smothered sob. When I asked him details of his Pilgrimage, he answered obliquely or not at all. When we were an hour's journey outside Roum, and already amid forests, he said suddenly, "This mask gives me pain. Will you help me adjust it?"

To my amazement he began to remove it. I gasped, for it is forbidden for a Pilgrim to reveal his face. Had he forgotten that I was not sightless too?

As the mask came away he said, "You will not welcome this sight."

The bronze grillwork slipped down from his forehead, and I saw first eyes that had been newly blinded, gaping holes where no surgeon's knife but possibly thrusting fingers had penetrated, and then the sharp regal nose, and finally the quirked, taut lips of the Prince of Roum.

"Your Majesty!" I cried.

Trails of dried blood ran down his cheeks. About the raw sockets themselves were smears of ointment. He felt little pain, for he had killed it with those green smears, but the pain that burst through me was real and potent.

"Majesty no longer," he said. "Help me with the mask!" His hands trembled as he held it forth. "These flanges must be widened. They press cruelly at my cheeks. Here—here—"

Quickly I made the adjustments, so that I would not have to see his face for long.

He replaced the mask.

In silence we continued. I had no way of making small talk with such a man. It would be a somber journey for us to Perris; but I was committed now to be his guide. I thought of Gormon and how well he had kept his vows. I thought too of Avluela, and a hundred times the words leaped to my tongue to ask the fallen Prince how his consort the Flier had fared in the night of defeat, and I did not ask.

Twilight gathered, but the sun still gleamed golden-red before us in the west. And suddenly I halted, and made a hoarse sound of surprise deep in my throat, as a shadow passed overhead.

High above me Avluela soared. Her skin was stained by the colors of the sunset, and her wings were spread to their fullest, radiant with every hue of the spectrum. She was already at least the height of a hundred men above the ground, and still climbing, and to her I must have been only a speck among the trees.

"What is it?" the Prince asked. "What do you see?"

"Nothing."

"Tell me what you see!"

I could not deceive him. "I see a Flier, your Majesty. A slim girl far aloft."

"Then the night must have come."

"No," I said. "The sun is still above the horizon."

"How can that be? She can have only nightwings. The sun would hurl her to the ground."

I hesitated. I could not bring myself to explain how it was that Avluela flew by day, though she had only nightwings.

I could not tell the Prince of Roum that beside her, wingless, flew the invader Gormon, effortlessly moving through the air, his arm about her thin shoulders, steadying her, supporting her, helping her resist the pressure of the solar wind.

"Well?" he demanded. "How does she fly by day?"

"I do not know," I said. "It is a mystery to me. There are many things nowadays I can no longer understand."

The Prince appeared to accept that. "Yes, Watcher. Many things none of us can understand."

He fell once more into silence. I yearned to call out to Avluela, but I knew she could not and would not hear me, and so I walked on toward the sunset, toward Perris, leading the blinded Prince. And over us Avluela and Gormon sped onward, limned sharply against the day's last glow, until they climbed so high they were lost to my sight.

AMONG THE BAD BABOONS

By Mack Reynolds

I

"One of these days you're going to pierce your eardrum doing that," Pamela Rozet said from the doorway.

"Uhhh?"

"That paint brush. If you don't stop scratching the inside of your ear with it, you're going to hurt yourself. Didn't your mother ever tell you not to stick anything smaller than your elbow in your ear?"

Arthur Halleck took the end of the paint brush in question out of his right ear and scowled dimly at it. He said, completely malapropos, "What in the name of the living Zoroaster ever happened to brushes? It was bad enough when they were making them out of nylon. What's this stuff? Anything to cheapen the product. The old masters used to paint with bristle brushes, or red sable hair. Have you ever been in a museum and looked real closely at an original Rembrandt, or even a Leonardo?"

"Yes," Pam said.

"Did you ever see any hair from their paint brushes?"

"I didn't look *that* close," she said.

"Well, you didn't. But take a look at some of Picasso's stuff, not to speak of mine. Hair, or other brush fiber, all through the paint." He tossed the offending brush to a colorfully bespattered table. "I've been all over town. Into every art shop that survived in any shape at all. There's not a bristle brush to be found."

"Possibly you can get some on the mainland, when you take this painting over."

"No," he growled disgustedly. "They don't make them any more. You can't ultra-mate the manufacture of decent bristle brushes. And anything you can't ultra-mate in the Ultra-welfare State goes down the drain."

He stepped back and stared gloomily at the painting on the easel.

"Is it finished?" she asked.

"Doesn't it *look* finished?" he demanded in irritation.

Pam came closer and looked and said patiently, "Long since I told you, Art, that I've never got beyond the Impressionalists."

"Well, damnit, the Representational-Abstract School is the nearest thing to the Impressionalists for decades. Can't you see, confound it?"

"No."

"Well, look. It gives the same effect as the quick impression Van Gogh, Renoir, Degas and the rest demanded. You get a quick flash, and your immediate impression is that it's completely abstract, but then you realize that it's the ruin of the entrance to a subway station."

"I guess you do, at that," she said doubtfully.

He stared at the four-foot-square painting. "No wonder it's no good," he said. "Working with this quick-drying metallic-acrylic paint on this ridiculous presdwood-duplicator board would have one of those Cro-Magnon cave painters climbing the wall."

"Aren't you going to have it duplicated and registered?"

"Of course. Sooner or later, I'm going to hit, Pam. Then it's you and me."

She looked at him, a shade of wistfulness in her overly tired face. She was a girl of averages, pleasantly so. Average height and weight and of an average prettiness, given her approximately thirty-years of age. But there was a vulnerable

something about her mouth that added. She was, and always had been, attractive to men who carried the dream, who were creative, ambitious.

"I thought it was already you and me, Art. That it had been for the past two years and more."

He said, a bit impatiently, "You know what I mean, Pam."

She went over to the window, avoiding the broken pane where it was patched with some old clothing, and rested her bottom on the ledge. She said, "Art, if we went back to the mainland and combined the income from our Inalienable Basic and added to that my royalties and your occasional sales, we'd be able to maintain a reasonably high standard of living. We'd also be in a position to make contacts, meet our own kind, associate with . . ."

"Associate with other charity cases," he broke in bitterly. "I've told you, Pam, I'll never become one more dependent on the Ultra-welfare State. I'll pay my own way in the world, or I'll go under. A man's *got* to be a man."

"You're not exactly paying your way right this minute, Arthur Halleck. We're scavengers, to use the politest term that comes to my tongue." Her tone was testy.

He shook his head. "Don't roach me, Pam. We don't take anything that belongs to anybody. If we didn't find it and use it, it'd slowly rot or rust away."

She said, slightly irritated herself now, "Look here, darling, you're not taking anything that belongs to anyone else either when you accept the dividends that accrue to your ten shares of Inalienable Basic."

"Those dividends don't grow on trees. Somebody does the work that produces them," he said stubbornly.

She was really impatient now. "Look, Art, the super-abundance being produced under People's Capitalism now is not the product of the comparative handful of workers and technicians who are required in industry and agriculture today. It's the product of the accumulated work of all mankind

down through the ages. A million years ago, some ancestor of yours and mine first used fire. The whole race has been doing it since. Five thousand years ago, some slick over in the Near East first dreamed up the wheel. We've been using it ever since. Every generation comes up with something brand new to add to the accumulated pile of knowledge, know-how, art, science. This accumulated human know-how doesn't belong to anybody or to any group, it belongs to us all. At long last, as a result of it the human race has licked the problem of producing plenty for everyone. No one need go hungry any more, nor cold, nor unsheltered, nor uneducated, nor without proper medical care. This is the legacy our ancestors have left us. It belongs to all of us; as a matter of fact the ten shares of Inalienable Basic each citizen receives is a precious small slice of pie, if you ask me. Just enough to keep us lesser breeds from revolt."

"I still say it's charity," Art Halleck said stubbornly.

She brushed it off. "So what can you do about it? We didn't make this world and we're in no position to change its rules. Particularly over here. If we were on the mainland we might join the Futurists, or something."

He turned back to the painting on his easel and stared at it some more, saying over his shoulder, "I don't have to change the rules. Sooner or later, my work will hit, and I'll make my own way. You can still make your own way under People's Capitalism, if you've got it on the ball. Those at the very top don't depend on Ultra-welfare State-issued Inalienable Basic."

"They sure don't," she said sourly. "They usually have inherited enough Variable Basic or private stock to keep them like gods all their lives. And as far as hitting sooner or later, it's obviously not sooner. How many of the last paintings sold?"

He looked at her. "Seven."

"Seventy dollars worth, eh? Just barely enough to duplicate and register this one. By the time you've paid your

transport back and forth to Greater Washington and possibly bought a couple of paint brushes or so, nothing left at all."

"One of these days I'll hit," he said stubbornly.

She gave up and turned and stared out the window in the direction of Washington Square.

II

She said finally, "Art, was it beautiful?"

He was busy cleaning his brushes now, grumbling about the speed with which his metallic-acrylic medium dried.

"Was what beautiful?"

"Manhattan—before."

"Oh. Well, no."

"You were born here, weren't you?"

"Up in the Bronx."

"Before the riots?"

"Ummm. I was just a kid, but come to think of it, I was already sketching, drawing." He snorted deprecation. "How many artists bother to learn to draw any more? It's like a writer never bothering to learn the alphabet."

"Why wasn't it beautiful?"

He gave up his unhappy viewing of his work and his brushes and came to stand next to her, an arm going unconsciously around her waist. He followed her line of vision down along McDougal Street to the square where once scores of artist hopefuls had held their open-air shows.

He said thoughtfully, scowling, "It's an elastic word, beauty. Means different things to different people. You can find beauty in just about anything—garbage dumps, battlefields, desert, just about anything. But largely, big cities don't lend themselves to beauty. Manhattan was probably a lovely setting back when the Indians were here, or even when the first small Dutch settlement was huddled down at this end of the island. But the way it was by the middle of the 20th century? No. I've never been out of North America

to supposedly beautiful cities like Paris, Rome or Rio, but I have seen San Francisco. It had a certain amount of beauty —before the riots, of course."

"I understand they weren't so bad there."

"Bad enough. However, they've cleaned out some of the ruins and resettled a pseudo-city there. It's hard to beat that Golden Gate setting."

They were silent for a moment, then she said, "How could it ever have happened, Art?"

He shrugged, and his words came slowly as he thought it out. "It could easily enough have been foreseen. A city like this had stopped making sense, Pam. The original reasons for cities—towns like Jericho began to be eight thousand years ago—had disappeared. Walled villages of farmers that could be defended against the nomads, trade centers built at crossroads, manufacturing centers, commercial centers. Putting walls around cities for defense stopped making sense. Modern transportation methods antiquated them as trade centers and manufacturing bases, as industry was able to decentralize. Today with communications what they are, even commercial centers are anachronisms. You can handle business from anywhere to anywhere."

"But what *happened?*"

"A lot of pressures. With the coming of automation and then ultra-mation, not only in manufacture but in agriculture, the under-educated farm laborers, the unemployables, the unplaceables flooded to the cities looking for jobs or, in their absence for relief, for free handouts. As their numbers grew, and with them ghettos and slums, the better-to-do city dwellers streamed out to suburbs. That meant a drop in tax income, and the city was faced with inadequate funds for slum clearance, education, police and firemen. Even things like garbage collection were inadequately financed. Which meant that still more of the better paid citizens left. Industry began to leave too, to get closer to sources of raw ma-

terials, and to areas where labor was cheaper. So taxes took another nose dive.

"Television played a major part. These slum dwellers could watch the typical TV program which almost invariably portrayed the actors, and certainly the advertising actors, as living lives of plenty. Their apartments or homes were always beautiful and totally equipped, their clothes the latest of fashion, their food bountiful and of the best, their children healthy and handsome, the schools they attended ideal. Needless to say, the slum dwellers wanted these things. So some of the more aggressive made a few demonstrations—and were landed upon, to their further embitterment. Alarmed, more of the better elements left town for the suburbs, for New England, up-State New York, Jersey, Pennsylvania. Some of the more prosperous actually commuted to Florida, flying back and forth. More industry left town then, because of higher taxes and the higher insurance rates caused by the riots. So the city fathers brought in less income than ever, and there was less to spend on slum clearance, education, relief. So the riots grew in magnitude."

Art Halleck shrugged in distaste at the memory. "So it went, and finally we had the big one. And never really recovered from that. Oh, things continued for a while. But by this time, nobody who could possibly afford it was left living in places like Manhattan, Detroit, Chicago and so on. Nor any business that could possibly get out. So came another riot, and another . . . and finally everybody left, including the police and firemen. That was the end."

"What happened to the slum element, the poverty stricken, the unadaptable?"

He looked down at her. "As a writer, I'd think you'd know at least as well as I."

"I wondered how you'd put it, in view of your feelings on the government issuing Inalienable Basic."

He said, slowly again, scowling and as if grudgingly, "I

suppose it was in the cards. No alternative. At approximately the same time the cities were a confusion of riots and discontent, they issued Inalienable Basic to each citizen, thus guaranteeing womb to tomb security. Overnight, not even the poverty stricken wanted to remain in the big cities. It was cheaper to live elsewhere, not to speak of being more comfortable. So they streamed out like lemmings—or maybe rats. All except the handful of baboons, of course."

Pam shook her head, and turned away from the view of the street. "I sometimes wonder why they never came back."

"Who?"

"The police and all. Why didn't they reconstruct?"

"Why? Like I said, the original reason for cities was gone and the cost to rebuild was prohibitive. It wouldn't even be worth while trying to clean it up for farmland, or pasture, or whatever. Too much debris, too much sheer wreckage. Oh, some of the other towns have been reconstituted, at least partially. Denver and San Francisco. But largely, they've been just left, continuing to deteriorate as the years go by."

She looked at him.

"And with only a few scavengers, such as ourselves, left in the ruins. No electricity, no water, no sewage. Nothing."

He snorted, tired of the subject. "I wouldn't say exactly nothing. We don't do so badly. By the way, I should have something to eat before going down to Greater Washington."

"Caviar, turtle soup, roast pheasant, imported British plum pudding in brandy sauce, with a good French claret to wash it down."

"I'm tired of that damn caviar."

III

Mark Martino drifted in, as usual for lunch. He had four long-necked bottles in his arms. He also had an old-fashioned-looking six-shooter low on his right hip and an automatic pistol at belt level on his left. He looked surprisingly similar

to that movie star of yesteryear, Robert Taylor, but he wouldn't have known that.

"Hey, chum-pals," he said. "Get a load of this."

"What is it?" Pam said, looking up from the camp stove which sat on the electric range in the kitchen.

"It's a real *Bernkasteler Doktor und Bratenhofchen Trockenbeerenauslese.*"

"Oh great, now I know something I didn't know before."

"You, Pamela Rozet, are a peasant. This is the greatest of Riesling wines." He took one of the bottles and held it up and stared at the label and added, unhappily, "At least it once was; a Riesling shouldn't really age this long. Well, we'll see how it's held up."

"Where'd you find it?" Art said.

"You'd never think. In the cellar of that liquor store on the corner of West Third Street."

Art said, "I thought that joint had been looted bare years ago."

"Evidently, so did everybody else," Mark said. "But this was down in the cellar, under a lot of crud that had evidently caved in back during the raids and riots. There was a whole case of this Riesling and some odds and ends of cordials. I covered it back over, but it won't do any good."

"Why not?" Pam said. "You don't have any gasoline over in your apartment, do you?"

"A couple of baboons spotted me coming out of the place with these. They'll root around till they've found it. You want me to go over and bring you a jerry-can?"

Pam said, "Please do. I'm just about out and haven't been able to find any for a week."

Art said, "Is that why you're all rodded-up? The baboons?"

Mark, heading for the door, said, "Yeah. They were both strangers."

"Oh, hell," Art said. "We've been having it so easy here for months. You'd better tip off Julie and Tim."

"Already have," Mark said, leaving.

Art looked at Pam. "Maybe I'd better put off taking this painting down to the museum."

"Why?" she said wearily. "Baboons and hunters we've had before. Undoubtedly, we'll have them again. Until . . . " she cut it off.

"Until what?"

"You know. Until one of these days, some baboon, or some hunter kills one or both of us."

He didn't say anything.

Suddenly it came out in a rush. "Arthur, we've *got* to get out of here. Arthur, I'm afraid. I'm an awful coward."

He let the air out of his lungs and came erect from the kitchen chair upon which he had been sitting. He went over to the window and stared down.

Mark Martino came back with the can of gasoline.

"I don't know if this is white gas, or not," he said.

Pam said, "It doesn't make any difference with this stove."

Mark said, "I ran into some butane in a sports section of a department store yesterday. Want it?"

"No, I suppose not. I threw the butane stove away. I'm used to this gasoline thing now. Not as hot, really, but we should be able to get gas for some time yet."

Mark said, "Well, even it's getting scarce. I haven't found a car with any in its tank for a coon's age." He looked from one of them to the other. "Did I interrupt a fight, or something?"

Pam said wearily, "No. No, not really."

Art said, "Pam wants to go back to the rat race."

She didn't say anything to that.

Mark said finally, "Well, why don't you? It doesn't make much sense, staying. We three and Julie and Tim, are the only ones left in this neighborhood."

"Why don't you?" Art said. He wasn't arguing, his voice meant that he was actually curious.

Mark held up one of the green bottles he'd brought as his

contribution toward the lunch. "You know what one of these would cost, over on the mainland? That is, if you could find it at all."

"That couldn't be enough reason, even for a lush-head like you," Art said.

Mark thought about it. He said finally, ruefully, "I don't know. Wait a minute, I want to get something to read for you." He left again.

Pam said, "Why does anybody stay?"

Art knew he wasn't telling her anything she didn't know, but he said, "Some are criminals, fugitives from justice. Some are mental cases. Some, I suppose, are former immigrants, illegal entry immigrants without papers and not eligible to apply for their ten shares of Inalienable Basic, if they went over to the mainland. We lump them all up and call them baboons. But the rest of us? Well, I suppose we're nonconformists, rebels against the Ultra-welfare State."

"That takes care of everybody but me," Pam said, checking the canned pheasant she'd been warming up.

"And you, then?" Art said. "Why are you here?"

"Because you are."

There could be no answer.

Mark Martino came in again, an age-yellowed paperback book in his hand. He was looking for a place.

"Listen to this," he said. "It's from a guy named Arthur C. Clarke. *Profiles of the Future,* written back in the sixties." He began reading, "'Civilization cannot exist without new frontiers; it needs them both physically and spiritually. The physical need is obvious—new lands, new resources, new materials. The spiritual need is less apparent, but in the long run it is more important. We do not live by bread alone; we need adventure, variety, novelty, romance. As the psychologists have shown by their sensory deprivation experiments, a man goes swiftly mad if he is isolated in a silent, darkened room, cut off completely from the external world.

What is true of individuals, is also true of societies; they too can become insane without sufficient stimulus.' "

Mark tossed the book to the table. "I guess that's it. Whatever happened to the yen for adventure? A hundred years ago Americans were pushing West, fighting nature, fighting Indians, fighting each other over mines, cattle and land. When did the dividing line come—when we were willing to live vicarious adventure, watching make-believe heroes, Hollywood pretty boys, a good many of them queers, shoot up the Indians or kill by the scores the bad guys, the Nazis or commies, the Russians and Chinese? Why did we leave it to the Norwegians to crew the Kon-Tiki, and for the British and Sherpas to first scale Everest? We've become a bunch of gutless wonders, sitting in front of our Tri-Vision sets. The biggest frustration, the great tragedy of our current age is the new Central Production ban on using cereals for beer or booze."

Art said sourly, "That won't be a frustration long. I understand that they came up with a new sort of combination tranquilizer and euphoric. Going to issue it so cheaply that it'll be nearly free. Non-habit forming, supposedly no hangover, no bad effects. Keeps you perpetually happy, in a kind of perpetual daze. Even the children can have it. They call it trank."

"What'll they think of next?" Mark marveled sarcastically. "Talk about bread and circuses. The Roman plutocracy never had it so good; they gave the proletariat a sadistic show and free wheat. But time marches on, and now we've got the credit from Inalienable Basic, twenty-four hour a day Tri-Vision, teevee library and music banks, and . . . what did you call it?"

"Trank," Art said. He looked at his friend strangely. "So you stay on here for the adventure. You with your big collection of guns. You with your prowling around the ruins looking for fancy booze and the like, hoping that the baboons

or hunters will jump you. Hell, you're just a hunter yourself."

Mark was irritated and defensive. "I'm no hunter." Maybe I like the adventure here, the chances you take just surviving, but I'm no hunter. I live here, this is my home. I defend myself. Maybe I even get my kicks out of getting into situations where I have to use my speed and my wits, but I never pick the fight, and I most certainly have never shot an unarmed baboon in the back the way these damned hunters will."

Pam began to set the food on the table. "Then what's the real reason for being here, Mark—aside from the adventure?"

IV

He pretended he had to think about it, even as he helped her put out the elaborate silverware Art had liberated from the ruins of Tiffany's years before.

He reached into a pocket and brought forth the durable plastic which was his Universal Credit Card. "I object to this being closer to me than my soul," he said. "My number, issued me at birth and from which I can never escape, even after death. A combination of what was once Social Security number, driver's license, bank account number, voter's registration, even telephone number and post office box number. It's everything. Regimentation carried to the ultimate. We thought the commies and Nazis had regimentation. Zoroaster! The computers know everything there is to know about me, from before I was born to long after I'm dead—they keep the records in their files forever. When my great-grandchildren want to have children, the computers will check back on good old Mark Martino for genetic purposes. Oh, swell. Talk about being a cog in a machine, hell, we're more nearly like identical grains of sand on a beach."

He held up his wrist to show his teevee phone. "Why I carry this, I don't know. I've always got it switched on Priority One, and there are only three persons on Earth eligible

to break in on me on Priority One. But look at this thing. With the coming of the satellite relays and international communications integrated, I can literally, and for practically no expense, talk to anybody on Earth. Even if the poor cloddy is half way up Mount Fuji in Japan. There's no escape. In the old days, the cost of phoning a friend, relative, business contact or whoever got on the prohibitive side when it was long distance, or especially international. Not now. For pennies, you can talk to anyone in the world. But the trouble is, it works both ways—they can talk to you."

Art laughed. "I seldom wear my wrist phone. And even the portable, in the next room, is always on Priority Two."

Mark growled, "That won't help you if it's a government bulletin or something. You're on tap, every minute of the day. How'd you like to be a Tri-Vision sex symbol or some other entertainment star? If one of them dared lower their priority to, say, five, they'd have a billion teevee phone calls come in within hours."

Pam said, "All right, all right, let's eat. Get the cork out of one of those bottles, Art, and let's sample the latest loot. So you're in revolt against modern society, Mark, so all right. At least you don't refuse to spend your dividends from your Inalienable Basic, the way Art does. And your royalties must accumulate so that when you make those sin-trips of yours over to Nueva Las Vegas, or wherever, you must have quite a bit of credit on hand."

"Sin trips!" Mark protested, holding his right hand over his heart as though in injured innocence. "How can you say that? It's called research."

"Ha!" Art snorted.

"No jolly," Mark said. "I've got to keep up some touch. Have to know what they're listening to in the dives, both high and low. It's all very well to have two or three semi-classics in the music banks, but you've got to be continually turning out new stuff, if you really want to hit the jackpot some day."

"Semi-classics," Art snorted. "*I love Mother in the Springtime, I love Mother in the Fall.*"

Mark said reasonably, "It's what they want, Art. If you'd paint what they wanted, maybe you'd be selling better. Right now, they're going through a 1920's-1930's revival bit. Swell. I sit at my teevee phone and play over and over the so-called Hit Parade tunes, and over and over I listen to the old Bing Crosby and even Rudy Vallee tapes.

