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# THE WATER OF THOUGHT

FRED SABERHAGEN



Complete Novel



## **WAS THAT THE KEY TO A WORLD FORGOTTEN?**

One explorer had already disappeared on the primitive planet, Kappa. So the day that a second Terrestrial, Jones, ran away after drinking the sacred Kappan water that he had coerced the natives into giving him, the remaining planetologists meant to find out just what was going on.

Questioning the aliens only deepened the mystery. For they said that what Jones had drunk would enable him to communicate with his animal ancestors. It was their most precious and sacred possession.

But how could it affect a person never born on Kappa, a person without such “animal” ancestors? What had really happened to Jones and the other man—and what would happen if either of them managed to bring this incredible liquid back to Earth?

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**FRED SABERHAGEN** has had stories in several science-fiction magazines. An Air Force veteran and a bachelor, he lives in Chicago and claims to enjoy "karate, chess, and science-fiction conventions, besides such more peaceful activities as writing and looking out for the right girl."

His previous novel for Ace Books was **THE GOLDEN PEOPLE** (M-103).

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**FRED SABERHAGEN**

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**THE WATER OF THOUGHT**

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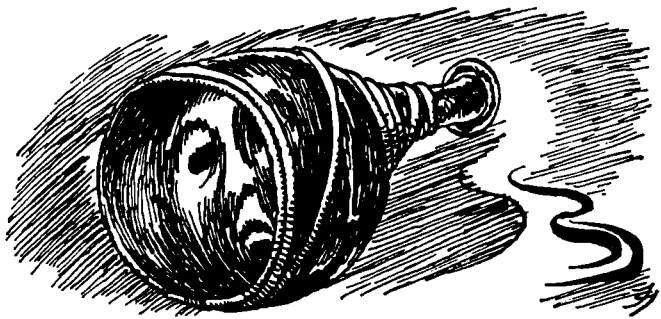
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**WE, THE VENUSIANS**

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## I

**I**N THE DREAM, a faceless figure paced after Boris, holding out distorted hands whose fingers writhed like menacing snakes.

No, Boris told the figure. It's not me you want. Those are your hands, not mine. And then he realized he was waking up.

The girl named Brenda was bending over him; he lay on his back in the bottom of a little sportboat, pulled in to the shore of a tiny river island. The light of an alien sun came dappling down through alien trees to reflect from the quiet water and shimmer on Brenda's laughing face and dark brown hair. Boris was blond and bony and tall, with innocent blue eyes in a rough face; he thought now that Brenda was his opposite in every physical detail.

"I don't mind your dozing off," she told him. "But must you have nightmares?"

"I guess I must." Boris stretched luxuriously. He tried to remember the dream, but it was already slipping away. "Was I making noises?"

"What was it about?"

"I think it was about my last job."

Brenda became sympathetic. "Where was that?"

"Oh. Light-years from here."

"Of course. But what happened?"

"A man on my crew opened his helmet when he shouldn't have. Something got in and began eating at him."

"Oh, horrible. I wish I hadn't asked. Will he—be all right?"

Boris felt a trace of amusement at her concern for someone she had never seen. "The medics saved him. He's getting a new face built."

Brenda watched him silently for a long moment. Then, with some hesitation, she asked, "Did they blame you for it?"

"No." Boris sat up in the boat, making it rock soft ripples into the quiet river. He looked around him at the peaceful green wilderness. Hayashi was a planeteer, not an infant; he shouldn't have needed warnings and leading by the hand.

Once, years and planets ago, Boris had been young and green; and a planeteering scheme of his, thoroughly approved by the higher-ups, had led to the drowning of a number of men. Now—why should he recall an old disaster on this pleasant afternoon? And why did Brenda ask him if he had been blamed—did he look guilty? He was far from being a failure.

He needed this leave. Lately he had felt tired and stale.

He grinned at Brenda. "Enough about nightmares!" He caught her by the arm and pulled.

A minute later, the communicator chimed from under the dashboard of the little sportboat.

With a little gasp, Brenda pulled away from him. "It must be important, or they wouldn't call."

"I suppose." Boris reached around her and touched a switch. "Brazil here."

A male voice shouted excitedly at him, telling some confused story about a killing. Boris let the babble go on while he disengaged himself fully from Brenda and got the boat moving away from the island into open water. Accelerating downstream at the top thrust of the sporter's water-jets, he could see, a couple of miles ahead, the insubstantial-looking forcefield screens that shielded the tiny colony of Earth-descended people.



"Is that you, Morton?" Boris put practiced calm into his voice. If he remembered correctly, Don Morton was the colonist now standing routine defensive watch; and if serious trouble had popped up, Morton might be forgiven some over-excitement. For ten rather peaceful years now, there had been a colony of Earth-descended humans on this lonely planet of Kappa. No doubt the colonists were beginning to think they understood the place.

"Yes, it's me. This is the defense tower."

"Now what's happened? Start again, will you?"

"It's Jones," said Morton's voice, gaining some self-control. "He went crazy here. Now he's run away."

"All right, hang on. I'll be there in two minutes."

All Boris knew about Edmund Jones was that the man was, like himself, a planeteer. Jones had said he was spending an entire leave here on Kappa, pursuing a semi-professional interest in anthropology. Boris was on leave too, but only stopping over on Kappa, waiting for a ship that would carry him home to Sol.

Boris and Jones had started out this morning on a picnic with Brenda and another unattached colony girl named Jane. Jones had a standing request to be notified at once when any native medicine men visited the colony, and Morton had called Jones on his boat radio about noon—a shaman had arrived, and started to set up camp near the colony's main gate.

Certainly Jones had not been drunk when he left the picnic, and hurried back, with the displeased Jane, to see the witch-doctor. That gave him less than an hour to somehow get in shape for going crazy and running away.

The sportboat skimmed over the calm brown river, between shores of growth that was just a bit too open and pleasant to be called jungle. Something in the sun and air of Kappa gave to chlorophyll in leaves a greener-than-reality postcard look. The planet might make an excellent site for a big colony, thought Boris, if it had not so many human natives, and if it lay in a different direction from Earth. As it was, dust clouds and permanent atomic storms peppered the section of galactic arm around Kappa, making C-plus travel uncertain.

Boris slowed the boat, passing the riverside landing field where shuttles came down from visiting starships. The field

was empty now. Just ahead, the colony's forcefield opened a gate in itself where it swept out into the river. Boris drove through the gate, docked, gave Brenda one farewell pat, and strode toward the defense tower, which was a neglected-looking building near the center of the small compound. There were only a couple of dozen structures here, built of native wood and stone and glass, inhabited by fewer than three hundred people. All the Earth-descended on Kappa lived here, while automated machinery ran mines and farms and ranches for them, out in the zones of Kappa's grimmer climates, where intelligent natives were few or none. The Space Force, with its planetees and research teams, was gone from Kappa, moved to Earthman's expanding frontier. The colonists were people who liked the life of an isolated small town, or they were not likely to remain long on Kappa. They maintained a foothold here for Earth, and made themselves comfortably prosperous. Kappa had never offered them more than incidental and occasional danger.

But now, Boris found half a dozen men, and Jane, gathered in the little room atop the defense tower. They had crowded around Morton's sentry chair and were watching his viewscreens.

Pete Kaleta, the colony's pudgy mayor, was saying, "It all looks normal at the silver mine; he went in the other direction anyway. Oh, Brazil, glad you're here."

"What's it all about?"

They looked uncertainly at one another. When no one else seemed eager to speak, Jane began, "Eddie—Mr. Jones—hardly said a word all the way back here in the boat. But he didn't seem wild or anything. Just thoughtful."

Boris asked, "So, what happened when he got here?"

Kaleta took a deep breath, and spoke, "A pair of men from a tribe just west of here arrived, right after you four had left on the picnic. They started to set up camp just outside the main gate. One of them was wearing a witch doctor's face paint, and he said he wanted to see Jones—Jones has been talking to all the witchmen. So, Morton here got Jones on the radio. Jones came back in his boat, put on a ground-suit, and walked out through the main gate."

"Put on a groundsuit?" Boris asked. "Why?"

Kaleta gestured nervously. "He didn't say. I suppose he

wanted to impress the natives; or maybe just to have the radio handy."

The big viewscreen in front of the sentry chair now pictured the area just outside the main gate. Bright bits of fabric, scattered boxes and primitive utensils littered the grass. In the foreground stood a native pack animal, placidly grazing. Heavy leather straps hung broken from its back; someone or something had torn the panniers from its sides and scattered the contents.

Don Morton, a powerfully-built young man, swung round in his sentry chair, and took up the story: "Jones went out there in the groundsuit. He said hello to the natives. I wasn't paying any attention to what they said. I'm not sure Jones even had his suit radio on then." Morton looked at Boris belligerently, as if expecting to be accused of something.

"All right, go on."

Morton hesitated. Jane said, "I came up here to watch. The Kappan outside was offering Eddie a drink. He poured it from a funny kind of bottle—I've never seen one just like it before. And then Eddie did radio in, and said something like: 'Hey, better have a stomach pump ready, just in case.' He didn't drink whatever it was right away. He still had his helmet on, and was standing there talking."

"Morton, I wish you'd called me," said Mayor Kaleta, staring into the viewscreen.

Morton shifted nervously in his chair. "Well, anyway, I called up the infirmary, and got Doc, here."

Doc pulled thoughtfully at a heavy mustache. "What that stuff was, I can't imagine. I wouldn't expect a small amount of any Kappan drink to have much effect on an Earthman—unless it was meant to be poison. You know, Kappans and Earth-descended are remarkably similar in their biology; I've seen experimental skin grafts made to take from one to the other. Anyway, I did get a stomach cleaner ready, just in case. Since he asked for it."

Morton took up the story again. "When I finished talking to Doc, Jones had his helmet off, and was starting to drink, from a little cup. He took a sip, and then he stood there talking for another minute. Then he tossed it all down. Then, in another minute, he and the Kappans were arguing. I was just starting to really pay attention when I guess he must

have shut off his radio. I don't know what the fight was about."

Morton looked at Jane. She said, "Well, I saw him step forward, shouting at the Kappans, I guess he was threatening them. They backed away from him; they looked like they were frightened and surprised."

"Jones grabbed at them," said Morton. "He knocked them down behind those bushes there. I suppose he might have killed them; you know the power in those suits. Then he tore the baskets off the pack animal, and scattered the stuff, as if he was looking for something. By that time I was already calling you, and the mayor."

Mayor Kaleta seemed much worried, but he had nothing to say for the moment.

"What kind of suit did Jones put on?" Boris asked.

"Heavy ground armor," Morton answered. "We keep two suits of it ready, just in case. We've never needed it."

"Ugh." It seemed to Boris that things just might get much worse before they got any better. He decided to put on the other suit himself before going out to investigate.

Jane said, "And Eddie found the bottle, where the Kappans had put it away, all wrapped up. He took another little drink, in a hurry, and then he set the bottle down in the grass, as if it was something precious. Then he came back to the gate."

"What?"

"Oh, yes." Morton had an angry look on his face. "He radioed: 'Open up the outer gate, you fool. I need a rifle.' Well, I didn't know what the hell was going on. When he came back like that, I thought he must have some good reason. I mean, he's a planeteer, isn't he? He's supposed to know what he's doing in—strange situations. Right?"

Boris said, "Well, let's find out how strange the situation is. So you opened the outer gate, and he came in again?"

"Right. And I opened the little door to the arms room, and he went in and got an energy rifle. We keep two of them handy, like the suits. And then he trotted off without another word, heading west."

Jane added, "And he picked up the bottle and took it with him."

The silent mayor had one hand over his eyes.

"I'd better get out there," said Boris. He adjourned the

meeting to the arms room at the main gate, where he could get himself into the remaining suit of heavy ground armor while the talk went on.

So, it seemed that Jones was running amok, with equipment that would make the average man as dangerous as a troop of saber-wielding cavalry. And Jones was not an average man, but a planeteer, with all the skills of the professional interstellar explorer.

Boris was a chief planeteer himself, when not on leave for rest and recreation as he was now. So it was logical for the colonists to call on him in an emergency like this one, and let him take over. Set one to catch one.

Possibly, he thought, Jones is still rational. It's just that he's discovered something that makes it right for him to manhandle a couple of natives, arm himself even further, and run off without a word of explanation. Boris couldn't imagine what such a discovery might be.

"Anything else peculiar around here lately? Unexplained?" he asked, while a couple of the colonists helped him into the armored suit.

"Things have been pretty dull," said Kaleta.

"Since Magnuson disappeared," said Doc. When Boris looked at him, he amplified: "An anthropologist named Emanuel Magnuson. Used to work for the Space Force, spent most of his time out in the hills near Great Lake. He was supposed to leave when the last of the Space Force people pulled out, but he vanished. Looked like some carnivore might have gotten him."

"But you weren't sure?" Boris probed. "Could the Kap-pans have done him in?"

"We've always kept on good terms with them," said Mayor Kaleta, looking at Doc. "The Space Force seemed to be satisfied it was just animals killed him."

Doc shrugged. "Magnuson was a strange one, in some ways. He'd argue his theories. . . . How's that fit?"

"Okay, now." Boris brought an arm in from one suit sleeve and fastened his helmet from the inside. Then without further delay he headed for the outer gate. For all the suit's weight of metal, walking was easier in it than without it. Its limbs were driven by servo-mechanisms which followed the movements of the man inside, and were powered by a tiny hydrogen-fusion lamp.

As he passed the arms rack, Boris took down the remaining energy rifle, and checked the charge. Such a weapon was effective against heavy ground armor at close range. If it should ever come to that.

When the main gate shimmered open for him, Boris went out and saw the scattered Kappan goods, and the grazing phlegmatic animal. It would be nice, he thought, to find tracks showing that the two Kappans had departed the area at a speed impossible for seriously injured men, and to find Jones sleeping off his strange intoxication behind a bush. Sometimes, Boris had noticed, the world was not nice.

Kappans were a leathery-skinned people, with very wide-set eyes and bulging foreheads, grotesque by Earth standards. The first man Boris found in the bushes was quite dead, with the insects at him already. The appearance of his head suggested he had died of a blow from the power-driven arm of a groundsuit.

Boris's helmet radio brought him a collective gasp from the people in the defense tower; they were watching through the TV eye that rode on his shoulder.

"That's not the witch-doctor," someone commented.

Boris turned up his suit's sensitive air mikes and kept searching, now holding the rifle ready with the safety off. When he had moved on a few more yards, he caught the sound of ragged breathing. The second Kappan had crawled under a bush to hide. The wide-set eyes were open, and from behind oozing blood and witchman's paint they followed Boris.

"Send out a couple of stretcher bearers," he radioed. "And someone tell me a few soothing words to use."

Boris stood with two or three others beside the hospital bed in which the injured Kappan lay. While Doc was still giving the man emergency treatment, Brenda was acting as translator for Boris.

"He says, as soon as Jones had smacked his lips over the drink, he demanded to know where it came from. Jones was being initiated into the—Kappan witchdoctor's union, I guess you'd call it—so they told him the truth; it comes in trade from the western hill people, near the Great Lake. Jones demanded more of the drink; they tried to stop him from tearing up their goods, but he just knocked them aside."

"What was in the drink?"

The Kappan hesitated for some time before giving his short answer. Brenda glanced around at the blank faces of the others present, frowned, and translated, "He says: 'The Water of Thought.'"

"What's that mean?"

No one knew. "I've never heard of it," said Kaleta, who had just come into the infirmary. "And I've been here eight years, always in contact with the natives."

"Maybe this guy's making it up," said Morton, shaking his head at bedside.

Boris said, "Well, an Earth-size planet holds a lot of secrets. I'd be out of a job, otherwise." He drummed metal fingers on the groundsuit helmet he was now carrying under one arm. "You're all sure there was nothing in the Space Force survey reports about such a drink, or poison, or whatever?"

Everyone nodded or murmured assent. "I'm sure," said the mayor. "We practically memorized those things."

"Then maybe our pal here is lying about it. Or, it's something new."

Brenda asked. "He says its old. The Water of Thought lets a man communicate with his animal ancestors; very powerful medicine. He can tell us about it now, because we've saved his life. No one ever reacted to it the way Jones did; he says he guesses Earth-descended men are just different."

"If only I'd reminded Mr. Jones of that fact," said Doc morosely. "You people had all better clear out for a while. He needs rest."

"Two anthropologists," said Boris, thinking aloud as he walked to the door. "One vanishes near Great Lake, and the other runs toward it. It is west of here, isn't it? Or is there another Great Lake?"

The colonists gave each other the quick searching looks of people who have known one another for a long time.

"There's just one Great Lake," said the mayor finally. "I don't see any connection, though, between Magnuson and Jones."

Brenda was thoughtfully silent.

"Excellent man in his field, he was," said Morton, closing the infirmary door behind them. "Magnuson, I mean."

Time was passing, but something in the air was a little fishy.

"I've got to go after Jones," Boris said. "If any of you know anything that might help me, I'd better hear it."

Mayor Kaleta shrugged irritably. "We're telling you all we know, Brazil. No doubt you're right; someone must stop Jones, or there's no telling what he'll do, what he'll involve us in with the natives. Frankly, I'm glad you're willing to take the risk of going after him. I don't want to send a lot of untrained people, not knowing what he's up to with that suit and that rifle, or what the natives might . . ." He looked uncertainly back toward the infirmary door, behind which lay the injured Kappan.

"You're right," Boris said. "Better keep your people here inside the defenses as much as possible. I'll need a copter, though."

"Right. I'll see that one's ready." Kaleta hurried out.

"I'm as good a pilot as there is around," said Brenda.

## II

FROM AN ALTITUDE of two thousand feet Boris could follow with binoculars the trail Jones had left, straight as a fanatic's lunge through bush and swamp and an occasional cultivated field, toward the western hills that were still fifty miles and more away.

Jones might be napping as he traveled, or unconscious, or even dead. The semi-robotic suit could be set to balance itself and walk, or even run at twenty miles an hour, holding to a course and steering itself around major obstacles. With its recycling systems and emergency rations, it could keep a man almost comfortable for a week, and functioning for a month, while he stayed sealed in.

Boris saw no signs along the trail that Jones had had more trouble with the natives. Any Kappan who saw his suited figure pace by would be likely to stay clear; he had knocked down rows of small trees that stood in his path.

"What do we do when we catch up with him?" Brenda asked coolly, sounding not at all like the girl who had been giggling in the sportboat a few hours ago.

"You set me down on his trail before then," Boris an-



swered. "This copter makes too good a target for that rifle of his, even at this altitude."

"You think he'd shoot us down?"

"We'd better think so." Boris watched Brenda's profile. Something about the colonists' behavior still bothered him, and he shot a sudden question, "What was this Emanuel Magnuson like? The other man who vanished."

Her eyes, watching the terrain and air ahead, clouded briefly. "I think he was a fine man. He was nice to me and to Jane—oh, in a fatherly sort of way, though he's not really old. But there's something so—intense about him."

"You speak as if he might be still alive."

"Well, I get the impression, sometimes—I don't know."

"Tell me."

"It's like a feeling in the air, around the colony that Dr. Magnuson didn't just die in a simple accident. I don't recall anything definite ever being said. Do you know what a small town's like? Or maybe we're unique."

"It puzzles me a little why you stay here, gal."

"Oh. My parents died here; I've just stayed on. All the people are my family and friends. Jane and I are the two orphans; maybe we're spoiled." She glanced over at Boris. "Sometimes I—we—get restless. We took a trip out once—"

Business came first, and Boris interrupted, "Better start down now; I don't think he can be more than three or four miles ahead. See that second meadow up there? Aim for it, but when you get halfway there peel off to the right. We'll take a little evasive action, just to be safe."

Suddenly the accustomed drone of the copter's engine was gone; in the heavy silence Boris looked overhead to see the jet-spun rotor idling to a halt. In his stomach he felt the familiar start of free-fall. His hand moved instinctively for the copter's controls, but Brenda's fingers were already there, doing the proper things.

But to no avail. The engine was dead; Jones must have hit it with a jolt from his energy rifle. The copter tilted forward, and forest replaced sky in front of Boris, trees coming closer in a long hard rush. The machine was not dropping quite like a rock, but you could hardly call it a glide.

"Bail out!" Boris yelled at Brenda. He reached to take what control was left out of her hands. "I've got the suit!"

Her fingers were already tightening the parachute straps

over her coverall, but she hesitated momentarily, her wide brown eyes looking into his, perhaps to see if he was being gallantly self-sacrificing. A cool one, this girl. Then, with her chute ready, she popped open the cabin door and leaped out, just as Boris was ready to shove her.

With his metal arms, he fought the controls until the steering column bent. And the trees were upon him.

Bounce and bang. Bounce again, and smash. He held his arms in front of his faceplate, until he had shocked and jolted to a halt. Blessed be heavy ground armor!

Boris's seat belt was holding him, upside down, among splintered branches. The copter was a mass of torn metal around him; it would never fly again. The afternoon sun shone through a fine haze of leaves and sawdust, still drifting and settling.

Taking inventory of his sensations, Boris found nothing worse than a couple of bruises; so he began to break his way out of the wreckage. It had been a frustrating day up to now, and there was a certain satisfaction in bashing obstructions aside. When the way was clear, he dropped with a clanging thud to the ground. He retrieved his rifle, and saw with relief that it was undamaged—Jones might be coming around for another shot.