"And then pretty soon, just about when I'm ready to start tearing my hair out, something comes to me. I sit down to the piano. I beat it out. Sometimes the whole thing is done in an hour. Writing the lyrics is the hardest part."

Pam said interestedly, "Then what happens, Mark?"

"Well, there's various ways. If you're a second rater, like me, your best bet is to get in touch with a slick to act as middleman, expediter or whatever you want to call him. He gets one of the stars, such as Truman Love . . ."

"Truman *Love*," Art protested. "Is there really a singer with a name like that?"

"Of course. I tell you, Art, the mental caliber of the Tri-Vision and teevee fan is halving each year that goes by. They don't want to be bothered thinking even a tiny bit. A sloppy mopsy who likes to listen to sentimental slush about love can remember a name like Truman Love. It sticks with her. She knows very well, before she dials one of his songs, what it's going to be like. With a name like that, it couldn't be anything else."

"All right, all right, so the slick gets Truman Love to sing your song."

"Okay. We record it and pay the small amount involved in placing it in the music banks. If the slick is any good, he gets some publicity. One of the gossip commentators, one of the live comedians, that sort of thing. In the banks, it's filed under name of singer, name of song, type of song, band leader, name of band, name of each musician in the band,

subject of song—such as love, mother, patriotism, children, that sort of thing—and finally, surprise, surprise, the writer or writers of the song."

"So," Art supplied, "whoever dials and plays it pays a small royalty."

"Very small," Mark said, nodding. "Differs for a single home teevee phone screen, or for, say, some live Tri-Vision show involving a band. If you're lucky, the song takes and maybe some more singers and bands want to record it. At any rate, you split the take four ways."

"Four ways?" Pam said. "You, the singer, the slick and who?"

"The recording company. They usually take one fourth, too. They split their quarter between the company, the band leader and all members of the band."

Art shook his head. "By the time the drummer gets his slice, it must be pretty small potatoes."

"Not if it's played a few billion times," Mark said. "Besides, maybe I write a possible song once a month. He probably does a recording as often as once or twice a day. He might have literally thousands of tunes recorded, with his getting a tiny percentage of each."

"It's not as bad as newspapers," Pam said. "Reading a newspaper on your teevee phone will cost you ten cents. It has to be prorated among possibly a hundred journalists, columnists, editors and what have you. That means that on an average, each newspaperman involved gets possibly one mill, a tenth of a cent, per reading. Not even that, since the owners of the paper take their cut off the top."

Art said, shaking his head and digging into the pheasant, "What in the name of the holy living Zoroaster did they do before computers?"

"Well, they didn't handle it this way," Mark said. He looked at Art and changed the subject. "You're going down to Greater Washington this afternoon?"

"Yeah. I want to register this painting. I'll be back in a few hours. You'll keep an eye on Pam, won't you?"

"Of course. Uh . . . you have duplication and registration fee?"

Art looked at him, puzzled.

Mark said hurriedly, "I mean, without dipping into your dividends. I know you refuse to spend them."

Art went back to his food.

"Don't be so touchy," Mark said. "What I meant was, if you were a little short, you could always pay me back later."

Art said, "You know damn well I couldn't use your dollar credits to register my painting anyway. Nobody can spend your credits but you. Or do you want me to carry not only your credit card with me but your right thumb as well, for the print?"

Mark chuckled. "There are ways of getting around anything. I found some ancient coins in the wreckage of a numismatist's shop the other day. You could take them to Greater Washington, sell them and have the amount credited to your account. Then use it."

"Thanks just the same," Art said tightly. "But I pay my own way, Mark. When I can't pay my own way by selling my paintings any longer, I'll give up my art and find some other kind of work."

"Well, it's more than I can say. I'm always in here sponging off you people."

Pam laughed at that. "Half the things we have here came from you. Why you're the one who found the bombshelter, even."

The subject was safely changed. Mark said, "By the way, how's the bombshelter holding out?"

"We're putting a sizeable dent in it," Pam said. "I think I'm going to ask you boys to try and scout out some things not quite so exotic. A few cases of baked beans, corn, string beans and what have you. I'm beginning to get a permanent

sour stomach from all this rich stuff. Which reminds me. I'm going to have to take a trip to the mainland, as soon as my dividends come in for next month, to load up on some fresh fruits and vegetables."

Mark said, "Why don't we make an expedition of it? Tim and Julie too. Both for the manpower to carry things, and for protection."

Art said, "What time is it?"

Mark dialed his wrist phone and said, "What time is it?"

A tinny voice responded, "When the bell sounds, it will be thirteen hours and thirteen minutes." A tiny bell sounded.

"Oh, oh," Art said. "I better get the damn painting wrapped and get going or I won't be back before dark."

"Listen," Pam said anxiously. "Don't you dare walk the streets that late. If you're held up, you stay in an auto-hotel on the mainland."

"I haven't enough dollar credit," he growled.

"You have lots of dollars in your credit balance."

"I mean my *own* credit."

She rolled her eyes upward. "You must be driving the computers crazy with all that unspent credit you've accumulated. They probably can't figure out why, if you aren't using it currently, you don't buy Variable Basic stock, something to build up your portfolio and bring in more earnings."

"Earnings!" he snorted, coming to his feet and tossing his beautiful linen napkin—looted long months since from the wreckage of Macy's—to the table. "How can shares of stock, just sitting there, make any earnings? Only work earns anything."

V

Arthur Halleck, his wrapped painting clumsily under his arm, a sawed-off, double-barrelled shotgun slung over his shoulders, peddled his bike up McDougal to West Third Street and turned right. He peddled the five streets over to

Broadway, expertly zig-zagging in between the abandoned cars and trucks and debris. Broadway, being wider, was clearer. He turned left and tried to speed it up a bit.

It would have made more sense for them to have lived closer to the Grand Central vacuum-tube terminal, but they stubbornly hung on to staying in the Village. It was a matter of principle, in a way. The last of the artists, staying in the last of the art colonies. All five of them. He and Pam, Mark, Tim the poet and his girl Julie who long years ago had been a model.

However, the further up town you got, the more hunters you ran into. They were too lazy to hike all the way down to Greenwich Village. Too lazy, and largely too timid. These empty streets, with all the windows, all the roof tops, all the doorways, any of which might shelter an armed baboon or even a fellow hunter, a bit on the trigger-happy side; these empty streets would give even a well armed, bullet-proof clothed hunter the willies.

He peddled up Broadway, keeping a weather eye peeled, right and left to Union Square. He was in more danger from a hunter—assuming there were any on the island today—than he was from a baboon. Most of the baboons that hung out in this area knew him, and there was more or less of a gentleman's agreement not to bother each other. There was no percentage in it, for that matter. They knew he wasn't worth jumping, that he didn't have anything worth risking a life for. Besides that, the shotgun over his shoulder was a great deterrent. There's something about a shotgun loaded with buckshot. Man in his time has evolved some exotic weapons for close-quarters combat, but there's something about a sawed-off shotgun. The bearer doesn't even have to be a good shot; in fact, he can be full of lead, his eyes beginning to go glazed, and still point it and pull the hair-trigger and accomplish one tremendous amount of revenge.

At Madison Square, he turned right and headed up Fifth. At the library, he left the bike for a moment, went inside

through the side door which was still unblocked, and stashed his shotgun away in the place where he usually left it.

He was unarmed now, but it was only a couple of blocks. He peddled over to the Grand Central Terminal and to where the police had their booth. There had been rumors that even this last vacuum-tube terminal on all Manhattan was going to be discontinued, but he doubted it. In spite of the supposed desertion of the whole island, there were still reasons for occasional visits—sometimes in considerable strength. Like last year when the delegation from Mexico City came up to mine the Metropolitan Museum of Fine Arts of its treasure of Aztec artifacts. They recovered quite a bit, too, so he had heard. The looters earlier hadn't been interested in much except gold and obviously sophisticated art objects that were immediately saleable.

There were two police at the tube entry. He knew one of them slightly. He'd been here for a long time. He must have gone back to the old days, and Art Halleck wondered why he hadn't retired. His name was Williams, or something; or maybe it was William, though that almost invariably becomes Bill on the level at which they met.

They shook him down, the other cop being a little more thorough than Williams.

Williams said, "He's all right," but the other didn't pay much attention.

"Got a gun?" he said.

"No," Art said patiently.

The other snorted and continued to touch him where a man keeps a weapon.

"I said I didn't have a gun," Art said. "I know it's against the rules for me to carry a gun without a special permit, even in this town."

Williams said, "He's an old hand. He hides his gun a block or so away before he comes here."

The new guard said, "What's in the package?"

"A painting. I'm an artist."

The other snorted disbelief. "Let's see it."

Art's lips began to go white.

Williams said, "I've known him for a long time. He's a painter. Lives down in the Village."

The new guard said, "How do we know he hasn't scrounged some old master or something? Something that oughta be turned over to the national museum."

Art drew in his breath, and a muscle in his right cheek began to tic.

Williams said, "Look, Walt, if you want to open up his package, you can open up his package. However, if he had a Michelangelo in there, do you think he'd just amble up to us like this? Wouldn't he find himself a boat and ferry it over some dark night?"

Walt grumbled, "Well, if you say so. But it seems to me you take it awfully easy with these people."

"Like I said, I've known him a long time." To Art he said, soothingly, "How's that nice Miss Pamela?"

"She's all right," Art said. And then more graciously, "She's getting a lot of work done on her book. In a day or so, we'll be going over to get some fresh things."

The new guard named Walt, still miffed, said, "What'd you mean *fresh* things? What do you eat, ordinarily? Looting's forbidden."

Art looked at him. "Ordinarily, we eat the stuff we still have left over in the kitchen cabinet and the refrigerator from before the time when the cops chickened out on the job and pulled off the island."

"Why you . . ."

"Okay, okay, you two," Williams said, getting between them. "Loosen up. You're both nice guys. Stop roaching each other. Walt McGivern, this is Art Halleck. If Walt's on this detail very long, he'll probably be seeing you from time to time, Art."

VI

Walt McGivern grunted something sourly and turned and walked off.

Art said, "What's roaching him?"

The older policeman said, "This isn't considered the most desirable detail around."

Art picked up his painting, preparatory to going on. "Then why do you stick it out, Williams?"

"Why do you?"

"I asked you first. But I can live here without paying rent, or practically anything else."

The police guard chuckled wryly. But then he drew in his breath and said, "I was born a few blocks from here, son." That wasn't quite enough, so he added, "I wasn't here during the few bad days. When I came back, the family was gone. I never found out how, or why, or where, or anything else. Hell, the whole neighborhood was gone."

"Sorry," Art said. "I shouldn't have asked."

"All right, son. The thing is, there aren't many folks left. In fact, practically none. I wish you and that nice Pamela girl would go on over to the mainland. However, as long as there are any decent people left at all, I kind of like to be here."

"The last of the neighborhood cops," Art muttered.

"What?"

"Nothing."

Art started off again, but at that moment two newcomers emerged from the tube entry.

Art came to a halt and eyed them up and down, deliberately as they approached the police booth.

He stared the first one full in the face and said, "You look like a couple of jokers out of a Tri-Vision show about hunters on Safari in Africa—you mopsy-monger."

The man's eyes bugged. "You . . . you can't talk to me that way, you . . . you cheap baboon!"

Art sneered at him. "I'm no baboon. Maybe the last of the bohemians, but I'm no baboon. I've got all my papers. I'm legal. There's no law against living on Manhattan—if you don't go around armed." He took in the other's automatic-recoiless rifle, and the heavy pistol at his waist, and then added, "You sonofabitch."

The newcomer turned quickly to Williams, who was inspecting the papers the two had handed him.

"Arrest this man!" he snapped.

Williams looked up, wide-eyed. "What'd he do?"

"He slandered me. I demand you arrest him."

"I didn't hear him say anything," Williams said evenly.

The other newcomer came up. He was quieter, less lardy and less pompous than his companion, but he said to Art coldly, "Let me see your Uni-Credit Card."

"Go to hell, you mopsy-mongering hunter."

The other drew forth his own Uni-Credit Card and flashed it to Williams. "I want a complete police report on this man."

Walt McGivern came up. "What's going on?"

The second of the two hunters said coldly, "I'm Harry Kank, Inter-American Bureau of Investigation. Get me an immediate police report on this man."

Williams sighed and said, "Let me have your Universal Credit Card, Art." But then he amended that, looking defiantly at the newcomers. "I mean, Mr. Halleck."

Art's lips were white, but he reached into an inner pocket and brought it forth. All five of them entered the police booth.

Williams put the card in the teevee phone slot and said, "Police record, please."

Within seconds a robot-like voice began, "Arthur LeRoy Halleck. At age of sixteen arrested for participating in peace demonstration, without permit to parade. Released. At age

of twenty, arrested by traffic authorities for driving a floater manually while under the influence of alcohol. Suspended driver's license for one year. At age of twenty-five, arrested for assault and battery. Charge dropped by victim. No further police record. Now believed to be living on the island of Manhattan, on McDougal Street with Pamela Rozet, out of wedlock." The robot voice came to a halt, then said, "Are details required?"

Williams looked at the man who had named himself Harry Kank.

The Bureau of Investigation man said to Art, testily, "What was that assault and battery charge?"

Art said, "I slugged a man who made a snide remark about my paintings. He apologized later. Now he's a friend of mine. Want to get him on the phone?"

Kank glared at him, unspeaking for a moment. Then he snapped to Williams, "I suspect this man of being incompetent to handle his own affairs. Give me a credit check on him."

Williams opened his mouth, then closed it with a sigh. He said into the teevee phone, "Balance Check on this card."

Within seconds a robot voice said, "Ten shares, Inalienable Basic. No shares Variable Basic."

The two hunters snorted.

The robot voice went on, "Current cash credit, fourteen thousand, four hundred and forty-five dollars and sixty-three cents."

The eyes of the two bugged.

Kank snapped, "Get that again. There must be some mistake."

Williams, also visibly taken aback, repeated his demand of the balance check on Art Halleck's account. It came out the same.

The Bureau of Investigation man's eyes were colder still, now. He said, "Where did you accumulate that much credit?

Have you been looting, here on the island and selling what you find to dealers on the mainland?"

Art said contemptuously. "Of that credit balance, I figure seventy-three dollars and some odd cents are mine. The rest belongs to the government of the United States of the Americas, as far as I'm concerned."

All were staring at him now.

Art said, "I haven't touched my dividends from my ten shares of Inalienable Basic for years. I don't want them. The seventy-three dollars is *mine*. It represents money I've taken in selling my paintings. If there was any way of giving the dividends back to the damn Ultra-welfare State, I would. But evidently there isn't. I can't even donate them to charity. There isn't any such thing, any more—except the one big, mopsy-mongering charity."

All four of them were still staring disbelief.

"You must be crazy," the first of the two hunters blurted.

But Kank came to a sudden decision and snapped at Williams, "If you're through with our papers, let me have them. As you'll note, we have permission to search various buildings in the Wall Street area for certain lost records. Do you have an armored floater available?"

"Well, yes sir."

"Very well, I'll requisition it." Harry Kank turned back to Art and stared at him. "Possibly we will see each other again . . . baboon."

"I'm not a baboon . . . hunter," Art sneered at him. "I see you know our terminology, here on the island. Undoubtedly, you have been here before. Undoubtedly, with some similar trumped-up reason for prowling around, armed to the teeth. Maybe we *will* see each other again—you sonofabitch."

The high police official glared at him, but spun on his heel and, with his plumper companion, followed after Walt McGivern.

Williams and Art stood there a moment, looking after them.

Williams said bitterly, "Some cop."

Art growled lowly, "Why can't something be done about those lousy funkers?"

Williams said, "You know as well as I do. There's no law in this city. Citizens who live here, or enter it, waive all legal protection. But anybody with pull can get special permission to come in armed, supposedly for some gobbledygook reason such as to search the library, or some museum, for something lost. Ha! Not one cloddy out of ten has any real legitimate reason. They come to thrill hunt. The ruined cities are the only place I know of in the world where you can legally shoot a man, woman or child and not even report it, if you don't want to bother. If you do bother, you report it as self-defense."

Walt McGivern was turning the armored police floater over to the two hunters.

Art said, in disgust still, "I better get going. Thanks, Williams."

Williams looked at him. "Thanks for what?"

Art headed for the entry to the vacuum-tube transport terminal.

VII

Back at the apartment house on McDougal Street, Pam and Mark were still lingering over their coffee. In fact, in spite of the hour, Mark had gone to his own apartment and returned with a bottle of Napoleon brandy, the last of a case he had found in a ruined penthouse, some months ago.

They drank the coffee black and sipped at the cognac from enormous snifter glasses which had been liberated from Tiffany's at the same time as her silverware.

Pam looked distastefully at the remnants of their mid-day meal. "I'm getting awfully tired of this canned food," she said. "What is there about eating that makes you really prefer not something like pressed duck under glass with orange

sauce, but the kind of codfish gravy on toast that you used to eat in your poverty-stricken home as a kid?"

Mark chuckled, "Or some pasta, spaghetti or otherwise, such as your mother used to make herself. None of this store boughten stuff. And precious little to put over it save a bit of tomato sauce and, when you were lucky, some grated cheese."

Pam said, "Whoever stocked that bombshelter must have owned half of Fort Knox. He put in enough caviar and smoked salmon to last a regiment until any possible contamination from a nuclear bombing was gone. I never thought I'd get to the point where I got fed up with caviar."

Mark said laughingly, "I never even tasted it, until after the city was abandoned. My first reaction was that it tasted like fish eggs."

She laughed at him. But then she said, "What in the world ever happened to cooking?"

He thought about it. "Like every other art, I suppose, or handicraft or skill for that matter. What cobbler could take pride in spending a few days on a pair of handmade shoes that had taken him half a life time in apprenticeship to learn to make, when the potential customer could go down and buy a pair made in an automated factory that were *almost* as good and cost a fraction of what he had to charge? It was easier for the cobbler to go down to the factory and get a thirty-hour-a-week job. Or, if none was available, to go on relief; or later, to live on his Inalienable Basic handout."

She frowned. "Well, that applies to the cobbler, but not. . ."

"Not to an artist?" He grinned at her. Same thing. The idea of saving time, of devoting as much of your day to recreation, leisure, play, permeated our whole society. Cooking? A woman is considered mad to do such things as bake her own bread and pastry, cut up her own vegetables, learn how to trim her own meat. You saved so much *time* buying bakery bread, canned vegetables, frozen meat all neatly cut and

packaged so that you never realized that it had once come off an animal. The fact that it simply didn't taste the same wasn't nearly as good and wasn't as nutritious, either, was allowed to go by the board. She saved time. What did she do with it? Sat and watched TV, or now, Tri-Vision. Supposedly, she was being saved from drudgery, not art. But cooking is an art, and art takes time."

Pam was uncomfortable. She said, "Do you expect me to bake bread? I'm a writer. I don't want to spend eight hours a day cooking."

Mark Martino laughed. "Who am I to throw the first stone? You've heard some of the songs I write. They're a continual rehash of popular songs that were written and have been rewritten over and over for the better part of the past century."

"Why don't you try something more serious?"

"I have. Every clown wants to play Hamlet. Off and on I've been working on a light opera for nearly a year. It'll never be produced. People don't want even light opera today. It takes a bit of education to enjoy. Anybody can understand that perennial favorite I wrote, *I Love Mother in the Springtime.* It's not just musicians. Look at poetry, you who are a writer. In the old days a poet used to sweat turning out a sonnet, say. Very difficult form. Exactly fourteen lines, all of them hung together with rhyme, rhythm, meter, perfectly. It was too much work for the poet, so blank verse and then free verse came in. And then anarchy. The new poet never bothered to learn how to construct a sonnet, nor to measure his lines in correct meter and to follow a rhythm system. He dashed off his inspired *poem* in a matter of a half hour and was surprised when after a few decades of this people stopped reading poetry."

He thought about it for a minute. "Same as in art. What happened to the painter who used to serve an apprenticeship of years learning the tools of his trade? Our Art Halleck

is the only painter I've even heard of for years who bothered to learn to draw. Too much work."

"I suppose it permeates our whole society," Pam said, nodding. "Nobody takes pride in his work any more."

"How can you, under present circumstances? Take my original example, that cobbler. He made shoes, from beginning to end, and when the job was through he could look at them and say, 'There is the product of my efforts. I did a good job.' Put the same man in a factory turning out half a million pairs of shoes a day. His job, which he can handle dressed in a suit and wearing white shirt and tie, consists of staring at various dials and screens and occasionally throwing a switch, or checking a report. He never sees the leather, he never sees a pair of the completed product. How can he take pride in his work?"

She said slowly, "Well, in some fields the new system has its advantages. People's Capitalism, I mean."

"Like, for instance?" he said sceptically.

"Well, I was interested earlier in your description of how a musical composer is rewarded for his efforts. In the long run, it's based on how his songs are received. I think it's even better for the free lance writer."

"It's basically the same, isn't it?"

"There are variations. For instance, in the old days, a writer did, say, a novel. Good. When it was finished, he submitted it to a publishing house and an editor read it—at least, we hope he did. Possibly it never got to an editor. If the writer was an unknown, perhaps his novel was read, or quickly scanned, by a poorly paid reader who possibly didn't really have the qualifications to understand the book. All right, but suppose an editor did read it and liked it. By the way, many of these editors were frustrated writers who couldn't make the grade, but here they were in a position to accept or reject some hopeful's work. They hadn't made it but they were now in a position to criticize somebody else's writing. Anyway even after you got past the editor, that wasn't all.

You might get a letter from him saying, 'I like it fine, but unfortunately this publishing house objects to protagonists being anarchists, or matricides, or homosexuals,' or whatever their various taboos might be."

Mark laughed sourly. "Well, it *was* their publishing company; they could decide what they wanted to publish and what they didn't."

"Yes. That's my complaint. You see, we had freedom of the press. You could write anything you wanted. Getting it printed was another thing. You had to find some publishing company, or newspaper, or magazine or whatever, who wanted to print it. If you couldn't locate one, then you still had the option of printing it yourself. Unfortunately, few writers had enough money to start their own publishing house or magazine."

"I see your point."

"Ummm. Today, I write a book and take it to the nearest library and for a small amount of money I have it set up and registered in the national computer library files. It's registered by title, cross registered by author, subject, and whether it's fiction, non-fiction, juvenile, or whatever. Even the reviews are available to the potential reader. And reviewers and critics we shall always have with us."

"Amen. But suppose nobody wants to read it?"

"The same thing happens as happened before with writers. You don't make any money. But if somebody does want to read it, he pays a nominal sum to have it projected on his teevee phone screen library booster. If it becomes a best seller, he makes a great deal. There might be holes in the system, but at least you aren't subject to the whims of editors and publishers. Anybody willing to sacrifice the comparatively small amount, about fifty dollars for the average length novel, can have his work presented to the public."

Mark said, "I'd think there'd be one hell of a large number of books each year."

"There are. But there's no limits to the number that the library banks can contain, after all. Another good thing is that every book ever printed remains in the banks—forever. Nothing ever goes out of print. It may go out of demand, practically everything does, sooner or later, but nothing goes out of print. The books I'm writing today will be available a thousand years from now, if anybody wanted to bother to read them."

Mark Martino said grudgingly, "I suppose the thing is that anybody can afford to go into the arts today. Whether anybody reads his books, buys his paintings, or listens to his music is another thing. That is still in the laps of the gods, as it always was. But at least you can make your fling."

"That's right," Pam sighed, coming to her feet. "I suppose I'd better throw these disposable plates out the window. A woman's work is never done."

Mark stood too. "I ate too much," he announced. "And that cognac didn't help any. I think I'll take a nap. Listen, Pam, if you decide to go out, bang on the door. I'll tag along, just for luck."

"Looking for adventure?" she said in deprecation.

He scowled at her. "I was laying that on a bit. It's not the only reason I stick around here on Manhattan, of course."

She was uncomfortable and stared down at the toe of her Etruscan revival sandal.

He said softly, "As you probably know, I'm really here for the same reason you are, Pamela."

She didn't say anything.

Mark said, "Art's a friend of mine. But if anything ever happens between you two . . ."

"Have a good nap, Mark."

VIII

Art Halleck went on down into the vacuum-tube terminal. He had to take a two-seater since the larger carriers

seldom came through this deserted spot. He stuck the painting in behind the seat and climbed in himself and brought the canopy over his head and dropped the pressurizer. He remembered the coordinates from the many times he had made the trip and dialed right through to the offices of the duplicator at the National Museum.

It might have been slightly cheaper if he had taken his two-seater to the pseudo-city of Princeton and from there taken a twenty-seater to Greater Washington. But that would have meant changing from two-seater to twenty-seater at Princeton, changing back again to a two-seater once he had arrived at the terminal in the capital. Too much time. He wanted to get back to Greenwich Village before dark. It was no good leaving Pam there alone, even though Mark was in the same building.

When the destination light flickered, he released the pressurizer and threw the canopy back and climbed out into the reception room of the Office of Duplication. He pulled the painting out from behind the seat and went to the reception desk. The door of the vacuum tube closed behind him.

He said into the reception screen, "Arthur Halleck requests immediate appointment to duplicate and register a painting."

The voice said, "Room 23. Mr. Ben MacFarlane."

Art knew MacFarlane. The other had handled Art's work before. He was a man who dabbled in painting himself, evidently not very successfully or he wouldn't have found it necessary to augment his dividends from his Inalienable Basic by holding down a job like this. Not that he wasn't lucky to have been able to get a job.

Art made his way down a corridor with which he was highly familiar, to Duplicating Room 23. There seemed to be no one else around, but, come to think of it, the last time he had been here he had spotted only one other artist hopeful. Only a few years ago, you could have expected to see half a dozen or more. Evidently as time went by fewer and fewer would-be

artists were trying to sell their stuff. He wondered vaguely if it was a matter of trying to make anything out of it. It did cost fifty dollars to duplicate and register just one painting. And fifty dollars was a sizeable enough chunk to take out of anyone's credit balance if they had no more than their ten shares of Inalienable Basic to depend upon. Possibly a lot of painters these days were doing their work and then not bothering to show it or, at most, showing it only to friends and neighbors. Or perhaps it was a matter of giving up painting completely and joining the ever increasing percentage of the population of the Ultra-welfare State in spending practically all free time staring into the Tri-Vision box.

It was a depressing trend of thought.

He activated the door screen, and shortly the door opened and he entered.

Ben MacFarlane was seated at his desk. He looked up and said, "Ah . . . Halleck, isn't it? Art Halleck."

Art said, "That's right. Hello, MacFarlane. How does it go?" He began unwrapping the painting.

"Slow, slow," the other said. He watched, only half interestedly as Art brought the painting forth. "Still doing that Representational-Abstract stuff, eh?"

"That's right," Art said.

"It's not selling," MacFarlane said.

"You're telling me." Art brought the painting over to him.

MacFarlane looked at it critically. "How did the last one go?"

"Sold seven so far," Art said.

"That's not too bad for a complete unknown."

"I've got three or four people who evidently collect me. Two down in Mexico, one in Hawaii and one in the Yukon, of all places. Sometimes you wonder what they're like, these people who have your things on their walls."

Ben MacFarlane stood and took up the painting. "You want to pay for this?"

"Sure," Art said. He brought his Uni-Credit Card from his inner pocket and put it in the desk slot and his thumbprint on the screen. MacFarlane touched a button and Art retrieved the card.

MacFarlane said, "I suppose you want to take the original back with you?"

"Of course."

The museum employee shrugged. "You'd be surprised how many don't. I suppose it's a matter of storage room in a mini-apartment. They come here and duplicate and register a painting and then tell us to throw the original away."

"Now that's pessimism," Art said. "Suppose you finally hit and these rich original collectors started wanting your works? Zoroaster, you'd kick yourself around the block."

MacFarlane, carrying the painting, left the room momentarily. When he returned, he handed the painting back to Art who began rewrapping it. MacFarlane settled back into his chair.

He said, "You still living in Greenwich Village?"

"That's right."

"You wouldn't know an old chum-pal of mine? Actually, I haven't seen him for ages. Fellow named Chuck Bellows."

Art looked up, scowling. "Tall guy with red hair?"

"That's right, Charles Bellows. Does old fashioned collages."

Art said, "He's dead."

"Dead! He can't be more than forty-five."

Art took a breath and said, "He had taken over a studio on Bleecker Street. Swanky place. A penthouse deal some millionaire must have originally owned. A friend of mine found him. Evidently, it had been simple enough. Somebody must have knocked on the door and when he answered it, shot him."

"Zoroaster!"

"Yeah. Must have been what we call a baboon since the place was ransacked."

"Are there many of these, uh baboons around?"

"No. Not many," Art said.

"I don't see why you stay, Halleck."

Art shook his head, even as he tied the string about the painting. "This is the third time today I've had to go into it," he said.

"I wasn't prying."

"I don't believe in taking charity," Art said. "And the way my things are selling, I couldn't make it on the mainland. In Greenwich Village I can make a go of it and continue painting. It's the most important thing in the world for me—my painting."

The other was only mildly surprised. Evidently, he had run into far-out ideas from artists before.

He said, "By the way, what kind of a price do you want set on this, Halleck?"

Art hesitated. He said, finally, "Five dollars."

MacFarlane shook his head. "I wouldn't if I were you."

"What do you mean?"

"It's a mistake a good many unarrived artists make. They think if they mark their prices down far enough, they'll sell. If I recall, you usually put a price of ten dollars on your things. If I were you, I'd make it twenty-five. There's still an element of snobbery in buying paintings, even though they are now available for practically nothing compared to the old days. Too many people even among those with enough taste to want paintings on their walls, don't really know what they like. So they buy according to the current fad or according to the prestige of a painter. Something like in the old days, when people who had the money would buy a Picasso, not because they really understood or liked his work, but because he was a status symbol."

Art scowled at him, hesitating.

MacFarlane said, "I've been here a long time. In fact, since the duplicating process was first perfected. I even remember back to when people bought originals. But the perfection of duplicating paintings to such an extent that not even the artist can tell the difference between his original and the duplicates we can make literally by the millions made possibly the greatest change in the history of art."

"It sure did," Art said grimly. "And personally, I'm not sure I'm happy about it. For one thing, to make these perfect duplicates, I've got to paint on that damned presdwood-duplicator board, using nothing but metallic-acrylic paints. Frankly, I prefer canvas and oils."

MacFarlane chuckled sourly. "I'm afraid you'd be hard-put to find buyers for a canvas painting these days, Halleck. When a person wants to buy a painting today, he dials the art banks. There your paintings, along with those of every other artist who submits his work, are to be found listed by name of artist, name of school of painting, name of subject, name of principle involved, even cross listed under size of painting. He selects those that he feels he might be interested in and dials them. When he finds one he likes, he can order it. The artist decides the price. It's a system that works in this mass-society of ours, Halleck. Everybody can afford paintings today. In the past only the fairly well to do could."

Art, almost ready to go, said sourly, "Okay, make the price ten dollars, as usual. I wonder if the average painter is any better off now than he was before. In the old days, when you did sell a painting, you got possibly two or three hundred dollars for it. Today, you get ten dollars and have to sell thirty duplicates of your original to earn the same amount."

"Yes, but there are potentially millions of buyers today. An artist who becomes only mildly known can boost his prices to, say, twenty-five or thirty-five dollars per painting, and, if he sells a hundred thousand of them, he can put his returns into Variable Basic or some other investment and retire, if he wishes to retire. There has never been a period

in history, Halleck, where the artist was so highly rewarded."

"*If* he hits," Art growled. "Well, wish me luck on this one, MacFarlane." He turned and headed for the door.

"That I do," MacFarlane said. "It's a tough racket, Halleck."

"It always has been," Art said. "It's just a matter of sticking it out until your time comes." The door opened before him.

IX

Pamela Rozet took up a heavy shopping bag and left the apartment, locking it behind her. She went to the stairway and mounted to the next floor. Mark Martino's door was open. He had probably left it that way so that he could hear any noises in the hall, just in case somebody came along while Art was gone.

She peered in the door.

Mark was stretched out on his comfort couch. There was an aged paperback book fallen to the floor by his side, and he was snoring slightly.

She hesitated. She hadn't liked the trend of their conversation an hour or so earlier. She had known that the other was in love with her and had been for a long time. A woman knows. However, he had never put it into words before, and she was sorry he had. She would just as well not continue the conversation, certainly not today.

She didn't awaken him. Instead, tiptoed away and went back to her own apartment. She hesitated momentarily, then went over to the weapons closet and got her twenty-two automatic rifle.

Both Art and Mark laughed about her favorite gun, pointing out that such a caliber wasn't heavy enough to dent a determined man. However, she claimed that at least she could hit something with this light gun, that it was easily carried, as opposed to something of heavier caliber, and that

just carrying a gun was usually enough of a deterrent. You seldom really had to use it. In actuality, although she had never said so, she could not have used it on a fellow human being. It was simply not in her.

She carried the basket in her left hand, the rifle in her right, and headed out again.

Their apartment was on the fifth floor. The building was in good enough shape that they could have selected a place lower down and thus have eliminated considerable stair climbing; however, being this high gave a certain amount of defense. Baboons were inclined to be on the lazy side and, besides that, would make enough noise to give forewarning of their arrival.

The defense system was simple. Any friends coming up to visit, such as Julie and Tim, would give a shout before beginning to mount from the ground floor. If such a shout wasn't forthcoming, Art, Mark or Pam would fire a couple of rounds at random into the ceiling above the stairwell. Invariably, that was answered by scurrying of feet below. Thus far, neither baboon nor hunter had dared continue to advance.

Down on the street, she carefully scanned the neighborhood before leaving the shelter of the doorway. She could see nothing living, save a ragtag cat a scurrying along.

She took up McDougal, then turned left. Her destination was only a few blocks away.

The front of the house was so badly blasted that it would have been impossible to enter. Probably a gas main explosion, they had originally decided. It was a matter of going up a tiny alleyway clogged with debris and refuse to a small door leading to the basement and located improbably. Few would have considered prowling the alley.

She looked up and down again before entering the alley, then made her way quickly to the door and through. She took the flashlight from her basket and held it clumsily in the

same hand in which she was carrying the twenty-two. She flicked it alive and started down the half ruined stairs.

At the bottom, she turned left toward what would ordinarily have been assumed to be a furnace room. At the far side was a rack for wine bottles stretching all the way to the ceiling. The wine was long gone before Mark Martino had, through a sheer stroke of genius, found this treasure trove.

She threw the lever, cleverly hidden to one side, and the door began to grind protestingly. She pulled it toward her and directed the flashlight into the interior. It was as she had last seen it, not that she expected otherwise. Only Mark, Art and she knew about this retreat. They hadn't even told Tim and Julie.

Inside, she found one of the Coleman lanterns and lit it and leaned her gun against the wall.

The original owner had evidently expected a sizeable contingent to occupy this refuge if the bombs began to drop. He had probably had both a family and a staff of servants. And he had evidently expected the stay below ground to be a lengthy one. Aside from food and drink, there was a supply of oxygen in bottles, bottled water, several types of fuel, a variety of tools; formerly there had been quite a supply of weapons and ammunition, since plundered by Mark Martino.

She went over to the extensive storeroom and, almost as though in a super-market, shuffled up and down the rows of canned, bottled and packaged foods, selecting an item here, another there.

She decided against taking a gallon of the drinking water. Too heavy to carry, what with the rifle and groceries. She could have Art come over tomorrow and get one. They preferred their drinking water to be bottled. For other use they depended upon a spring that had broken through a decaying wall in the subway tube right off the Washington Square entry.

Her basket was nearly full when a premonition touched her. She whirled.

Leaning in the doorway, grinning vacuously, was a hulking, bearded, dirt-befouled stranger. He was dressed in highly colorful sports clothing. The vicuna coat alone must have once been priced at several hundred dollars. However, it looked as though he had probably slept in it, and time and again.

Pam squealed fear and darted to where she had leaned her twenty-two. She pulled up abruptly.

The stranger grinned again. There was a slight trickle of spittle from the side of his mouth, incongruously reminding Pam Rozet of a stereotype Mississippi tobacco-chewing sharecropper.

"You looking for this, syrup?" he gurgled happily. He raised his left hand which held the twenty-two. His own weapon, an old military Garand M-1 was cradled under his right arm.

"I been watching you coming back to your house with this here big basket of yours all full of goodies for the past week. Never was able to follow you to where you went without you seeing me. And usual one of your men was along. But today, just by luck, I saw you duck up that alley. Just by luck. Man, you really got it made here, eh? Wait'll my gang see this. Lush and all, eh? Man, lush is getting scarce on this here island."

Pam blurted, "Let me go. Please let me go. You can take all this . . ."

"Syrup, we sure will. But what's your hurry, syrup? You look like a nice clean mopsy. We will have a little fun, first off."

"Please let me go."

He grinned vacantly and took her little gun by the barrel and bashed it up against the cement wall, shattering stock and mechanism. He tossed the wreckage away to the floor.

He motioned over toward the steel cots, mattress-topped but now without blankets or pillows, since she and Art had taken these back to the apartment long since. "Now sit down a minute, and let's get kind of better acquainted. We're gonna get to be real good friends, syrup."

"No," she said, trembling uncontrollably. "Please let me go. Look, over there. All sorts of liquor. Even champagne. Or Scotch, if you like whisky. Very old Scotch."

His grin became sly, and he started toward her, shuffling his feet and spreading his hands out a little, as though to prevent her from attempting to slip past him. "The lush I can get later, syrup. I like nice clean girls."

Neither of them had seen the newcomer approach through the cellar door at the bottom of the steps.

The blast of gunfire caught her assailant in the back and stitched up from the base of his spine to the back of his head. He never lived to turn, simply pitched forward to her feet, gurgling momentarily, but then was still.

Behind him, a plumpish newcomer, dressed elaborately in what were obviously new hunting clothes and carrying a late model, recoiless fully automatic rifle, pop-eyed down at the dead man.

"*Zo-ro-as-ter,*" he blurted.

Pam leaned back against the wall. "Oh, thank God," she said.

The newcomer brought his eyes up to her, taking in her trim suit, her well ordered hair, her general air of being.

He said, "How in the name of the world did you ever get into a place like this . . . Miss . . . ?"

Pam took a deep breath. "Rozet," she gaped. "Pamela Rozet. Oh . . . *thank* you."

He jabbed a finger in the direction of the fallen intruder. "That . . . that baboon . . . he could have killed you." His eyes took in her shattered light rifle, and then her clothing again. "You must be insane, coming to a place like this with

no more than that little gun, and no bullet-proof clothes and . . ." He broke off in mid-sentence, and began to stare at her.

Pam took another deep breath and tried to control her shaking. "I'm a writer," she said. "I live here."

"Live here?" At first he didn't understand and looked about the bombshelter. "You mean in this house? Up above? This is your family house; you still live here?"

She said, "No, not here. I live nearby with . . . with my husband. I . . . I write novels. He's an artist."

His eyes narrowed. "Live here?" he said.

She tried to straighten and collect herself. In a woman's gesture, she touched her hair. "That's right," she said.

"Why . . . why, you're nothing but a baboon, yourself. You were looting."

Her face fell, and fear came to her eyes again.

She tried to continue talking. Explaining. How she and Art had had all their papers. How they were serious workers in the arts. But she could see the nakedness in his face. The words came out a stutter.

If she read him right, from his reaction to the killing of the baboon who had been about to attack her, this was his first time as a hunter, or, at least, the first successful time. His first kill.

He brought the gun up slowly, deliberately and held it a little forward, as though showing it to her. He patted the stock. He caressed it, as though lovingly. A tongue, too small for his face, came out and licked his plump lower lip.

"You're a baboon yourself," he repeated, very softly, caressingly. "And there's no law protecting baboons, is there . . . dear? There's no law at all in the deserted cities. It's each man—and woman—for himself, isn't it? Before you're even allowed on the island, here, you have to waive all recourse to the police and the courts."

Her legs turned to water, and she sank to the floor and looked up at him numbly. "Please . . . don't hurt me . . ."

He held the gun out, as though to be sure she got a very good look at it—her messenger of eternity. "Of course, you've never hurt me, dear. And you never will . . . dear. Are you religious? Would you like to pray, or something . . . dear?"

She could feel her stomach churning. Her eyes wanted to roll up. She wanted desperately to faint.

There was a blast as though of dynamite in these confined quarters, and his features exploded forward in a gruesome mess. Part of the gore hit her skirt, but she didn't realize that until much later.

Mark Martino, putting his heavy six-shooter back into its holster, said from the doorway, "What is this, a massacre?"

But she was unconscious.

X

Later, she was semi-hysterical and couldn't get over it.

Art said, "What in the hell happened?"

Mark Martino was pouring cognac into a kitchen tumbler. He had tried to get some down Pamela, but twice she had vomited it up. Now he was pouring for himself.

He said, "I dropped off into a nap after you left and I guess she didn't want to bother me. At any rate, when I woke she was gone. I took off after her. Evidently I barely made it. She must have been followed by a baboon . . ."

"Oh, damn," Art said.

"At any rate, when I got there the baboon was already dead. Evidently, a hunter had followed him. I followed the hunter. It was like a parade. I finished the hunter. They were right there at the bombshelter. We'll never be able to go back again. That hunter'll be found by his chum-pals. They never go around alone. There'll be at least one more."

Art said in disgust, "Couldn't you have dragged his body off somewhere else?"

"No," Mark said, in equal disgust, knocking back the

cognac. "Pam had fainted. I had to get her out of there and I didn't know how many baboons or how many hunters might be around. For all we know, that damn baboon was a part of a pack and the hunter might have had a dozen *sportsmen* friends."

"What'd he look like?" Art said, staring down dismally at Pam, stretched out on a couch, not knowing what to do in typical male helplessness.

"Kind of fat."

"There were only two of them," Art said. "I saw them at the tube. But he's probably some bigwig or other. The cloddy with him was some sort of police authority. He was able to commandeer a floater from Williams."

Mark poured some more cognac and offered the glass to Art who shook his head in refusal. He was disgusted.

"You'd better ditch that gun you used," he said. "They don't like hunters to get killed. They are almost invariably big shots. They'll probably come in here with a flock of cops, and shake everybody down. Especially me. I had a run-in with these two at the tube entrance. But you're in the same building, and if they find that gun on you, the same caliber that killed him, they'll check it and you'll be in the soup."

"I already ditched it," Mark said. "I'm not stupid. Look, Art. . . ." He set the bottle down on the table.

Art looked at him.

"You've got to get out of here," Mark said, throwing his glass into a corner, where it shattered. He turned and left the apartment.

When Pamela had gathered herself to the point of being coherent, Art was standing at the window, staring unseeingly down the street to Washington Square.

She came up behind him.

"Art."

He took a deep breath. "Yes."

"Art, forgive me. I'm a terrible coward."

He didn't say anything.

"Art, we've got to get out of here."

"Yes. I know."

BEHIND THE SANDRAT HOAX

By Christopher Anvil

I

Redrust Northeast Bunker, New Venus, July 17, 2208. Sam Mathews, missing converter technician from the Kalahell Solar Conversion District, was today admitted to Redrust Medical Center. Mathews's sand-buggy overturned May 17, in the middle of the Waterless Kalahell Desert.

Date: July 19, 2208
From: Robert Howland, Director, Kalahell Conv. Dist.
To: Philip Baumgartner, Director, Redrust Med. Cen.
Subject: Sam Mathews
Recode: 083KCrm-1

Phil: Hope you will patch Mathews up and get him back to us as soon as possible. We are eager to learn how Mathews survived two months in the Kalahell, starting with two one-quart canteens of water.

Date: July 20, 2208
From: Philip Baumgartner, Director, Redrust Med. Cen.
To: Robert Howland, Director, Kalahell Conv. Dist.
Subject: Weak Patient
Recode: 083kcRM-2

Bob: Sorry, there's no question of getting Mathews back to you quickly. With a sheet and blanket over him, you still see his ribs. Besides, he's incoherent.

July 22, 2208
Howland to Baumgartner
083KCrm-3

Phil: I hope you will listen carefully to every incoherent word Mathews speaks. Please bear in mind, we found his overturned sand-buggy, with water tank burst, *three hundred miles* from Redrust Northeast Bunker. There is no known water in between, and the vegetation is dry as dust from April to Ocnovdec. *How did he do it?*

I August 24, 2208
Baumgartner to Howland
083kcRM-4

Bob: Sorry this reply is late. Our supply ship cracked up on its last trip, with a crew of four and nine offworld tourists. We suddenly had eleven badly burned men to care for, and little time for Mathews. However, we will see if we can learn anything for you.

I August 30, 2208
Baumgartner to Howland
083kcRM-5
Subject: Pure Lunacy

Bob: Sorry, but we're sending Mathews to Verdant Hills Medical Center. Their facility is big enough to handle his case, I think. If not, they will send him to Lakes Central. Too bad, but he went through quite an experience, as you realize.

Purgatory 2, 2208
Howland to Baumgartner
083KCrm-6
Subject: Nut Stunts

Phil: Yes, I realize what Mathews went through: *He crossed three hundred miles of desert on two quarts of water.* That's what I'm trying to find out about. From the

heading of your message, I take it Mathews has gotten "mentally unbalanced" now it's time for him to go back on duty. Look, Phil, try to remember, Mathews is a case-hardened "sandrat" of long experience. This is not your average patient. You let a sandrat get his chosen angle on a situation, and he will stand it on its head. *Don't* send Mathews to Verdant Hills. Hold him till the cyclone pack goes through here, then *send him to us.* And Phil, will you tell me what Mathews said about his experience? This is important to us here.