After getting his directions from the sun, Boris moved off through the thin forest at a fast lope, toward the area where Brenda should have come down. In a few minutes he spotted the bright cloth of her parachute spread on the ground.

"Boris!" Her voice came from above him. She sat twelve feet high in a tree, clasping the trunk. Her face was pale. "My ankle's hurt," she said. "No, I'm all right, really; I climbed up here. I thought I might see where you came down."

"Well." Boris allowed himself a grin. "Your knight in shining alloy is here now. Looks like we're in pretty good shape; with this suit I can carry you back to the colony in five or six hours. Of course if I have to wear the suit I won't enjoy the task nearly so much."

"What about Mr. Jones?" she asked.

What a girl. "Just let me check his trail; I'll be back in about five minutes. He can keep running west all night if he wants to; but I want to make sure he's not lurking around here to take another shot at us. Suppose you come down from

that tree and hide in a bush, and I'll call your name when I get back. My suit's number Two—see? Jones has number One on, I guess."

"Okay, go ahead. I'll be all right." Brenda started down from the tree.

There seemed little point in trying to tell her what to do if he didn't come back, so without further delay he moved out through the woods, going as quietly as possible in his bulk of metal. For a minute he waited, just out of Brenda's view, watching to see if Jones appeared near her. Jones might have seen the chute come down.

Jones did not materialize, so Boris moved on. Where he expected Jones's trail, he found it—a line of brush and saplings trampled down and bent toward the west. Boris followed the trail for a hundred yards, and noticed hopefully that it began to waver. Soon it looped around as if the man making it was no longer certain of his directions.

And then Boris saw a silver gleam ahead—Jones's suit, fallen on its faceplate in low grass. Boris let out a little sigh of relief, and moved forward, watching alertly—

"I've got a rifle on you, Brazil," said a voice behind him. "Freeze in your tracks."

There seemed to be little future in any other course.

"Now drop the rifle and take off your helmet."

He did.

After a moment Jones came walking around to face him, well out of reach but easily close enough for the energy rifle he held to puncture Boris's armor. And the weapon stayed center-aimed at Boris.

Jones was as tall as Boris, and heavier. He sported a short black beard; more dark hair grew thickly on his bare massive forearms, and from the throat of his coveralls. He looked happy.

"Well, what's the matter, Jones?" Boris asked. "I'd like to hear your side of this." He made his voice a trifle loud, for Brenda might by now have decided to follow him.

Jones showed white teeth, and looked Boris's suit up and down with an expert eye. "No sidearms, eh? Fine. Sit down against that tree over there and I'll tell you my side, as you put it. I'll kill you, if need be, but I don't want to kill you. I've thought of a much better way."

"That's good to hear," said Boris, sitting down as directed.

Then he nodded toward Jones's fallen armor. "Neat ambush."

Jones ignored the compliment. "Brazil, I've tasted the Water of Thought—that's what the witchman said they call it. And I've come to know—" Jones paused, then gave a little shake of his head. "There's no use my trying to explain. I wouldn't have believed anyone who'd tried to tell me. You'll have to taste it yourself before you'll understand." He walked to the fallen groundsuit, and from somewhere inside it he brought out what could only be the medicine man's bottle.

"Maybe I *can* understand," said Boris smoothly. "I'd like to try. You tore up those people's property back there, and ran off, just to find more of this Water of Thought?"

"I did more than that. I killed someone, didn't I?"

"One of them."

"Ah. But I had to, they were keeping me from the Water. You'll see, when you taste it. Nothing could mean more to me now than it does, not food, or relief from pain, or women, or anything else. I sound like a madman, don't I? You'll see how it is." Jones put a hand to his forehead. His face and eyes looked as if he might be developing a fever.

Boris thought rapidly. "Jones, do you have a family?" Had something shown of the guilty married man when Jones during the morning's picnic put an arm around Jane? How long ago the morning and the picnic were.

"Never mind my family!" For the first time, Jones showed a hint of inner conflict. "I won't see them now for a long time. Maybe I'll never see them again. How can I, when the Water of Thought is here on Kappa?"

"All right, so you want more of this Water of Thought. Most likely it'll take a large expedition to find where the stuff comes from."

"Oh, no, Brazil." Jones chuckled. "No. You're not sweet-talking me back to the colony. They'd just stick me in the infirmary, and wouldn't give me any more Thought-Water if they had any, which they don't. Right now, the only way I can get along with another Earthman is to convert him to my way of thinking." Jones held up his stone bottle. "You will be my first disciple."

Keep him talking, thought Boris. Maybe the stuff will wear off. "Jones, are you religious?"

Jones accepted the question as relevant. "You know I wasn't."

"And now you are? I don't understand."

"You will." Still keeping the rifle ready, Jones used his teeth to loosen the carved top of the bottle. Removed, the cap made a little drinking cup. He set down the cup and very carefully poured it half full of clear liquid from the bottle.

"This is God, Brazil. That's what I mean. God's in my little bottle here." It was only with great evident effort that Jones was able to keep himself from drinking the contents of the cup. But he set it gently on the ground, and backed away, holding the bottle and the rifle. "Now drink that!" he ordered. "Move forward slowly, and drink it."

"If I take any, there'll be less for you."

Jones bit his lip. "It's an investment, to get more. That's the only reason I can stand to give it away. With two of us, in ground armor, working together, the Kappans will never be able to keep us from getting at the source of the Water; one man alone can always be tricked or trapped somehow. Now drink! I'm in a hurry. If I must, I'll kill you and go on alone."

Boris stood up and walked slowly forward; he had heard the threat of murder in voices before. But experience gave no protection against the cutting edge of fear.

"Let me just walk away, Jones," he said loudly. "Even without my groundsuit, I could just walk back to the colony." Maybe Brenda was listening, wondering what to do and would accept the hint. He added more quietly, "It would take me a couple of days, and you'd get away."

Jones just moved the rifle muzzle slightly, motioning toward the cup. It would be plain suicide to try to rush Jones. Swallowing the Water of Thought might be suicide of a different kind, but it seemed that if Boris drank he would at least keep on breathing, and there was always hope while breath lasted. In three or four days the cruiser Boris had expected to ride home to Sol would make planetfall on Kappa; it would have the men and equipment for a massive search.

Boris decided to risk one last argument. "Jones—"

"One more stalling word and you're dead."

Boris bent down, reaching for the cup. He noticed that his fingers were still steady. As if that meant anything.

"Brazil, if you *spill* even one drop, I'll take time to kill you slowly, before I go on."

Carefully Boris picked up the cup. The liquid in it was as clear and thin as spring water, or raw corn whiskey. A subtle, slightly fishy odor rose from it.

"Drink!"

As a man threatened with drowning would clutch for physical support, so Boris tried to clamp a mental hold on sanity. He hoped Brenda would somehow know enough to run from him if he went mad. The fluid in the cup rose before his face, a tidal wave to sweep his mind away. I am the master of my fate—

"Drink!"

Boris sipped. It had an alien tang, not unpleasant, but with a ghost of fishiness. He swallowed the half-cupful of the Water of Thought, and found it pleasantly cooling to his throat.

Boris brought his hand down with the empty cup, careful not to spill a drop. He tried to brace his mind against the overwhelming lust for another drink, which any second now would hit him.

Jones relaxed, sure of himself, slinging the rifle over his shoulder. "Brazil, I'll pour you another little shot, if you like. You don't have to rush me for it. It might spill, and we wouldn't want that, would we?" His chuckle had an obscene sound.

Boris felt a moment of mental confusion; but it seemed to pass. He still had no craving for the Water of Thought. Could he hope to be immune? He would play along with Jones. He would hold out the cup, and when Jones reached toward it he would grab—

And then Boris discovered that he could not move a muscle.

He still breathed, and obviously his heart was still beating. He didn't feel numb. But he couldn't move. He felt sweat break out on his forehead.

Jones stepped closer to him. "What's the matter with you? Brazil. Look at me. Answer me!"

As if with a life of their own, Boris's eyes swiveled obediently to look at Jones. Boris's voice said: "The matter with me is that I can't move."

"Hah!" said Jones, in a kind of incredulous snort.

"So, you can't move without being ordered," said Jones,

three minutes later, pacing back and forth. "You can't be faking. If you were faking, you'd pretend to feel the way I do. I'd have fallen for that. Then you'd take me by surprise, and drag me back to the colony." Jones shuddered. "They'd keep me there, alive, but without the Water. They'd try to cure me."

Jones grabbed the cup from Boris's statue-hand, and rationed himself a tiny drink. He swallowed it, gasped, and stood for a moment with his eyes closed. Then he carefully capped the bottle again. "Oh, put your arm down," he said, in preoccupied annoyance.

Boris's arm relaxed, but his eyes still helplessly followed Jones, who had begun to pace again.

"You don't have to watch me all the time!" Jones barked. Then, in an apologetic tone, he added: "Look—you can stand easy, or whatever you want to call it. Just don't try to attack me, or run away, or disobey me—or communicate with the colony. Outside of that you can move anyway you like. All right?"

Boris's neural circuits seemed to close again.

"I guess it'll have to do," he said. The paralysis had left him so shaky that he sat down and closed his eyes. He hoped Brenda was hiking for the colony by this time. Probably, though, she would spend the approaching night in a tree somewhere near here. And it seemed likely that the colonists would come searching this way in the morning, and spot her parachute, if she remembered to spread it out. Boris wished he knew more about Mayor Kaleta and the other people back there.

"Well, maybe this is all right!" said Jones, suddenly pleased. "Yes, I think so. You'll have to help me, and when we find more of the Thought-Water I won't have to share it with you."

Opening his eyes, Boris saw that Jones was climbing cheerfully back into his groundsuit. If Boris moved quickly, he could beat Jones to one of the rifles. Boris decided to leap for the weapon, grab it up, and kill Jones if need be. But he could get no farther than the thought; his body would not even consider starting any such course of action.

*At least I still have my sanity, he thought. But what use is it, and how long will it last?*

Jones resumed his westward march, and Boris, by his order, walked beside him. I am a semi-robotic man, Boris thought, walking inside a semi-robotic suit. That makes one whole robot, plus a little extra machinery. Plus a little something else, all that is left of me. Or might the little something else be an illusion?

Darkness found them on the first steep slope of the western hills, and there Jones called a halt. Ahead of them lay a hundred thousand square miles of rough forest-covered country, almost completely unexplored.

"There'll be more copters looking for me, sooner or later," said Jones, turning his faceplate up to the first stars of the Kappan night. "So we'll light no fire. And we'll take turns standing watch, just in case. Wake me in about two hours, or sooner if you see anything I'd want to know about."

So Jones lay down to sleep; and Boris found himself unable to do anything but stand guard against his possible rescuers. How long could his slavery last? Surely any drug would wear off in time.

But two hours passed, and he awakened Jones. Then Boris drifted off into a daze of sickly dreams, in which he had to fight with a child's thin arms against an overwhelming faceless Something—

Jones was shaking his suit to awaken him. It was dawn and Jones had watched for more than two hours. Fifty or sixty feet away a figure stood, motionless, partly hidden by mist.

It's a man, was Boris's first thought. It's a short Kappan savage without clothes. It was less than five feet tall, male, with grayish leathery skin and a heavy growth of dark hair at crotch and armpits, on the forearms and lower legs.

Standing up slowly, open hands spread out, Jones made the planeteer's gesture for greeting primitive people. With a bobbing, somehow apelike motion of its upper body, the figure half-turned away from Boris and Jones. Its arms were muscular, but short, not apelike. It hesitated, as if on the verge of flight, looking back over a shoulder at the two men. Boris imagined he saw intelligence in the pale eyes, and then imagined he saw the lack of it. Jones gestured again, and the creature turned and sped away into the mist, running easily like a man.

"So," said Jones, as if not greatly surprised. "The Kappan hominid does exist. It was carrying something in one hand."



"Yes, I believe it had a rock." So might Earth's first tool-maker have looked, thought Boris, a million years ago. "It was pre-human, then?"

"Can't say, for sure." Briefly Jones was a planeteer again. "The survey missed them completely. Only in the last couple of years a few stories have leaked out of these hills. Other Kappans live around here, too. They call the hominids the Forest People."

"Our survey missed a whole tribe? Or maybe even a species?"

Jones took off his helmet and rubbed his neck. "I'd say they're a separate species; from what little I've heard I don't think they're men. Sloppy work, sure. But look at this country around here; you can see how survey crews would miss a lot. High-crowned tropical forest. No way to see under it, really."

"That's right."

Jones surveyed the morning sky again. "Trees'll help to hide us—we'll need that." He picked up his rifle and adjusted the vernier for a fine beam. "Think I'll try to get us some meat for breakfast. Why don't you start a little fire?"

Boris began to look for wood. "That was a neat shot you made yesterday."

Jones looked at him blankly. "What?"

"Hitting my copter."

Jones blinked. "I never saw your copter after it started down. Didn't you just land it?"

### III

BRENDA WAS AWAKENED by the sound of a copter's engine. She had dozed off in spite of everything after tying herself into a tree a dozen feet above the ground. Now the sun was up, burning away a low ground mist. The sky was clear.

The copter was circling slowly, a few hundred feet above her head. From the branches of her tree she had hung the bright cloth of her parachute, making a marker visible for miles.

Brenda waved; the copter circled once more, and then started down to land a little distance away where the trees were thinner. Brenda unknotted the belt with which she

had secured herself to the tree, and climbed down. Pain stabbed her right ankle, and now she could hardly stand on it. She remained where she was, clinging to the tree trunk, until she saw Kaleta coming toward her from the landed copter. He was carrying a machine pistol, and looking around him warily.

"Mayor Petel Am I glad to see you!"

Something was wrong with the way he looked at her. "Where's Brazil?" he asked.

"He went on after Jones, yesterday before dark. He said he'd be back in five minutes, but he never came. I couldn't look for him—my ankle's hurt. Something's happened to him, we've got to get more people out here and start searching, right away."

"Hm. We've got to find him, all right. Can't you walk? Here, lean on me." They started to the copter.

"I'm sorry, Brenda," the mayor said, watching her limp. "I didn't intend—well, now you're in this, I suppose. There's nothing to be done about it."

"What's up?" Don Morton demanded, leaning from the pilot's seat of the copter. Jane sat beside him, looking small and frightened.

"Brazil's gone west, I guess," said Kaleta, motioning in that direction with his gun. "After Jones, or with him."

"I don't like it." Shutting off the copter's engine, Morton hopped out. "Why couldn't we have had a couple of more energy rifles?" he complained, as if to himself. He slapped his own holstered pistol. "I don't know about these things—against one of those suits."

"Are you going to call for help?" Brenda demanded.

"No," said Morton. "Shut up and get in the back seat."

Brenda had seen Don Morton in ugly moods before, but this was the worst. She kept quiet for the moment, and climbed up into the rear of the copter. Jane helped her up, and came to sit beside her, while the men talked to each other in low urgent voices.

"What's going on?" Brenda whispered.

Jane was near tears. "Oh, Brenda, honey, I'm sorry. I knew Don and Mayor Pete were up to something. I guess I knew it was smuggling. But I didn't know that business yesterday had any connection with it. And there I was, telling everyone

just what Eddie did outside the gate before Don could hush me up. I thought he was going to kill me, later."

"Smuggling? What?"

"That—damned drink. It's some kind of drug . . ." Jane bowed her face into her hands.

Right now, to Brenda, the important thing was that Boris still needed help; she would not let herself believe him dead. Intending to call the colony herself, she reached forward to the copter's radio—found that all power was off.

"Please, Mayor Petel Don!"

The mayor would not meet her eye. Don Morton held up the copter's power key, showing her he had it; his smile was ugly indeed. "Just behave," he said. "The good mayor and I will do our own searching."

"You're not drinking much from your bottle," Boris commented, when he and Jones were on their way again, striding up a long slope through open forest. After a breakfast of roast meat Jones had taken a single swallow of the Water of Thought; he had otherwise been content with the ordinary water in his suit's canteen tank.

"I know something about drug addiction." Jones smiled faintly, behind his faceplate. "This is something different from any addiction I've ever heard of. In fact, I'm not an addict, in the sense that I don't suffer physically if I don't drink the Water. No, the effect seems almost purely—mental. I can't describe it. I don't think any doctor could—or any poet. All I know is that nothing else will matter to me, for the rest of my life."

"How did you come to take the first drink?" Boris asked, and felt the ghost of humor at sounding like someone interviewing an old alcoholic.

"Why, I wanted to get in good with the witchmen." Jones laughed, without humor. "I told you I know something about drug addiction. I'm here on Kappa for Space Force intelligence. The crime syndicate's taken an interest in this planet lately, and we've wondered what the attraction was. Some kind of exotic dope seemed a good bet, but I swallowed the stuff myself before I suspected that I'd found it. All I really wanted from the witchmen was information about the tribes in these hills, and to try to get a line on Magnuson. He's in-

volved somehow. Nobody ever really believed that the wolves got him."

"He worked for the Space Force, didn't he?"

"Yes. Towards the end he spent most of his time arguing with his boss. It seems he wanted to make anthropology an experimental science. He had theories about reinforcing natural selection, and weeding out the unfit. Of course the Tribunes wouldn't let him test any scheme like that on a Kappan tribe."

"So you think he went into hiding here? To work in secret?"

"That's what SFI thought. Now, I think he might have tasted the same thing you and I have." Jones looked at Boris. "It hit you one way and me another. There's no telling what it might have done to him."

In the afternoon Boris and Jones passed four Kappans, who stood in a group at some distance, watching them. These were not hominids, but tall spear-carrying warriors who resembled the men of the tribes nearer the colony. Jones waved at them but when he got no reply he made no move to approach them.

"They don't seem too much surprised by our suits," observed Jones thoughtfully. "They've had some contact with Earthmen. Maybe Magnuson."

"So, what do you do now?"

"We just walk on some more. Let ourselves be seen."

At sunset, Boris and Jones dined again on fresh-killed meat. And again Boris was left to stand the first watch.

Boris had not asked a second time for his freedom. It was not something to be given him, it was something he would take when he was able.

He would try now, with all the will that he could muster. Jones slept. Boris picked up a rifle. Experimentally, he tried to aim the weapon at Jones, and found that he could not. There was no struggle with himself; his hands and arms simply refused to make the required motions.

He threw the rifle down, and looked up through the tree-tops at the stars. Killing Jones, or threatening him, was not the answer anyway. The trouble was inside himself.

Boris faced in the proper direction, drew a deep breath, and willed himself to walk quietly away, back toward the

colony. But his feet would not move. After a long time he sat down.

Again Jones's shaking awakened Boris to a cool and misty dawn. What had looked in the evening twilight like another valley, he now saw to be a lake, at least two or three miles in diameter. Much of its surface and shoreline was obscured by the morning haze.

Eight Kappan men, armed with spears and wearing loin-cloths, stood about twenty yards off, watching stolidly, not much impressed by groundsuits.

Seeing that Boris was awake, Jones slowly stood up, making the peace gesture. Boris imitated him, willingly. He welcomed the natives, on the theory that any random change in his predicament was likely to be for the better.

Some of the Kappans imitated the peace gesture. Then the tallest one stepped forward, and spoke in the language of Earth's colonies and Space Force:

"You men of Earth, why do you walk here?" His voice was accented but quite plain.

Jones answered, "We are looking for a man named Magnuson. We are the enemies of his enemies, so we would be his friends."

The tall warrior raised his arm as in a wave to someone on a distant hill. Then he said, "Wait. Magnuson is not far. If you try to use your far-speakers, he will hear them, and then you will not find him."

"We will wait," said Jones. He turned to Boris. "If Magnuson has radio equipment out here, that means he's getting help."

Boris came to a decision. "Jones, I don't think you're my worst enemy on this planet. I'd better tell you something. You know accidental failure of a copter is very unlikely. If you didn't shoot at mine, someone probably sabotaged it."

"So. Probably our smuggler didn't want you to catch me. Wants us both out of the way. Who do you think it was?"

"Probably the mayor. Another thing—Brenda was with me in the copter, and she had to parachute. She's back there somewhere with a twisted ankle."

Jones turned away. "What's all that to me, now?" he asked. "If my own family means nothing, what do you suppose Brenda means?"

The warriors still leaned on their spears, watching impassively. Perhaps half an hour passed, and the morning mist lifted slowly into the greenish Kappan sky, revealing most of the lake's shoreline. About a mile and a half away, along the shore, the huts of a village became visible. The settlement straddled the mouth of a small river and was almost concealed under the forest's edge.

In the direction of the village, but much closer, another Kappan warrior appeared on a hilltop, waving his arms.

"Walk," said the tallest warrior in the waiting group. He had circles of red paint or clay daubed around his thick arms, and his flint-bladed spear was longer by a foot than those of the men with him. Now he motioned with it toward the distant village. Jones and Boris started in that direction; the Kappans followed.

Seen at close range, the village was surprisingly well built. The houses—structures too elaborate to be called huts—were of dressed logs and shingles, even a few of stone. Stone paths were laid out neatly, and a central building which appeared to be a temple was built half of smooth-cut stone and half of elaborately carved wood. Boris was certain that other villages of the same or tributary tribes must be nearby; there were not enough dwellings visible here to support the social superstructures implied by the temple.

Perhaps the Space Force survey, ten years before, had not even touched these people. The whole planet would of course have been mapped by aerial and orbital photographers, but quite possibly ninety-five per cent of the surface had received no further attention than that.