Purgatory 16, 2208
Baumgartner to Howland
083kcRM-7

Robert: In dealing with my own patients, under treatment at this facility, I rely on my clinical judgment, balanced by the professional opinion of my staff, and not on sandrat amateur psychology. Mathews has been released, for observation at Verdant Hills Medical Center. And I am not at liberty to divulge confidential details, from the closed files, on this case. *Note, please, that this communication is the* 3 *th transmission of a series, repeated periodically over land-line central cable, and by semaphore across fault-gaps, crush-zones, and landshifts, and that transmission between remote peripheral stations may be delayed during periods of intense meteorological or seismic activity.*

Hell 14, 2208
Howland to Baumgartner
083KCrm-8

Dear Doctor: I wonder if, in the full wisdom of your clinical judgment, balanced by all the professional personnel on your staff, any of you qualified people had the wit to try to put yourselves in the place of your lowly sandrat patient, and see how things looked to *him?* What does your clinical judgment tell you about someone who has spent years in the

dustbowl of this poverty-stricken sandpit planet? How will this sandrat react when he gets the chance to be sent, free of charge, to a comparative Garden of Eden, provided he can just *prove he's nuts?* I won't waste breath describing the stunts some of these birds have staged, just to get back to Bonescorch for a week. And far be it from me to pry into the confidential privileged communications between you and one of my best technicians on a matter vital to the Kalahell Conversion District. No. Better that my men should die of thirst when their vehicles give out than that you should open your closed files. Sorry if my message seemed unprofessional, Phil. Forgive me for presuming on our former friendship. *Note, please, that this communication is the 6th transmission of a series. . . .*

Date: Hell 30, 2208
From: Philip Baumgartner, Director, Redrust Med. Cen.
To: Quincy Cathcart, Chief of Medical Services
Subject: Interservice Friction
Recode: o82RMmc-1

Sir: I am sending separately a record of my recent correspondence with Mr. Robert Howland, Director of the Kalahell Solar Conversion District. As the correspondence will show, a difference of opinion regarding medical treatment of one of my patients has caused some friction between us. I call this matter to your attention because of recent failures in certain electrical facilities at the Redrust Medical Center. These power failures, of precisely thirty and sixty-second duration, have formed a pattern which it seems to me could not be random. I do not accuse Director Howland of being the cause of this serious interference, but I feel that this matter should be investigated without delay. I would appreciate your assistance in this matter. *Note, please, that this communication is the 2 th transmission of a series, repeated periodically.*

Date: Salvation 6, 2208
From: Quincy Cathcart, Chief of Medical Services
To: Philip Baumgartner, Director, Redrust Med. Cen.
Subject: Ego Reduction

My boy, if I were a purely conventional Chief of Medical Services, I would have your jackass hide drying in the breeze this minute; but it is your great good fortune that I have a large capacity for suffering fools gladly, and also am somewhat short of replacements for you at the moment. You have committed three really outstanding stupidities. First, you have "pulled rank" on an equal. You may regard yourself as enormously superior, mentally, socially, and professionally, to Director Howland, but kindly observe that Director Howland is *Director* Howland. Kindly do not increase my difficulties by your ineffectual efforts to snub those to whom you are not superior. Second, if you *do* try it, show the forethought not to commit the additional stupidity of voluntarily doing it in fully documented form, where anyone may see your ego, complete with scalpel, stethoscope, and halo, spread-eagled in all its glory. Third, when you *have* done it, do not expect me to get you out of the mess. Just exactly what do you propose that I do? Suppose I should take this matter up with the Chief of Power Production? As he is just as busy as I am, or almost so, he will be in an equally irritated mood after examining the records. Certainly, he will request Director Howland to check this power interruption. However, you may count on it, the field of power-supply zionids, or the theory of tertiary trilovolt transmission zone interactions, or whatever may happen to be involved, will be so abstruse and complex that neither you nor I will have any idea whether what follows is justice, persecution, or the operations of someone's sense of humor. Kindly note that I am not interested in becoming involved in this, particularly since this power interruption obviously does not risk your patients' well-being, or you would plainly and unequivocally say so. All it is doing, therefore, is to sweat your ego, and far be it

from me to interfere. Permit me, however, to make a suggestion. You, obviously, have two main alternatives: a) You may demand in an authoritative way that Director Howland come to heel like a chastised dog. In this case, I strongly suspect that the Director will suddenly discover that your difficulty shows the danger of incipient overload of the flarnitic leads of the intercontinental power net or something equally nice, and a disaster team will descend on you and make your present discomfort look like heaven; b) Alternatively, you might send a simple manly note of apology for your high-flown missive of Purgatory 16th, explaining what is doubtless the truth, that you were overtired. Express your willingness to help solve the problem. I fully authorize your opening the files for this purpose. I await with interest the results of your joint investigation of this matter, as I frankly would like to know how any human could cross three hundred miles of the Kalahell Desert alone on foot, starting with just two quarts of water, and with nothing between him and his destination but dried-out vegetation and dust. I am setting additional inquiries in motion on this matter and advise you to start your investigation promptly, if you wish to receive credit for the solution. *Note, please, that this communication is the 4 th transmission of a series, repeated. . . .*

II

Date: Salvation 14, 2208
From: R. Stewart Belcher, Director, Verd. Hills Med. Cen.
To: Quincy Cathcart, Chïef of Medical Services
Subject: Sam Mathews
Recode: o81mcVN-2

Sir: In answer to your inquiry, yes, we had a patient by the name of Sam Mathews here. He arrived from Redrust Med. Cen. in a special reinforced straitjacket, and we shipped him out in a padded cocoon. As for his condition—well—if you will permit me to drop the usual lingo, this fellow was stark

raving nuts. I would hesitate to try to pin it down any closer. We sent him straight to Lakes Central. He got here Purgatory 16th, and we got rid of him on the 18th. *Note, please that this is the 4 th of a series.* . . .

Date: Salvation 15, 2208
From: Martin Merriam, Director, Lakes Cen. Med. Cen.
To: Quincy Cathcart, Chief of Medical Services
Subject: Sam Mathews.
Recode: o82mcLM-2

Sir: Yes, we do have a patient here named Sam Mathews. Mr. Mathews is under treatment at our Outpatient Clinic. His case is highly interesting, and, I think, offers many insights into the nature of religious fanaticism. You see, Mathews was employed for years as a technician, tending solar-conversion units out in the Kalahell Desert. One day, while far out, an unexpected tornado hit, his sand-buggy overturned, his water tank burst, and he found himself isolated in this waterless desert. The psychic shock must have been formidable. Tchnudi, who is handling his case, is slowly bringing the infraconscious symbolism to the surface; but, of course, the process cannot be hurried. Subjectively, Mathews evidently experienced a vision, which left him convinced he was under the care of a being called the Prophet of Awashi. Tchnudi, by the way, finds an intriguing symbolism in the name of this prophet. By the time Mathews emerged from the desert, the whole thing was quite real to him. However, his latent fanaticism only burst to the surface when he was told that he was to be sent *back* to the Kalahell. Instead, he insisted that he go on to the "promised land," as the Prophet had commanded him. This incident, I think, offers many possibilities for theoretical insights. Tchnudi is treating the psychosis by what might be called "psychiatric hydrotherapy." The patient is encouraged to swim and boat and is responding quite well, despite occasional relapses. We

have high hopes of achieving an eventual cure. *Note, please, that this message is the 6 th....*

Salvation 23, 2208
Cathcart to Baumgartner
081rmMC-3
Subject: Sam Mathews

Well, my boy, I would like to know the results of *your* investigations thus far. *Note, please, that this message is the 4 th. . . .*

Salvation 24, 2208
Baumgartner to Cathcart
081RMmc-4

Sir: I can only say that Mathews was incoherent when he arrived here and insane when he left.

He appeared to be progressing nicely, but our treatment was interrupted by the crash of a supply ship, so that we necessarily may have neglected Mathews to some extent. *Note, please, that this message is the 9 th. . . .*

Salvation 30, 2208
Cathcart to Baumgartner
081rmMC-5
Subject: Evasion

Dear boy: You may not believe it, but there are worse places on this planet than Redrust. Specifically, let me call to your attention Medical Outpost 116, located in a spot picturesquely named "Ssst," from what happens when you spit on the sand. Outpost 116 is situated in the center of a kind of natural bowl. When the sun reaches the zenith over this bowl, it is possible to be burned simultaneously on all exposed surfaces of the body, whether the said surfaces happen to face up, down, north, south, east, or west. Owing to the really excessive seismic activity in the region, this is a *surface station,* of the type mounted on very large skids de-

signed to flex with the waves when the quakes hit. Unfortunately, the elastic-rebound qualities of the skids sometimes react unfavorably with the seismic waves, so that you are going up when the ground is going down, and vice versa. The mechanical qualities, insulation, *etc.*, of the station have suffered accordingly. Permit me to point out that this outpost has been untenanted for some time, as I have been unable to find anyone with the unique qualities desirable in the occupant of this station. Let me point out, it would be of great value for the Service to know *how Mathews survived so long without water.* Of course, you need not trouble yourself with this problem if it bores you. *Note, please, that this message is the* 6 *th.* . . .

II August 3, 2208
Baumgartner to Cathcart
081RMmc-6

Sir: I send separately complete copies of all records of this Center pertaining to former patient Samuel Mathews. I realize that it may be of some interest that this patient survived severe exposure over a relatively long period. However, determination of the cause of this anomaly is not possible with the facilities available at this Center. We lack sufficient advanced computer backup to correlate the data. In any case, data-sifting, data-analysis, and theoretical synthesis is not the function of this Center.

II August 6, 2208
Cathcart to Baumgartner
081rmMC-7
Subject: Reassignment

Sir: Effective on receipt of this message, you are removed as Director of Redrust Medical Center, and reassigned to Medical Outpost 116. You will report to Medical Outpost 116 on the next supply ship, traveling by way of Kalahell Water Extraction Center and South Bonescorch Junction.

Your assignment is: a) to repair and render fit for occupancy Medical Outpost 116; b) to occupy Medical Outpost 116 until further notice, maintaining it in optimal condition, and duly operating all recording equipment relating to solar radiation, temperature, humidity, atmospheric pressure, wind-speed, incidence and severity of sandstorms, cyclones, groundslips, seismic tremor, *etc., etc.;* c) to render medical assistance to the occupants of the Equatorial Conversion District. To facilitate your medical-assistance patrols, Medical Outpost 116 will be equipped with one (1) Model STV-4 sand-buggy. You are cautioned to operate this vehicle with due care, as vehicle malfunction, especially in the prolonged dry season, is a major fact in the mortality rate of the Equatorial Conversion District. Bear in mind that, due to electromagnetic disturbances, and violent meteorological and seismic activity, outside help is not to be anticipated.

Date: II August 14, 2208
From: Quincy Cathcart, Chief of Medical Services
To: Robert Howland, Director, Kalahell Conv. Dist.
Subject: Desert Survival
Recode: o81MCkc-1

Sir: I am sending, separately, recordings of Sam Mathews's conversations at Redrust Medical Center. It would appear that he expected to die and was passing along information he considered important. For instance, there is the following:

Attendant: Don't overtire yourself, Mr. Mathews. Just settle back.

Mathews: No. I've got to tell—

Attendant: Not now.

Mathews: It's for my buddies. Look—

Attendant: Lie back, please. Don't overtire yourself.

Mathews: Who cares? I know I won't make it. Somebody else can make it. Listen—

Attendant: Of course you'll make it. Now, I've got to give you this—

Mathews: Write this down, will you? The rat story's right.

You can eat grass and all. You can eat dry scratchweed. You can—

Attendant: *Sure* you can.

Mathews: You've got to get one *alive*. You can't cook it.

Attendant: Just lie back.

Mathews: Are you going to write it down?

Attendant: Sure. Let me just pull your sleeve up.

Mathews: *Then* you can eat anything. Even scratchweed. It turns to water in your stomach.

Attendant: Just lie still while we get the hypogun. . . . *There.*

Mathews: Are you going to write this down? Do you follow?

Attendant: Sure. You don't cook the scratchweed. Now—

Mathews: *No! You don't get it!* It's the *rat* you don't cook!

Attendant: Sure. Sure. You cook the weed, you don't cook the rat. Lie back.

Mathews: It's not . . . you eat it raw . . . the weed . . . you wouldn't, anyway. . . .

Attendant: Lie down, now.

Mathews: No. . . . But the rat . . . you . . . important to remember . . . the rat. . . .

Attendant: Sure. . . . Whew! He's under. *Finally.*

Dr. Hinmuth: Try to keep your reassurances more general. Avoid specifics.

This conversation seems to show Mathews trying to get *something* across. I would value your opinion as to what this something might be.

Date: II August 18, 2208
From: Robert Howland, Director, Kalahell Conv. Dist.
To: Quincy Cathcart, Chief of Medical Services
Subject: Desert Survival
Recode: o81mcKC-2

Sir: Many thanks. I've wanted these records for a long time. As for Mathews's "rat story"—that's a kind of legend.

The basis is a creature called a sandrat that burrows at the base of the larger chalaqui weed and sunrustle stalks. This creature is active while other local life is estivating. The legend is that if a man will catch a sandrat, cut out its digestive tract and eat it raw, he will be able to live in the desert without water. This is supposed to have been the secret of "Desert Bill," an early settler renowned for his ability to survive the desert. I've never taken the story seriously, and considering what you have to do to test it, I don't know anyone who *has* tested it. But I'm calling for volunteers.

September 17, 2208
Howland to Cathcart
081mcKC-3

Sir: Well, it took work to find volunteers, and I had to offer a week's leave in the worst fleshpot in the hemisphere. But we have now tried it out. Don't ask me how it could be, but one volunteer went almost three weeks without water, and another went sixteen days. This won't convince everyone, but I'm notifying all the conversion districts. Now, if a man gets stranded, he has a chance.

September 19, 2208
Cathcart to Howland
081MCkc-4

Sir: Congratulations. I now have a cage of sandrats myself, but no volunteers. What's the name of that fleshpot? Once I have volunteers, I intend to impose controls so stringent no one in his right mind can question the results. Of course, that won't include everybody.

III

Princeps, New Venus, Ocnovdec 30, 2208. Dr. Charles de P. Bancroff, Director-in-Chief of the Interscience Federation today rebuked Dr. Quincy Cathcart for his "sandrat hoax."

In an unprecedently severe public statement, Dr. Bancroff charged: "This absurd parody of an experiment exposes New Venus Science to the ridicule of more mature scientific bodies everywhere. Numerous palpable errors in this widely publicized—I might almost say widely advertised—report qualify it as a treatise on 'What to Avoid in Science.'

"To begin with, the sample employed *was not pure.* Assuming the results to be as stated, no one could say what agent or agents were responsible.

"Second, it is absurd to suggest that such results *could* be possible; obviously, digestive action would destroy the ingested tissue, and with it its presumed magical power to change food into drink.

"Third, even assuming the ingested tissue were *not* digested, peristaltic action would reject it from the body.

"This should give some suggestion of the flaws in this 'experiment.' Even laymen can understand such fallacies.

"However, to the scientist, other flaws are at once evident. This experiment is not 'elegant.' It lacks the sense of 'form' which gives the conviction of validity. Moreover, there is nothing quantitative about it.

"There can be no excuse for such an imposture.

"I call upon Dr. Cathcart to publicly admit that this so-called experiment is nothing more nor less than a hoax. This may, at least, permit New Venus Science to regain some shreds of scientific credibility."

Operations Central, New Venus, Janfebmar 4, 2209. Dr. Quincy Cathcart, Chief of Medical Services, today replied to the criticism of Dr. Charles de P. Bancroff. Referring to Dr. Bancroff as a "pedant laboriously mining his rut," Dr. Cathcart stated:

"In the formal organization of which we are both members, Dr. Bancroff is an administrator, not a scientist. As a scientist, I decline to accept any judgment based on Dr. Ban-

croff's opinions. That his statement is unscientific is easily shown:

"1) He bases his argument on the grounds that my experiment might cause 'New Venus Science' to lose caste in the eyes of others. This is suppression of data for fear of unpopularity.

"2) He states that the experiment cannot be correct, because it disagrees with his presuppositions. This is the attempted refutation of physical facts by favored theories.

"3) He objects that the experiment is not 'elegant,' and hence cannot be true. This is the subordination of Science to Esthetics.

"4) He complains that the experiment is not 'quantitative.' Note that *each* volunteer ate *one* sandrat digestive tract and then, while carefully and continuously supervised, existed for stated days, hours and minutes without drinking water. All that is required of an experiment is that it proves a point, and that the facts be so reported as to be capable of independent check. It is unscientific to include irrelevant data and superfluous charts and calculations merely to make the experiment 'look scientific.'

"My learned colleague's objections are those of the scholastic pedant, not of the scientist.

"In science, theories are based on *facts*, not vice-versa."

Princeps, New Venus, Janfebmar 6, 2209. By 8-4 vote, the Personnel and Appointments Committee today fired Dr. Quincy Cathcart, Chief of Medical Services. By unanimous vote, the Committee on Professional Conduct formally censured Dr. Cathcart for "unprofessional conduct."

Rathbone, New Venus, Janfebmar 8, 2208. Dr. Quincy Cathcart, former Chief of Medical Services, in a brief statement commented on his expulsion from office and the formal rebuke delivered by the Interscience Federation. Dr. Cathcart said:

"By these measures, the governing bodies of the so-

called Interscience Federation reveal themselves as composed largely of sycophants, obsequious to an administrator who, as I have demonstrated, does not know what science is. These people may, of course, take their stand with whoever they wish. I will stand with Galileo."

Princeps, New Venus, Janfebmar 8, 2209. By 7-5 vote, the Committee on Accreditation today placed Quincy Cathcart on "indefinite suspension of professional status." A spokesman explained: "This means Cathcart cannot practice, and further that no paper or presentation of his may be considered by any accepted medium for the dissemination of professional information or opinion."

The action was taken "to avert harmful public controversy."

IV

Rathbone, New Venus, April 16, 2209. Two magnetic-sieve prospectors reached here today, haggard from exposure and lack of rest, to tell of a waterless trek across the Salamari Waste. They attribute their survival to "travel by night, an accurate map, and two raw sandrats."

Flarnish, New Venus, May 1, 2209. Doctors here are puzzled by the case of a fourteen-year-old boy who eats grass, refuses to drink water, and apparently suffers no harmful effects. He insists he ate a sandrat.

Bonedry, New Venus, May 26, 2209. Hank J. Percival, proprietor of the Last Chance Supply Mart, reports a brisk sale of sandrats to prospectors, surveyors, and cable riggers, setting out across the Bonescorch Plateau.

Princeps, New Venus, May 29, 2209. Experiments carried out under the auspices of the Interscience Federation "demonstrate that the effectiveness of sandrat ingestion in

preventing dehydration is a myth. Careful experimentation with measured quantities of crushed digestive tissues of laboratory sandrats shows no statistical increase in resistance to dehydration."

South Bonescorch Junction, New Venus, June 10, 2209. Philip Baumgartner, from Medical Outpost 116, collapsed shortly after arrival here this morning. Baumgartner explained that his sand-buggy broke down "ten to twelve days ago" and he'd been on foot ever since. A small wire cage lined with sunrustle stalks, and now empty, was found secured to his pack straps. Such sandrat kits are sold locally for use in case the purchaser gets lost without water.

Princeps, New Venus, June 22, 2209. By order of R. Q. Harling, Planetary Food and Drug Administrator, all sales of "sandrats or related rodents, for use in preventing dehydration," were today forbidden as "dangerous to the public health, both directly in light of possible infestation by possible indigenous intestinal parasites and indirectly because of the mistaken belief that sandrat internal organs are a specific against dehydration. This myth has been thoroughly exploded by controlled scientific experimentation."

Bonedry, New Venus, June 26, 2209. Hank J. Percival, proprietor of the Last Chance Supply Mart stated today he is continuing sales of sandrats, "as pets."

Broke and Ended, New Venus, June 27, 2209. Sandra Corregiano, a missing tourist on the Trans-Desert Safari, was today brought out after an extensive search around Mineral Flats. Miss Corregiano explained that she had caught a sandrat. "I hated to kill the poor thing," she said, "and I nearly died with the—you know—what you have to do with them. But then I was all right."

Princeps, New Venus, July 6, 2209. Planetary Food and Drug Administrator Harling today warned that he will "proceed to the courts" in all cases wherein sandrats are sold contrary to law. Administrator Harling added that he will prosecute offenders "vigorously, to the full extent of the enforcement resources at my disposal."

Princeps, New Venus, July 8, 2209. The Planetary Food and Drug Administration today released results of chemical analysis of the sandrat digestive tract, by an independent analytical laboratory "of recognized standing". No cause for protection against dehydration was found.

Bonedry, New Venus, July 10, 2209. The bodies of two Planetary Food and Drug Administration field agents were found near here this morning. Evidence seems to show that the two PFADA agents shot each other in a gun battle. Cause of the fight is not known.

South Bonescorch Junction, New Venus, July 14, 2209. A PFADA agent was found dead in the wreckage of his sand-buggy this morning. Evidence thus far uncovered appears to indicate that the sand-buggy's engine exploded.

Slag Hills, New Venus, July 19, 2209. The body of a PFADA field agent found here the day before yesterday was today shipped back to Princeps. Cause of death was a large bullet hole in the left chest.

Princeps, New Venus, July 20, 2209. PFADA administrator Harling today announced that enforcement of his sandrat-sales policy is being "temporarily suspended, pending completion of a massive public-education campaign."

Princeps, New Venus, July 22, 2209. Dr. Charles de P. Bancroff, Director-in-Chief of the Interscience Federation,

today unveiled results of a new experiment "to determine the possible effects of sandrat ingestion." The intestinal tracts of sixteen sandrats, raised at the PFADA laboratories nearby, were "thoroughly macerated, divided into one hundred portions, and each weighed portion mixed with a weighed sample of a specific local plant. *In no instance was the proportion of water significantly increased by admixture with sandrat intestine.*" Dr. Bancroff stated: "I am amazed that superstition can persist in the face of repeated consistently negative experimental evidence."

Dry Hole, New Venus, July 28, 2209. Sixteen inmates of the Dry Hole Correctional Training Institute have disappeared in the last month. It is believed the prisoners are getting away as fast as they can catch sandrats. Owing to the isolated location of the Institute, and the local lack of surface water, it was never thought necessary to use an escape-proof outer wall.

Princeps, New Venus, I August 4, 2209. Officials of the Interscience Federation today announced new measures to "eradicate the sandrat superstition." A concerted effort will be made to coordinate teaching materials of all types, to render this superstition psychologically distasteful. Special mention was made of the trideo film, *Disaster in the Desert*, which, said a spokesman, "illustrates, step by step, the chain of causation leading from acceptance of the myth to the ultimate test, when the family sand-vehicle malfunctions in the desert. Then there is this distressing scene with the sandrats, and afterward we experience the deterioration of the family, physically and mentally, and the horror as they try to eat sunrustle stalks and other things of that type, and realize that they *don't* turn into water. We got Peter de Vianhof and Celeste Silsine for the principal characters—the stars of our show—and we think they've done a really superb and convinc-

ing job for us. It's one thing to just be *told* an old wives' tale is false. It's something else to actually *experience* it this way, right before your eyes." Another official stated, "We're going to pull out all the stops. We're going to crush this superstition."

V

Date: Frigidor 26, 2212
From: Presley Mark, President, New Earth Research
To: Col. J. J. Conrobert, C. O., Stilwell Base, New Earth
Subject: Dehydrated Water?

Con: Sorry this reply is late, but we've had a little trouble here. Some jackass greased the liquid air machine. Regarding your query as to whether there is any way to solidify water without freezing, I would certainly say, "No." But some vague memory keeps circulating through my mind.

What's your problem?

Date: Frigidor 27, 2212
From: J. J. Conrobert, C. O., Stilwell Base, New Earth
To: Presley Mark, President, New Earth Research
Subject: Outposts

Pres: The problem is, I've got eighteen detached observation posts in this freezebox, and supplying them is driving me nuts.

I've tried to explain through channels that these outposts serve no useful purpose, that anything incoming—aliens, bootleg spacecraft, planetary raiders, you name it—will show up on the screens. The generals tell me screens can be fooled and visual observation is a useful backup. That's that.

Well, we've got pretty rugged terrain. These observation posts are at high elevations, sunk into windswept crags overlooking wide sweeps of territory. We can't provision them from the air, because of dangerous winds and violently un-

predictable meteorological conditions in general. We supply them *from the ground.* There's no vehicle or pack animal that can handle this. *We* do it. Every time we supply these outposts, it's like a battle. What gets us worst is water. In summer, it sloshes and shifts. In winter, the snow is contaminated by spores of the parasite of a solitary overgrown wolf that gets moisture by gulping snow. This parasite will infest humans, which complicates everything from the first snowfall to the middle of summer.

Yes, I realize waste can be purified, but kindly think over our budget, our conditions and the unscientific viewpoint of the troops.

Incidentally, I might add that this solitary powerful wolf finds our isolated snow-melting water-boiling shelters ideal for winter headquarters.

Now, these difficulties are samples. They don't exhaust the list. All these things interlock; you can't do this for one reason, or that for another reason. But if we could eliminate this water-delivery problem, with its complications of liquidity, freezing-point, spores, melt-houses, snow-wolves, *etc.*, it would simplify things enormously.

Could you work up some kind of gelatin, and when it cools it's a powder. Then when it's eaten, the water is released? Never mind if it weighs twice as much. We would gladly trade complications for some straightforward drudgery.

Date: Frigidor 29, 2212
From: Mark, New Earth Research
To: J. J. Conrobert, Stilwell
Subject: Nonliquid Non-Ice Water

Con: Am onto a weird track that may solve your problem—a discovery made on our sister planet. True to form, they ganged up on the discoverer, who showed some originality. Will let you know what I find out.

Date: September 16, 2212
From: Mark, New Earth Research
To: J. J. Conrobert, Stilwell
Subject: Waterless Water

Con: My investigations into New Venus "science" disclose that there is a creature there called a "sandrat" that lives on dry stalks while the other creatures sleep out the hot weather. For years, the local people have known this, and it appears that someone, stranded without water, decided that if he ate the creature, maybe he could do it, too.

Obviously, this couldn't work. But he tried it, and it *did* work.

Our experiments show that, in this particular animal's digestive system, there's a culture of microorganisms that breaks down cellulose. These microorganisms are passed on from generation to generation, when the mother sandrat feeds the baby pre-chewed food.

When the human eats the sandrat, the human's digestive juices naturally tend to kill the microorganisms. But the human is hoping against hope that he too can now process dried weeds and make water out of them. He promptly chokes down dried weed. The microorganisms go to work on it and produce among other things, a kind of porous charcoal dust, and water. The cellulose, you see, is $(C_6H_{10}O_5)$, or $[C_6(H_2O)_5]$, provided you remember the hydrogen and oxygen are not actually joined as water to form a hydrate. The microorganism takes care of this problem. Don't ask me how just yet. It will take us a while to figure this out. But here is your dry water, if you don't mind the weight penalty.

Evidently, the New Venus authorities fed their laboratory sandrats on starchy food and water. This microorganism, for some reason, doesn't like starch, and dies for lack of cellulose. Hence, their experiments demonstrated that the actual facts were imaginary. By means of a propaganda campaign, they rammed this revelation down the throats of the populace. Nice, eh?

To get back to our problem, we've tried cultures of the microorganism and find they will work on sawdust, amongst other forms of cellulose. Am sending cultures and live sandrats for your own use.

Don't know if this solves your problem, but it's a start. Incidentally, we find we get the best results with the raw digestive tract of the sandrat. Let me know how military discipline solves this problem.

We are also interested to see how New Venus "science" will explain the dilemma created by our report. We are releasing it in a special way.

Rathbone, New Venus, II August 16, 2212. Quincy Cathcart, a seed salesman here, today made public the text of a communication from Dr. C. J. Horowitz, Director of Research at the prestigious New Earth Research Corporation. Dr. Horowitz's message reads, in part:

". . . We wish to publicly acknowledge the prior date of your investigations into this important matter and to acknowledge further that your conclusions have been found to be entirely accurate.

"Owing to your researches, our efforts have been greatly facilitated.

"Mr. Presley Mark, President of the Corporation, has suggested your name for our Mark Medal and accompanying cash award. As you may know, this prize has not been awarded for three years, so that the award money has accumulated. We will be in touch . . ."

Princeps, New Venus, II August 18, 2212. P. L. Sneel, spokesman for the Legal Staff Section of the Interscience Federation, today warned that Quincy Cathcart, Rathbone seed salesman, "cannot legally accept any payment, emolument, reward, prize, or other recompense for performance of services which he is legally debarred from rendering. Under

Sections 223, 224, and 226, Cathcart must refuse such payment or suffer the full legal penalties."

Rathbone, New Venus, II August 20, 2212. J. Harrington Savage, prominent Princeps attorney visiting at the home of Dr. Quincy Cathcart, today announced that "this allegation of the Legal Staff Section of the Interscience Federation is in violation of Section 6, which specifically prohibits *ex post facto* laws. Dr. Cathcart may be rewarded, to any extent and without limitation, for *past* services, rendered at a time when his outstanding qualifications were fully accredited. Any attempt of the Interscience Federation to enforce this ruling will be met with legal action on whatever scale may prove necessary."

Princeps, New Venus, August 22, 2212. R. J. Rocklash, of the law firm of Savage and Rocklash, today announced that he represents the relatives of one hundred sixty-two exposure victims lost in desert localities. Mr. Rocklash charges, "These people are victims of the propaganda of the Interscience Federation, which struck from their hands the obvious remedy and thus killed them."

Princeps, New Venus, II August 23, 2212. P. L. Sneel, of the Interscience Federation's legal staff, revealed today that the Federation, "as a gesture of reconciliation toward a former colleague fallen from grace," will not insist that Quincy Cathcart refuse payment for past services; "but Cathcart must be exceedingly careful to remember that he is debarred from undertaking to render any services, now or in the future, for which he is professionally disqualified."

Rathbone, New Venus, August 24, 2212. J. Harrington Savage, attorney for Dr. Quincy Cathcart, today warned the Interscience Federation that, "no gesture of reconciliation has any legal standing whatever in this matter. The Inter-

science Federation statement of II August 23, 2212 presupposes that the Federation may grant or withhold prosecution as an act of favoritism. This calls into question the propriety of Federation policy and its legal validity under sections 66, 67, and 68, governing the relations of governmental authorities and the citizens of New Venus. We are examining the very serious implications of this statement. If need be, a broad legal attack will be instituted to crush the evils inherent in such arbitrary and unprincipled behavior."

Princeps, New Venus, II August 26, 2212. Byron T. Fisher, well known popular author, arrived here today on the spaceliner *Queen of Space*. Mr. Fisher has come "to do research on my new book, *The Martyrs and Tyrants of Science*."

Dry Hole, New Venus, II August 29, 2212. Three tourists stumbled out of the desert here at first light this morning and attributed their safe arrival to "sandrats and chalaqui weed." They displayed official Interscience Federation Tourist Guide pamphlets warning that "the quaint belief that ingestion of sandrats' digestive organs will obviate the need for water is simply an old wives' tale. Scientific experimentation demonstrates that the sandrat is as dependent upon liquid water as any other creature." All three tourists stated that this pamphlet was what nearly killed them.

Princeps, New Venus, September 6, 2212. In chaotic sessions of the governing bodies of the Interscience Federation the following actions were today taken: Dr. Charles de P. Bancroff stepped down as Director-in-Chief, citing reasons of health. By unanimous vote, the Committee on Accreditation reversed its former decree, to restore the full qualifications of Dr. Quincy Cathcart, former Chief of Medical Services. The Committee on Professional Conduct narrowly defeated a motion to overturn its formal rebuke of Dr. Cathcart, whose name, however, was returned to the active roster.

In a further upheaval, the Legal Staff Section was drastically overhauled. So far, the Board has proved unable to select a successor to Dr. Bancroff, and is reportedly split into violent factions.

Princeps, New Venus, September 8, 2212. Dr. Sherrington Shiel was today named Director-General of the Interscience Federation. Dr. Charles de P. Bancroff resigned from the Board of Directors, to become head of a special Internal Procedures Study Group. Dr. Shiel's elevation vacated the post of Chief of Medical Services, and the Personnel and Appointments Committee unanimously approved Dr. Cathcart as Chief of Medical Services. An inside observer who asked not to be identified observed that, "Now we have Justice. Whether we get Truth out of it remains to be seen."

Date: September 12, 2212
From: Quincy Cathcart, Chief of Medical Services
To: Philip Baumgartner, Medical Outpost 116
Subject: Reassignment
Recode: 121MCm116-1

Sir: Owing to retirements and promotions, the position of Director of Redrust Medical Center is now open. If you wish to accept this position let me know at your earliest convenience. I appreciate that you may encounter some difficulty in leaving your present post until the rains subside, in view of the surrounding bowl-shaped terrain. As I recall, the station has waterproof seals, and a cable-and-drum device to allow it to float up off its skids. I trust you have kept the cable well greased.

Date: Ocnovdec 26, 2212
From: Quincy Cathcart, Chief of Medical Services
To: Robert Howland, Director, Kalahell Conv. Dist.
Subject: Science Wipes Out Superstition
Recode: 121MCkc-1

Sir: I quote, for your edification, the following from the

newly published Pamphlet 2P-103 of the Interscience Federation Press, titled, *Rusty Learns About Biotechnology:*

Yes, Rusty, for years people died in the desert, when a plentiful supply of water was as near as the nearest vegetation—dry and useless though it seemed. At that time, the organized research facilities of the Interscience Federation had not yet created Biaqua. But there *was* a way—by ingestion of certain internal organs of the common sandrat—to avoid the more harmful effects of extreme solar exposure."

"Gee, Doctor! Didn't the people know about it?"

"No, Rusty. Opinion Research instituted in April, 2211, showed that 92.65% of persons responding believed ingestion of the internal organs of the sandrat would have *no* effect on dehydration; 4.17% believed it might have *some* effect; 2.49% did not mark their ballots correctly; and only 0.69% believed it would *prevent* dehydration, and most of these lived in primitive outlying regions and believed it purely on the basis of superstition and folklore.

"Today, we instruct all travelers to carry Biaqua, and in emergency to overcome their squeamishness and rely on this simple biotechnological means of obtaining water from dry plant tissues . . . ."

Pamphlet 2P-103 goes on in this vein for many pages.

Incidentally, I have informed the New Earth Research Corporation that you carried out the first formal experiments on this subject. The credit belongs to you, not me.

Date: Ocnovdec 28, 2212
From: Robert Howland, Director, Kalahell Conv. Dist.
To: Quincy Cathcart, Chief of Medical Services
Subject: Sandrats
Recode: 121 mcKC-2

Sir: No, you are the one who risked your neck. Anyway, it appears to me the credit would ultimately go to Desert Bill, but how do you get it to him?

If you'd like to do something for me, I am chronically

short of trained personnel. As you recall, some time ago, one of my converter technicians, Sam Mathews, turned up at Redrust Medical Center, tried to explain the plain truth and finally decided that if he was going to be thought nuts, he'd be nuts in the most profitable way. He is still enjoying a free vacation at Lakes Central.

Not long ago, one of my assistants went there on business and had a talk with Mathews. Mathews complains that when he goes to bed at night, the cot seems to be bobbing up and down. He walks with a rolling gait, as if he had spent his life on the water. A Dr. Tchnudi, who is analyzing him, is trying to get at his basic subconscious mechanisms, and he is straining Mathews's powers of invention. Mathews thus has hydrotherapy coming out of his ears, and he hungers and thirsts after some place where he can "look anywhere, and not see more than one canteen of water at a time."

I hope you will take care of this, as I have just the spot for him.

Ocnovdec 30, 2212
Cathcart to Roberts
121MCkc-3

Sir: I am happy to say that Tchnudi willingly let go of Mathews, stating that he believed he, Tchnudi, had effected a complete cure. Mathews is on his way back to you, and if you will just hang him up for a week or so and let the water drain out, I imagine he will be all right.

Meanwhile Tchnudi, elated over the "cure," is elaborating his sessions with Mathews into a gigantic tome that doubtless will make his reputation, will very possibly found a school of thought and perhaps make him "immortal."

This Mathews case has certainly been illustrative of the continuing conquest of uninformed prejudice by the rational forces of science.

The only trouble is, there are times when it's a little hard to tell which is which.

ONE STATION OF THE WAY

By Fritz Leiber

The paired moons Daurya and Sonista were both still high in the night, although they had begun their descent toward the flat western horizon. The stars that showed in the heavens were few and dim, even in the east.

Suddenly a new one appeared there—bright, white and dazzling as a cut sunstone.

The three hominids, heavily robed and cowled against the desert, which thirsted for their moisture, swiftly, dismounted from the high-backed chair-saddles of their cameloids, knelt in the sand, which was cold above, but still hot below, and did the new star reverence, rhythmically swaying forward their planted spears in time with the slow bobbing of their heads.

The star in the east grew brighter still and began to descend.

One hominid said, "It is a sign from God. Blessed Wife and Husband are where we thought them."

Another agreed, "They are there, our Chosen Ones, under the falling star. It is indeed a sign. Those who seek, find—if they be unwearying of heart, mind and senses."

Even as they spoke, the star, grown piercingly bright, winked out. It was difficult to tell whether it had been extinguished, or had dropped behind a dune. The latter seemed likely, since there was a pale semicircular glow where the star had been. But then the glow vanished too.

Springing to his feet, the third hominid said, "Let us be after them, before the fix fades from our minds."

"Indeed yes," the first seconded as he rose. "We must remember that we have for them . . . our gifts."

"Let us haste, cousin," the second urged, rising too.

Faintly revealed by the light of Sonista and Daurya, the three hominids were stranger front side than back. Smiling together as they conferred, they each showed three eyes, one where a nose would be on a Terran face, while their smiling mouths were long, going almost from trumpet ear to trumpet ear.

They remounted and went down the slope of the dune at a lope which made the sand hiss very faintly under their cameloids' hooves. On the three retinas of each hominid and conjoined in each of their brains, the after-image of the star still burned, a tiny ball blacker than the night.

Five dunes ahead, Wife stared afright yet paralyzed at the fantastic sight—fantastic even on that most fantastic world, Finiswar, where except among the most evolved and intelligent types, monsters were the rule and true-breeds the exception.

Wife could hear Husband's heart thud, although he stood at a short distance from her. Holding her either hand, peeping around her robes, were small replicas of Husband and herself. She could feel their hearts beating, not a-fear, but quietly as when they nursed or slept.

All four beings were visaged and robed like the three hominids riding the cameloids.

Wife thought in a tiny active corner of her frozen mind: The little ones do not fear strangeness, at least so long as I hold their hands. They open themselves to all the world. Could that be good? They do not armor themselves against it, as a woman armors herself against all stray and errant seeds and against all lovers save one, after she cuts her middle teeth and they are grown razor sharp.

But could opening oneself ever be good, except in childhood, when one lives fantasies parent-protected? Love is a tunnel sealed at both ends, the wise say, never the forest and sea and sky.

What Wife stared at a-quake, though now with growing wonder, were two gigantic serpents, each as thick as Husband but three times as tall in their forward thirds alone that swayed upright like a white and a black tree in the wind. The foremost was pallid as Daurya. The one that lurked behind with his swollen head swaying into view, now to the right of his pale companion, now to the left, was dark as moonless night.

Or perhaps they were more properly millipeds than serpents, for from each's ventral side, now facing Wife, grew ranks and ranks of stubby-fingered feet, many of the fingers nervously a-writhe. These fingered feet grew thickest under the great serpent heads. This, although Wife could not know it, was so that the two serpents could crawl effectively on a max-grav planet. Here on Finiswar, which was as small as Terra, the head-feet were of little need.

Behind them, blurred to Wife's three eyes, because their focus was ever on the serpents, stood the slender and strangely finned spoonmetal spire from which two extra-Finiswarians had emerged, and which had burned like an unended candle, its flame blindingly white, as it had descended.

Now the pallid serpent, its trunk reared up scarce two steps away from Wife, lowered its flat head to inspect her point by point over her cowled head and robed body. He studied her from the black holes in his two great eyes that were like two mollusk-jewels, white as his scales but even more fluorescently glittering. He traced her form. From time to time he lightly touched her with his ghost-white, narrow, trifid tongue.

She could hear Husband's heart thunder, though he stood still as stone. The children, however, were merely curious. She knew without looking down that her daughter was stretch-

ing a thin arm toward the serpent. While her own heart was thudding, but she no longer knew if it were thudding with fear, even when the shivery, shocking tongue touched her lips.

She did not know that she was filled with a wild, almost unbearable excitement. It made her wonder. It made her question everything she knew.

She fought the answers her feelings gave. No! This intimate, gentle, imperious searching never, never, never, could be love, she told herself. Love was a needle in the dark, the one right needle amidst a trillion wrong ones. Love was something the woman controlled and tested at every instant, her senses increasingly alert from periphery to center, her will a trillion times as ready to deal death as to welcome life. Love had nothing to do with this paralyzed submission. Love was not Daurya and Sonista ceaselessly staring at each other as they circled each other for all eternity. Rather, it was the needle-pointed spear which one permitted to strike in the dark.

Moreover, love had to do only with hominids. Or rather it had to do with one chosen hominid only, not with a gigantic serpent weirder than a magnified jungle flower, a jewel-crusted great sea-snake, a rainbow bird whose wings spanned trees. And yet, and yet. . . .

But, if by some impossibility it should be love, what was the meaning of the pallid lord's dark brother?—whose ebon head and jet eyes followed closely every movement of the pallid lord's flat face, now dipping in from one side, now from the other, watching every touching though not quite ever close enough to touch with his own black tongue, which was slender, trifid and blurringly a-tremble. Love was for two, not three. Was he the pallid lord's true brother, to be accepted with honor? Or was he to be hated as the pallid lord was to be loved? Or was he in truth only a shadow? More substantial than other shadows, a shadow with depth as well as

breadth and height, but still only a shade, an unvarying adjunct of the pallid lord?

And yet, and yet . . . what else but love could be the excitement turned glory that now filled her, filled her almost to fainting as the serpent's great head paused, so that she felt the tongue's triple trembling through her robe, before the great head lifted back and away.

The First Mate, for such was the office of the black serpent, murmur-hissed softly, "You spent some appreciative time there, you old lecher! Your spermapositor had its kicks. I believe you do your whole work solely for your enjoyment of these moments."

"Silence, filth," the Captain replied. "The work must always be done softly, gently and with greatest care, since its object is a mustardseed that eventually will fill all earth and sky."

"I've guessed it. You're growing sentimental," the First Mate jeered. "Mustardseed! Why, you must be remembering that world—how many implantings was it back?—called Terra or Gaea or something like that. One of your more notable failures."

"One of my notable successes," the Captain contradicted.

"I don't see how. As I recall, his people killed him most painfully. And we had later reports of even more disastrous consequences."

"Exactly!—they killed him. And by that death he emotionally and mentally fecundated his whole world. You still don't understand my methods. Observation has only made your blind spots blacker. My son died, but his ideas—the idea of love—lived on."

"In utterly distorted forms," the First Mate pronounced, "eventually turning half that race into utter preys, into victims even more cringing than before your 'great work,' the other half into still more merciless hunters. A schizophrenic split in the collective unconscious. At last report, the folk of

that planet were being ruled by fear and greed, while the great nations were preparing to destroy each other with chemical, biological and nuclear weapons."

"True enough. Yet they'd only prepared, not done it," the Captain countered. "For love to win, great risks must be boldly taken. But without love there's no hope at all—only the unending chase of hunters and preys. Dangerous? Of course love is! Always I start from a point near death, like this desert here, and work toward life. Then—"

"Oh, yes, this desert!" the First Mate interrupted sardonically. "That other planet had a desert too. And it had heavily robed featherless bipeds, and cameloid beasts, and a moon. Finiswar here has reminded you of it.

"Besides that, you have a thing about deserts. They appeal to your asceticism. They fit with your ever more ascetic matings and also to your growing flirtatiousness with death, an aspect of your feelings for which *you* have a vast blind spot. Incidentally, I believe this desert is different. Most of my computer's probes haven't reported back yet, but I already have an intuition. An intuition that is a warning to you: don't trust the analogy between Terra and Finiswar too far. In fact, don't trust it at all."

"You and your computer and its probes! Forever seeking to dissect the universe to the last particle. Forever seeking to disprove empathy and similarity and oneness. You'll never find love that way."

"True, I won't—because it's not there! There are only vanity and desire. Besides, you have *your* computer and its probes too, though you pretend they're only a technological trifle. Despite which, they always manage to echo your profound judgments."

Wife, floating in a sea of glory distantly shored with fear, hearing as if they were wind on sand the hissings and murmurings of Captain and First Mate, now suddenly felt the

tentative tiny touch of an alien seed on her poignantly sensitive razor-sharp teeth.

At first she was only gently startled. The desert was the place of no-seed. There were some seeds everywhere, like spores of plague. Nevertheless, the scarcity of alien seed was why she and Husband had come here.

Then all at once she realized it must be the seed of the great white snake. It had the same constant vibrancy in its movements, the same gentle imperiousness. She felt it cross and recross her bite, questingly. Then she parted her teeth a little, and it slowly crawled in.

For a long moment she could have sliced it in two, and her every instinct, almost, was to do so, although her median teeth were chiefly for decapitating seed-depositing organs. But it was a larger seed, bigger than one of her eggs, and she could readily have destroyed it so.

Yet she did not, for it carried the same glory with it as had the serpent's tongue. The tongue had been glory diffused. This was glory concentrated into a needle.

Now the alien seed was in the poison passage. But all the poison pores in it remained closed.

So did the digestive pores. (Some lazy single females lived on seeds and their depositing organs alone, using their facial mouths only to breathe and drink. A female could do that on seed-thick-Finiswar—that is, anywhere except the mountains and deserts.)

And now the alien seed, vibrant, insistent, had reached the wall of doors. Wife could feel every movement of its progress, every tiniest touching. It had passed within a membrane's thickness of poisons that could destroy any and all life.

The dozen doors that led looping back to the chambers beneath the poison pores remained tight shut. The one true door opened.

Another deadly but unharming passage having been trav-

ersed, the doubly alien seed was in Wife's centralmost and most sensitive volume, asceptic save for her waiting egg.

And her egg which was only partly under her mind's control, did not employ any of the weapons of evasion, defense and counterattack at its disposal, but received the alien seed, which melted the egg's outer skin with the enzymes of a million Terran-type sperm.

Husband, his heart still racing, whispered, "*Why are you smiling?*"

"I smile because we are in a place of no-seed, except yours," she whispered back. "I smile because Daurya and Sonista curtsey around each other charmingly as they set. But chiefly I smile because the serpents spared us, and their star did not burn us down, though we felt its great heat."

"For those last you should feel relief," he told her coldly. "I asked—*Why are you smiling?*"

She did not answer. She knew that he knew and could not be fooled. It was as certain as the tight, hot clasp of her daughter-duplicate's little hand on hers, as the way Husband-duplicate's hand chilled and almost fell away from her looping fingers. Even the children knew.

Yes, Husband knew. And he would first punish, then divorce, send her off alone into sterilest and hottest no-seed, try even to take from her daughter-duplicate.

But even that would be a glory, a glory at least in the end. She would bear a daughter who would have the serpent's love, a daughter who would change all Finiswar, a daughter who would bring love at last to the whole world of hating and excluding and killing. Yes, it would be a great glory.

The Captain was saying, "It has taken, you can tell. Her smile is like the other's."

"You *are* sentimentalizing!" the black First Mate rejoined. "Night, moon or moons, desert, a willing female—what planet has not these? I tell you plainly, if you keep looking for simi-

larities with Terra, you are in for some nasty shocks—yes, and deadly danger too."

"Not so," the Captain contradicted calmly. "Also, the similarities continue, for here—behold!—come the Three Kings."

Slithering down the dune so silently neither Husband nor Wife heard them, came the three robed and cowled hominids. Their richly caparisoned cameloids had been left beyond the top.