A little mob of village children formed, and men and women came out of the house, seeming calmly curious, as Jones and Boris drew near. The people of the village wore robe-like garments, and their gestures were gentle. They were of the same stock as the eight hard-muscled warriors, but obviously of a different class or caste.

The tall spearman with the red-circled arms now came to the front of the procession, to lead Jones and Boris through the village. Boris's planeteeering eye judged that the warriors were not conquerors here, for they moved courteously enough among the soft-robed people.

Spanning twenty yards of quiet river was a wooden bridge that thumped and squeaked under the weight of groundsuits.

Just ahead was the temple building, and now a lean and shaggy Earthman, wearing worn coverall and boots, appeared in its doorway. He had the bearings of a leader, a chief, and the robed villagers there deferentially made way for him.

Jones halted a few yards from the man, and bowed slightly. "Dr. Magnuson."

The man returned the nod, and cast quick, appraising glances over Jones and Boris.

"Gentlemen, you puzzle me. You've been walking for at least a day in this area, but you've made no radio contact with the colony."

"Magnuson, they say your enemies are theirs," the tall warrior informed him.

Jones smiled. "That's right, Doctor. I've come to prefer your way of life."

Boris thought the appraising eyes were puzzled. But they moved calmly enough over to him. "And you, sir?"

"He's drugged," Jones cut in. "Never mind him for the moment. Magnuson, can I speak to you alone right away? It's urgent."

"Why not?" Magnuson gestured toward the entrance of the temple.

Boris followed Jones inside; Magnuson came after them. The interior was dim, divided into several rooms, and held nothing immediately startling to a planeteer's eye. A couple of the soft-robed men were there. Magnuson said a word to them, and after hesitating for a moment they made graceful gestures and went out.

Magnuson turned to Jones. "Now?"

"I want the source of the Water of Thought," said Jones in a deliberate voice. "And I want it right away."

"So." Magnuson hesitated thoughtfully. "Once I wanted very much to find that myself. I should still like to, but—May I ask you what your reason is?"

"I don't want to steal it, or smuggle it. I just want some for myself; I can live with any arrangement that guarantees me a steady supply. A few mouthfuls a day, at a minimum. But that minimum I mean to have, make no mistake. I've killed men already for the Water. You know the power in these suits?"

"I'm not a fool," said Magnuson shortly. Not a man to be bluffed or easily frightened, Boris thought.

Magnuson went on, "Some of the Water of Thought is available, in this village. I'll undertake to guarantee you a mouthful a day, if you work with me."

"Where does it come from?"

"The warriors capture it, somewhere upstream along the Yunoe, the river in the village. They make periodic raids, and bring it back with them in pails." Magnuson gestured at some pot-like containers piled against a wall. "I don't know more than that. I've made myself a person of some importance here, as you'll see, but I'm not yet privy to the tribal secrets. I am in some ways a dictator, but not yet a full member of the people. Perhaps I shall be soon." He smiled suddenly, with surprising magnetism.

Jones looked about him. "You say there's some of the Water here in the village? Show me."

A tiny frown creased Magnuson's brow. "Remember, it's a sacred thing to these people."

"Show me."

Magnuson hesitated briefly. "All right. Come in here." He led them through a door behind a stone altar, into another room, a windowless place, lighted only by a few oil lamps on low stone pedestals. Half a dozen of the robed priestly men were here; two of them lay supine on a mat of woven branches, and Boris was not sure that those two breathed.

"They've drunk the Water of Thought," said Magnuson, indicating the two with a gesture. "Kappans claim to experience racial memories under its influence."

It seemed to be all things to all men. Boris spoke up: "What did it do to you, Doctor?"

Magnuson's vital eyes flicked at him, unperturbed. "Nothing, really."

"Where is it?" Jones demanded.

Magnuson bent, and, from the floor against one wall, lifted another mat. A sunken vat, of bathtub size, was revealed. The liquid in the vat seemed black in the dim light.

Jones took a step forward. "You mean, that whole tubful is—the Water?"

"Yes. You see, the priests here try to keep a stock—what are you doing?"

Jones had dropped to his knees beside the sunken vat. He pulled his helmet off and tossed it aside. Turning to Boris,



he ordered: "Brazil, watch them. If any of them start to do anything dangerous to me, kill them. Say you'll obey me."

Boris's hands moved to unsling his rifle, and his finger flicked off the safety. His chest forced air up through his throat, and his throat and his mouth made a word of it: "Yes."

Jones bent over the vat, and there was a stir among the watching Kappans. Magnuson gestured sharply, and said something, and the robed ones muttered but stood still.

Jones dipped a finger into the vat, and raised it to his mouth, tasting. A moment later he had stretched himself prone on the stone floor, and was thrusting down his head to drink.

Boris had to watch Magnuson and the Kappans, to see if they might be going to do anything dangerous to Jones. Their faces were not pleased at what was happening. There was a bubbling sound; Boris wondered what would happen if his master drowned himself.

At last there came a louder gurgle, followed by a gasp, and Boris looked down. Jones rolled over on the floor, his armor clanking on stone, his whole head wet, his eyes moving like a baby's, chasing things unseen by others. For an instant Boris thought that the man had been poisoned, but then he saw that Jones's ecstasy was of pleasure and not of pain.

Jones cracked the stone floor with a metal fist. "Brazil, let them kill me if they want to!" A moment later he sat up. "But no, don't let them! I can drink again tomorrow, and the day after, and every day, for years and years." As if his body was a new thing to him, Jones got unsteadily to his feet, and leaned for support against a carved temple post.

A lamp sputtered. Everyone else in the temple was silent while Jones's gasping breath slowly returned to normal.

His eyes came back to look at the others. He said, "Magnuson, there's plenty here for both of us. We have no quarrel."

"I don't use the drug, but you're forgetting the owners. My friends here will not allow you unlimited wallowing in that vat. No. I told you it was sacred."

"We'll see about that."

"I suppose in those suits you could destroy this village, but that won't help you find the source of the Water. Not if you kill the whole tribe."

"I don't want any more killing, but I'll do anything to find that source." Jones let go of his support.

Magnuson moved two paces away, and stood for a moment with his back to everyone. Then he spun around. "You say you'll do anything. Will you join this tribe? I'm supposed to be initiated soon. The ceremony can be held a day or two from now."

"What'll I gain?"

"Once initiated, we will be entitled to the tribal secrets. These people will help us and defend us like brothers."

"Might be a good idea."

Magnuson nodded. "I'll explain the details presently. Right now things will be easier if you'll leave the temple."

Jones looked down at the Water of Thought in its dark vat. "Funny. Now, when I try to imagine the source I can almost see a green, peaceful place. But it's like a half-forgotten dream." Abstractedly, Jones moved to the door and slowly out of the room.

"It's not good that he should drink so much of it." Magnuson shook his head, looking after Jones. Then he put a hand on Boris's suited arm. "You must follow his orders?"

"That's right."

"When did you first drink the Water of Thought . . . both of you?"

Boris thought back. It seemed a year. "This is the third day."

"I drank the Water once myself, and in five days its effects had left me. I give you this hope now; I trust you'll remember me when I need help."

Boris could not let himself start hoping. "What did it do to you, Magnuson? What was the effect that passed in five days?"

"It brought me here." Magnuson looked round the temple. "To more important things than drugs." His sudden magnetic smile flashed again. "Come. You are my guests tonight, and we will have a feast."

#### IV

GREAT LAKE, south of the village, mirrored half the greenish sunset in its calm water. In front of Magnuson's hut, torches were lighted, a low table was set up, and platters of food

were prepared. Acting as cooks and waiters and furniture movers were Kappans who wore neither the warrior's loincloth nor the priest's robe, but a kind of kilt. The kilted men and women alike wore their hair in long braids.

Magnuson emerged from his dwelling and addressed Jones cheerfully: "I would suggest that you and Brazil get out of those suits, if you want the people here to accept you. Anyway, you must remove your helmets to eat."

"All right, we can't live sealed in forever." Jones's eyes were still distant, and his face had a feverish look again. He had spent most of the day sitting alone, as if preoccupied with thought. "Let's relax for a while, Brazil."

A minute later, the empty suits lay with the rifles on the ground. Five seconds after that, the necks of Boris and Jones were ringed by a dozen spearpoints. Boris, at least, was not greatly surprised.

Magnuson was pleased, but also worried. He chided the spearman in their own language, and pulled gently at their arms. The ring of flinty points widened by four or five inches.

"I'm sorry to frighten you," said Magnuson. "Still, my Kappan friends have the right idea. You must be subject to me here, not I to you. More than your lives or mine is at stake here. Man himself. Yes."

Red Circles, who seemed to be chief of all the warriors, appeared, and smiled to see the groundsuits and weapons separated from their owners. Red Circles held a brief dialogue with Magnuson, then issued a few sharp orders. The ring of threatening spears dissolved. Teams of kilted workers carried away the groundsuits and rifles.

Magnuson excused himself briefly. "I have a short radio message to send, and I'd better do it before our planet's Heaviside layer makes it difficult to maintain privacy." He nodded at the sunset. "Soon enough, the colony and the galaxy will know where I am. But not just yet." He went into his house.

In a minute, Magnuson was back. "Gentlemen, shall we dine?" He motioned them to the table. "Believe me, I mean you no harm. There is suffering enough."

With a slave's fatalism, Boris squatted on a mat at the low table. He was halfway through his portion of the roast meat when he heard a copter.

Beside him, Jones jumped up shouting, "Our suits! Bring them back!"

But Magnuson simply got up and walked away, not showing any great excitement. The copter's sound slowed and died abruptly in the darkness as if the machine had made a radar landing nearby. In a few minutes Magnuson was back, and Boris was not astonished to see that Pete Kaleta walked with him. Don Morton and Jane were more of a surprise; and then, stopping Boris's heart for a second, Brenda walked into the firelight, her hands behind her as if they were tied. She limped badly, but seemed otherwise unhurt. The relief in her eyes when they discovered him tore at the raw wound of his helplessness.

Kaleta stopped in front of him. "I meant you no harm, Brazil. Or her. I didn't expect your copter would fail that suddenly. I'm no expert at sabotage."

"No one's meant me any harm yet on this planet," said Boris. "How far behind you is the Space Force?"

"I meant I didn't want to kill you." The mayor stared thoughtfully at Boris; the stare was all the worse in that it did not seem intended to frighten.

Magnuson suddenly noticed Brenda's bound hands. He yanked a knife from a sheath at his belt and cut her free. "There's no need for this damnable business!" He hurled pieces of cord away.

"Who said you could—" Morton's move toward Magnuson was stopped by Red Circles' spear leveled at his chest. Morton stepped back, his hand going to the holster at his side.

"No!" Kaleta grabbed at Morton. "Take it easy. We can't afford— Take it easy, will you? We'll talk this over later."

"Go ahead, tough guy," said Jane to Morton. "Get us all killed."

With a little shudder she moved away from him, toward the table. "I see supper's ready. Are we all invited?"

"You are indeed," said Magnuson. He looked big, standing protectively beside little Brenda. Beside him she looked very young, rubbing her freed hands, her brown hair hanging loose around her face.

"Thank you," she said to Magnuson. Then she looked across the table at Boris. "Are you all right? Our *mayor* came and *rescued* me this morning, as you see."

"I'm alive; I'm drugged," Boris told her. Brenda's eyes went wide.

Magnuson sheathed his knife. "Let's all have something to eat," he said, calmly. "Then we can talk."

While eating, Boris kept a planeteer's eye turned on the Kappans. None of them were sharing Magnuson's table tonight, yet Boris thought they might at the next meal. Their relationship with Magnuson seemed to be a complex one. The robed priests deferred to him, the warriors defended him, and the kilted workers served him. Yet he had said they would not tell him the secret of the source of the Water of Thought; not that he seemed much interested in it. Such a relationship might be possible only between people of different planets.

From across the table, Brenda was appealing silently to Boris for some reassurance if not help. He found himself resenting the way she looked at him. He wanted to scream at her that he was helpless, that there was nothing he could do for her whatever happened. But he kept his face calm; that was all he could do.

Jane was a frightened girl and showed it, looking from one face to another for some sign of hope.

Kaleta and Jones and Morton were all dining in poker-faced silence.

Even now, relaxed, Magnuson had the bearing of a chief. He ate sparingly, though with evident enjoyment. At last he wiped greasy fingers on a cloth handed to him by a kilted worker-girl, and belched with healthy satisfaction. The worker-chef smiled at this sign of approval.

"On Kappa," Magnuson began, "Eden is here and now."

At Boris's side, Jones raised his head. He turned his face, with an odd expression, down the table toward Magnuson.

Magnuson gestured at the villagers nearby. "Oh, for these people, and for the rest of their species scattered around the planet, Eden of course has passed. But, for some creatures in the wilderness near here, its time is now."

The Kappan night was deep around the torch-lit table, and the night insects had awakened. Jane giggled in nervousness, and Morton ostentatiously yawned.

Magnuson looked at Jones. "I told you that something more than our individual lives is at stake here. We find ourselves privileged to aid the forces that created us, to become

the conscious, willing tools of evolution. I mean that the Kappan hominid is on the verge of becoming man, and chance has given us the opportunity to help."

Red Circles had been leaning on his spear, a few yards from the table. Now he stirred restlessly.

Magnuson looked over him, as if accepting a challenge implied by the movement. "What are the Forest People, Red Circles? Are they men?"

"They are enemies or slaves, Magnuson."

"But when some of them become men, full men like you and me, what then?"

"Magnuson you know they are our enemies. I have seen you torture them, and it was good. Now these others from Earth will help us kill the grown Forest People and make the young ones slaves. And we will hide all of you, when your enemies come flying to find you. All this will be good."

Magnuson sighed with weary impatience. "Red Circles, I do not mean to kill the Forest People or to make them slaves, and you well know it. You have learned new speech from me, with great skill. Can you not learn more? When the Forest People have become full men, like you and me, it will be wrong to kill them or keep them at work by whipping them."

"Yes," said Red Circles calmly, not arguing. But not giving way either, thought Boris.

Magnuson looked round at his fellow Earth-descended. "How many men and women, do you think, upon how many planets, have lived out the lives of baboons, among groups of less-than-men? How many with the spark of humanity in them have spent their days and years grubbing for insects beside their animal fathers and brothers? I tell you it is happening here and now on Kappa.

"Tomorrow we all go up the river to the Workers' Village. The chiefs have decided that a new temple is to be built, and the stone quarry up there is busy. You will see the hominid used in the quarry. They are beasts of burden, but among those beasts I fear that there are slaves."

"Helping the poor slaves is all very fine," said Pete Kaleta to Magnuson. "But you know what we want."

"I sent you some of the Water of Thought," said Magnuson shortly. "I've paid you for the radio and the other things you sent me. For your silence about me. As if you didn't want silence."

"Yes, you gave us a little of the stuff, just a sample. Well, the people in the Outfit want more. I understand they like something with a real kick to it. Don't look so disgusted. You knew who we were doing business with. Now I swear to you, Magnuson, I mean to deliver the stuff we've contracted for." Kaleta looked around; Red Circles had walked away, and no other Kappan was listening. "That's going to mean a lot of Thought-Water. We'll give you a share of the profits. You can spend it working with these hominids, if that's what you live for. But understand you're going to help us deliver the Thought-Water."

Magnuson looked at Kaleta and Morton as if they were filth on his supper table. Then he turned to Jones and Boris. "Gentlemen, I have quarreled with the Space Force. Daily I violate its somewhat narrow-minded rules governing anthropological research; but I still respect it and I respect you. When I see such as these . . ."

"Don't get tough." Morton's voice was cold. Then he smiled over at Jones. "I understand you'll make a good customer for the Water from now on. Stick with us, and we'll see you're taken care of."

Jones stared back. Then he put his face down in his hands on the table.

In the small hut where he and Boris were quartered for the night, Jones poured himself a sip of the Water of Thought. Then he sat silently clutching his stone bottle, which seemed nearly empty.

"You look sick," said Boris.

"I am. Magnuson hasn't given me any more of the stuff yet. It may be killing me, but I don't mind if it does. If only I wouldn't imagine strange things." Jones stretched out on a sleeping mat, still holding the bottle tightly.

"What sort of things?"

Jones did not answer. After a little while he seemed to sleep.

Boris sat cross-legged in the little hut's open doorway, looking out at the fire-spotted village night. He wondered where the groundsuit and rifles were being kept. Not that the knowledge was likely to do him much good. Against a nearby tree there leaned a warrior with a spear, visible in silhouette, probably watching Boris.

Kaleta and Morton had not seemed to be worried about the Space Force. Doubtless the cruiser was late, and before it got here the smugglers planned to have a barrel of Thought-Water stowed away, and no inconvenient witnesses on hand.

The rest of the colonists were probably staying close to their firesides, and thinking with admiration of heroic Mayor Kaleta, brave Don Morton, and fearless Jane whatever-her-name was, all of whom were trying to rescue Brenda and Boris from the berserk killer Jones. Probably Kaleta had ordered the rest of the colonists to stay home, even if the rescue operation became protracted.

On the other side of the village common, a slender figure appeared beside a small fire. It was Jane, looking about as if hoping to see someone.

Boris found himself free to stand up and walk from his hut. Jane watched him coming, and smiled tentatively when he drew near.

"How goes the plotting?" Boris asked, moving up beside her at the fire.

"Not too well, I think." Jane's voice was like her body, small but firm. "Don and the good mayor have walked out to the copter; they're going to radio back to the colony that all's well with us but that we haven't found you or Brenda yet. I suppose you're worried about Brenda?"

He thought it was best kept hidden. "Sure, not to mention myself. How about you? Should I worry over what might be done to you, or what you might do?"

She gave her nervous laugh. "Both, I guess. You mean, which side am I on. Well, I'd like to be rich and to get off this planet with Don. Or someone. But I don't want to hurt anyone in the process. Isn't that a laugh?"

"No."

"No." Her eyes became sympathetic. "Boris, what's happened to you?"

"I drank the Water of Thought. I lost my—free will." Boris's voice cracked. He realized suddenly that he was close to breaking down. He had lost count of the days and hours of his helplessness. "I have to follow Jones's orders. If he told me to stick my head in this fire, I don't doubt that I'd have to do it."

"Don't say that!" Jane took a step toward Boris. She gripped his arm, as if to save him from the flames.



Having her do that was more help than he would have thought. "I'll be all right." He put his hand over hers. "Are you involved in this dope-peddling? Not yet, eh?"

"No." Jane let go of him, and shivered, and spread her small hands to the fire for warmth. "But I'm afraid of Don. Why haven't you asked me about Brenda?"

"How is she?"

"All right. Asleep. Boris, you don't think I'm ugly, do you?"

"You're certainly not ugly. Under normal conditions, I might well be chasing you around the fire."

"But as it is, you just worry about Brenda. Oh, I'm her friend, really, Boris. But I have this streak of envy when she has something or someone I don't have. Maybe that's how I got started with Don. He was after her though she was too smart ever to be much interested in him."

"What kind of guy is Morton?"

"Not a nice guy. He can be mean, very mean. Boris, I've been—well, I've been living with him, you might say, on and off, for a year."

"And you never knew what he and Kaleta were up to?"

"I was afraid to ask, I guess. But I didn't know it was anything this bad!"

"But you knew it was something."

"I found out little bits of things from Don. Dr. Magnuson made himself vanish out here, and then he sent a Kappan he trusted to Don at the colony, telling Don there was something up that might make money and that he needed help from Don. He knew what my Donnie boy is like, all right. Magnuson scares me."

"What kind of help?"

"Oh, radio equipment, so he could tell if anyone was searching for him. Other things, some scientific equipment. I don't know. You ask a lot of questions."

"It's about all I can do."

"I know, Boris. I wish it wasn't so. Then Don had to cut the mayor in on things. He's greedy too."

"So they're using Magnuson and he's using them. Interesting. Anyone else in on it?"

"No. Oh, you mean Brenda? She never knew anything. I'm one of those females who *can* keep secrets." She gave him a cold bright smile.

Boris returned it. "So here we are. You still think you

might get rich and get away from this planet and not have dope-peddling on your conscience—or murder. But in your heart you know the Space Force is bound to uncover all this sooner or later, because so many people are involved. And when that time comes you'd like me as your friend."

She put her hand on his arm again. "I'll do what I can for you. Yes, for Brenda too. But I can't do much." Jane raised one finger, to trace the line of his jaw. "You know, I could wish you were under *my* control, not Eddie's. But Don will be coming back. I'd better go; good-night."

When Boris was almost back at the door of his own hut, he realized that a man was standing motionless in the shadows beside it. It was Magnuson.

When Boris stopped, the doctor took a step forward, cleared his throat, and said self-consciously, "I order you to stand on your head."

"What?" Boris almost giggled with the sudden relief of apparent silliness. Then he understood. "Oh, a test. No, Doctor, I don't have to obey your orders. Only Jones's."

"Good. Then you will not obey Morton or Kaleta. Will you step into the hut?"

Inside, three warriors held Jones. His arms were bound, and there was a flint knife at his throat.

"Jones controls you, and now, as you see, I control Jones." Magnuson was not boasting; he was miserable. "Oh, this is all horrible. But I must remain in control, and there is no other way for me to do it."

Jones spoke without moving his head. "Brazil, he wants you to get into a groundsuit and disarm Morton and Kaleta. Wait until they finish with the radio and come back to the village. Shouldn't be too hard a job."

"It should be a pleasure." Boris looked from Jones to Magnuson. "You don't need to compel me to do that—just give me permission."