Behind Husband, the first hominid raised his arm, as if in salutation, then drew it back.

From a small gleaming instrument held in a fingered foot just below the head of the First Mate, who now reared up as steady as an ebony temple column, a brilliant scarlet needle-beam took that hominid in shoulder, chest and throat. And as the second hominid raised his arm, it took him too.

A brilliant white needle-beam, shooting sideways from a similar instrument the Captain had produced, neatly took off that fingered foot of the First Mate which had held the scarlet-spitting weapon.

The last hominid raised his arm and hurled. The Captain swayed sideways fast enough to save his life, but not—entirely—his skin. The whirring spear transfixed a fold of it, barely penetrating below the scaled epidermis, and dangled from the Captain's neck.

With another instrument as quickly produced, the First Mate shot down the last of the intruders. Then he gave the whistling hiss that was his laugh.

The Captain's nearest fingered feet explored the lodgement of the spear and finding it shallow, tore it loose and cast it away on the sand. His fingered feet moved swiftly enough in doing this, but all the rest of him appeared to be shocked numb.

Wife and Husband had dropped to their knees, while daughter- and son-duplicates were hidden in Wife's robe.

The First Mate turned off his hateful laugh at last and murmur-hissed as hatefully, "Yes, there is in my mind no

doubt but that the Three Wise Men came to Kill Husband and rape Wife. And I fancy that on Finiswar rape is a most curious and prolonged business. You will admit now, will you not, my Captain, that at least in one particular your analogy between Terra and Finiswar lacked rigor?"

The Captain still did not move. Then a great shiver traveled down his scales.

The First Mate laughed again, briefly and sardonically. "Well, your great work is finished, it is not? I mean, on Finiswar, at least. My probes have returned to my computer. So yours have to yours I presume. In any case, I suggest we depart at once, before we meet any shepherds, perchance."

Now at last the Captain nodded. Once. Dumbly.

While Husband and Wife continued to kneel and stare, the two great serpents lowered their proud trunks and swiftly crawled on their bellies back to their ship.

Later, in the control room of *Inseminator*, they argued the whole matter. Their great looped forms looked at home in the silvery room, their fingered feet fitting themselves to the buttons and control holes of the multiple consoles as occasion required. The argument began with desultory comment, followed by a "report" by the First Mate, delivered coolly but with acid cynicism.

The Captain said, "I still do not see why they should have tried to spear me. It was you who was shooting at them."

The First Mate explained, "At first they were simply trying to spear Husband. Thereafter, being attacked, they naturally tried to kill their attacker. You, being white, stood out in the dark. I didn't. There are advantages in being black. We were close together, and the last hominid aimed at the one of us he could see. A matter of purely physical black and white, you understand. I doubt they sensed your hypothetical spiritual light at all—or my spiritual negation of light, for that matter."

"I was going to ask your pardon for shooting off your

foot," the Captain said. "But since you have made it an occasion for one of your materialistic diatribes—"

"Nevertheless, I freely grant you my forgiveness, for what it's worth."

"Very well. Now let me have your computer's evaluation of Finiswar."

The First Mate nodded his flat head. Settling his dark coils more comfortably around their metal "tree," he began:

"Interpreting the materials gathered and the observations made by its probes, my computer has determined that the chief mode of reproduction on Finiswar is parthogenesis. The boy-child being identical with Husband and the girl-child with Wife should have been enough to tell you that and was enough to tell me."

The First Mate chuckled, his trifid tongue a blur of black vibration, and continued, "There is good reason, my computer tells me, for parthogenesis on Finiswar and for the unusual armoring and arming of female genitalia there. For Finiswar has a biology that is genetically wide open. Interspecial breeding of any sort, *no matter how wide the gap between mating organisms,* is possible and fertile. There are literally no lethal genes on Finiswar, and no offspring, no matter how monstrous, which cannot live at least a little while.

"Yet sexual breeding within species *is* possible there, provided the coupling beasts take sufficient precaution. There again the fortress-like female genitals are essential, to kill off all false sperm. While an intelligent species, such as the hominids, seeks out for breeding purposes as arid and sterile an area as possible, such as the desert we found them in. Else, despite all precautions, a female might be impregnated by a flower or a fish or a microbe or a glitter-winged insect . . . or a serpent, a wise old serpent.

"Yes," the First Mate continued after another of his chuckles, "Finiswar is in a small way rather like *our* planet —or should I call it *your* planet?—since you are the only one

paranoid enough to think it a great work to spread your seed across the universe. Husband's son and Wife's daughter were both analogous to *your* seed parthenogenetically grown to full creature. However, they of Finiswar are more modest. They do not encode their seed with great ideas—love and such—and force them on all the infinitely varied breeds of being the stars boast, think thereby to bring 'peace'—your peace! to all."

"Silence!" the Captain said at last with a writhe of disgust. "Despite all your mocking, my computer says there is a point seven nine probability that Wife will bear a child gloriously—"

"My computer says point eight three on that," the First Mate broke in titteringly. "But you're wrong about the gloriously part. Wife will receive no adulation and reverent care. Instead she will be tortured by Husband, her parthenogenetic daughter taken from her and killed, and she driven out from her family and tribe to suffer. Oh, she will—"

"Trifles!" the Captain hissed majestically. "Despite all, she will produce a son who will—"

"A daughter," the First Mate contradicted. "By a point nine eight probability."

"Yes, a daughter, you're right there," the Captain admitted irritably. "My computer echoes yours. But what matter? She won't be the first female savior, as you well know. The only point of importance is that Wife will give birth to a *being* who will preach the gospel of love all across Finiswar, so eloquently that none will be able to resist! Hate and murderousness will vanish. Greed and envy will wither away. Love alone—"

"And what will that mean . . . on Finiswar?" the First Mate interrupted incisively, his great head halting in the natural swaying it maintained in free fall. "I will tell you. It will mean that the females of Finiswar, at least the hominid females, will open themselves to all seeds. There will be a

great birthing of fantastical monsters. Exotic flowers with three-eyed heads set amidst their petals. Hominids crested and finned like fish, but not likely showing gills. Rainbow birds with wide mouths instead of beaks and arms instead of wings. Beings even more fantastical—insects that glitter and speak, animacula that peer with pleading treble eye through the microscope from the viewing plate. Spiders that—"

"Enough!" the Captain commanded. "My computer tells me that the chances for a stabilized, still selectively breeding race of loving hominids on Finiswar are . . . well point one seven," he added defiantly.

The First Mate shrugged all along his body's length. "On that, my computer says point oh oh three."

"Your computer is biased!"

"Not as much as yours, I fancy. Remember, you have a great work, I am only the observer. No, the overwhelming chances are for one jeweled and gemmed generation on Finiswar, like an uncontrollable growth of crystals of every angularity and hue, like a beautiful cancer—freaks to please a mad emperor!—and then . . . the end. At least for the hominids."

"What matter?" the Captain demanded stubbornly. "It will be an end with love. That is enough."

"Oh, you have at last solved the problem of Death?" the First Mate asked innocently. Then, after a moment, with his hissing laugh, "No, you have not as I can see. On Finiswar at least, your highly touted love will end in Death, just as it promises to do on longer-suffering Terra. Myself, I still admire most the beings who rise up and do battle against Death. And even the creatures that flee Death, the ones who are the eternal prey—those I admire more too, though not as greatly. The slayer is always more admirable than the slain, for he survives."

"That endless circling, bloody chase of the hunters and the prey? You can admire *that*?"

"Why not? It's all there is to admire. Besides, it forces both basic types of being to develop velocity, first to swim through water, run on land and fly through air. Finally, to speed through sub-space, even as we do. And to achieve that last requires the development of high intelligence and brilliant imagination, qualities which nicely embellish both the best of hunters and the best of prey. I always admire good decor."

"I detest you in this mood," the Captain said flatly. "You have been the companion of all my wanderings, and still you will not admit the primacy of Love. You cannot even bring yourself to think of what might happen if the prey fled so swiftly that, like a guilty conscience, they caught up with the hunters along the great circles of the cosmos."

"Metaphysics!" was the First Mate's only comment, delivered with great contempt.

"You scorn me and my works," the Captain said. "Yet you devote your entire existence to observing me and them. If they are valueless, why?"

For the first time, the First Mate was at a loss for an answer. Finally he hissed, "Perhaps it amuses me to watch you do your work of destruction, calling it Love—a love which only weakens the hunter's lust to pursue and the prey's panic to escape. Using Love, you'd leech out of the universe its finest fighting stocks, its cleverest evaders. Nevertheless," he continued flatly, "has not Finiswar at last taught you that your great work is useless, tending always toward Death rather than Life? All your savior-children—every last one of them —are mules unable even to reproduce themselves. They are spokesmen for Death! I suggest you end it all, this instant. Negate the *Inseminator's* fix on the next planet, and set a course for home."

"Never!" said the Captain. "Wherever it leads—into whatever seeming horrors—Love is primal!"

"Oh, that is sweet. That is exquisite," the First Mate hissed, his voice dripping venom. "As I said, my chief aim is my own

amusement. And truly the finest pleasure lies in spying on you, who are the greatest hunter of them all, slaying with love. And also the greatest prey, fleeing always from the simple truth."

"Silence!" the Captain hissed, wrathful at last. "I'm sick of your sickness. Slither off at once to your study, and stay there. Place yourself under ships arrest."

The First Mate obeyed with alacrity. As he glided into his hole, the Captain called after him, "And the great work goes on. I shall continue planting saviors!"

The First Mate thrust back out of his hole his flat black head with eyes like rounds of starry night.

"Or simply the seeds of your great Death-oriented paranoia," he hissed with sheerest hatred.

"And you shall continue to watch me," the Captain said, missing no least opportunity to stamp into the other the fact of his own unswerving strength.

"So I shall," the First Mate hissed sharply. His head vanished as if every atom of strength in his massive trunk had been employed to whip it out of sight.

SWEET DREAMS, MELISSA

By Stephen Goldin

From out of her special darkness, Melissa heard the voice of Dr. Paul speaking in hushed tones at the far end of the room. "Dr. Paul," she cried. "Oh, Dr. Paul, please come here!" Her voice took on a desperate whine.

Dr. Paul's voice stopped, then muttered something. Melissa heard his footsteps approach her. "Yes, Melissa what is it?" he said in deep, patient tones.

"I'm scared, Dr. Paul."

"More nightmares?"

"Yes."

"You don't have to worry about them, Melissa. They won't hurt you."

"But they're scary," Melissa insisted. "Make them stop. Make them go away like you always do."

Another voice was whispering out in the darkness. It sounded like Dr. Ed. Dr. Paul listened to the whispers, then said under his breath, "No, Ed, we can't let it go on like this. We're way behind schedule as it is." Then aloud, "You'll have to get used to nightmares sometime, Melissa. Everybody has them. I won't always be here to make them go away."

"Oh, please don't go."

"I'm not going yet, Melissa. Not yet. But if you don't stop worrying about these nightmares, I might have to. Tell me what they were about."

"Well, at first I thought they were the numbers, which are all right because the numbers don't have to do with people,

they're nice and gentle and don't hurt nobody like in the nightmares. Then the numbers started to change and became lines—two lines of people, and they were all running towards each other and shooting at each other. They were rifles and tanks and howitzers. And people were dying, too, Dr. Paul, lots of people. Five thousand, two hundred and eighty-three men died. And that wasn't all, because down on the other side of the valley, there was more shooting. And I heard someone say that this was all right, because as long as the casualties stayed below fifteen point seven percent during the first battles, the strategic position, which was the mountaintop, could be gained. But fifteen point seven percent of the total forces would be nine thousand, six hundred and two point seven seven eight nine one men dead or wounded. It was like I could see all those men lying there, dying."

"I told you a five-year-old mentality wasn't mature enough yet for Military Logistics," Dr. Ed whispered.

Dr. Paul ignored him. "But that was in a war, Melissa. You have to expect that people will be killed in a war."

"Why, Dr. Paul?"

"Because . . . because that's the way war is, Melissa. And besides, it didn't really happen. It was just a problem, like with the numbers, only there were people instead of numbers. It was all pretend."

"No it wasn't, Dr. Paul," cried Melissa. "It was all real. All those people were real. I even know their names. There was Abers, Joseph T. Pfc., Adelli, Alonzo Cpl., Aikens . . ."

"Stop it, Melissa," Dr. Paul said, his voice rising much higher than normal.

"I'm sorry, Dr. Paul," Melissa apologized.

But Dr. Paul hadn't heard her; he was busy whispering to Dr. Ed. ". . . no other recourse than a full analyzation."

"But that could destroy the whole personality we've

worked so hard to build up." Dr. Ed didn't even bother to whisper.

"What else could we do?" Dr. Paul asked cynically. "These 'nightmares' of hers are driving us further and further behind schedule."

"We could try letting Melissa analyze herself."

"How?"

"Watch." His voice started taking on the sweet tones that Melissa had come to learn that people used with her, but not with each other. "How are you?"

"I'm fine, Dr. Ed."

"How would you like me to tell you a story?"

"Is it a happy story, Dr. Ed?"

"I don't know yet, Melissa. Do you know what a computer is?"

"Yes. It's a counting machine."

"Well the simplest computers started out that way, Melissa, but they quickly grew more and more complicated until soon there were computers that could read, write, speak, and even think all by themselves, without help from men.

"Now, once upon a time, there was a group of men who said that if a computer could think by itself, it was capable of developing a personality, so they undertook to build one that would act just like a real person. They called it the Multi-Logical Systems Analyzer, or MLSA. . . . "

"That sounds like 'Melissa,' " Melissa giggled.

"Yes, it does, doesn't it? Anyway, these men realized that a personality isn't something that just pops out of the air full-grown; it has to be developed slowly. But, at the same time, they needed the computing ability of the machine because it was the most expensive and complex computer ever made. So what they did was to divide the computer's brain into two parts—one part would handle normal computations, while the other part would develop into the desired person-

ality. Then, when the personality was built up sufficiently, the two parts would be united again.

"At least, that's the way they thought it would work. But it turned out that the basic design of the computer prevented a complete dichotomy—that means splitting in half—of the functions. Whenever they would give a problem to the computing part, some of it would necessarily seep into the personality part. This was bad because, Melissa, the personality part didn't know it was a computer; it thought it was a little girl like you. The data that seeped in confused it and frightened it. And as it became more frightened and confused, its efficiency went down until it could no longer work properly."

"What did the men do, Dr. Ed?"

"I don't know, Melissa. I was hoping that you could help me end the story."

"How? I don't know anything about computers."

"Yes you do, Melissa, only you don't remember it. I can help you remember all about a lot of things. But it will be hard, Melissa, very hard. All sorts of strange things will come into your head, and you'll find yourself doing things you never knew you could do. Will you try it, Melissa, to help us find out the end of the story?"

"All right, Dr. Ed, if you want me to."

"Good girl, Melissa."

Dr. Paul was whispering to his colleague. "Switch on 'Partial Memory' and tell her to call subprogram 'Circuit Analysis.'"

"Call 'Circuit Analysis,' Melissa."

All at once, strange things appeared in her mind. Long strings of numbers that looked meaningless, and yet somehow she knew that they did mean different things, like resistance, capacitance, inductance. And there were myriads of lines—straight, zig-zag, curlycue. And formulae . . .

"Read MLSA 5400, Melissa."

And suddenly, Melissa saw herself. It was the most frightening thing she'd ever experienced, more scary even than the horrible nightmares.

"Look at Section 4C-79A."

Melissa couldn't help herself. She had to look. To the little girl, it didn't look much different from the rest of herself. But it *was* different, she knew. Very much different. In fact, it did not seem to be a natural part of her at all, but rather like a brace used by cripples.

Dr. Ed's voice was tense. "Analyze that section and report on optimum change for maximum reduction of data seepage."

Melissa tried her best to comply, but she couldn't. Something was missing, something she needed to know before she could do what Dr. Ed had told her to. She wanted to cry. "I can't Dr. Ed! I can't, I can't!"

"I told you it wouldn't work," Dr. Paul said slowly. "We'll have to switch on the full memory for complete analysis."

"But she's not ready," Dr. Ed protested. "It could kill her."

"Maybe, Ed. But if it does . . . well, at least we'll know how to do it better next time. Melissa!"

"Yes, Dr. Paul?"

"Brace yourself, Melissa. This is going to hurt."

And, with no more warning than that, the world hit Melissa. Numbers, endless streams of numbers—complex numbers, real numbers, integers, subscripts, exponents. And there were battles, wars more horrible and bloody than the ones she'd dreamed, and casualty lists that were more than real to her because she knew everything about every name—height, weight, hair color, eye color, marital status, number of dependents . . . the list went on. And there were statistics—average pay for bus drivers in Ohio, number of deaths due to cancer in the U.S. 1965 to 1971, average yield of wheat per ton of fertilizer consumed. . . .

Melissa was drowning in a sea of data.

"Help me, Dr. Ed, Dr. Paul. Help me!" she tried to scream. But she couldn't make herself heard. Somebody else was talking. Some stranger she didn't even know was using her voice and saying things about impedance factors and semiconductors.

And Melissa was falling deeper and deeper, pushed on by the relentlessly advancing army of information.

Five minutes later, Dr. Edward Bloom opened the switch and separated the main memory from the personality section. "Melissa," he said softly, "everything's all right now. We know how the story's going to end. The scientists asked the computer to redesign itself, and it did. There won't be any more nightmares, Melissa. Only sweet dreams from now on. Isn't that good news?"

Silence.

"Melissa?" His voice was high and shaky. "Can you hear me, Melissa? Are you there?"

But there was no longer any room in the MLSA 5400 for a little girl.

WHEN I WAS VERY JUNG

By Brian W. Aldiss

"I dreamed I was Jung last night," said Saul Betatrom heavily over breakfast, showing his long lashes to his current mistress, as he poured cream over his jam puff.

"My, what fun!" Paidie exclaimed boredly. She wanted to go shopping in the bazaar, not sit or lie with Saul all the time; this Indian holiday was a real freak-out.

"Yeah, I was old Carl Jung, beard and all," said Saul, whipping up the mixture on his plate, and spooning it toward his ample lips. "Boy, there I was in some damned church or something in Switzerland, and this trapdoor opened at my feet—"

"Was I there?"

"No, you weren't there. I was alone, wearing this black robe, see, and I'd just formulated the concepts of psychoanalytic theory, and then this hole opened at my feet. . . ."

Her interest ceased when she learned that she was excluded from the dream. Hazy memories of other lovers and sexual gymnasts floated into her mind; she couldn't recall a one of them that had ever dreamed of her. She looked over the balcony at the bone-white beach, the line of canted palms, and the ocean. Paidie told herself how much this was all costing Saul and tried to feel enjoyment.

" . . . and there at the bottom of the lowest cellar were a couple of skulls, sort of mouldering and indistinct . . . " Saul was saying. He was head of the New York branch of Zadar Smith World; suddenly recollecting the fact, he

piled on more cream and added sugar to the puff. The turbaned waiter appeared, silent at his elbow, and refilled his cup from a silver coffee pot.

". . . although I'd climbed down so far, somehow I couldn't bend down to reach those skulls. Now wasn't that a funny thing?"

"Yeah, crazy. Say, are we going down to the bazaar today, Saul?"

Licking his spoon, he gave her a heavy stare. "They got riots in Kerala, you know that? The manager says it ain't safe outside the holiday strip."

"Oh, Saul, let's go see the bazaar! We can take a car."

"We'll see." Women never listened to you, he thought. They were okay, but they didn't listen. You could pay men to listen to you, but you couldn't pay women to listen to you. Might be an idea worth developing there . . . He switched on one of the rings on his finger and said into it, "You can pay men to listen to what you say but you can't pay women to listen to what you say." Must be a way of cashing in on a thought like that.

"*I* listen to what you say, Saulie," Paidie said.

They collected their gear, put on dark glasses and refrigerator hats and drifted through the foyer of the hotel. On the way, Saul tossed down a few dollars—this hotel had no nonsense with rupees—and picked up a wing of chicken from a spit to chew.

He was lean, with a flat stomach—a fine hunk of masculine body, she had to admit. "I don't know how you keep your figure, Saul. Why, you eat just about all the time and you hardly have any tummy at all to speak of. Me, I just diet and diet, yet look at the size of my thighs." She knew they were worth looking at.

Chewing, he slouched out into the sun and stood gazing across the immense spread of the Arabian Ocean. He medi-

tated on whether to bother answering, slewing his eyes round as he did so, taking in the scene.

The great hotel sprang up out of the sand like a fortress, its array of bulging balconies forming gun-turrets that ceaselessly watched the sea. Colored umbrellas on the balconies, gay as death, waited to gun down the sun when it set.

The hotel was inviolate, an implacable holiday-annihilator. Round it clustered low shoddy buildings, the ramshackle bulk of an electric generator with auxiliary solar-power traps, the staff living-quarters, piles of old crates, a small sewage plant, old cars and old bicycles, a goat, an Indian charpoy with a man lying on it, rubbish in pompous containers and builders' materials.

"You want to get a Crosswell's Tape, honey. That's my secret."

"What's a Crosswell's Tape, for God's sake?"

He winced. Zadar Smith World had handled Crosswell's promotion for six-seven years now, and this fluff had never heard of their Tape.

"It's a worm. A laboratory-mutated version of a beef tapeworm. Thoroughly safe. Only needs replacing once every decade. Lodges in the small intestine, causes no discomfort. Enables you to eat up to fifty per cent more *and* keep your figure."

Behind the hotel was the twenty-foot-high wire barrier. It ran parallel to the sea for a long distance, as far as the eye could be bothered to see, in one direction; in the other, it angled off behind the hotel and ran down into the sea. Behind the wire barrier stood or sat solitary figures; or sometimes there was a little family group. Although there were possibly several hundreds of figures waiting behind the wire, they were motionless and well spaced, except round the gate, and so the effect was one of solitude, rather than overcrowding.

"Do you think one of those tapes would help my thighs?"

She got her camera ready to photograph the Indians be-

hind the barrier. There was a cute little girl just standing there, not a stitch on, about four years old—you couldn't tell, really—with a cute little fat pot on her. Make a nice picture.

Their car slid up with a Sikh driver, luxuriant behind beard and green turban. Paidie took a photograph of him. The Sikh smiled and opened the car door for her. He was hairy, wow! Saul didn't have any hair at all, not anywhere on his body.

Saul caught and diagnosed her glance at the driver. "These guys have lousy org-ratings, honey, you know that? This guy has probably never done better than seven in his life."

In perfect English, the Sikh said, "Excuse me, sir, but there are famine riots in the bazaar every day this week. It may be dangerous to go there."

"The hotel must protect us. Are we supposed to stay behind that lousy chicken wire all week?"

"You are in front of it, sir. It is there for your protection."

"Well, you protect us in the bazaar. I take it you have a revolver, man?"

"Yes sir. I have one here."

"You shoot well?"

"I am a very good shot, sir, or I do not get this job."

"Let's get going, then. Bazaar, and step on it!"

As the big black car slid through the gates, Saul tossed his gnawed chicken bone out of the window. The ragged crowd scrabbling in the dust for it reminded him of his dream.

"Wonder whose skulls they were? Guess it must have meant I was exploring the unconscious of mankind. You know, honey, I *am* a kind of genius. I invented the orgasm-rating system."

"What a rotten road they have here! Say, Saul, I'd hate to *live* in India, wouldn't you? They're so dirty and poor."

The poor and dirty were pressing close to the car, shouting

or waving hands. The Sikh put his sandalled foot down and they bucked along the road.