"I hate to use you as a slave." Magnuson was suffering. "But I have done worse things. I know you'd escape me in a moment if you could. Perhaps you'd kill me. I must control you in the groundsuit and get you out of it again. I hope that soon I can convince you that I do the work of Man. But . . ."

There came a muffled clanking at the door of the hut. Red

Circles and three others bore a groundsuit in, carrying it across bending spears.

Jones gave precise orders. "Brazil, put the groundsuit on. Disarm Kaleta and Morton, but don't hurt them if you can help it. Then come at once back to this hut and take off the suit." He glanced at Magnuson, who nodded. The flint knife was taken from Jones's throat, but not any great distance.

"I think I will be the one to take the weapons from the two Earthmen," said Red Circles.

"No." Magnuson looked steadily at the war chief. "They will be on their guard, and you might have to kill them, especially if you went alone against them."

Muscles bunched along Red Circles' jaw. "Magnuson does not say that I might fail."

"I know you better than that. But as bad as they are, I do not want the two Earthmen killed. I mean to give them the chance to prove themselves true men."

Red Circles seemed to understand, if not agree.

Magnuson stared briefly off into space, fascinated by something only he could see. "Like a baptism," he mused. "It might wash away past sins."

Boris, getting into the suit, thought he understood. Magnuson had said that all of the Earthmen present would become members of this tribe. Then the "baptism" he talked of would be an initiation ceremony.

"There may be some shooting," Boris said to Magnuson. "Better see that the village people keep their heads down."

"Yes, that's right." Magnuson hurried out of the hut.

"One thing," said Boris to Jones.

"What?" Jones opened his eyes. He had seemed to be resting, almost oblivious of the Kappans who were still ready to kill him at a moment's notice.

"Let me make sure Brenda's safe."

"I'll have them bring her over here so you can see she's healthy—when you come back here and get out of that suit."

And that had to suffice; Boris went out of the hut. Outside, he met Magnuson and strode beside him across the village common, wrapped now in the familiar fluid power of a groundsuit but as helpless as ever.

"They'll come back to the village along that path," Mag-

nuson whispered to him, pointing in the starlight. "The copter is in a clearing over there. Remember, no bloodshed."

"I want none."

"Of course. Good luck." Magnuson moved silently away.

I don't need it now, thought Boris, watching the greater darkness of the path where it emerged from the forest. He would need all the luck he could get, later, when he tried to resist his orders, when he tried to keep the suit on and pick up Brenda and carry her out of this mess.

A flashlight appeared, far down the path. Moving expertly in the bulky suit, Boris took shelter behind some bushes. He turned up the sensitivity of his helmet's microphones, and picked up a low murmur of voices.

"—anything fatal to Brenda, at least not right away. That'd be a terrible waste." Don Morton chuckled.

"Let's get the *business* settled." Kaleta sounded angry. "We'll be lucky to manage that, without playing around."

"All right, all right. Anyone who's dead or missing can be blamed on Jones, when there's an investigation."

"If we can get the Kappans on our side. But we go along with Magnuson until we find out where this Thought-Water comes from."

They were very close to Boris now, and evidently caught the gleam of his suit in the bushes. The flashlight in Morton's hand swung suddenly to shine straight on him.

"Who?" Kaleta demanded sharply.

"Me," said Boris, and plunged after Morton, who had turned and was running back along the path toward the copter. Morton heard the metal footfalls closing in, turned, and fired. Bullets whanged off the armored suit before Boris got a grip on the barrel of the machine pistol, yanked it from Morton's grasp, and flattened it into uselessness.

"Come along." With compelled gentleness, Boris took Morton's arm and towed him back toward the village. Morton made choking sounds, of rage or fear or both, but offered no more resistance.

The good mayor had been smart enough to raise his hands and stand still. Boris plucked Kaleta's firearm from its holster, and squeezed it into junk. Then, gripping one man's arm lightly in each metal gauntlet, Boris marched his prisoners back across the village common.

Magnuson met them, an escort of warriors at his back. His face showed relief. The two girls stood beside him.

"I'm all right, Boris," Brenda called to him. There was hope in her eyes again.

Nothing would be easier, now, than to rage through them all, knocking them aside until he had Brenda safe in his metal arms; then, to run with her, spears bouncing from his back, trees crashing under his feet, carrying her safe through the night to the sheltering forcefield walls of the colony.

. . . Boris began to remove his helmet, and then his suit. He could not even try to disobey.

## V

IN THE MORNING, again transmitting his orders through Jones, Magnuson had Boris again put on a groundsuit, and then drag the other one to the river and throw it in, together with the energy rifles.

"We are going upstream," Magnuson announced, when the rest of his prisoners had been assembled. "A couple of miles north of here, at the Workers' Village, there are some things I want all of you to see. Probably we will stay there tonight, and tomorrow go upstream again, another mile or two to the Warriors' Village. And there we will see, all of us, whether we are acceptable to the spirit of man."

"You're out of your head," said Morton.

"I know you think so, now. But come."

Magnuson led the march upstream, with Red Circles and an elaborately robed chief priest at his sides. Boris, still wearing the groundsuit, followed, with Brenda and Jane. Then, sullenly silent, came Kaleta and Morton. After a few more priests, a band of warriors brought up the rear, with Jones secured among them, gagged so he could shout no sudden orders to Boris.

The path between villages was a well-worn trail but steep in places and fairly difficult. It zigzagged uphill among boulders and under overshadowing trees, and skirted rapids and falls. Boris helped the girls over the rougher places. He found he could hardly speak to Brenda. Her eyes were sympathetic, not accusing—but still it was harder and harder for him to meet them with his own.

After about a mile, the slopes smoothed out, and the trail wound beside the Yunoe through cultivated fields in a broad flat valley. Trees were widely scattered here; a scouting copter could have seen the procession, spotted the Earth-descended people and the glinting groundsuit. Magnuson kept looking up and around at the sky, but there was no searching copter.

A few kilted field workers looked up from their labor or rest to gape at the procession as it passed; and soon another cluster of huts and small buildings came in view ahead.

The Workers' Village, like the Temple Village, straddled the narrow Yunoe, but instead of a temple it held shed-like buildings where logs and stone were worked and stored. A kilted worker-chief came forth to greet Magnuson and the other two village chiefs as equals. The six new Earth-descended people caused much polite curiosity among the workers.

Again Boris was ordered out of the groundsuit, and it was carried away to some hiding place; then Jones could be relieved of his gag. Magnuson's prisoners were casually watched. After talking until mid-day with the other chiefs, Magnuson came to share a meal with the six other Earth-descended. He ate quickly and sparingly, as usual, then rose to speak.

"I have persuaded the other chiefs to begin the annual rite of passage tomorrow night. When this year's class of young Kappans face their test, all of us will go with them." He smiled happily at the two girls. "You will go to the women's earlier ceremony, of course. Things will be much easier for you than for us."

Kaleta jumped to his feet. "What are you getting us into?"

"Why, Mr. Mayor, I am giving you a chance. Not to enter a tribe of savages, no. Though if you survive, you will find the tribal secrets open to you, and these warriors sworn to defend you as their brother. But I give you a greater chance. If you can prove your own humanity and your own manhood, to yourself, I think you will care less for peddling dope."

"And if I can't—prove myself—to you?"

"Not to me, Mr. Mayor, to the tribe. I'll be beside you, undergoing the same things. And if we fail? Why, we will die—deservedly."

Kaleta sat down as if his legs were suddenly too weak to

hold him; his plump face was grayish. Morton sat beside him, smoldering silently. Boris found some satisfaction in watching the clever operators as they revised their opinion of the crackpot who wanted to be a savage, bumbled around with theories, and could be somehow disposed of when the time was ripe.

Magnuson turned from the table. "Come along, all of you. I'll show you something of my work."

He led them west from the village, at right angles to the river's course. The path was wide and dusty, as if worn by the dragging of heavy objects. After a quarter mile's walk, staccato shouting and the cracking of whips could be heard from a short distance ahead.

The path emerged from the forest, and spread out to form a grassless area that rimmed the edge of a quarry-pit. Dust hung in the air. Kilted workers shaped blocks of stone with saws of copper or bronze, the first metal tools Boris had seen in Kappan hands.

The workers took time out to stare at their visitors, but stone cutting and metal tools were not what Magnuson meant to show.

"There," he said, and pointed.

Up over the lip of the quarry-pit, through a haze of dust, beasts of burden came into view, a pair at a time, gripping a rope with their human hands, hauling upward with all their strength. There were eight of the short, two-legged beasts in the team, and they dragged uphill a sledge weighted with a single stone block. Under the flicking whip of a kilted overseer, the hominids moved their load with a straining slowness, but without outcry. Their naked leathery skins were powdered with the dust of the quarry. One of the two females in the team was pregnant.

Moving a few paces forward, Boris saw other hominid groups toiling in the quarry. He had seen slaves before—men abused and brutalized upon a score of planets. This sight before him now was somehow different—he could not decide at once if it was worse, or not as bad. These hominid faces showed nothing, no gleam of human hope or hate, fear or resentment. For all their human shape, the creatures seemed to be not apathetic men, but animals. Their five-fingered hands hung limp when not curving to grip a rope or flatten-

ing to push stones. The kilted men with whips barked their orders in repeated monosyllables, as if to horses.

If these beasts were the once-human product of some brainwasher's art, the the most evil men of the galaxy might learn new skills on Kappa. But no, thought Boris. These two-legged beasts have never been men.

Jane had turned her face from the sight. But Brenda watched, and Boris saw that there were tears in her eyes.

"It is not as simple as it seems," said Magnuson to her gently. "If they had the bodies of horses, and you saw them given food and water and rest, you would not weep for them. They are given those things."

"But they're not horses," said Brenda.

"Weep for those who are not. That's the point, yes. One in three, or one in ten, must bear in his brain the spark of humanity, and that spark has never been fanned."

"Why do you say they must?" Kaleta asked.

"Well, they can hardly be anywhere else on the evolutionary tree. In the wild state they use weapons—to fight the villagers and no doubt in hunting. I'm no biologist, but their brain capacity seems adequate for abstract thought. Apes will now and then use tools, but their brains are smaller, and their forelimbs are needed primarily for travel, whether brachiating or walking. Only man and his immediate ancestors habitually stand erect. Come this way. I'll show you my laboratory."

Magnuson led his party away from the quarry, along a narrow path that curved through the woods for a hundred yards and came to an end at a big, new-looking cabin. At one end of the building was a pen of upright logs, like a prison stockade.

In the stockade were eight hominids. The one female and one of the males looked old and completely crippled, obviously unable to haul stone in the quarry. The remaining six were younger males, all more or less healthy-looking, though one of them was minus a hand. Looking at the six more carefully, Boris saw that each of them bore the scar of some serious but now healed injury. Probably primitive ropes broke often in the quarry, and heavy stones slipped and slid and fell.

A water trough ran into the pen. "Dry again," sighed Magnuson. He took up a pail, and began to fill the trough from



a nearby well. "I can't get the villagers to feed or water a hominid that does no work. They give me the ones that are badly injured in quarry accidents, and first aid and Earth drugs save some of them, as you see. Red Circles will not understand that my treatments are not meant as torture. There. You were all thirsty, weren't you?"

Inside the pen, the hominids clustered along the trough, cupping up water in their hands, or bending over to slurp noisily. The one-handed male drank, then turned and reached out between the logs of the palisade toward Magnuson. Magnuson touched the gray leathery hand, as if knowing that was all the creature wanted.

"Have they any speech?" Jones asked, staring with an odd expression at the hominids.

"No. Oh, the villagers say that the wild adults have a language of their own, but I doubt that it's more than a system of warning cries such as monkeys use. Though I've never gotten close to a wild adult myself."

"But they *must* have speech. Don't they? I can remember—" Jones stopped speaking, abruptly. He stared at the hominids as if they frightened him; they were paying him no attention.

Magnuson shook his head, watching Jones carefully. "No, they have no speech. The young ones are captured when they wander away from the wild troop, brought here and trained like horses or dogs. I've tried to teach these a few words, but I think none of them are psychically ready for symbolic thought. So I mean for the six young males to go with us, tomorrow night, into the rite of passage."

Boris was not surprised, having followed Magnuson's thought this far. He tried to picture members of three intelligent species being initiated into the same primitive tribe—he didn't yet know what the initiation would be like, but he could imagine it. Still, he refrained for the moment from arguing.

Jones was surprised. He asked, "Will the villagers stand for it?"

Magnuson nodded. "Just barely. Oh, perhaps all six of these will die in the ordeal, for no mere animal can pass through alive. But in pain and shock is man born, as an individual or as a race. If the ordeal awakens none of these six to manhood, why I must try again; I must somehow get time

to try again. In the end I must succeed. Then I shall have made man, and what civilization does to me will not matter."

Morton laughed. "You'll play hell starting a tribe with those. Six males."

Magnuson was unruffled. "The female is not so important." He bowed, smiling, to the girls. "Until civilization is attained. And even then a psychic difference remains between the sexes, which we ignore to our cost. Civilization abandons the rite of passage, and enfeebles the race. Eventually we must return on our home planet to the ordeal, to the weeding-out. Only males who can prove their manhood should survive and reproduce."

Magnuson's Earth-descended audience was silent, angry or fearful, some of them half-believing him. Magnuson ignored them. The one-armed hominid still stood at the palisade, thrusting his hand and stump out between the logs. Magnuson touched the gray hand again.

After feeding his hominids, throwing leaves and roots from a bin into the pen, he beckoned to his visitors. "Come inside, all of you."

Most of the interior of the large cabin was a single room, floored with stone slabs. There were village-made worktables and shelves, and a scattering of books, papers, chemical and electrical apparatus.

"I took a chance, stealing this for you," said Kaleta, pointing to a microscope under a dusty plastic cover. "Why'd you want it, if you're not working with the Water of Thought?"

"I was interested in the Water, at first. Drinking it brought me here; but here I have turned to more important things. Yes. Now I've almost entirely given over the physical and chemical sides of research. But here, here's an interesting bit of physical evidence."

From a table Magnuson picked up a skull, of somewhat less than adult Earthman size, but of a brain capacity probably sufficient for intelligence. The teeth were omnivorous, human-looking, and noticeably worn—probably a quarry-beast that chewed a lot of grit with its rough food. The jaw was short, heavy and almost chinless. Below a receding forehead the supraorbital ridges stood out boldly, joining together between the eyes.

"What do you say of it, gentlemen?" Magnuson spoke to Jones and Boris.

Jones, briefly a planeteer again, took the skull and turned it in his hands, looking at the face, the sides, and the top of the cranium. "I'd say it fits the type of standard, galactic pre-sapient hominid. Rare, but not astonishing."

"Right. Now, tell me, upon how many planets has the transition from beast to man been observed? The achievement of sapience by the standard hominid, or any other form?"

Jones shrugged. "It's never been observed but that's not surprising. If you want to talk technical evolutionary theory, it's an instance of the automatic suppression of a peduncle. The beginnings of all things tend to be out of sight and out of reach."

"Right again." Magnuson nodded, smiling and intent. "But here and now, upon this planet the rare moment is before us, or it will be if we choose to create it. And I so choose."

Jones put down the skull, and leaned wearily against the table. "All this has ceased to concern me, or I'd argue with your methods."

"Then argue. You will soon be concerned again with the rest of humanity. I've told you that your slavery to the Water of Thought will probably soon be over."

"If I'm soon dead." Jones displayed a sickly smile. "If I argue with you, will you refill my bottle?"

"No. But I can promise you that you'll drink the Water of Thought once more. We all will when we enter the initiation ceremony."

Kaleta and Morton almost jumped at Magnuson, cursing him and demanding explanations; Boris came near joining them.

"I tried to have you all exempted from drinking," Magnuson said. "But the chiefs refused. They gave in to me on letting the hominids participate, so I could not press this other point."

Only Jones had relaxed. "Then I won't argue. I'll accept as true any theory that brings me more of the Water."

"If you won't argue, I will," said Boris. "Our going through a paddling to join some half-wit fraternity is not going to prove anything, except that we'd rather suffer than die. Neither will it prove much about your hominid pupils here, as far as I can see. If you can't educate them now, a torture

session won't make them any smarter. What's wrong with just letting them alone, to go to hell in their own way? That's all the Space Force wants, and for once I agree with my bosses."

But it was no use, he was not getting through to Magnuson; they were thinking in different co-ordinate systems. Boris had expected an argument to fail but he had to try.

Magnuson faced Boris more in sadness than in anger, or perhaps controlling his anger well. "Oh, yes. I am—what is the phrase?—a do-gooder? I interfere. My interference in evolutionary processes has been forbidden on this and other planets. I remember the words of one Tribune—he said my work would be cruel, cruel to animals and men. As if hominids and men were not already on the anvil of evolution! The only mercy granted the hominids now is their ignorance of what lies just beyond their reach. Cruel! Perhaps that Tribune would forbid a woman to give birth, because the experience would traumatize her child."

"Well. I can't stop you." Boris picked up the hominid skull from the table, and on a hunch turned it upside down. The *foramen magnum* had been enlarged by crude hacking into a gaping hole, large enough to have permitted extraction of the brain.

Magnuson was smiling at Boris's discovery. "Yes, more evidence of proto-humanity. When a hominid dies in the quarry, or in my pen, the others cut or break open the skull, and devour at least part of the brain. Unpleasant, yes, young ladies. But still, as a twentieth-century anthropologist wrote: 'Nearly the most ancient human trick we know.'"

Boris sat in the sunny common of the Workers' Village, while Brenda stood behind him, massaging his tired neck, and kilted and kiltless children goggled at them.

"How's your ankle?" he asked.

"Not bad. Afraid I can't run for help, though."

"I can't do that or anything," he said. "I've tried."

"You will be able to, you will. Sometime."

"Magnuson thinks Jones and I will recover in another day or two; I suppose just in time to drink more of the stuff. But Magnuson isn't trusting me in the groundsuit any more."

"That's a good sign. Maybe he's right."

"I can't afford to start hoping." That was a shameful thing

to say to a brave girl but Boris said it. He could feel himself hitting bottom.

Quartered that night in a hut in the Workers' Village, Boris dreamed again. He was a hominid, dragging a heavy sledge up the side of a quarry-pit. He felt a whip. Planeteer Hayashi was behind him, pulling desperately with one hand at the monstrous growth upon his face, and lashing Boris with the other.

## VI

IN THE MORNING there was a breakfast of fruit, stewed meat, and fresh-baked bread. A pair of robed priests arrived from the lower village, and helped Magnuson lead his six young hominids from the pen, after first roping them together like mountain climbers. Then the procession of the day before, enlarged by hominids and priests, moved upstream again. This time the groundsuit was left behind, so Jones was not as closely guarded.

After a mile the flat valley pinched in again, becoming a gorge through which the Yunoeë tumbled. Again the trail became difficult; but the journey was short.

The Warriors' Village, at the influx of a tributary creek, straddled the Yunoeë like the two settlements below. The warriors' huts were roughly made, and crudely shingled with thorny bark.

Here, the villagers' greeting was a screaming mob-scene. Boris put protective arms around Brenda and Jane as howling warriors leaped past them, brandishing knives and clubs.

It was the roped-together hominids who drew the brunt of the threatening uproar. It took all the shouting and gesturing that Magnuson and the robed witch-men could manage to keep the hominids from being assaulted and probably slaughtered. The hominids cowered and snarled, huddling in a group ringed by screaming warriors and squaws. It took half an hour for Magnuson to get his pupils into the village to the comparative safety of a pen that had been built for them.

Boris had little worry to spare for hominids. But he was relieved when the village women took gentle custody of

Brenda and Jane and led them away, evidently to some ceremony where males were prohibited.

Kaleta and Morton whispered together. Jones paced the village restlessly. Boris sat down in the abandoned hut where he and Jones had been billeted, and tried to keep out of trouble.

He had been there only a few minutes when a shadow darkened the green brightness of the doorway, and Morton stepped in.

"Brazil, you're still under Jones's orders, huh?"

"Yes. But I can defend myself if need be."

"I didn't come in to start a fight." Morton seated himself on the earth floor. "Look, 'do you know anything about this initiation business Magnuson's got us into?"

"Not this one in particular. I've seen 'em on other planets."

"What's the best way to get through one?"

"You're asking me for help? When do you plan to murder me?"

"All right, so I've got a lot of nerve. I said I didn't come in here for trouble, but you don't scare me a damn bit, colonel, or whatever the hell you are. You don't have your tin suit on now."

Jones came in. "What's this all about?"

Morton stood up. "Maybe *you'll* tell me something about this initiation thing. After it's over you'll want me around to help you fill your bottle."

Jones's cheek started twitching. "There's no secret about getting through. Just grit your teeth and follow orders, and don't try to fight back. As Brazil said, it's like joining some half-wit fraternity."

Morton nodded slowly. "That's about what I thought. And it might be pretty rough, right? Suppose we tried to get out of here, today or tonight. What do you think our chances would be?"

"Just about zero," said Jones. "And I don't want to get away."

"Sure, you'll do anything to stay near the Thought-Water." Morton thought for a moment. "Well, I agree, for once. I've gone through a lot already to get my hands on it. I'm not gonna quit."

When Morton was gone, Jones sat down, his cheek still twitching, and pulled his stone bottle from a coverall pocket.

"Brazil, you're lucky. If you're cured, you're a free man. If I'm cured, I'm still a murderer. You know if I lose the Water now, I won't have anything."

"You think we'll be cured?"