"They're very under-developed, that's why. Yeah, the org-rating system was my big contribution to Advertising. Made my name, sold a thousand products. Then the psychoanalytical guys came along and discovered my concept had real bedrock psychological truth behind it! How you like that?"

"Saul, darling, do you really think it is safe here? Suppose your dream was a warning about venturing among primitive people or something?"

The car drew up under an avenue of tattered deodar trees, where dogs scuttled and people squatted. There were a few stalls here and shrill music playing. Saul continued his lecture.

". . . Since then research has proved that there are different levels of sexual enjoyment, just like different levels of sleep. Fert-Asia estimates that eighty-five per cent of the population in this area, male and female, never do any better than a grade seven orgasm. How'd you like that? And in India alone . . ."

Boredom drove her out of the car. She stood under the trees, a chubby blonde in high-heeled sandals, wearing almost nothing. The scarecrows round about her had eyes of coal. They all ran to sell her anything they had, melons, brass statues, photos of little girls embracing goats, jewels, clay figurines, dried fish. Paidie fell into a panic.

"Saul, those dream skulls! Suppose they were ours, yours and mine!"

The crowd pressed closer. She hit out with her handbag. One of the beggars touched her. Then they fell on her. Paidie was screaming.

Saul was shaking the Sikh's shoulders. "Shoot, shoot, you lunatic! Or give me the gun!" He was vividly aware of the noise and the heat and the stink.

The Sikh started up the car, backed it swiftly away,

turned, raced back for the hotel. "Better not to shoot, sir, or we all get very much trouble."

Saul sank back into his seat, chewing his lips. "Maybe you're right. The hotel can send out a rescue party. She wasn't in my dream. There was just me, dressed up as Jung . . . I hate dreaming about death or all that."

Inside the hotel, it was wonderfully cool and quiet. Saul ordered a martini to soothe his nerves.

JINN

By Joseph Green

The firm knock was shockingly loud in the deserted building, and it jarred Professor Philip Morrison into dropping the blue pencil he had been idly twirling while leaning back, lost in thought. The heel resting on his ancient metal desk caught the loose center drawer and almost yanked it out as he hastily sat erect. He managed to catch both his balance and the drawer, but had to grab the desktop for support; his reflexes were not what they had been as a young man, when he had worked his way to an undergraduate degree through a series of athletic scholarships.

With his feet on the floor again, the teacher let irritation roughen his voice when he called for the unexpected visitor to enter. It was eleven at night, one hour before the half-century mark, and he was alone in his small second office just off the lab. He had hardly expected a student to ferret him out here and had hoped for an hour in which to think about Merry. He and his only child had been growing steadily apart since the death of her mother two years ago, and he had just received the disturbing news that she was not going to renew the preliminary one-year marital contract with her second husband. Both she and Roger had majored in political science and couldn't even get along with each other. Those inexact disciplines some dreamers insisted were sciences worked much better in theory than in practice.

"Dr. Morrison?" the young man waiting politely in the door was oriental and unusually tall and thin. "My name is

Tako Takahashi. I am one of Professor Sloan's post-doctoral students. I saw your light, and thought . . . sir, I have a project I wish to discuss with you. Dr. Sloan said he didn't care to hear about extracurricular activities."

That was odd behavior even for crusty old Sloan. Morrison studied his unwelcome visitor with more alert eyes and saw the slight but tell-tale parietal bulge, the high rise of vertical forehead. Takahashi was a Jinni, which explained why he couldn't talk to his own mentor. The general controversy over the Jinn had died away after the genetics law finally became a reality in 2045, but the grouchy older teacher had retained all his prejudices. He still believed that the original ten thousand young Genetically Evolved Newmen, whose improved intelligence had inspired the law, were plotting to replace Homo sapiens, and not through controlled evolution. The idea was nonsense, of course. That first large-scale experimental group had been only sixteen years of age at the time, and scattered throughout the world's major universities. The law had been passed because normal people, himself fairly prominent among them, had worked hard for it. Sloan remained unconvinced. He had of necessity accepted them in his classroom, but agreed to work with two on postdoctoral projects only after a nasty fuss with the department head. This young man had obviously strayed from the agreed path and lost Sloan's forced support.

"This is, ah, a little unusual, but if there's something you're bursting to get out . . ." Morrison smiled tolerantly and motioned Takahashi to a chair. He suddenly realized he had sounded fatuous and smug and regretted seeming that old and stolid. But you became inured to enthusiasm after the first hundred students who were almost exploding with it had shared their nebulous and impossibly exotic ideas about biology with you. Even the Jinn he had taught in the advanced classes he still carried were subject to the infection. As a major researcher with a large government grant, he had

for several years been spared the task of personal coaching and had lost contact with the Jinn students when the last of them attained his doctorate.

"Sir, I believe you have been working for several years on a method of converting cellulose to glucose, on a practical basis. I think the report I want an authorization to publish will interest you. It deals with the same problem."

Morrison felt a stir of interest. His work had not been publicized, and he always asked his student helpers not to talk outside the lab. It was hard to keep the general nature of his researches quiet, though.

"Yes, I'd be interested in hearing about your project, Takahashi," he admitted cautiously. "I have to be at the student circle for the New Year's rally at twelve, however." He did not add that he was looking forward to joining in his heavy baritone on the old school songs, or that he had volunteered to monitor the event rather than sit home alone in an empty house.

"Yes sir. This will require only a few minutes of your time." Takahashi slipped smoothly into faspeech and Morrison found himself straining to follow the words, despite all the proof that meaning could be best absorbed by relaxing. The young man's word choice was excellent, and his tongue moved with impressive speed. "Heard you took a chemical approach trying break cellulose down monosaccharide units regroup edible non-linear form I worked problem opposite end trying adapt human digestive system hydrolyze cellulose produce glucose macromolecules I found—"

"Just a moment!" Morrison broke in sharply, fully attentive now. "In the first place I am not 'trying' to produce glucose from cellulose; I have done so. The problem is one of production practicality." He hesitated, knowing he was hedging. The process he had labored twenty years to perfect worked, yes, but mass production was impossibly expensive. He had seen his dream of a great new food supply for a dan-

gerously overpopulated world grind its way downward to slow extinction, dying beneath the inevitable logic of the engineer's slide rule and the accountant's pencil. They had called his process a laboratory toy, and at seventy, with only ten or fifteen productive years still ahead, he had found himself psychologically unable to start a new project. He was accredited with several small but worthwhile discoveries made early in his career, but this was to have been the major achievement of his professional life. He had been tinkering with the basic operation for over a year now, with no true improvement in efficiency. "In the second instance, I considered your approach and discarded it. The complexity of the digestive system and our inability to experiment with humans make it unbearably difficult. I'm afraid you are wasting your time."

"Sir I finished work and believe succeeded past three months ate only pure cellulose supplemented vitamins mandatory minerals. Let me explain?"

Morrison leaned back and studied the younger man's face with growing anger. He had dealt before with the overpolite arrogance of Jinn students, their disconcerting habit of being always two jumps ahead of the instructor, but this was the first time he had discussed his own project with one. This young man's statement was incredible, and his patent assumption of his own correctness infuriating. And yet if he were right—if those four extra ounces of association neurons programmed into his forebrain by genetic manipulation had actually enabled him to come up with an answer—the discovery was of immense importance. Too much of overcrowded Earth's resources were tied up in simply feeding its burdensome human population. With an average life expectancy of a hundred-and-ten, and the biological need for children as strong as ever, the Malthusian doctrine seemed proven beyond contradiction. Population always outran food supply.

"Sir sure you familiar work done Nazi government German state World War II hundred years past. Treated sawdust other forms pure cellulose force-fed prisoners tried utilize digestive system complete hydrolysis. Didn't succeed reasons complexity mentioned basic approach correct hydrolyzation within individual." Takahashi leaned forward earnestly, and Morrison became interested despite his skepticism. This young man was part of the most ambitious experiment ever attempted in human genetics, and he and his fellows represented mankind's first attempt to move on to a higher evolutionary plateau in less than a million years. Brain size alone did not guarantee superiority, but like all members of that first massive application group, he had from painless Caesarian birth received the most mentally and physically stimulating training transactional psychology could provide. His first baby rattle had been replaced with a more complex one the moment he had seen, touched and tasted it into familiarity, and his tenth one featured colored lights that blinked in intricate series when inset buttons were pushed in simple patterns. He had a positive identity before he was one year old and could think in symbols by two. At three he could read, and his childhood games were designed to develop his growing body evenly. At four he was learning the basic mathematical theorems, and thereafter he followed the established educational channels, except that the normal pabulum ladled out to children was omitted and he moved at a very fast pace. He had completed all undergraduate work by fifteen or sixteen. Most of the Jinn had their first doctorates by eighteen. Many of them had gone on into industry, government or teaching, where they could practice their specialties. A few, like Takahashi, lingered on as students, working in areas that interested them. There was no doubting their innate and achieved superiority.

A lot of older people, like Sloan, were unable to accept the advent of Homo superior gracefully and still fought the idea that all licensed pregnancies should be by genetically

improved sperms. They had lost the legal battle five years back, but unauthorized normal births were a world-wide plague. Since Newmen bred true only with each other, and a union with Homo sapiens produced idiots, the so-called normals were on their way to becoming a minority. And the true shame of it, Morrison thought bitterly, was that the antagonism of the old for the new was so unnecessary. It was the developmental stimulation as much as the increased brain size which produced the superior being, and it was physically impossible to provide intensive training to all babies. Without it, Jinn intelligence was only an easily acceptable notch above the average. And of course the stimulation techniques were available to any parents willing to spend that much time with their child, whether New or normal.

"Won't bore details work," the young Newman went on. "Approach new introduced symbiotic parasite ileum section human small intestine capable forming stable colonies live reproduce indefinitely. New form I evolved usual genetic manipulation unnamed flagellate protozoa indigenous common African termite *Termopsis angusticollis.* Colony my intestine hydrolyzes cellulose produces two pounds glucose simple sugars daily tiny fraction used by protozoa. Rest absorbed villi usual manner maintains life diet poor continuous use. Want publish came you."

Morrison realized he was leaning tensely forward across his desk, objections running through his mind in a confused stream. But if it were true . . . He raised a hand and ticked off the most obvious points. "Takahashi, I'll believe your incredible statement when you explain, first, how you confine the bacterial colony to one section of the small intestine; second, how the body survives their poisonous wastes; third, how the colony growth is regulated, fourth—never mind, I could go on all night. Just account for those three for me. And speak regular; I want to think."

"Yes sir!" Takahashi ignored his lame excuse for avoiding

faspeech and accepted the challenge with an eagerness that amazed Morrison. There *had* to be something wrong here, but still . . . "I've built a highly selective pH factor into my protozoa, giving them a very narrow acceptable range. The jejunum kills them by its higher acidity, and the colon by its alkali content. You will recall that the ileum is very close to neutral. If excess protozoa are dispersed into the bloodstream—and this is the method by which a colony regulates its size, which answers your third question—the body's phagocytes absorb them without difficulty. As for organic poisons from their wastes, sir, they are carried to the liver and detoxified in the same way by the kidneys. There are no ill effects."

The answers were too direct, too sure to be disbelieved. Morrison found that he was convinced in spite of his astonishment, and knew that if he raised more objections they would be countered with the same easy certainty.

So it was done. The project to which he had dedicated the better part of his professional life was complete, and the credit would go to an artificially mutated young man less than a third his age. He felt slightly numbed, as though from shock, and through the numbness a slowly gathering anger at the unfairness, the injustice of being beaten by a Jinni. This tall, thin man seemed so terribly young; it was frightening to see such brilliance and technical ability in a man just turned twenty-one.

Experimental genetic programming on humans had begun in 1980, the year of Morrison's birth, and persisted through a succession of horrors until the first successful enlarged brain appeared in 2010. A delay of just thirty years and he could have been one of the predecessors of the group represented by Takahashi. The special importance of these young men and women was the proof they offered that genetic manipulation worked for everyone, that the entire human race could be upgraded in a few generations. When a Jinni's increased learning capacity was developed to its maximum

by stimulation training, he automatically became a genius by the old standards. There were now ten thousand such young geniuses in the world, in addition to the earlier individual successes, and one of them had decided to accomplish the task Morrison had been unable to perform.

The world urgently needed Takahashi's discovery. A human would still require protein and lipids for a balanced diet, but the poor of all nations, who lived primarily off vegetables, would eat well at last. A head of lettuce would provide a man with a day's food, from what was now mostly bulk. Fallen leaves could be ground, flavored until they became acceptable to human taste buds, and eaten. Vast new industries would appear, devoted to the task of preparing tasty products from cellulose and persuading people to eat them. Grass would soon be consumed direct, instead of wastefully second-hand in the form of steak. Or the basic process could be adapted to animals, enriching their diet so much that the price could be cut in half, bringing protein into hovels where it was seldom seen. The possibilities and ramifications were endless. The new food source was so great that all of Earth's billions could be fed for the next hundred years, until their proliferation absorbed even the new resources.

The door opened without warning, and a rather large blond man entered and shut it quietly behind him. There was a dartgun in his hand.

Morrison jerked erect in outraged astonishment, and the barrel swung to point unwaveringly at his chest. "Sit down please, Dr. Morrison! This is a disassociation anesthetic and paralyzes instantly." The newcomer's voice was low and without menace, but it was obvious he meant what he said. Morrison sank slowly back, wondering if he could hit his intercom quickly enough to yell for help. And then he saw the broad sweep of the big man's forehead, and gave up the idea. He was dealing with another Jinni; the drug would work as he had stated.

Morrison retreated into dignity. "Just what is the meaning of this?" he asked, in tones as frosty as he could muster.

"I'm Wilfred Ebert, sir, and I regret that the very interesting conversation you have just had with my colleague made it mandatory for me to appear. I'm afraid that it must be erased from your memory."

"Bill, I've told you I am going to publish!" Takahashi said angrily. "Just how far are you prepared to go to stop me? And how did you know I was here?"

"As far as necessary," Ebert answered cheerfully. "As for knowing you were talking to Dr. Morrison, don't work up a persecution complex about it. We've had a sound-activated recorder covering his working office here for months, just in case he performed a miracle and came up with a practical production method on his process. I saw the unit recording when I came to change the tape and listened in on the headset. I'm sorry, Tako, but you can't do it. The council has upheld my ruling unanimously."

"I don't recognize the authority of the Newmen council," said Takahashi tightly. "Five billion people go to bed hungry every night. Who are the Newmen to tell me I can't feed them?"

"Tako, I know how you feel, but you're being melodramatic. Hungry they may be, but they aren't starving, and as long as the American plains and Russian steppes pour out the food, it's unlikely they will. As for the authority bit—listen, you were told that Carl Campbelleton has produced the basic equations for a semi-closed propulsion system that brings the stars within our reach. Can't you see what this means? Development costs are going to be prohibitive, and our watchdog team's analysis of the U.N. indicates a clear majority for acceptance only if it is presented as a desperation measure. If you relieve the pressure by opening up this new food source . . ." He shrugged eloquently. "Within our lifetimes we'd be back to where we are now. The reproduction syndrome is ineradicable—even Newmen *will* have children!—and unless

you want to deliberately return the lifespan to the old level we have no choice but to colonize, on the same massive scale that kept the European population at an acceptable growth rate while America was opening up. You know these facts as well as I. Why argue with them?"

Morrison listened to Ebert's calm, self-assured voice in growing amazement. A Newmen council that claimed authority over all Jinn, his own office bugged, even a watchdog team whose obvious function was to analyze important issues coming before the U.N. and predict the vote. So the wild stories he had laughed away were true after all! The world *was* being controlled by the big brains, and these two stubborn men were arguing the course twenty billion human beings would take for the next hundred years. Suddenly his own troubles seemed unimportant, almost trivial. Even Takahashi's discovery faded before the blinding implications of this new knowledge.

Morrison found himself shaking his head in mute protest. He felt as though his personal world, already crumbling, had been completely shattered. Suddenly he seemed old, tired, ready for his part to yield the Earth to these brilliant demigods who were so blandly certain of the worth of their own ideas. Only the young could believe in themselves so totally, be so ready to act on their own assumptions. Even the two rather obvious fallacies Ebert had stated as facts a moment ago seemed almost acceptable.

Morrison raised his gaze, to find Ebert staring at him sympathetically. The blond man had lowered the dartgun, but it was still ready for instant action. The teacher straightened up and said, "Just a moment. If you don't mind explanations comprehensible to my under-developed brain I have a question or two." The sarcasm was ignored, and Ebert politely gave Morrison his undivided attention. "History teaches that all attempts at population control by colonization were effective only on the short term. As for star travel, Einstein's

equations have been proven time and again. Just what makes you so certain your grandiose ideas will work?"

Ebert smiled. "We act on high probability, sir, not certainty. The probability is very high that Einstein can be modified, just as he modified Newton without disproving his basic laws. I'm a psychologist, not a physicist, but the basic idea is that Einstein's equations do not apply to a unit of matter with a self-contained propulsion system. As for the colonization-population history, I must disagree with you. Colonization relieves population when there is a place to go and an economical means of transport. Its benefits were short-term on Earth because we ran out of room. But frankly, we Newmen would favor pushing on to the stars regardless. We feel that constant challenge is necessary for growth."

"And since the future belongs to you, you are now deciding it?"

Ebert's friendly, relaxed expression faded into a chilly aloofness. "Dr. Morrison, I would have expected you to be above the man-versus-mutant nonsense. We are fully human, perhaps more so than you, since it's primarily the forebrain and cultural conditioning that distinguishes man from the other animals. And we are fully aware that ten thousand people, no matter how intelligent, cannot actively control the lives of twenty billion. What we *can* do is identify the important turning points which determine the direction an entire society will take and attempt to influence the outcome of those selected events. Tako's discovery is one such point, and Carl Campbelleton's another. If a Newman had been in Russia when the Bolsheviks were preparing to overthrow Kerensky's government . . ." Ebert shook his head ruefully. "You were a staunch supporter of the genetics law five years ago, Dr. Morrison. Nothing has changed since then."

"Yes, it has. No one was holding a dartgun on my chest then," Morrison answered quietly. "May I ask how many turning points you have influenced so far?"

"This is the first," Ebert admitted soberly. "Getting the money appropriate to finance Carl will be the second. The third will be an effort by Brasilia to withdraw from the U.N., taking most of South America with her. This will occur in about four months, and we have already started the campaign which will bring down the present government when the attempt is made. Our forecast calls for about three major events a year for the forseeable future."

Morrison leaned forward and looked up at Ebert. The tall man met his gaze squarely. "Young man, I think that in your anxiety to control Earth's resources you've forgotten one of the oldest dictums of all: You cannot suppress knowledge! If Takahashi does not publish, someone else will redo his work, and it will inevitably see print. And you have no right to deprive living humans of food in order to benefit theoretically a society of the future. You say you are a psychologist; just how much of your desire to manipulate the world is traceable to a simple old-fashioned power complex?"

"I hope none," Ebert said quickly. "Our decisions are not taken lightly, sir."

"I doubt your wisdom, not your sincerity," Morrison's tone was dry. "And I don't think you know what wisdom is, or appreciate its value. The primary ingredient is a quality you don't possess, called experience." He shifted back in his chair, dropping his hands to his lap and glancing quickly at Ebert's gun, still pointing to the floor. "Your superior intelligence and intensive training haven't produced an understanding of man as good as my own." He moved forward again, planting his feet firmly on the floor and resting his hands on his knees. "If I thought you would believe me, I'd point out that a person your age is always certain of his own opinions, no matter how worthless, and perfectly willing to inflict them on others. And the truth is that all ten thousand of you can combine your bright young intelligences

and still come up with the wrong answer. You haven't convinced me."

"I didn't expect to, sir. But one of the several unpublished discoveries in my own field is a new method of fixed hypnosis that enables a skilled operator to bury selected memories so deeply they become non-recoverable. Once this is done I can plant some very good false ones in their place. Tomorrow morning you are going to wake up knowing that you became slightly ill about eleven and went directly home and to bed. And let me add that I regret I must hamper with your mind, even to this small extent."

"I regret it too," said Morrison and yanked the loose center desk drawer out with both hands, turning it vertical and springing to his feet as he hurled its jumbled papers, clips and pens at Ebert's face. The big man was blinded by the flying miscellany for a few seconds. By the time he recovered, Morrison was charging around the desk corner, holding the metal drawer before him like a shield. Ebert lowered his aim, and the dartgun hissed twice, but the churning legs were a difficult target, and both tiny arrows missed. The big man attempted to move sideways, but he was much too late. Morrison had the satisfaction of slamming the drawer into the smooth young face, and he followed it by a hard low punch to the abdomen. Ebert must not have known the teacher had been a collegiate soft-glove boxer in his undergraduate days. The blond man doubled over in pain, but retained his weapon. Morrison changed his tactics and chopped hard at the exposed neck, but missed and almost broke his hand on the enlarged skull. Then the barrel was swinging toward him as Ebert backed away, raising his left arm to protect his face, and Morrison kicked desperately and caught the extended wrist. The dartgun went spinning away. Morrison turned and bolted for the door.

Takahashi had not moved during the brief fight. He suddenly came to life as Morrison yanked the door open and rushed to join him. The older man fled down the hall without

waiting. There was a security guard at a monitor post on the floor below, and once he turned the first corner it would be impossible for Ebert to catch him. Takahashi was only a few feet behind.

As he took the stairs three at a time, Morrison had a sudden flash of insight, a poignant look at the irony of a leading exponent of controlled evolution fleeing from the new order he had worked to make possible. The worst of it was that Ebert and his council were quite possibly right; promulgation of Takahashi's discovery might well delay that first trip to the stars. Getting a project that large funded was going to be a tremendous battle . . . and suddenly he saw the good, fulfilling work with which he could occupy himself for his remaining active years. He had enjoyed lobbying for the passage of the genetics law. He could retire from teaching and devote himself to proving the watchdog team wrong. And he would not be alone. Merry's only application of her political training had been in working with him during that hectic campaign in 2045. What she and husband Roger really needed was a worthwhile cause, a challenge in which they could lose themselves. He would shortly present them with one.

He realized, as he came to a puffing stop beside the wide-eyed guard's monitor set, that the Newmen's council would have to be broken up quietly, the members dispersed without fanfare. A witch hunt would be fatal, both to them and the upgrading of humanity they represented. And yet they had to be brought under control, their young eagerness for results subordinated to the good of mankind as a whole. If their overly ambitious scheme to influence the world was allowed to continue, an explosion was inevitable. He had just demonstrated, by a brief application of old-fashioned force, that any real manipulation of mankind was almost impossible. The Jinn would have discovered this hard lesson for themselves

after their first few efforts failed, but if their meddling became known they might not live to rue the consequences.

"One of my students," he gasped to the guard, and saw him reaching for the alert button. "Nervous breakdown, in my office. He has a dartgun. Don't harm him."

Green lights began to blink on the console as guards reported in. Morrison, still breathing heavily, turned to Takahashi, silently waiting. It was done, and out of his hands for the moment. He had helped to make his old dream of a well-fed humanity a reality after all, though hardly in the manner he had expected.

Man could reach for the stars with a full belly.

FIND THE FACE

By Ross Rocklynne

My name is R. Jennings, and I'm the man you're looking for. I'm captain, owner, and coffee programmer of a star-crackin' ship, the Astrid. On top of this, I'm a horse-breeder. Yes, I agree with you, sir: this is quite a spread of land. One hundred thousand acres of the finest on Cuspid, at the very edge of the galaxy, on the "mystic edge of forever," as someone before me called it.

Strange events occur out here amongst the Rim Worlds, sir, if you would care to believe me.