"Magnuson thinks so, and he's so sure of everything. Right now he's arguing with the chiefs again. They still don't like the idea of initiating his six hominids, but he's insisting, and he'll probably win. He's quite a man."

"He is. But what chance will his hominids have in an initiation?"

"Almost none. They won't know what it's all about. They're just simple, ignorant people."

"People?"

Jones raised the dry bottle to his mouth, holding it vertical to drain any last possible drop. Then he hurled it across the hut, and began to laugh, in quiet near-hysteria.

"They're people," Jones said. "I'm mad, but I know. Don't ask me how." Then he collapsed, laughing or sobbing.

Boris sat quietly looking out into the green Kappan sunshine.

Somehow, the day passed and most of the night.

In the dark pre-dawn, Boris found himself suddenly awake, listening to a distant rumble of drums, and to a howl like that of whirled bull-roarers. Across the hut, Jones too was awake and sitting up. Before either could speak, the hut was filled with warriors, masked and painted as Boris had never seen them before. He was jerked to his feet and dragged from the hut with Jones beside him. Their escort joined another little swarm of warriors surrounding Morton and Kaleta, and the whole mob moved out of the village, taking the path that climbed yet farther upstream beside the riverbank. Magnuson was there already, going in the same direction under his own power, holding the lead end of a rope which the six cowering hominids gripped like blind men traversing a place of danger.

There was much howling and jostling. Boris staggered and scrambled and was pushed along. Torchlight fell on frenzied or frightened faces, on night-black river water and the white curl of rapids. Half a mile ahead, the sky was lighted by a huge fire, and from there came the sounds of drum and bull-roarer.

The steep riverbanks fell away again as the place of the fire drew near. The procession moved on into the glare and heat of the flames before halting. The young villagers who were candidates for initiation were here already, in kilt or robe or loincloth, frightened but trying to be stoic. The five Earthmen and six hominids were pushed into their group. The drums were very loud.

"Tell Brazil that he is free," Magnuson shouted to Jones. "Until he has passed through the ordeal, or failed it, he must act for himself. Tell him!"

"All right." Jones turned to Boris. "So be it. You're on your own, sink or swim."

Boris hated both of them. He was not property, not a robot to be turned off or on. And at the moment, any talk of his having freedom was a bad joke. The hands of half a dozen warriors were on him, pulling off his clothes. Each candidate was first stripped, then draped with a net-like garment of tough fibers, weighted with fist-sized stones. Someone thrust another such rock, painted with a crude design, into Boris's hand, making sure his fingers gripped it tightly.

"Hold on to your rock at all costs," Magnuson was shouting at the other Earthmen. "To drop it means to reject the use of tools, and you will be killed."

The candidates were pushed into a ring, scorchingly close around the fire. A warrior thrust a cup under Boris's nose; he drank, and the Water of Thought was cool and familiar in his throat. Jones gasped, and drank; they had to tear the empty cup away from him. The hominids gulped, like so many thirsty animals. The young villagers swallowed the drug with reverence, tasting it for the first time. Magnuson and Kaleta and Morton were now somewhere on the other side of the fire from Boris.

Someone screamed and a dance began, the candidates circling the fire, the warriors keeping pace with them in an outer ring, flourishing weapons and leaping between a village youth and one of the hominids, in the firelight, to the roar of the drums.

Boris jiggled and hopped in the inner ring, doing what seemed to be expected of him. Somehow the hominids were moving with the others, not dancing, but at least keeping their relative places in the ring. What would the Water of



Thought do to them? At least it had not paralyzed Boris again; he felt nothing from it yet.

One warrior leaped in from the outer circle, and slashed lightly with a small knife across the chest of one of the young villagers, who gave no sign of pain or shock. Then the man whirled back to his place in the outer ring, and others danced in, each to single out a different victim.

Boris felt a sudden sharp gouge on the back of one leg, and managed to keep himself from showing any reaction. The man who had wounded him now spun dancing past in front of Boris. He was masked, but Boris recognized Red Circles by his size and his painted arms. It was a compliment to be favored with the personal attention of the war chief, though not one that Boris could fully appreciate.

The creeping hypnosis of the drums and the dance began to grip Boris, and he knew that it could help him. He let himself move into it, gradually, while holding part of his mind clear and ready to take control.

Screaming hell broke loose; the warriors had started to torment one of the hominids. Boris turned in time to see the victim react with the simple directness of an animal, striking back with the sacred rock it held in its fist. In the next instant, the hominid's body seemed to sprout spears like porcupine's quills. Then it was only a gory and lifeless thing, being dragged away.

In the next moment, another hominid fought back and died. And in the next, another. Between the explosions of violence, only seconds elapsed, but Boris found himself able to think as if leisurely minutes were passing. The hypnotic influence of the dance had brought him to a state of observant detachment; he felt he was able to calculate long plans between throbs of the hammering drum. He saw the warriors with torture-knife and killing-spear, getting rid of their hominid enemies one after another, killing them within the rules of the ordeal, but with hair-trigger good will for the task. He saw Magnuson, standing still, arms half raised, ignoring his own fate, watching while all his work and his hope died on Kappan spear points.

And with this detached clarity and tremendous speed of thought, Boris saw the fifth and sixth hominids still standing in their places behind Magnuson, while the fourth was dying before Magnuson's eyes.

Those last two hominids still stood, moving obediently with the circle, holding firmly to their ritual rocks, while one warrior jabbed at them with a point and another scorched them with a glowing stick. The two hominids watched Magnuson like dogs, and they obeyed him like trusting men, amid this violence and death. And Boris saw two warriors look at each other, look and come to silent agreement. They thrust with their spears, and the fifth hominid died, not by the rules of the rite of passage, but by racial murder.

Then the two murderers saw Magnuson turn toward them, and they moved away as if ashamed, and so the sixth hominid still lived, under Magnuson's watchful eye.

To Boris, all these things seemed to hold deep mystical significance. He knew he was sliding deeper into the hypnosis of rhythm and pain and the Water of Thought and whatever else might be here at work; he knew it with the corner of his mind that was still normal but kept shrinking into less and less importance. Boris was not frightened now. Mayor Pete Kaleta hopped past him, glaring wildly, muttering his terror, but that meant nothing to Boris. Even Red Circles had become an unimportant figure, who now and then approached bringing unimportant torment.

The fifth hominid had died unjustly, killed by murderers who were false to the tribe and false to the spirit of man. Some time Boris would tell the story and see the murderers punished. Some time in the future. But there was no future, really; this dance was eternal.

The figure of Magnuson drifted past, dancing mechanically, bending to look at the stained earth where his hominids had died, then looking up again, eyes prayerfully following the lone hominid survivor.

It was the young hominid with one hand.

Magnuson should be praying, now. There should be some atheist's prayer to the Spirit of Man that he could say.

Let us call you down, Man, from your abode of evolutionary law. Let our fire and the sound of our drum bring you down through this planet's night to enter the brains of those who dance for you. Make us all men. Make us all men. Boris could almost see the Spirit now, brooding in the rolling heat above the tongues of fire, coming and going with the heartbeat of the heaviest drum.

Then there was a disturbing noise to give his mind a

foothold, and he fought his way up from deepening trance, pushing spirits and dreams away. One of the village adolescents had cracked and gone wild, had screamed and tried to run from the torture and the dance. And spearmen, ruthlessly obedient to the law of the ritual, forced their weapons home. The young Kappan died with a bubbling scream. Magnuson did not care about this one; Magnuson did not take his eyes from his hominid. But Boris saw the corpse dragged away. The sacred rock had fallen from the boy's hand, and a man kicked it into the fire.

Don Morton danced past; Boris was vaguely surprised to see him still alive. Morton's eyes were glazed and he shouted incoherently. He did not blink when a warrior jabbed him.

The next thing Boris realized clearly was that the dance was over; the sun was touching the eastern horizon; and he and the other survivors were being led through the gloomy woods in torchlit silence. Was the ordeal finished? Not likely.

Boris heard one awakening bird, and then found himself entering the mouth of a cave. His head still echoed with the now-silent drums, and his minor wounds blended into one pervasive ache, but it was not over yet. He was herded forward with the others into damp stony silence.

The twisting passages of the cave linked together chambers so big that in some of them the torchlight died out without revealing all the walls. Feet shuffled behind Boris and ahead of him, and from somewhere came the sound of trickling water. His throat burned with thirst, but there was no use hoping for a drink.

The procession of candidates for manhood wound to a halt inside another big chamber. Here each candidate was made to sit in a separate niche among the rocks, isolated from sight of the others. Boris sat down with relief; there was a moment of rest and peace.

Magnuson walked past him, croaking, "Do not move from where you have been placed, under pain of death. Do not move from where you have been placed—" He went on, repeating the warning, evidently for the other Earth-descended.

Sitting in his rocky niche, probably carved out many generations ago, Boris could see no one. In most directions, his field of view extended hardly farther than his arm could reach. Directly behind him was a shadowy opening between

rocks that looked as if Something might crawl out of it at any moment; directly in front was a large open space. Niches and folds and stalagmites surrounded the open space like rows of seats round an arena; and now in the arena there gathered half a dozen robed medicine men, carrying torches and chanting.

As they chanted, the witchmen were extinguishing their torches one by one, so the darkness grew up a leap at a time. Boris waited, fatalistically ready for whatever might come next. He sat tailor-fashion, holding his sacred rock on one knee, while the other stones tied to his net-garment dragged wearily down upon his shoulders.

Only one torch still burned. The medicine men were lighting what appeared to be small shielded lanterns from it, while the rocks of the cave leaned and swayed with its light. And now the priest-chief, wearing the biggest mask of all, appeared in the arena, chanting his own song, an animal-skin robe dribbling wet in his hands. He raised the robe above his head, and brought the night down with it, putting out the light. The last syllable of the chant died with the sputtering of the torch. With sight gone, the sound of trickling water seemed louder. And now Boris could notice that the air in the cave was fresh and that it moved subtly past him. Probably there were several exits. A clever man might crawl through this darkness, find a way out and be miles away in the woods before his tormentors missed him. A man who thought himself clever might easily crawl into a trap and get himself speared to death. Still, escape was now a possibility, but a faint one; and things were not that desperate yet.

At least Boris found himself able to think like a man again. Had his free will really been restored? Did Magnuson think that the ordeal would help to cure him and Jones—

A hideous scream tore through the blackness, echoing and re-echoing like a frenzied animal leaping from one wall to another of its cage. Boris kept himself under control and sat still. There was a shuffle of movement nearby and the sound of heavy breathing. Somewhere a Kappan boy began a hesitant, groping chant, as if inventing prayer.

Boris's eyes grew slowly sensitive in the darkness. Now he could detect a faint blur of light across the upper part of the cave.

"Brazil? Magnuson? Anyone near me?" It was Jones's voice from somewhere nearby on Boris's right.

No one jumped at Jones to kill him for speaking, so Boris judged it was safe to answer. "Brazil here. What's up?"

"Good. Listen, Brazil, some of these guys with the spears may have taken a drug to sharpen their night vision. Before this started I heard one of the women saying something about it."

"One of the women?" Talking was rough on the dried-out throat, but it might help the cause of sanity.

"Yes. From what I heard, the women have their initiation in this cave, too. None of them ever get killed; Brenda and Jane are probably having a feast with their new sisters right now. How long have we been in here?"

"I don't know."

No one else seemed disposed to join the conversation. Talking too much might be dangerous. There was silence for a little while.

"Brazil, you don't think I really wanted to leave my family, do you? Leave everything I had and everything I was? Maybe you wanted to be a slave to this Water of Thought but I didn't."

Boris's head jerked around. He stared into the darkness, toward the invisible Jones. "What do you mean, maybe I wanted to be a slave?"

"Well. Some people do want to get rid of all responsibility. It occurred to me."

Boris felt a great hollow rage. *There's no truth at all in that*, he thought. *Not in my case. I wasn't tired of being responsible for myself.*

*God. It couldn't be true, could it?* He shivered, sitting still in the damp, moving air. Suppose the Water of Thought pushed an Earthman's mind whichever way it happened to be leaning, making a fatal obsession out of what had been only a potential weakness.

Was this realization the cure that Magnuson had predicted? Or was it the cure, but Magnuson didn't realize it—

From off among the rocks came a sudden weak flash of light—one of the dark lanterns flicked open for an instant. There was a startled gasp and then a return of darkness and silence. After a timeless interval another lantern flashed in another part of the cave, accompanied by the sound of sud-

den movement and a cry of fear. Boris made his muscles relax and tried to keep his mind on things other than thirst or danger.

Perhaps it was well that he did, for the next light that flashed was aimed at him, and he saw that between him and the lantern crawled the figure of Red Circles, knife in hand. In the next instant blackness had returned. Don't move, Boris reminded himself, under penalty of death. He would like to crack Red Circles on the knuckles with two or three pounds of sacred rock, but that might be considered bad form.

But instead of the now-familiar pain of Red Circles' dull bone knife, the lantern beam came again, still aimed at Boris. Red Circles was not in sight. Five feet in front of Boris, on the cave floor, was a large cup that seemed to be full of water. The light went out again.

He was not to move from where they had placed him; and they would know, somehow, if he did. But Boris's memory held the sight of the cup, full to overflowing, a little water sloshed out onto the stone floor as if the cup had just been hastily set down. Boris's thirsty throat argued that no one could notice a difference if a mouthful of water were taken out. But his brain knew it was some kind of a trap. The cup might even be poisoned. If he had to, he could go for a long time yet without drinking. And he had to.

He shifted and stretched his fingers, which were growing stiff from gripping the sacred tool-rock; it would not do to drop the thing by accident. Then he gave a little jump, and cursed, as Red Circles jabbed him nastily from behind, out of utter silence and darkness. Boris felt sure it had been Red Circles again; he thought he could recognize the technique by now. He kept himself from trying to kill Red Circles.

What price free will now?

From somewhere in the cave there came an animal sound, a growling and snuffling that spoke plainly of a prowling predator. Boris's intellect insisted that it must be only a warrior doing imitations, and Boris kept his intellect firmly in control.

Soon, from close in front of him, came the faintest possible sound, as if someone were examining the cup, or removing it.

Unmeasurable time hung in the cave. Its darkness swarmed with ghosts of sound, like the murmur in a man's ears of his own bloodstream. Like the imaginable sounds inside an ant-

hill whose inhabitants sought a way to climb out toward sentience. Growing louder in the mind, a whispering that might have been blind cells, evolving, pre-conscious but desperate to grow, to find the way to Thought. . . .

This was worse than the dance. Boris wanted to leap up, to fight, to run away; but he made himself sit still. When the animal snuffling came again, it was almost a relief.

Boris heard Red Circles coming to stick him again, behind the rocks to his left rear. It was a very faint sound of movement, but Boris heard it. How good it would be to turn and smash the sacred rock into—

“Boris?” It was a tiny ghost of a whisper, but he knew immediately that it came from Brenda. Great God Support of Physics! He wanted to whisper to her to get out of here, but his dry throat choked.

“Boris, it’s Brenda. I can see, a little. Do you need water?”

“Yes,” he got out, in a faint whisper. “But—”

She was moving away already, crawling in almost perfect silence, apparently going to get him a drink. She must be mad. But what was he to do, call her back, start an argument with her?

Then Jones’s voice came again from somewhere on Boris’s right.

“Brazil, I did want to. I’ve thought it out, I’ve faced it.”

“Jones? What’s that?”

“I did want to give up everything. I sit here in the dark and I can see into myself. I left Kitty and I left my work and everything else I had. I wanted to be a fanatic, to give up my whole life for something, and I did. For the Water.”

“It—may work out.” Boris was listening for Brenda, expecting every moment to hear the sounds of her capture or murder. He wondered if any of the warriors who must be listening could understand his talk with Jones. Boris flexed his legs, getting ready for the hopeless running fight that seemed inevitable. At least that might give Brenda a chance to escape. But how had she gotten in? And where was she?

“It’ll work out, Brazil. I’ll tell you how it will. I gave up everything for the Water, and now it’s given me up. I’m cured.” Jones’s voice was dead.

“What?”

“That last drink we had, starting this business. It tasted

the same, but it meant nothing to me—it had no effect. I'm dead, Brazil. My life has gone for nothing."

Boris was listening and listening for Brenda, sifting every whisper of sound. He almost shouted for Jones to shut up. "Maybe so, Jones," Boris said.

"Maybe so. Listen, Brazil, they put a cup here, right in front of me. I wonder what's in it."

"They set a cup here but I didn't taste it."

"No, you wouldn't. You're not the kind to give up your life for something. Nobody's ever understood me. My wife or anyone else. If I thought this cup had the Water in it, and that I might feel it again—"

"Can't you keep quiet?"

"Quiet? Quiet? Gods of Space, I'm dead, and you say keep quiet. Brazil, I'm putting you back under orders, right now. Don't move unless I tell you, and don't lie to me."

Boris heard a sound behind him, and knew somehow that it was Brenda coming back, bringing him water. He was afraid to try to move. His freedom had been only an illusion, and had flickered away into nothing at a word from his master. Boris could do nothing for Brenda, for himself or for anyone else: Whatever happened was not going to be his fault, no, not this time.

Jones said, "Brazil, is your cup still there? Taste it and tell me what it is."

"I don't know if it's here."

"Boris." It was Brenda's whisper, from behind him. Boris realized suddenly that they must have given her the Water of Thought during the women's ceremony, and that it must have unbalanced her in some way that brought her here now trying in this mad fashion to help him.

Jones said: "Brazil, I order you."

"Boris." She whispered his name again, and this time one of the warriors heard. Boris could vaguely see the man's upper body as he passed nearby, turned at the sound of Brenda's voice and approached to investigate, soft-footed as a cat. In ghostly silence the warrior passed so near that Boris could see he carried a short spear, and was going to probe with the spear for Brenda.

Boris moved, without thinking of whether it might be possible—this terrible thing called freedom was his again.

He should have used his sacred rock, but for some reason



he set it down before he rose up silently behind the warrior. Boris's left hand shoved low into the Kappan's back, and his right whipped around for the silent-killing throat attack. Boris was stiff and weak, and the man was not properly caught. He still had balance enough to twist around and gasp in air, getting ready to yell. Boris drove a hand into the man's throat, preventing an outcry, and then grappled for the spear.

A second later the silhouette of the warrior's head bent backward; hands had reached from behind him to scratch and pull at his face. Boris managed to wrench the spear away, spun it end for end, and drove it home. A dying weight sagged away, sliding quietly to the floor of the cave.

Then Brenda had Boris by the hand, kissing his hand, and tugging on it at the same time, pulling him away. He let her lead him. The only hope now was to get out of here quickly, by whatever way she had sneaked in. Other warriors would already be approaching to see what had caused the scuffle.

Behind Boris, a far louder struggle exploded in the darkness. Jones's voice bellowed, "Brazil! There is no cure! Obey me! Fight for me!"

Lantern beams were springing alive, centered upon Jones. He had captured a spear, and was fighting like a berserker. Another spear had already been thrust through his body. One warrior lay at his feet, while more of them closed in.

There was nothing to do but go with Brenda and get out of here. Boris followed her insistent tugging, away from the lights and the struggle, under an overhang of rock that forced him to stoop, into still deeper darkness.

"Brazil, fight for me! I'll have the Water—before—"

Jones's voice died away, and the sounds of fighting with it. The faint reflected glow of the lanterns vanished suddenly from Boris's vision. *Jones is cured*, he thought suddenly.

Brenda released Boris's hand and crawled ahead of him. The way became a tight low passage through which Boris could barely escape. He lost the rocks from his net-suit, and he lost a little more skin, but he got through, still gripping his captured spear in one hand. After perhaps another hundred feet of crawling he could hear insects, and then he saw a crevice of comparative brightness, like the night sky.

There was room now for him to move beside Brenda. "This way out is the women's secret," she whispered. "One of them

showed it to me today. And I took some of the night-vision drug."

At last they had room to stand and walk; the passage emerged into the open air through a hole in a rocky hillside. Boris realized with dull surprise that night had indeed fallen again; he had been all day in the cave.

"We'll be safe here, for a while," Brenda whispered. "All alone." She put her arms around him.

He was so dulled with thirst and fatigue and weary pain that for a moment he did not understand what she was doing. Then with a jolt of surprise he gripped her shoulders and pushed her away, looking into her face.

"Boris, please, I can't help myself. Here." She started to take off her coverall.

"No," he croaked. It was the damned Thought-Water, of course, making her do this. She had been leaning toward loving him, and the Water had pushed her. "Water," he croaked, looking round the starlit forest. The only animal urge he could feel at the moment was thirst.

"Boris!" But then she followed him downhill, limping on her bad ankle. "The river's this way." Her voice sounded as if she was weeping.

When he came in sight of the Yunoe, he staggered toward it with only elementary caution, and threw himself down on the bank. He thrust in his head, and drank and swallowed. He emerged with sharpened awareness of all his pains and problems, but again able to think clearly.

"Now, Boris, please. Love me."

"Brenda, honey, I've got to run for my life. There's no time. It's the drug making you do this now—"

She gave a little scream of frustration and shame, and her hand slapped across his face. "You filth! I risked my life to save you!"

"Brenda—" He hesitated. Would she come with him? Should he drag her along? There was her bad ankle. And if they caught her with him, likely they would kill her. If she stayed here, Magnuson might protect her. They didn't know she had sneaked into the cave.

Brenda made her own decision. "Go on, run! I'll stay here where there are *men*!"