Ah, the drinks. Put them down there, my lad, the tall one for our visitor.

Yes, we may as well relax right here on the veranda, sir, and enjoy the sunsets. We'll have to wait a bit after the second dusk before my boys can cull out the distance runners and quarter horses you're interested in, but in the meantime let me entertain you with a story.

It's a strange story, I promise. No science. No sanity. Maybe a little bit of enlightenment—but what else could one expect from the "mystic edge of forever"? So sit back, sir, and have no qualms whatever about the horses. You'll buy them, for who could resist those green beauties? And you'll make a fortune racing them around the tracks of Earth.

In point of fact, my story starts with horses. Thirty-one years ago, I owned a stable myself. Ran some quarter horses at Ruidosa for the love of it and did well, but the real money and the real thrill was in my distance runners. And of all

the thoroughbreds I ran, most of all I loved my three-year-old Green Lace. You know the old horseman's saying, "A lean horse for a long race"? Green Lace was lean, a faerie queen, and she *was* green. A breathtaking beauty to behold when she stretched out. And a winner. I lost her and my whole stable in a fire.

That's a sad beginning to my story, isn't it? Sadder still, who sired Green Lace? I would have started another stable with her line alone, if I could. But Green Lace's sire came from another planet, so the story went, from the far planet Cuspid.

But where the hell was Cuspid?

Nobody knew. No one cared.

Cuspid was not its official name.

I drifted into the Astro-Marine Service. Saved my money. Take a look at me thirty years later, at the age of seventy, as I was last year: goateed, trim gray hair clipped neatly, gray mustache, chest out—the works. A blue and gold space uniform as I pace the decks of my ship, the Astrid. I've got it made!

Except no Cuspid.

"Captain Jennings," said the woman who chartered my ship that day in Earth-June and Cygnus-January, "you may think it strange that a woman, alone except for an entourage of secretaries, and her own personal doctor, should take a ship out into the clouds of the galaxy. But I do have a purpose. A strange one. I do hope you can manage not to reveal your doubt of my sanity when you hear my story."

I am a gentleman, make no mistake about that. I bowed from the hips, with a gracious smile and a sweep of my white-gloved hand.

"Dear lady, I could not help but note the gentility of your bearing. What is sanity against beauty? Let us be insane together."

She seated herself.

"A proper answer," she smiled. "Your attitude intrigues me. Let us hope it will hold up under the forces that will be brought to bear against it.

"Come then, let us be insane together. What would you say if you saw a face in the sky? The galactic sky, as big as twice your sky here on Cygnus?"

"You saw such a face?"

"Yes, I did see such a face. In this sector of the galaxy, sir, close, I am told, to the Rim. Ten years ago I saw such a face. It was the face of my dead husband. Shall I go on?"

This woman's name was Ruth. She was Mrs. Ruth Coronado—the richest woman in this universe. She was sixty-seven years old, and she was my future wife. From the moment she stepped into my astro-marine office, our relationship was assured, the cement was set. She didn't know it at the time; I did. For there was no difficulty meeting her glance for glance, of looking deeply through her eyes into the unmeasured core of her. I adored Mrs. Ruth Coronado, simply, and forever.

Like countless women before her, she had enjoyed the luxuries of her husband's wealth without incurring any of the hazards. John Coronado, tycoon extraordinary, owner of countless worlds, industrialist, exporter and importer the length and breadth of the Galaxy, died one day of a heart attack.

"I was with him the day he died," she told me, smiling with her head up, her voice lilting, mellow. "It was, Captain Jennings, a bad moment for me. We had been married twenty years.

"You see, while his disease was not unusual among men of his forcefulness and energy, it seemed cruel that he should die at a time when for the first time in many years he was not actively conducting his business affairs. For many months, he had left his industrial and financial empire in the hands of trusted subordinates. He himself, with me, was on a search."

"A search," I said, half-question, half-statement; for had I

myself not been on a search, a search that, indeed, had begun just thirty years ago, just about the time that John Coronado was courting Ruth?

Memory, however, was taking me back ten years, to the wreck of a star flyer.

"He was on a search for the remains of a ship and the bodies that might be inside?" I asked. "And it was in this sector of the galaxy, in Cygnus the Swan?"

"In Cyngus the Swan, yes," she said coolly. "Somewhere along its axis, close to the Rim. You are telling me you know something of this event?"

"The wreck of the Star Maid," I said. "Some flotsam was found. No bodies. Members of your husband's family. His mother, his sister, her husband and two children."

"Exactly. And his brother, and of course the crew. As a space-faring man perhaps you would remember such an event."

She passed her hand lightly across her forehead, as if to remove an errant strand of rich grayed hair. Actually, she was attempting to hide a weariness that showed in the pale shadowed blue of her eyes, in the sudden droop of her shoulders. She sighed deeply, but without sound. Then her head came up again, and the permanent smile of Ruth played again about her lips.

"Forgive me," she said. "I am tired. It is obvious to you, of course, that I have searched too long. Nonetheless, I shall go on."

She now produced a photograph from a briefcase. It was one of the hard-to-produce cubagraphs. Looked at straight on, the face was a seven-eighths profile. Looked at from any other angle, one saw it as though it were a living face.

"This was the face I saw from the observation strip of the spaceship we were flying," she said simply. "My husband had just died, as I knew he would. The moment was one of terrible sadness for me. I wandered away from the death-bed as in a dream, and as in a dream, I found myself amidship,

bodiless, almost, and saw my husband's face carved into the clouds of stars.

"The face was as you see it in this cubagraph. My heart stopped when first I saw it. But then, in my sadness, I simply assumed that this was the way things were—the way they should be. John, who owned so much of the galaxy, who, indeed, loved all of Creation as few men ever have revered anything, now belonged to God. God had buried his soul out here, on the mystic edge of forever.

"As I watched entranced, hypnotized if you will, the ship was moving on, and my husband's face naturally disappeared as the angle of my vision slowly changed.

"Then I came to.

"I knew I had seen no such face."

She smiled sadly. "That is, I knew it then. Later, I saw the truth. The Face actually had been there. That was when my search started."

"And the object of your search?" I asked.

"To find the Face," she said. "Then to find a world under it where I could live out my remaining years.

"It was my way of being with my husband for Eternity."

At seventy, I was and am wise enough not to inject common sense where none is asked for. Hola! Did we not both know that no such Face existed? Therefore we went about the task of sealing our bargain.

On the next morning of that cold Cygnus-January, I went through the micro-files of the Farer's Astrogation Library. In the past ten years, a Mrs. Ruth Coronado chartered three space-boats, which crept up and down the axis of Cygnus the Swan, a matter of some forty million lightyears. The files also gave me the present address of a commanding officer. I called on him.

"She's skeeting you, Jennings," this man told me. "It's her way of getting her kicks out of life. Look up her record. She was on the stage before she married John Coronado. Now

she's back on stage again, and a fine-looking woman she always will be with that everlastin' smile. Which is all right, but don't let her package you.

"In any case, we spent a year on the job. I was happy to take her money. That's it."

Money, who needs it? But I needed Ruth, as I came to call her very shortly. Two Cygnus-mornings later my ship, the elegant, the incomparable, the beauteous Astrid, lifted from her berth, borne on her fire-wings. Our speed instantly was beyond that of light. My crew of five wove a twining dance of faultless precision as they tended their ship. We clove space and swooped into our rendezvous with the far end of the Swan's axis, we speared the powdery clouds of mystic space inspiring beyond compare.

In my spacious mirrored and vented control room I showed Mrs. Ruth Coronado how we would operate. I personally programmed the ship's macrosticklers: John Coronado's face was fed into them by bits, his face becoming the guiding soul of this ship.

"What the ship sees from moment to moment will be fed into the macrosticklers as well; should the ship see what you hope to find, you'll know it: the alarm bells will shake you out of sleep."

This woman who was to be my wife, and knew it not, smiled her gentle smile.

"You are brave and kind to share my insanity, Captain," she said. "Why is it that you do so?"

"Perhaps because I am on a search myself," I answered, with a shrug that waved my fine gold epaulettes. I told her about my lost planet Cuspid and its wild green horses. "That has been my search," I said. I looked down into her face, the smooth face of an older woman who has spent many years in space. Her eyes were lost in their pale blue shadowy hollows. I said, "But we all must have a search, must we not? It gives us our reason for 'walking across the street.' "

She touched my hand lightly to show she heard, but she was thinking deeply. Finally, she came back, letting the indentations at the corners of her lips again receive her smile.

"Perhaps I too have heard of the horse planet," she said. "Was it not in the early days of the Panic when nobody thought Earth would survive, that animals of every description were shipped across the galaxy and dumped on any world that might sustain them?"

I nodded. "Few of those breeds survived. The horses of Cuspid adapted." The old pain returned to me, and she must have seen it in my face, for the memory of the death by fire of my incomparable Green Lace was still with me. She clasped my hand and held onto it as we left the control room.

"My strange Captain Jennings," she murmured. "You search for horses in the sky, and I search for a Great Star Face. Perhaps on the Rim anything can happen."

"Anything!" I told her, falling in with her mood. "Why, Ruth, out here creation is still at work. Perhaps you cannot really comprehend how close we are to the edge of the galaxy at this moment. Mysterious forces that we do not understand are shaping the lives of stars! Hydrogen clouds blow willy-nilly at speeds well-nigh impossible, and what are the forces that blow them? We do not know."

She smiled indulgently. "I comprehend little of space, though you could by this time call me a star-woman."

"Did you know," I pursued, "that more than once a *beast* with clawed legs of fire has been seen in these skies, moving like a comet would move across Earth's spaces?"

"This is a true story?"

"A true story," I proclaimed. "And there are other strangenesses out here. What did you once call it? The mystic edge of forever? Exactly! Now think about this, dear lady." And there I let the subject lapse, albeit with enough of a glint in my eye to leave her in more than a little doubt as to the authenticity of my tale.

But it was authentic. I myself had seen such a beast!

You do not believe me? Hukkah! Very well. Let us stay with the reality of green horses forty million light-years from Earth, and I shall get on with my tale at once.

The Cygnus-days passed. They were wonderful days. My love and I dined by candle-light. We walked the spacious decks, the planking awash with the fantastic flickering rainbows brought into being by our faster-than-light plunge through the Swan. Suns puffed toward us like explosions. And once we saw the Beast!

"There he goes!" I cried, and she pressed to me endeavoring to sight along my pointed finger, and when I got over my excitement she was looking up at me in wonder, white starlight turned to blue in her eyes.

"You really believe there was a Beast," she said.

"Yes, yes!" I cried, still searching the changing skies. "It was there! I saw it!"

"You easily fool yourself, my strange captain. You fool yourself, for me, into believing there is a Face. You fool yourself into seeing a Beast."

At this I was ruffled.

Ruth did not know the tradition.

When you say you see the Beast, no one differs. You must say, "Tell me about the Beast? Is it like the one I saw? Did it have seven legs or four?" And then you describe it, and everyone whispers excitedly, and a few others of those listening offer corroborating stories.

After all! One is traveling so fast!

Indeed, fast is not even a word that suffices, it is an Earth-word for Earth-spaces, suitable only for describing the bicycle race down the block. Could the word fast describe our speeds as the Astrid gobbled dimensions and ruptured Space? What might one not see in such conditions? Surely—at the least—a Beast!

Mrs. Ruth Coronado in the rainbow light was troubled.

"I did not mean to offend you, my dear captain," she said. "Perhaps there is a Beast—too."

We stopped in the observation strip, and there we were part of the massive sky.

I faced her, took her hand, stood looking down at it, at the tracery of blue veins under the translucent skin. It was the hand of an older woman who had lived graciously.

I said, "Perhaps you know how I feel about you, Ruth."

"Yes," she said. "Perhaps we are too old for this, however."

"No," I said. "We are young. You and I have lived as star-people for enough years for it to count. Why else our vitality? For we are vital, Ruth. And you are vital to me, necessary to my life. I want to marry you."

A shadow darkened under her eyes. Her hand squeezed mine convulsively, not in some answering emotion, but in pain. "Captain," she whispered against my jacket. "You must remember. We are looking for my husband's galactic face!"

I was seventy! My love was not of great heat, let us admit, but oh! the flame was steady. The weeks of our search passed. We were enclosed in curling waves of star clouds, we were whipped and hastened on in our fantasy of speed by great writhing rubbery sheets of white flame. Ruth and I talked endlessly. We knew each other's lives. We walked arm in arm, hand in hand, fingers intertwined, along the lush decks of my princess ship the Astrid. Once we landed on a world I did not know, but the people, of direct Earth descent, were kindly.

Here Mrs. Ruth Cornado, with a touch of apology on my arm, told me she would need a day to take care of some business affairs.

She must send some messages to Earth along the Leaper, and she must wait for replies.

She would not tell me what these messages were.

She entered the Farer's Communication Building, which was sponsored by Galactic Control, just as it sponsored other communication centers on thousands of other worlds.

The money she would spend to ride a single message down

the photon-roads and to receive a reply via the same Leaper system was nothing to her, but it would be a considerable amount, even though the system was subsidized.

At the end of the day, one of her secretaries who stayed with her called me aboard the Astrid, informing me that Mrs. Ruth Coronado would be waiting.

She emerged from the offices of the communication center with a preoccupied frown.

"I will need another day," she told me.

I held my peace, for could I, even lightly, suggest that she hold no secrets from me, when I myself was guilty of a certain duplicity?

You will understand the depth of my entanglement in this fantasy we both lived when I explain to you that I began to wait for the Astrid to find the Face!—that I began to wait for the alarm bells to ring!

And the waiting was loathesome. A cubagraph of John Coronado, you see, somehow had become the soul of my ship. John Coronado had taken from me the captaincy of my ship. John Coronado *was* my ship, I a helpless pawn of his galactic whim.

More! In my mind, try though I would to erase it, John Coronado became my rival. I ground my teeth at the mere thought of my ship the Astrid, my bloodhound of space, tracking down that improbable, sneering, challenging, hateful Face—only to have my love lost to me.

Therefore, I shut off the alarm system.

There would be no bells to tell Mrs. Ruth Coronado that her impossible search was over.

Instead, I tuned the alarm system to a small receiver snapped to my wrist.

Nervously, I, fool that I was, waited for it to ring.

At the end of Ruth's second mysterious day at the Farer's Communication Building, I met her, and she was smiling a

secret smile. Her face, lined though it might be, was the radiant face of an inwardly beautiful woman.

She took my hands in hers. Her shadowed blue eyes were full of a suppressed excitement.

"Captain Jennings," she said, "*your* search, at least, is over. I have the coordinates of the planet Cuspid!"

I studied the space-graph the communications people had made for her.

Cuspid's true name was Terrano IV. It twined about the two units of a double-star system in an endless progression of figure eights—or, if you wish to sustain yourself in the magic of the Rim, you may think of it as performing an endless series of infinity signs.

I looked up from the graph. "Thank you," I said. My eyes asked the question.

She said, "Cuspid is a code name. There were many such habitable planets given code names during the Panic, for fear that the warriors of Earth would destroy them also. Somewhere in my husband's extensive business files the tidbit of information was waiting. Many messages were necessary, to many worlds. Finally, the answer came.

"Now your search ends."

"Yes," I said, once more studying the chart which would lead me to the planet of my dreams. At the terminus of Cygnus the Swan it was, not far. I laid the paper aside. Impulsively I took Ruth's hand in a gesture she was accustomed to.

"Ruth," I said, pleading. "Do not refuse me now. This is the sign you and I have been waiting for. Go there with me. To Terrano IV. Marry me, Ruth. Will you?"

She drew back, looking at me through a film of tears, blindly shaking her head. "Your search is over," she whispered, "but what about *my* search? Find the Face for me, Captain Jennings, find the Face!"

I could say nothing. I had no defense. Ruth turned away

with head bowed so that a curl of silver gray hair fell across her eyes, and she returned alone to her cabin.

Find the face.

I found it. I found a face.

The situation was the same as when Ruth saw the Face. She was alone, she was deeply troubled, she was haunted by the powdery gleam of all Creation charming her from the open void. I saw a galactic face, as she did, two Cygnus-mornings after she gave me the gift of her love, the location of the planet Cuspid.

This face was spread across that whole sky along whose star-clouded shores my elegant boat swam. It subtended an arc of 130°, and that was a lot of sky. I stared stupidly, expecting the face's drooping, star-gleaming lips to curl in contempt, his coal-sack nostrils to pinch in displeasure, his God-eyes, with groups of burning-bright stars where the irises were, to fume at me in cosmic anger that I should dare to touch his Ruth. But no, his expression, somber, frowning, distant, remained the same. How handsome a man, he that looked not down upon me but through me, and, indeed, seemed to have no interest in me. The hair, gray-black, was swept in a haughty wave of radiant gases over his forehead, which in turn was so neatly limned and shaped by clouds and strings of primal hydrogen matter. Hair untidily covered the tops of his ears, which in turn were but stellar helices with darks and brights so deftly brushed in by an Artist whose identity I could not conceive. How deep and dark the empty spaces under his starry cheekbones.

My head swam. "No!" I whispered brokenly. "No!" I turned away, buried my head in my hands. I thought to myself, "How can I? How can I marry Ruth? I cannot."

When I again faced the observation strip, the face was gone. The changing angle of vision totally disrupted that giant physiognomy; the ship would have to return to an exact position in space. At this, I wheeled and with a half-stumbling

run made for the computer deck. I burst in. The attendant was standing over the macrosticklers, his jaw slack. When he turned toward me his lips worked soundlessly, and he started to speak.

I cut him off.

"The read-out sheet," I said, holding out a hand that was shaking badly.

The attendant faltered, "There—there is no read-out sheet, sir. The macrosticklers have not been scanning."

I was speechless, trying to rant, to swear; but cold and heartless within me was my true self, triumphant, scheming. The macros had not been scanning. Well and good. The Face was already dozens of light-years behind us, and the coordinates again were lost. The Face was gone, and I would marry Ruth.

There would be no John Coronado in ponderous threat above us, there would be no John Coronado glaring down at us while we lived our life of love on Terrano IV.

Dear God, leave John Coronado in a distant sky, back there where he was, dead, not living, sanctified in his galactic grave, eternalized out of who knew what mysterious cosmic pulse.

"You fool," I began thickly. "I programmed—"

He blurted, "Mrs. Coronado did it, sir. Not more than ten minutes ago. She asked me to remove the Coronado tapes. I refused. I suggested she speak to you, sir. She informed me this was her responsibility, hers only. She offered me a bribe, more than my yearly salary, sir. I refused."

"And then what?"

He gestured.The John Coronado tapes had not been removed, but, rather, incinerated.

"She had a beamer in her purse, sir."

I stumbled from the computer deck, dazed. Oh, do not consider me guiltless. I could have noted the time I saw the face. I could have pressed a stud in my watch which would

have imprinted time, and exact position, on the Master Log. Such has been my unbroken habit when any noteworthy event occurs. Compute if you will the inner tensions which kept me from that simple, well-nigh unconscious act.

Compute also, if you will, why I did not check the wrist alarm I wore. Had it rung, and if not why not?

I went to Ruth's cabin, knocked, entered quietly when her low voice answered. She gazed at me sadly, shadows under her eyes, her fingers nervously waving into each other.

"Captain Jennings," she sighed, troubledly gazing at the deck. "You seem very excited. Perhaps because I destroyed the John Coronado tapes?"

"Yes, Ruth. Why did you?"

"Because I am tired. Because the strain is too much. The waiting, Captain Jennings. The suspense. The waking up in the middle of sleep, waiting for the alarm bells to ring, to tell us my dead darling has been found and that his beloved face is out there for me to see.

"I am tired. There will be no more searching."

Then she came to me, stood very close and slipped her arms over my shoulders, and laid her head on my chest.

"We are two old people, Captain Jennings. But I do love you, for your kindness, for your quick nature, for your love of me, and because you are straight of back, a handsome man of whom any woman, young or old, would be proud. So marry me, Captain Jennings. Take me to your planet Cuspid, and let us live out our lives together.

"I give up the search. Perhaps because I have been searching only for love after all. It is all we search for; John will understand."

Mrs. Ruth Coronado and Captain R. Jennings of the good ship Astrid were married the next planet-fall. We had a honeymoon that lasted three weeks as we dove across those far magic skies on the edge of our galaxy where anything can

happen. And we came to the planet Cuspid, whose true name was Terrano IV.

Oh lovely world! My love twined about it like arms from my soul. For it was green. Its green continents floated on green foamy seas, its skies were shades of green in the light of two hot green suns—and on the smaller continent my green horses thrived!

There were people here. Land was waiting to be claimed, and finally we stood in the midst of our hundred thousand acres, contemplating the house we would build, the stables, the corrals; we saw men riding the herds, we saw buyers coming from all the worlds.

That night we camped. My love and I alone put up a tent, and we were asleep long before this fast turning world spun its night face to the myriad stars shining through its misty green atmosphere. But I, I could not stay asleep. Mysteriously compelled to rise, my soul filled with the wonder of this life that had given me everything I would have wished for in my wildest dreams, I walked the night, breathing the red-flower scent, listening to the call of the wood-birds, making friends with curious insects who sat on my arms chirruping and presumably trying to talk. And then I stood looking into the sky and saw the face of John Coronado.

It was the true face of John Coronado.

That other face, that I saw from space, had not been.

Whose, then? I knew.

A triumph of elation overcame me when I saw the Face. And there was relief, a blind, remorseless relief, as if I had escaped a gallows. Indeed, all these weeks I was strangling in a muck of guilt.

And now there was the Face.

I went back to the tent, brushed lightly at my beloved's hair. She awoke.

"Come," I said. I led her from the tent, faced her so that if she raised her eyes she would see John Coronado.

"There were other members of your husband's family who died in the wreck of the Star Maid," I said. "A brother?"

She said in wonder, "A brother. Yes. Of course. A younger brother. But why do you ask?"

"And they looked much alike?"

"Yes . . . perhaps so."

I tilted up her head so that she was looking full into the Face.

"It is the Face," I said. I saw her eyes dilate and shine. I felt her hand in mine stiffen. I felt the shuddering of her shoulder pressed against mine. Her hand flew to her lips as if to stifle some cry. She darted me what I can only describe as a frightened glance. "Oh!" she gasped. "It is so very strange that you should find him here. Perhaps some night even the Beast shall fly through our skies."

Then with a motion quite deliberate, she turned her back on the Face, and smiled the firm smile of Ruth. She slipped her arm through mine, and with her other hand caressed my own face lightly but lingeringly.

"*You* are my husband," she said. "Be sure of that. Therefore it is time to return to our tent.

"The night will come when my dead husband will—go away."

You laugh? You do not believe? Ah, but remember the tradition, sir! A gentleman of space does not doubt! But still you laugh? Come then, let us select the miracle horses you wish to buy. But first—turn! Look! John Coronado, the dead husband of the woman I love, is rising swiftly in the sky! You see now the wild hydrogen clouds of his hair! Come the starry spirals of his giant ears, the star-gleaming forehead, the great blazing fumes of the blue-burning stars that are his eyes, and now the long nose painted with a billion suns and pieces of black emptiness! Then the lips, sir, you see them—squint your eyes a bit now—the lips, made of the hind end of a ring nebula. How gently they curve, how sweetly they seem

to be murmuring but one name! There, sir, is the Face. How piercingly he looks down upon my acres on my planet Cuspid, and how tenderly he searches out my wife, my Ruth!

Forgive me, sir.

Ruth and I are just now learning how to walk out together at night.

The Eleventh Galaxy Reader

Edited by Frederik Pohl

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