And she collapsed, sobbing.

## VII

BORIS BENT over her, and kissed her once. "Good-by," he said, and started running away from her, dodging among the trees as if flint points were already hurtling at his back—as they might well be, at any moment.

When he had seen enough of the sky to get his bearings from the stars, he set his course northward, at right angles to the easterly direction of the colony. Some of Red Circles' men would go east to cut him off, but he would try to circle them and hide from them.

At the moment, the important thing was to put distance between himself and the Warriors' Village. So far, the grassy footing was easy, and Boris made the most of it. When daylight came, he would hide and rest, and think about scrounging food and improvising shoes.

Boris took stride after stride through the night, and there was no sign of pursuit yet. He came to a ridge, and climbed it, avoiding any way that looked in the starlight like a path, for beside a trail on this rim would be an ideal spot for a sentry. *Red Circles*, he thought, *you'll have quite a chase before you catch me, giving me this much start. In fact you'll find to your surprise that you can't catch me at all—positive thinking is the thing.*

From the top of the ridge, Boris looked back. Now there were torches coming among the trees, but they were scattered widely and uncertainly, and he had a quarter of a mile on the nearest of them. He rested for a moment, and then moved north into the hills.

Boris expected Magnuson to join the pursuit. Once through the ordeal and in the tribe officially, Magnuson would be a great Kappan chief, and Boris expected him to have no tolerance for heretics. If Morton and Kaleta survived the test, they would doubtless join the hunt too, wanting Boris kept silent about their smuggling.

Boris held his course northward, angling a little east. His pursuers seemed not to be prospering, for he saw no more torches. They would finish the ceremony, probably, and wait until dawn, before starting an all-out search.

His way led him downhill, and he came to a stream, prob-

ably the same river that wound through the villages. Boris drank again, deeply, and told himself to hurry on without delay. But he really needed rest, and he sat down for a moment beside the star-reflecting water.

A vivid flash of memory came, a picture of Jones fighting in the cave, transfixed by a spear, and Boris's head jerked up in alarm. He had dozed into sleep, sitting slumped over on the bank of the murmuring stream. Gods of Space, he had more than dozed; the eastern sky was gray. He jumped to his feet in a near panic, and stood turning his head this way and that, looking and listening; but no one was near. He sighed with relief. He would find a place to hide during the daylight hours and move on again at night.

He waded into the stream and bent to drink again.

The stream here had a faintly fishy taste. Well, what was so strange about that? Probably there were a number of things that could make a stream taste that way—fish, for one.

The Yunoe flowed quiet and dark around Boris's knees. He waded upstream, stooping now and then to let the river bathe his stiffening little wounds, and wash the dried Kappan blood from the spear he carried.

Dawn was becoming a fact. Boris tasted the river again; there was no use denying that here it savored faintly of the Water of Thought. That was one taste he was never going to forget.

He came to where a tangled thicket grew down to the water's edge, and probed his way with the spear into the midnight gloom of the densest growth, and settled down to rest.

When the ordeal ended, at dawn, Magnuson went with the other survivors to a joyful welcome—somewhat marred by Brazil's escape—in the Warriors' Village. Their wounds had been treated, and the new members of the tribe drank and ate and rested. Before allowing himself to relax, Magnuson first saw the new man, the one-handed hominid, safely housed in the pen where he had been one of six confined animals the day before. Planning the new man's protection and education, Magnuson fell asleep.

He was awakened by a not-too-gentle prodding, and saw a figure wearing a groundsuit standing over him. Startled, he jumped to his feet.

It was Morton's face inside the helmet. "Magnuson, you're coming with me. They haven't caught Brazil yet, and we can't let him reach the colony. I can run him down easy in this suit if I can get on his trail, but I need some guides and trackers and I need you to boss them and interpret."

Magnuson thought about Brazil. "Yes, he should be caught," he finally said.

"Damn right. I'm glad you see things straight for once."

Jane, excited, came running up to them. "You'll catch him, won't you? And what about Brenda? She couldn't be with him, could she?"

"You jealous?" Morton grinned. "Red Circles tells me little Brenda's just sitting out in the woods, all by herself. I told him to let her stay there as long as she's out of our hair for a while. She can't run away with that ankle."

Magnuson realized that Jane and Brenda had both been given the Water of Thought for the first time. And Morton! Again Magnuson would have to deal with a madman in a groundsuit.

"How do you two feel?" Magnuson asked.

"I'll feel fine when I get Brazil in these." Morton raised the suit's armored hands, and smiled. "Surprised to see me dressed up? Why, you told me the whole tribe would be my brothers now. Nobody stopped me putting it on."

"Go catch him, then," said Jane, her fingers twisting nervously at her hair. "Why should *she* ever have him?"

"Come on, Professor," said Morton.

"All right, all right, I'll come with you. Where's Kaleta? I'll have to leave some instructions for him."

"In there, still sleeping it off. Hurry up!"

Magnuson entered the hut and shook the mayor awake. "Kaleta, can I trust you to do something important?"

"I can hardly move."

"You needn't move much. I've got to go with Morton, and my hominid is in the pen, here in the village. I don't expect any of the villagers will attack him now, but, just in case, I want you to guard him. Nothing must happen to him. And see that he has food and water. I've treated his wounds already. Watch over him until I get back."

"Awright. When I wake up."

"You can sleep in front of the pen. No one will bother you."

From outside, Morton shouted, "Get the lead out, Magnuson! I'm takin' a regular war party north!"

Setting out with Morton and six warriors to track down Brazil, Magnuson glanced back into the empty-looking village. Kaleta's plump form was stretched in sleep beside the pen; above him, the one-handed hominid reached out through the palings, as if asking some patient question.

Boris awoke to find the sun near the zenith. He was ravenously hungry, and nibbled the leaves and juicy stalks of a likely-looking plant. While awaiting his stomach's judgment on the plant, he unraveled some strings from his net-garment, and tried binding big leaves to his feet to serve as sandals. He feared that the service life of leaf-sandals was likely to be almost zero, but no better materials were available. So far he had been lucky in that his hike had been mostly over easy grass. Tonight things might well be worse.

His stomach was growling with nothing worse than hunger, so he ate more of the leaves and stalks. Some trees grew up through the thicket, and under their loose bark Boris discovered some grubs which were no doubt rich in protein and fat, and which turned out to be quite palatable to an experienced planeteer who thought of something else while he swallowed. Boris did not need to approach starvation before he could suppress his civilized tastes. Today even raw and hairy food meant strength and life, and he meant to live.

After eating enough to take the edge off his hunger, and trying some improvements on the sandals, Boris rested again. It was nearly dark when he heard men's voices, evidently moving along the opposite bank of the stream. He thought they were speaking in the villagers' language, and he waited motionless until after they had faded out in the distance.

It was nearly six days now, he computed, since Jones had pointed an energy rifle at him and compelled him to swallow the Water of Thought. It was a day and a half since the ordeal had started, and doubtless that was over by now. For nearly twenty Standard Hours Boris had been free, and that would not sit well with the Kappans, nor with Magnuson, nor with the smugglers. A massive search would be under way for the defector from the fraternity. Magnuson or Kaleta or Morton might be wearing the groundsuit, in the search.

Probably they had a copter available, too, but it would not help them much above this high forest.

He had a substantial start on his pursuers, and a real chance. He decided to wade on upstream as far as possible, then leave the river and start moving in a great circle toward the colony. In three or four days he might reach it.

When it was quite dark, Boris slid from the thicket into the water again. When he drank, he was again aware of the taste of the Water of Thought, faint but undeniable. He couldn't puzzle it out now; he moved on.

Within a quarter of a mile, he ran into rapids and waterfalls, as he had more or less expected. He had to climb from the stream, and, looking back, he got a nasty shock. There were lanterns behind him, near the thicket where he had spent the day. He had used up strength and time, and moved himself a dozen miles further from the colony, but they were as close on his trail as ever. No doubt he had succeeded in scattering and worrying his tribe of enemies, but that did him little good.

There was a reasonable path following the course of the river, and he took it upstream. If he struck off through the brush he would slow himself down and leave a plain trail. Not to mention his feet. The leaf-sandals were falling apart already, as useless as he had feared they would be. Tonight, he thought, my feet will give out.

He looked up at the stars. The Space Force ship was now three days overdue, and might very well be in orbit around Kappa now, but then again it might very well be three more days in arriving. And when they arrived, they would hardly start their search during the hours of darkness. These were not very positive thoughts he was having, but they were the best he could do at the moment.

It was a nightmare of a night. All through it, four or five lanterns stayed on his trail in the dark. At last the undergrowth thinned out, and he could move away from the riverbank and start a false trail or two. Sore feet and all, he thought he gained a little distance on his pursuers, but at dawn he did not dare try and hide. He found himself following the spine of a high wooded ridge, and he just kept moving along it. He could go downhill, and hope to find a peaceful stretch of the Yunoe, or another stream in which to drown his trail; but if he missed finding an escape, the hunt-

ers would come down on him like an avalanche. He didn't think he could climb another hill.

Having just admitted that to himself, he came to a place where the ridge he was following angled higher. A sketch of a path led upward, and in the soft dust were several sets of prints of what looked like bare human feet. The sight raised some hope in Boris; to enter the territory of another tribe could mean a chance for him.

Somewhat to his surprise, Boris found that he could still walk uphill, at least in this soft dusty trail. His feet had once been strong and sure, and they might someday be useful again, but right now he would prefer not to know them. Then, too, there were things called water, and food, and rest, but Boris had more or less forgotten what they were like.

Scion of the Martian Brazils, famous bon vivant and adventurer, adjudged not quite human by Red Circles, scion of the Kappan Circles . . .

He was getting lightheaded, and all he had to do now was faint and roll back downhill; that would fix everything nicely. Boris gained a small rise in the trail, and stopped to breathe. Looking back, he could see the warriors coming, only two hundred yards behind him now. There were ten of them, and one had something over his eyes as if to shield them from the light. So, one of them had taken the night-vision drug, that was how they had tracked him through the night with only torches to light his trail. It seemed unfair.

Boris climbed on. He had to pause for rest after every second or third step, and each time he stopped he glanced back. The warriors saw him, all right, for they pointed at him, and waved their weapons as if to urge one another on. But still they advanced hesitantly, making no great speed. Could they possibly fear him? Did they think he had magic powers which had let him escape the ordeal?

Gritting his teeth and gripping his spear, Boris kept going. They weren't going to take him prisoner. No, not again. His hunters gained on him, but reluctantly. Maybe from down there he looked like a man walking deliberately, contemptuous of his pursuers. Maybe if he turned and walked toward them they would run.

He glanced back once more, and nearly fell, for his hunters were indeed retreating, backing away with nocked arrows and leveled spears. Boris looked uphill, and saw the hominid



tribe coming down in a slow semi-circle, dozens of them, armed with stones and crude clubs. He faced back immediately toward the retreating hunters and hurled his spear after them, staggering with the effort. The spear fell short, but the gesture just might suggest to the hominids that his heart was in the right place.

About half of the hominids charged downhill past Boris, howling at his pursuers, who turned and fled. The others surrounded him, yipping and jabbering about him, not knowing what to make of him. These were no dead-eyed quarry beasts. It seemed to Boris, groggy as he was, that these might very well be men. He made a planeteer's gesture for communicating with primitives, and aroused some interest. The hominids formed a loose squatting circle around Boris, and took turns jabbering. They shooed insects, and panted and yawned, showing their human teeth.

Boris's head was spinning, but he kept on making gestures, and tried a few words of this and that, being careful not to sound like a villager. His audience gaped unappreciatively. To blazes with them all, and also with the idea of preserving a show of something or other. If he was going to die here, it would not be while standing on these feet. He sat down in the dust, and began to examine what was left of his soles.

From somewhere downhill came cries and shouts that sounded like a fight in progress. Most of the crowd lost interest in Boris and charged off in that direction, only three or four staying behind to watch him.

He would try to ask them for water. Because the sun was so hot . . .

He was being carried, his head on a leathery shoulder, other arms and shoulders supporting his body. Hominid smell was thick about him. Overhead, treetops flowed by at a fast walk. Boris's mouth was wet: it seemed water had been poured on him, and he had a memory of recent choking and swallowing. It was dim here under the tall trees, though what little sky Boris could see was still bright with daylight. The trail he was on was narrow and twisting, overhung by many branches. His unspeaking bearers were carrying him into some secret fastness of the dim green forest.

## VIII

TWENTY-FOUR HOURS after drinking the Water of Thought, Brenda felt its madness leaving her. When she was sure, she got to her feet and limped through the woods back toward the Warriors' Village. Now she could face Morton or Kaleta or Magnuson without fear of hurling herself at them like a love-starved spinster in a bad comedy.

Her obsession had been one of love and lust for Boris, and she could see now how she had almost killed him by trying to help him. And then, when he had to run for his life, she had slapped him. But he knew what the Water of Thought was; he would understand and forgive her; though the Water seemed to be easier on Earth-descended women than on their men. After one day of it, she wondered how Boris had endured it for five.

Several times during the day, parties of scowling warriors had come upon her in the woods, only to jabber contemptuously and hurry on, almost ignoring the alien female with the flat forehead, close-set eyes, and what they must think disgustingly soft skin.

But what mattered was that Boris had not yet been captured. The last search party, outward bound and looking even angrier than the first one, had passed Brenda not ten minutes ago.

Brenda hugged that knowledge as she limped slowly into the village. She had considered trying to get away and reach the colony, but she could not walk ten miles a day with this ankle. And she wanted to stay where she would know if anything happened to Boris.

A few children played in the dust of the village common, and women passed to and fro, stolidly engaged with their eternal chores. Brenda was one of the tribe now, and the women nodded to her and smiled across the barrier of language.

"Brenda!" It was Jane, her face showing relief, running toward her. "Brenda, honey. Oh, I'm glad you're all right."

"Where are the others?" Taking the weight off her ankle, Brenda sat down on a log which served the village as a bench.

"Your boyfriend is gone."

Brenda tried to appear surprised. "He got away?"

Jane's eyes searched hers. "Maybe you know about it already. All the men were wild about it, and Don was worse than any of the Kappans. Magnuson, too. They're all out chasing after Boris, but they haven't caught him." Jane, her face troubled, sat down beside Brenda. "Eddie was killed, in the ordeal."

"I'm sorry."

"Yes. He was married, anyway." Jane pulled her arm from Brenda's touch. "Honey, I have to confess something. It must have been that drug that made me do it. When I heard that Boris had gotten away, I—I was hoping that they'd catch him. In fact I ran around here screaming like some terrible . . . I wanted to see him dead, and you too, just because he was yours, and you had something I didn't." Jane began to cry. "I don't suppose you can understand."

"Oh, Janey, it *was* that awful drug. I know. It made me do things—"

The two small town girls who had grown up together sat side by side trying to comfort each other, both of them crying.

"Where's Mayor Pete?" Brenda asked finally, dabbing at her eyes and looking around the village.

"Oh, I wish I'd never heard of him, or Don Morton either. I knew they were both rotten, and still I played along with them. When that terrible business in the cave was over, they were proud of themselves like nasty little boys, like savages. They proved they were tough, and they didn't care that another man was murdered."

"They had to drink the Water of Thought, too."

"Don't make excuses for them, Brenda. Don never was any good, and the mayor isn't, not any more, since he got in with Don. I guess I'm no good, either."

Pete Kaleta peered around the corner of the hominid's pen, looking across the village common at the two girls, who were now crying on each other's shoulders again. Probably they were set to talk and weep the rest of the day. They were not likely to interfere with anything he did.

The hominid in the pen reached out through the palings to touch Kaleta's coverall; Kaleta brushed the single leathery hand away with distaste.

"So, we belong to the same club now," he said aloud, looking at the hominid. Both bore practically the same ritual wounds from the ordeal. "I hope you feel as lousy as I do."

The pale eyes looked back at Kaleta with what might be frustration, as if the creature wanted to talk to him and almost knew how.

Kaleta turned away. Since the ordeal he had not been able to think for long of anything except what he had seen in the Temple Village, a few miles away—a vat, filled with many gallons of the Water of Thought.

The interstellar criminal syndicate would pay a fortune, a vast fortune, for the contents of that vat. And now the warriors were all gone from the villages, Magnuson and Morton were gone, Jones and Brazil were out of the way. There was no one between Kaleta and the wealth in the lower village.

The copter was still parked down there near the Temple Village. Magnuson believed himself to have the only power key for the copter, but Magnuson was not as smart as he thought he was. Kaleta had hidden an extra power key inside the copter's cabin, and he had also concealed weapons there.

It was not likely that Kaleta would ever get a better chance than this. He could walk downstream right now, to the copter, and arm himself. Then he could raid the undefended temple, and fly away with buckets full of the Water of Thought. He would hide the stuff somewhere near the colony, and when the Space Force came he would put them on a false trail and try to keep them away from these villages. There were great risks involved, but the possible reward was worth any risk.

Kaleta saw himself safely away from Kappa and his nagging wife, amid the fleshpots of Earth or Planet Golden, allowing beautiful women to spend his money.

He drew a deep breath, and found that he had made his decision. He would do it; he would gamble everything now. A helpful idea immediately suggested itself, and Kaleta smiled and opened the door of the hominid's pen. Let the creature wander away. Then Magnuson, returning here, might think Kaleta had gone chasing after the escaped hominid. Or, Magnuson might even blame the villagers for both disappearances. Either way, there would be a diversion.

Without waiting to see whether the hominid took immedi-

ate advantage of the unlatched door, Kaleta turned and walked calmly away, as if he was just going into the woods to relieve himself. The few Kappan women and children in sight ignored him; he didn't think Jane or Brenda were looking at him at all.

Once the trees were solidly around him, Kaleta quickened his pace. Going downhill, he hoped to be able to reach the Temple Village in two hours or less.

He stumbled awkwardly as he emerged from the woods onto the riverside path, and cursed. He was still worn out, and aching all over, from the ordeal. He had had only about six hours sleep before Magnuson awakened him. Morton in a groundsuit was another good reason for Kaleta's getting out; he didn't trust Morton a bit. But the main reason was the Water of Thought, and the price that the Outfit would pay for it.

He would get away with twenty gallons if he got a drop; maybe he could get a lot more. He could force some of the Temple Villagers to help him. All Earth-descended men probably looked alike to them, and he might easily manage to blame his actions on someone else. There were all kinds of possibilities and dangers in his plan, that would have to be worked out as he went along. But he could not turn down this chance of wealth, because nothing else mattered.

His legs were weary already, but he still walked quickly, sliding and scrambling down the steeper places in the path. As a member of the tribe, he expected no trouble from any Kappans he might meet. Even Magnuson almost trusted him now and that was the biggest joke yet. Magnuson was clever but blind about his obsession with ordeals and weeding-out the unfit, wanting to be God and decide who could live and who couldn't, creating men from baboons.

It was strange, thought Kaleta, how everyone else among the Earth-descended had been mentally twisted by their draughts of the Water of Thought. Jones driven to give up everything else for another drink of it. Brazil paralyzed. Magnuson probably confirmed in his pseudo-religious fanaticism. Morton? Kaleta had hardly seen Morton since the ordeal, but now he looked over his shoulder and shivered slightly. Morton in his right mind was bad enough.

And the two girls had acted strangely. A collection of nuts, all of them. It seemed that he, Pete Kaleta, was the only one

who had not been unbalanced by drinking the Water of Thought. Probably that was because he was the only tough-minded realist among them to begin with.

Could he be certain of his own sanity? As he hurried downstream now he frowned, trying to step back mentally and view his present actions with objectivity. His basic goal, realistically enough, was wealth. Very well. Then it was only logical for him to steal the most valuable property within reach (which happened to be the Water), hide it, and later on sell it. Of course it was a dangerous plan, but you never gained anything really important without taking risks.

After he had somehow weathered the inevitable Space Force investigation, the smart thing would be to smuggle his stolen Water off the planet in small batches. He had contacts with crew members on various trading ships who would be eager to do a little illegal business.

He would be careful and not try to leave Kappa himself to enjoy his wealth, at least for a long time. If need be, he could forego the fleshpots and continue to put up with his wife's nagging. Once wealth was his, nothing else would bother him greatly.

Maybe Morton and Magnuson and Brazil would eliminate one another. That would help a lot, not having to try to kill them himself or cut them in. And the girls would have to be put out of the way somehow; that was sad, but there it was. They were all dangerous to Kaleta's wealth.

Anyway, when he had surmounted all such dangers in one way or another, he would smuggle his stolen Thought-Water off planet in small batches and have his payment smuggled in, in installments, just as the Water went out. He would arrange to be paid in bills of high denomination which would take up little space and so could easily be hidden.

Puffing with effort, his feet hurting, Kaleta still smiled and maintained his rapid pace downhill. His vision of wealth, before vague and abstract, had now become concrete. He could almost see the money, the dozens of crisp bills coming into his hands. Possibly he'd get away with thirty gallons of the Water today, and possibly the Outfit would pay him five million dollars for that much. Maybe just the first installment of his payment would be half a million. He would bury it in the woods, somewhere fairly near the colony. Interstellar currency was made to last, physically, and it would stay

buried years and years and still be fresh and crackling whenever he went to dig it out and fondle it. He could almost see that first payment of half a million right now, he could see the numbers and the zeros on the bills—

A rock tripped him, and he sprawled painfully on the path. He cursed and scrambled to his feet and hurried on.

After he had stolen and sold this first barrel-full of the Water of Thought, collecting his first five or six million, what was to prevent him from raiding these villages again and again, and getting away with more and more of the stuff? Maybe the Space Force could be put off somehow. Maybe he could bribe someone; even a Tribune. Kaleta grimaced. He would try that only as a last resort, for bribing anyone important would mean giving up a large portion of his wealth. A crooked Tribune would be very greedy. Kaleta groaned aloud, hurrying through the woods. It seemed he was doomed to be forced to share his money, with Morton or with someone else.

A sudden thought stopped Kaleta in the rocky path, and made him face back upstream. The real wealth, the source of the Water, was somewhere up there. Immediately after the ordeal, he and the other new members of the tribe had been told something of its secrets. Most of what had been revealed was magical nonsense about this and that, but one secret was that the Water of Thought was obtained by raiding the territory of the Forest People, north of the villages. Kaleta had been too groggy to think or care about it then, but now he saw it offered unlimited possibilities for the future, when he had weapons and a copter, and time.

But the vat in the temple was a sure thing, and when he had it emptied he could go on with further plans. Kaleta faced downstream again, and hurried on.

Now the Workers' Village was just ahead. A branching trail joined in here, and along it were approaching a few kilted men, dragging with them a half-grown hominid, gagged by a stick tied into its mouth, its arms bound. The men were laughing and pleased with themselves; evidently they had just caught a beast which would be useful in the quarry. When they saw Kaleta they stopped and stared at him, letting him pass the trail intersection ahead of them.

He waved and smiled at them, as he would have done on meeting Kappans near the colony. He half-understood

these villagers' speech, but now he did not try to say anything. All he wanted was to pass these men without alarming them.

He succeeded in this, and in another minute was entering the Workers' Village. The few people he saw were working, and paid him little attention. Trying to look like a man on a casual stroll, he stopped at the village well, where the river water came up mudless after filtering through twenty yards of sand. Taking his time, Kaleta drank from a gourd hung at the well, smiled at some watching children, and walked on along the downstream trail.

When he was a couple of hundred yards below the Workers' Village, he looked about to make sure he was unobserved, then waded out into the Yunoe. If he had all his directions straight, the copter should be only half a mile from him now. It was hidden at the edge of a landing clearing in the woods on the other side of the river, just a minute's walk from the Temple Village. Probably there would be a Kappan guard or two watching the copter, but Kaleta now had the wounds of his ordeal to prove he was one of them. The half-wit fraternity, Brazil had said. Right now Brazil was probably wishing he had joined.

The river, nowhere more than a stone's throw wide, was not swift at this point. Kaleta did not even bother to remove his light boots, though he had to swim a few yards near the center of the channel. Then he was wading again, reaching the opposite shore, and climbing out. No one was in sight except a few kilted laborers who were a long way off, and paying him no attention. He walked away from the river, across a cultivated field, and then into woods again.

He located the copter landing with little trouble. It was just a little natural clearing whose two or three obstructing trees had been hacked or burned away. The copter was just where Kaleta had last seen it—pulled back out of the clearing, under high trees whose canopy of branches would make it invisible from the air. There were two guards; not fierce warriors, Kaleta saw thankfully, but a pair of robed priests who looked as if they did not know what to do with the clubs in their hands. Evidently all of Red Circles' men were busy chasing Brazil.

Kaleta walked calmly out into the clearing. He smiled



and waved to the priests when they saw him; they were muscular youngsters, and he would have to be careful.

"I must enter bird," he said—or tried to say—in their language, as he walked toward them. He pointed to show what he meant, and continued to smile.

The two regarded him with some dislike, he thought, but they were not really suspicious. They seemed to be uncertain about the duties of guards, and jabbered between themselves, saying something about the chiefs. Finally, they made way for him to approach the copter.

Still smiling, Kaleta stepped past them. He opened the door to the cabin and felt under the front seat, letting out a breath of relief when his fingers found the machine pistol and the spare power key exactly where he had hidden them. There were also extra clips of ammunition for the pistol, which he brought out and stowed in a pocket of his coverall.

He climbed into the copter and looked over the controls. Everything was in order, ready to go. Now all he had to do was collect his cargo.

As he hopped down from the copter and approached the guards with the gun, his hands were shaking. He had never killed anyone before, and he felt almost sick at what he was going to do. But then he visualized the money again, and saw these two Kappans standing between himself and it.

The pistol made a low, ripping sound, like heavy cloth tearing. One burst, and then another. It was not loud, but the two young Kappans were twitching on the ground, amid a great deal of blood. Kaleta saw that he had used up half a clip, and reloaded. Now his hands were steady. He dragged the riddled bodies into the bushes, out of sight, and kicked leaves over the blood.

So far, so good. Now, should he fly the copter to the village? But that would attract the attention of everyone in the area; and, as he recalled, there was no good place to land in the village itself. He made sure there were no blood-stains on his hands or clothing, stuck the pistol inside his coverall, and started briskly down the path toward the Temple Village.

The path took him near the edge of Great Lake, which was as calm as ever, rimmed by distant green hills under the greenish Kappan sky. Lake and hills and sky made a peaceful scene, and Kaleta stopped for a moment to look at

it. Why did life have to be the grim and ugly thing it was? But there was no getting around it, the game of life had to be played by the rules of harsh reality.

A few seconds' walk took him past the spot where Brazil had jumped out in the groundsuit, to disarm Morton and him. Kaleta smiled; no interference this time.

His smile grew broader as he entered the Temple Village; it was, if anything, more nearly deserted than the other two. Kaleta walked straight to the temple, and entered. He found no one in the first chamber. In the room where the Water of Thought was buried, an old priest and a young one were fiddling around at the altar. They looked up as Kaleta came in, and they were astonished when he went straight to the sunken vat and pulled aside the cover. The priests shouted angrily at him, and he drew the pistol, wondering if they even knew what it was.

The older man came forward, waving his arms and yelling, and Kaleta shot him, knocking him back across the room. The young man just stood still, gaping, frozen with shock.

Against one wall were stacked some wooden buckets with fiber handles, clean and painted utensils, possibly used by the brave warriors who raided hominid territory for the Water of Thought. Kaleta held out a pair of the buckets to the frozen young man. He cursed the young man with no effect, and had to kick him before he would move.

"Fill them! Like this!" Kaleta got himself a third pail, and filled it from the vat. He would be able to carry only one, having to keep the pistol ready.

At last the young man got the idea, and obeyed. Kaleta prodded him toward the exit. "Go on! No, stupid, take the pails with you! Carry them!"

A woman saw them come out of the temple. She saw what they were carrying, and ran away screaming before Kaleta could decide whether or not to shoot at her. It was too bad, but he would probably have to do some more killing before he got away.

"Go, that way. Go on!" Kaleta urged his coolie through the village. The Kappan moved ahead slowly, carrying two buckets dripping with the Water of Thought, stopping every few feet to look back in unbelieving terror, as if he expected Kaleta to vanish at any moment. Kaleta snarled at him and jabbed him on with the pistol.

"Don't slop that stuff around, you—" But if he hit the man, more of the Water would certainly be spilled. They made slow progress, but the village seemed empty, as if the only effect of the woman's screams had been to scare the remaining people away. It seemed to Kaleta that it took him an hour to urge his trembling, laden captive as far as the copter.

Fortunately, the young man had set down the buckets before he saw the four dead hands of the two guards protruding from a thicket; at that sight, he went completely to pieces. Kaleta shoved him aside, and carefully hoisted his twenty or twenty-five gallons of wealth into the rear of the copter, a pail at a time. He found a sheet of sealing plastic in the copter, and wrapped the pails to prevent any further spillage. Everything was working out.

He hopped down from the copter, meaning to shoot the only potential witness who might identify him, when there flashed before his mind's eye the picture of those other empty pails inside the temple.

It was agonizing. There had been a lot of Thought-Water left in the vat. Should he attempt another trip? The delay would mean risking what he had already gained.

Maybe he could make ten million dollars today.

Kaleta grabbed the blubbering youth by one arm, and instead of shooting him, slung him staggering back toward the village.

"We go again. Hurry!" Kaleta made the youth run, and ran beside him. At the edge of the village Kaleta had to stop for a moment. He was still weak from the ordeal. If he fainted now—

But the vision of the ten million dollars was plain before him, and he knew he would not faint.

"Come along, hurry!"

The village still looked empty of people; Kaleta gasped with relief. Only the old priest's dead body inhabited the temple. Kaleta handed two more of the pails to his unwilling partner, and again took another for himself.

This time the Kappan youth knew what was wanted, and moved a trifle faster, filling the pails and starting out of the temple again. He kept shooting fearful glances at Kaleta's pistol, but he was starting to think again, and Kaleta watched him carefully.

Kaleta felt a rising certainty that he was going to make it; he could almost smell the money. From here on it was downhill. Even if half a dozen warriors came at him now, he thought, he could fight them off with the pistol, and get away.

They got out of the village and traveled the long-seeming path again, past the lake. They were halfway across the landing clearing when Kaleta heard a boy's voice shouting. A half-grown robed youth ran out of the forest near the copter, Red Circles gasping four steps behind him. Kaleta's porter set down his buckets and fell on his face. Red Circles had a bow and arrow in his hands, small things that it seemed a child might use for practice. The angle was wrong for Kaleta; if he shot Red Circles from here, some of the bullets could hit the copter, and drain priceless wealth from the Water-laden buckets stowed inside.

Kaleta sidestepped for a better angle. The bow twanged, and the little arrow came so swiftly that it was sprouted between Kaleta's ribs before he could try to dodge.

He looked down at the arrow in surprise, found he could not breathe, and dropped his pistol. He managed to carefully set down his pail full of the Water of Thought before he fell.

## IX

DON MORTON DUG in his metal-shod feet and took a grip with his servo-powered gauntlets on the trunk of a sapling. He bent his legs, lifting, grunting with the strain. With a mighty ripping sound, roots snapping like shots, the young tree gave up its hold on the soil.

It was a satisfying feeling. Morton straightened up, waving the tree easily as a feathered wand. "There. I'm getting pretty good, huh?"

Magnuson was busy with a pair of binoculars, and did not answer at once. He and Morton were alone, for the moment, atop a ridge somewhere near the hidden headwaters of the Yunoee in hominid territory. The six warriors accompanying them as trackers on the search for Brazil were out hunting down an evening meal.

Ever since the ordeal, it seemed to Morton that Magnu-

son's behavior had been even more arrogant than usual, as if he deliberately wanted to anger a man. Now, he still seemed not to have heard what Morton had just said to him.

"How about an answer, huh?"

At last Magnuson put down the binoculars. "If the other party's report is true," he said, "the hominids could easily have killed him."

Talking about Brazil. Changing the subject without answering. Was this man trying to get himself killed?

"*I said, I'm getting pretty good with the suit!*" Morton roared, turning up his helmet's speakers to amplify his voice. "*Answer me! Answer!*"

Magnuson looked vaguely sick and uneasy. "I'm sorry," he said. "Very sorry. Yes. you are getting very good with the suit. When you find Brazil, he won't talk to you the way he did last time."

"Damn right he won't." Morton cracked the tree over his armored knee, and threw the shattered wood away. "And I don't believe the hominids got him, either. I'm gonna get him."

Brazil was the kind of guy who liked to get into one of these superman suits himself and then push people around. Morton remembered Brazil disarming him, and then laughing at him, back in the Temple Village. And then Brazil had somehow escaped from the cave of the ordeal, and had doubtless run away laughing again, while Morton had had to stay there and suffer. . . .

"I'll kill him," Morton vowed. "A guy like that. I'll break his arms and his legs, and then his neck, when I get these hands on him." Morton raised the steel fingers that trembled in sympathy with his rage; oh, this suit was a wonderful thing!

"Yes." Magnuson heaved a tired sigh, and sat down on a log. "In another day or two we may find him."

"Any idiot knows that: we *may* find him." Morton felt weary himself; he had worked hard today, practicing with the suit, and climbing cliffs and trees to look for Brazil. And the world seemed to be against him as it had always been.

Ever since the start of the ordeal, when he had tasted the Water of Thought, all the causes of just rage that Morton had endured in his lifetime had seemed to take on doubled force. The Water of Thought was good stuff after all, for a

real man; it just made him see clearly the way things really were.

The Water had made Morton fully aware of all the injustices heaped upon him, and during the ordeal his rage had been so great and pure that for a while it had made him meek. Morton had endured the sufferings of the ordeal with what amounted to calm patience, because that was the only way he could survive to enjoy revenge. When he had finished Brazil and gotten back to the village, Morton was going to look up the warrior who had tormented him during the ordeal, and devise for him some elaborate, slow, and horrible death. Morton wanted to spend a lot of time and thought on that project, not to hurry it.

Thinking of his enemies, Morton was unable to stand still a moment longer. He spun around, pacing nervously this way and that, armored hands flexing.

"Oh, sit down," said Magnuson peevishly. "Better save some of that energy."

That tore it. With the gorilla-strong arms of the suit, Morton grabbed Magnuson and hauled him to his feet. He aimed a backhanded slap at Magnuson's face, but at the last instant stopped it almost completely. He was going to need Magnuson yet for a while.

Magnuson fell back over the log. He lay there with his mouth bloody, conscious but making no move to get up.

"Why don't you stop making me mad?" Morton demanded. "You just keep asking for trouble."

"I'll try to stop."

Magnuson's cold eyes were uncomfortable things to face, and Morton turned away from them. "Where are those gooks?" he wondered aloud. "They're supposed to be hunters, and it takes 'em all day to catch one animal. I'm gonna see what they're up to." He trotted heavily away, down the hill.

When Morton was out of sight, and he was alone, Magnuson struggled wearily back up to a sitting position on the log. He spat out some blood, and tested his loosened teeth with tongue and fingers. It was a narrow, dangerous path he had to walk with Morton, every moment, until the effect of the drug had worn off. And even after that, Morton would still be deadly dangerous in the suit; Magnuson would never be able to trust him.

And yet Morton had come through the rite of passage, had proven himself as a man.

Magnuson shook his head. Morton's case proved only that real men could do bad things—as Brazil's proved that apparently strong, complete men could have fatal, hidden flaws that showed up only under the X-ray probing of the ordeal.

Magnuson was certain that only by such ritual testing of all its men could galactic civilization save itself from decadence. To help the cause of Man here on Kappa, Magnuson had stolen, lied and worked with the dope-smuggling scum of that civilization, making himself a criminal in its eyes. He had interfered in Kappan affairs, and he was prepared to commit worse crimes, to kill Brazil or anyone else who failed the test of manhood—but if civilization survived in the galaxy, Magnuson felt sure of being remembered as one of its saviors. And it struck him as ironic that two planeteeers, members of that civilization's elite Space Force, had failed Man's test.

Magnuson remembered his first drink of the Water of Thought, which he had taken about a year ago. It had been part of his first initiation. Then, in the peculiar Kappan way, he had become a shaman without first becoming a member of a tribe. On that day, after he had taken the drug, while the drums pounded and the chant soared, he had seen with new and overpowering certainty how right and necessary was the work he had already chosen to do—to pull the Kappan hominids up into the human status for which some of them must be ready. This almost mystical certainty had continued during the four or five days it had taken him to arrange his own disappearance and flee to these villages. Then, though he never began to doubt, the transcendent quality of his belief in his work had abruptly faded.

Now, he realized his good fortune in having had a strong mind already committed to the truth before he drank the Water of Thought. Then, during his first weeks among the villagers, he had taken a good deal of interest in the drug. But he was no biologist and no chemist, and in those early days the Kappans had not trusted him with free access to the Water-vat in the temple. Soon his work with the quarry-hominids had absorbed him, and he had thought less and less about the Water. He had not taken a second drink of it until just before the ordeal, when all the candidates drank.

It had been a pleasant surprise to find that his earlier draught had evidently given him immunity; if that was the usual case with Earthmen, the crime syndicate was due to suffer a disappointment, which made Magnuson feel better about his involvement with them.

Now, the Water of Thought interested him hardly at all. On Kappa or on Earth, the key to Man's future lay in his deliberate evolutionary selection of himself, not in drugs.

Oh, to get back to the Warriors' Village, where the new man-hominid waited, new intelligence in his eyes, living proof who must convince the Space Force that Magnuson's way was right! Oh, in the name of Man, if only Kaleta was taking care of the hominid!

At the foot of the ridge, the suited figure of Morton reappeared, accompanied by the six warriors. There was water down there, a small tributary of the Yunoe. It would make a good place to camp for the night.

Morton waved for Magnuson to come down; it might be fatal to irritate Morton again. Magnuson stood up with a sigh, and began to descend the hill.

Before opening his eyes, Boris tried to remember where he was. He knew he was sitting on grassy earth, his back propped against a tree. Oh yes, the picnic. Brenda was so beautiful—

An unearthly voice jabbered nearby, and memory returned with a rush. Boris cracked his eyelids open. A daylight scene in the shady forest. Nearby and in the middle distance, a number of gray, two-legged forms moved about, apparently not concerned with Boris.

Had they carried him here to be guest or dinner? They had given him water, which was a most hopeful sign. Boris thought things over before he moved so much as a finger or completely opened his eyes while his accumulated physical discomforts were still soothed by warmth and inertia.

At least he had escaped the villagers. Jones was dead, and the other Earth-descended men might be. Ironical if Magnuson was killed in the ritual he loved so well, but Magnuson would survive if anyone did.

And Brenda—at the thought of her, Boris opened his eyes fully, and straightened up with a groan from his leaning



position against the tree. He might as well find out at once what the hominids intended.

A few of the gray figures noticed his movement, and turned toward him, showing mild interest. There was no general alarm, no cry of alert. What jabbering took place was between individuals. Watching and listening, Boris got a strong impression that it was genuine though primitive speech.

He could not call the place around him a camp. The hominids who had driven off the villagers had carried rocks and branches as weapons, but here not an artifact was in sight, not a lean-to, a fire, a bed, a shred of clothing or an ornament. With only the remains of his net-garment, Boris could feel overdressed among these leathery nudists.

On other planets he had seen primitive people who lived almost this simply. But something was wrong in this Eden, something was missing. A small hominid crowd had accumulated and was watching Boris with curiosity before he realized what the odd thing was. There were babes in female arms, but no other pre-pubescent children anywhere in sight.

He started to get to his feet. Slow movement kept him from startling his primitive audience. He began a routine of friendly gestures.

He towered a bit unsteadily over the crowd, which averaged about four and a half feet tall. Seen like this, in their own world, they were not ugly creatures. Somehow the thickness of their grayish, leathery skins was perceptible, and not unattractive.

As he went through the sign-language meant to demonstrate his admirable qualities of good will and fearlessness, Boris became especially aware of one individual in his audience—a male, taller than the average and probably a little older, if silver in hominid hair meant age.

The others seemed to make way for him with slight and probably unconscious movements. Boris paused in his presentation and looked at this individual who took the opportunity to toss something toward Boris. Boris found himself catching and holding the raw hind-quarter of a small mammal.

The haunch did not smell especially good, but at least it was fresh, and Boris's stomach rumbled approval. He made a thank-you gesture, peeled away some fur, bit, chewed, and swallowed.

The food-giving one said something to Boris. Boris wished him good health in return. In his planeteer's judgment, the odds that these were men had just risen enormously. Near-men might use tools to fight and hunt; but when a dominant male went about handing out food instead of grabbing it, it seemed a safe bet that the sometimes blurry-looking line at the border of humanity had been crossed.

So today's dinner was not where a planeteer was eaten but where he ate. The raw meat tasted better than grubs, though not a whole lot better. Boris stopped gesturing and enjoyed his food.

The food-giver alternately smiled and frowned, as if considering the obvious language problem. Or perhaps he was only stretching his face.

Before the attempts at dialogue could resume, a real monkey-troop alarm was called. The hominids surrounding Boris all scrambled away in one direction, jumping and shrieking. The food-giver ran with the others, trying like any leader to get ahead of his followers as soon as he was sure where they were going.

It seemed that a war party, or something like one, was returning. Boris could not recognize individuals, but he guessed it to be the group, all male, who had gone skirmishing after the village warriors. Several of the arriving hominids were wounded, and two of them were being carried by others. Of the two, one had a disabled leg and clung to a stretcher improvised from a springy branch. The other looked dead.

There was a great deal of jabbering, and Boris was almost forgotten in the excitement. He noticed that the dead hominid was receiving more attention than the wounded ones, and moved into a position where he could watch what was going on around the corpse. He could pick out no chief mourner, but it seemed to be an indignation meeting.

People as primitive as these were probably quite non-aggressive, but it still made Boris uneasy to be a lone outsider when they were angry about something. It was a time to be unobtrusive but not timid, and that was a balance hard to strike for a man who stood two feet taller than the crowd and came from a different planet.

But Boris was almost ignored for the moment. Here came a man with an edged stone in his hand, and Food-Giver

beside him, making their way through the crowd around the corpse. They squatted down by the head of the body, and the man with the rough hand-axe went to work on the neck.

This was intriguing. Boris watched closely with a hardened planeteer's interest. He thought he knew what was coming, for he remembered the hacked-open hominid skull he had seen in Magnuson's laboratory.

Now there were almost a hundred hominids gathered around the dead man, watching, but Boris's height still let him see. The head came free, and was more or less peeled. Then the man with the hand-axe turned the skull upside down and attacked the base, enlarging the *foramen magnum* to get at the brain.

Boris was expecting a ritual cannibalism of the brain, but there was nothing of the kind performed now. He missed some of the details of what was being done, but what he did see astonished him. Perhaps half a cup of clear liquid, only faintly tinted with blood, was drained from the skull into a gourd held ready by Food-Giver.

And that appeared to be that, for the present. The crowd began to disperse. Boris saw that some of them were weeping, but this did not surprise him. Here, observing the hominids in their natural state for only minutes, he had already seen enough to convince himself of their human status.

The question was, what had been drained into that gourd, and what was going to be done with it now? Was it some kind of lymph? Boris had a wild and horrible suspicion about that liquid.

Some of the females were now gathering closely about the dismembered corpse. Boris did not wait to see what they would do with it. Wincing along on painful feet, he followed Food-Giver and a couple of his aides, who were walking away with the gourd.

They took it without ceremony a couple of hundred yards through the woods to a small clearing centered by a smoldering pile of logs. Possibly lightning had once fired a dead tree here, and the embers had been fed and maintained since then.

At the edge of the blackened area stood a cairn of rocks, and a couple of hominids were already busy pushing the smoldering fire that way, leading it to the cairn with a lure of fresh dry wood. Others had gathered large, thick leaves,

which were now wrapped around the gourd. Then the gourd was settled on the cairn, positioned carefully not where it would cook, but where it would be heated. One man squatted down, keeping an eye on the fire's progress; the others drifted away.

Boris was thirsty, and limped downhill, following the lay of the land toward the probable location of a watercourse. No one hindered him, which was reassuring, though he had no plans for immediate flight. He would have to eat and rest, and do something about improvising shoes—if not pants—before starting once more for the colony.

At the foot of the slope he came upon the small stream he had expected to find; he wondered if it was the upper Yunoee. He lay down at the edge of it and drank, and felt a chill as if a snake had struck at him from the water. This stream was, though much diluted, the Water of Thought.

The stuff could hardly run in every river on the planet, so this evidently was the Yunoee. The farther upstream he got along it, the stronger was the taste. Down at the villages, it was ordinary river water. What would be found at the source?

For a few minutes Boris sat there, cooling his sore feet in the stream, and telling himself that mere survival presented him enough problems. Then his curiosity won out, and he began to hobble upstream along the bank. There was a waterfall close ahead, a high slender curtain of crashing spray.

Studying the bank on behalf of his sore feet, Boris's eye spotted an arrowhead; then another a few feet farther on. Red Circles' men might once have been here.

In a nearby bush was a broken pail, with a rotted handle of twisted fiber. Where had Boris seen the like before?

In the temple of the lower village, he remembered. Pails like this one had been piled near the buried vat of the Water of Thought.

He tasted the river again. The unforgettable flavor was there; now it grew stronger with every few yards he advanced, to the very foot of the waterfall. But still it was a flavoring only, not the strong Water itself.

Climbing the rocks beside the fall was a hard job, but Boris took his time. In one crevice he found bones that might

have been a village warrior's skeleton before animals had chewed them.

He gained the highest rock and sat on it, getting his breath, looking ahead on a level at a green meadow of Eden. Above the narrow fall, the river was a long and sinuous spring-fed pool amid a park of stately trees. When he had rested briefly, Boris walked through the lush, well-watered grass, near the pool. All was so peaceful that he thought of serpents.

It was not a serpent's head that rose from the grass at the very edge of the water. The head belonged to a half-grown hominid, who had evidently thrown himself down to drink.

Boris made a peace gesture. The boy stared back at him for long seconds, and then rolled over toward the water and drank again, as if deeply thirsty. Boris wondered if he might be sick. He was the youngest hominid, except for unweaned infants, that Boris had yet seen in the forest.

The youth took his time drinking. At last, with a sigh and a gurgling belch, he rolled back to look once more at Boris. Something in the look gave Boris the snaky chill again.

Boris stepped carefully toward the pool, meaning to taste it. But for all his caution, the young hominid was alarmed. The hominid was a gaping boy no longer, but a startled ape, leaping up heavy with drink, grabbing a fallen branch as a weapon, hooting and snarling wordless threats. Boris stood still.

Another hominid torso rose from the tall grass on the other side of the pool, this one showing the budding breasts of a young female. She hooted a questioning response to the male. And she too had been drinking, for silvery drops fell from her chin.

Boris stood quietly waiting. He was not physically afraid of the two small ones, but he wanted no misunderstanding with the tribe. Soon, the head on the other side of the pool bent down again to drink. The young male on the near side was not so easily placated; he still crouched, baring his teeth and growling.

Then a thing happened that was perhaps one of the ordinary miracles of the universe; but Boris was to remember it with perfect clarity for the rest of his life. Somewhere in the hominid brain a critical synapse closed; the hominid body stood a little straighter and a man looked out of the

hominid eyes, and distinctly spoke some words which sounded like a slowed-down version of an adult hominid's jabber.

An answer came, from behind Boris. He whirled; Food-Giver stood there, a club held with apparent absent-mindedness in one hand. Food-Giver was only five feet tall, but his arms were heavily muscled; Boris had a rough moment or two before he could be sure that Food-Giver was not annoyed with him.

The young hominid dropped his branch and sighed, as if he had understood Food-Giver's words, and had been reassured by them. Then he sprawled again at the edge of the pool to drink.

Food-Giver stood watching Boris. Cautiously Boris stepped to the edge of the pool, bent, and cupped up a few drops in his hand. It seemed he was committing no offense. He tasted it; it was the Water of Thought, nearly as strong as what he had been forced to drink from Jones's stone bottle, and again before the ordeal.

Boris sighed, and started away from the pool, heading downhill out of Eden. If he could, he meant to rest and eat and think for a day and a night. He was very weary and there was much to think about.

Food-Giver threw aside his club and walked beside him.

## X

GETTING FOOD, or what passed for food, posed no great problem. The moment Boris showed an interest in anything eatable that a hominid had, some of it was handed him. It was not that he was regarded with any special favor; the hominids did the same thing among themselves. It was not surprising in an extremely primitive culture. Food-Giver had probably achieved what dominance he had simply by being a better provider than anyone else. Boris dug up some food for himself, lest he lose all status. He even managed to give away a couple of juicy roots and a few fat grubs he felt no reluctance to part with.

At night the tribe bedded down under the trees, mostly paired male and female. Boris found a comfortable spot near the edge of the fire-clearing and when he woke during the night made himself useful and kept warm by adding a log

or two. The leaf-wrapped gourd still waited on the cairn, and he was careful not to disturb it.

It was morning, and Food-Giver was prodding him awake. Grunting and stiff, Boris arose from his grassy nest, and saw at once that something was up. Four or five of the graying elders of the tribe were inspecting the gourd.

Evidently deciding that it had been warmed enough, they took it off through the forest. Boris's feet felt better, and he kept up with them. They looked at him curiously, and talked about him, but made no objection. By a roundabout way that avoided any steep rock-climbing they reached the pool of the Water of Thought, and poured into it, carefully but without ceremony, half the contents of the gourd. Then Water from the pool was added until the gourd was full.

Back at the fire-clearing, a gathering of the younger males awaited the elders and Boris. Attention was centered on the gourd. Things were solemn. Boris was willing to fade into the background, until it became obvious that he was expected to stay.

There were no drums or chants here, but still what followed was ritual, the first Boris had seen among the hominids. The young men sat in a semi-circle facing the leaders, and Food-Giver motioned Boris to take the place at the end of the young men's line. The gourd was handed to the man at the other end, who took a sip and passed it on to the next. Each man sipped in turn, and the gourd moved down the line from hand to hand.

Well, it hadn't killed him before he knew what it was; and there was no way to avoid it now. When the gourd reached him, Boris was ready. He touched his lips to the stuff inside.

It was the Water of Thought and nothing else, far stronger than he had ever tasted it before. What did the clear Yunoe have to do with hominid craniums? Almost absently, Boris handed the gourd to Food-Giver, who stood before him with what might be termed an expectant expression.

Food-Giver pushed Boris's hand back. Food-Giver raised his own empty hands in a pantomime of a man draining a cup to the last drop.

Well, Boris's second deep drink, just before the ordeal, hadn't seemed to affect him at all. What with his drinking from the tainted river, he might be building up an immunity.

There was a good cupful left in the gourd, and like a good diplomat Boris drank it all.

The taste was not bad, but it was very strong.

With that, the meeting was over, and the council returned to personal problems of root-digging and flea-scratching. Boris found that his hosts had shared other things besides food and drink with him, and walked to the river to drown some of the gifts or persuade them to leave.

After some success with that job, he started doing ingenious things with a flint point, some green tough bark, and a couple of strings from his shredded net. Planeteer's survival school had not been wasted on him.

Before he could complete the first moccasin, he knew he had a fever which was rapidly getting worse. He tried for a while to keep on working, and then gave up and threw himself down in the shade; he was burning up, and getting light-headed. Damn the Water of Thought. Jones had been feverish from drinking a lot of it. What now, plenty of bed rest?

He tossed restlessly on the grass, wondering if he dared go to the river and cool himself. Someone came to sit beside him, and he looked up to see Food-Giver.

"I hope you can talk soon, Swimmer-With-Berries," Food-Giver said.

"Soon, but I feel sick," answered Boris, abstractedly, speaking the hominid language. The jabber felt strange on his tongue, and yet not strange. Then Boris sat up, staring in awe at Food-Giver, who looked back at him in mild alarm. "Great Gods of the Galaxy," said Boris softly in Space Force-Colonial. There were no hominid words for that.

The fever leveled off before he became delirious, though all he could do for it was lie in the shade and hope. Food-Giver and some of the others stood or squatted around him, now and then questioning him softly and mournfully—or rather, questioning Swimmer-With-Berries, who had died yesterday from a villager's spear thrust. Of course Boris was still Yellow Monster, his original self, but as the newest male around he had been chosen to bear the reincarnation of Swimmer.

Boris fairly well understood these things without asking, for he found himself now possessed of a profusion of hominid



memories besides his new knowledge of the language. And yet, fever and all, he still knew himself as Boris Brazil; there was for him no real confusion of identity, no sense of an alien personality crowding him inside his skull.

Food-Giver (which was a correct title) and the others asked polite questions of Swimmer-With-Berries. Had it been painful, they asked, to die?

Not very, Boris remembered. He could plainly recall looking down at his own gray leathery chest, watching his own ebbing blood, glimpsing at his feet where his failing hands had dropped the rocks he had carried into the fight. He remembered seeing the tall yellowish monster who had thrown a spear at the villagers. Much farther back, he remembered himself at other sessions like this, asking the traditional mourners' questions of the newly dead, who were merged again through the Water of Thought with the living.

It was Boris who remembered all these things. Around him now were not old friends talking with Swimmer-With-Berries, though they thought of themselves that way. They were still Kappan hominids talking with a Mars-born planeteer. Swimmer was dead and gone, but he had left parts of his memory like segments of recording tape in Boris's brain.

Food-Giver and the others chatted of old times like cronies at a wake. Boris could not recall everything they spoke of, and this did not surprise them. That was the way the Water worked; some of the departed one's life was always lost to death.

But Boris now had Swimmer's memories of many everyday routine things, of eating and mating and fighting, and Boris searched those memories now for information.

There was a scene where a young female was being ritually buried, and rows of hominid faces looked at Swimmer as his hands scooped earth into the grave. There had been tears then on Swimmer's face, but there was no emotional content for Boris in this or any of the other memories.

The earliest of Swimmer's memories was one in which he lay by the Sacred Pool, drinking and drinking. His belly was bloated with the Water of Thought, but it was still pleasant to drink more.

Of course. Young hominids after being weaned ran free in the forest, on the fringes of the tribal territory, and survived as best they might. No adult tried to teach them anything,

for they were not yet real Thinking People, they were Dark People, like other animals. And sometimes the hated villagers trapped the young ones, and took them to a terrible place where they were tortured, and made to spend their lives in moving useless stones. There they remained Dark People forever because they were kept from the Sacred Pool.

About the same time that a free young wild one grew into the power of sex, the taste of the Sacred Pool, which had been repugnant to him, suddenly became irresistibly attractive. For long days the young ones lay by the banks of the pool, drinking until their bellies bloated, hardly stirring themselves to eat. Then there came a time when the taste of the Water no longer pleased them greatly. Then they came and joined the tribe, bringing with them the powers of speech and thought, and the tribal memories.

The tribal memories? Why, of course.

Now that he thought of it, Boris could remember himself in a female hominid body, gathering sweet roots along the base of a great ice wall that blocked the upper end of a valley—

As a planeteer, Boris recognized the great ice wall as a glacier. He could remember the looming size of it, and feel again its cold breath on his leathery hominid skin, as if he had passed it yesterday.

Was that scene ten thousand years old? Boris knew at least that much time had passed since glaciers scoured these subtropical valleys.

Restless with his fever and awed by what was happening to him, Boris got up and walked unsteadily away from the mourners. He went down to the Yunoe and splashed its water on his fevered face. The Yunoe was cool, but Boris had no memory of its ever being frozen, even when the glaciers were near. All adult hominids knew that its Sacred Pool had to be defended. It was the Water of Thought, a River of Thought that flowed in the brains of men, generation after generation.

After drinking the Thought-tainted water, Boris scooped up a shaky palmful and held it close to his eyes.

Hypothesis. A microscopic organism—call it the X-bug—lives and thrives and reproduces in the Sacred Pool. Some X-bugs are carried out over the fall, but for some reason they

die or lose their potency as they drift downstream; after a few miles, they are gone.

A hominid drinks from the pool. Suppose the X-bugs resist digestion and are taken into the drinker's bloodstream live. Suppose they have an affinity for the brain, and suppose that they become a loosely integrated but necessary part of the hominid brain, serving some critical synaptic function and also bringing information that is henceforth available to the hominid as memory. And also, while in the brain, they record some part of what the hominid experiences.

Boris discarded his handful of water and started groggily uphill again. He rather liked his theory. There were the planarian worms of Earth, one of which could acquire part of the simple learning of another by eating the educated one's minced body.

How could the X-bugs keep storing up new data, century after century, and still retain at least a substantial part of the old? Perhaps the X-bug reproductive process started each new individual with half its data-capacity blank.

Boris was not a biologist, only a feverish and beaten-up jack of all trades; but he thought that his theory could not be far from the truth.

The doctor, back at the colony, had said that Earthmen and Kappans were remarkably alike, biologically. But after all, Earthmen were not meant to imbibe their memories and the neural connections of their speech centers. When an Earthman drank the Water of Thought, the X-bugs must rush to his brain and there raise frustrated hell until the body's defense system did them in. A Kappan of the villagers' species who drank the Water probably experienced the same thing in a milder form—they spoke of trance, and racial memories. But it was small wonder that the Water of Thought caused an Earthman mental unbalance.

The mental effect of Boris's first drink had been so powerful that he had noticed no physical effects. But Jones had been feverish. Come to think of it, Jones had said things suggesting that he had picked up hominid memories with his draughts of Water. Then after four or five days, each of them had recovered. Boris had regained his freedom, and Jones had discovered that the object of his fanaticism no longer satisfied him.

Perhaps their first drinks had given them a certain immunity, for their second drinks, at the start of the ordeal, had had little or no effect. Kaleta and Morton had taken their first drinks when the ordeal started, and were probably still crazed in one way or another.

And Brenda—Gods, he had to get out of here and help her, or at least find out what was happening. But at the moment he was glad to be able to reach his shaded nest again, and sink weakly down into the grass.

"I am sick," he told Food-Giver. Food-Giver offered him half a mouse. Boris waved it away and closed his eyes.

Why had the third drink sickened him if he had been immune to the second? Well, the third had tasted much stronger than the other two, and he had been forced to drink more of it. If his theory was correct, the third drink had brought X-bugs to his brain in such concentration that the data they carried somehow became available to him. Skin-grafts could be made to take from Kappan to Earthman, Doc at the colony had said.

But this time, though the drink had been stronger, Boris had not been mentally unbalanced by it. Maybe his psyche had actually been strengthened by that first bout of temporary madness—another interesting theory. The Water of Thought was going to keep a lot of research people busy for a long time.

Magnuson was a scientist; but he had swallowed the Water, and then apparently had never tried to work on it.

Wearily puzzling about Magnuson, Boris fell into a fevered sleep. The mass animal-screeching of hominid children awakened him. Swimmer's memory knew that particular sound to be an important warning, and brought Boris jumping up from sleep. His first clear impression was that he felt much better. His fever was breaking, and he was in a cold sweat.

Boris ran with the tribe toward the distant sounds of alarm, picking up a club as he went. A couple of adult scouts who had gone out to investigate now came hurrying back to where the tribe was assembling.

"There are six villagers coming," one reported.

"And another monster, like this one," said the second scout, pointing to Boris. "And yet another monster, who has no face or hair, but shines all over like the sun on water. They are all

coming this way along the river, four or five shouts from here."

Food-Giver turned slowly to Boris, as if asking silently for expert advice on the subject of monsters.

Boris's fever was gone. If his theory was right, the last living cells of Swimmer-With-Berries had been repelled from Boris's Earth-descended brain, and were food for phagocytes in his alien circulatory system.

But Boris found that he still understood the hominid language. With a second's thought, he could still see the glacier, though perhaps some of the detail had been lost. Evidently his own brain had somehow re-recorded much of what Swimmer's cells had tried to bring it.

"I know this monster-who-shines," said Boris. "I think he and the other have come to find me and kill me."

"If they come with the villagers, they must be our enemies too," said someone. There was general agreement.

Whoever was in the groundsuit would not be a real expert in its use, and would doubtless be demented in some way by the Water of Thought. In some aggressive way, probably, since he came hunting.

Boris asked, "Did one of the monsters have shaggy hair on his face and head?"

"Yes, the one who did not shine and had much hair, darker than yours."

Magnuson. That meant Morton or Kaleta was in the suit; and Morton was the tough one. If it was true that the Water of Thought pushed a man toward his weakness, Morton might easily be afflicted with blind rage. This suggested a plan.

Boris interrupted a strategy conference. "This shining monster is a very great fighter. Clubs and little stones will not hurt him."

There was an awed murmur; all eyes were turned on Boris.

Swimmer's segmented memories were unclear about something, and Boris asked for information. "Food-Giver, have The People ever attacked the villages?"

Food-Giver was probably astonished at having to explain any historical matter to Swimmer. But he was tolerant of monsters, and finally answered, "Yes, six father's-times ago."

"If we go to fight in the villages, the villagers will kill us," observed a large man standing nearby. There were grunts of

agreement. The Sacred Pool meant humanity to future generations of The People, so it would always be defended to the death. But what was the reason for fighting in an enemy village?

"I think today all their warriors are busy in other places," said Boris. "And if we go to the villages we will frighten their whole tribe very much, so tomorrow their warriors may stay home instead of coming here. But first there is the shining monster, who can kill us all if we let him."

Again there was murmuring; but Swimmer's word seemed to be trusted.

"I want two of you young men, the most agile, to come with me," Boris said. "We will fight the monster among the high rocks, two shouts below the Sacred Pool." It was a bend of the Yunoe he had never seen, but he could remember the place. "Then the rest of The People can easily drive off the six warriors and the other monster."

The Home Guard was much astonished; they were not at all used to such strong suggestions. For fanatically poor discipline, this army would have made Old American backwoodsman look like Prussian regulars. Still, this proliferation of monsters was an unheard-of situation, and Boris's try for leadership was therefore at least tolerable to The People.

"We know six villagers are coming," said Food-Giver, sticking conservatively to facts. "Maybe there are more. I'm getting ready to fight." He made no comment on the plans of yellow monsters. He might have argued jealously against such plans if his culture had been slightly less primitive, but leaders in the simplest societies of every planet rarely argued. Everyone did much as they pleased, anyway.

Boris called firmly for two volunteers. "You," he said. "And you. Will you come with me? And will you do as I say? We will have a hard fight, and a strange fight, against the shining monster. We will save many of The People from being killed."

The two young males he had chosen had youth in their eyes, as well as in their supple bodies. They came with him. They knew no more of groundsuits than of quadratic equations, and quite likely he was going to get them mangled; but he told himself it was for Brenda, if not for The People.

## XI

"Now SOMETHING's wrong with the damn suit," growled Don Morton, standing knee-deep in the rapids of the upper Yunque. The suit's left arm had developed some kind of a hitch in movement; he couldn't control it precisely any more.

Magnuson, breathing heavily in his effort to keep up with Morton, was ascending the steep riverside path. The six warriors were out somewhere ahead, scouting. Or more probably loafing, Morton thought.

"I said, there's something wrong with this!" Morton waved the defective arm.

"Yes." Magnuson nodded agreement. It was easy to tell what he was thinking, though.

Morton demanded, "I suppose you think I shouldn't have broken all those rocks back there. Well, they kept slipping under my feet. Why shouldn't I hit 'em?"

"You know more about the suit than I do," said Magnuson.

"Damn right I do."

Morton scanned the hillside about him. Here, the hills were steep, the bones of rock thrusting up through the soil, into occasional crags and pinnacles. Oh, to catch one glimpse of Brazil, who was the cause of all this effort and trouble! When he got a grip on Brazil he would tear him into hand-fuls.

Magnuson had stopped to drink from the stream. When he got up, he had a funny expression on his face; he smacked his lips and looked thoughtfully upstream.

"Well, you got any more bright ideas?" Morton asked him.

"At the moment, no," said Magnuson, at once giving Morton his polite attention. Magnuson wasn't really a bad guy; ever since Morton had slapped him he had been polite and respectful. It just showed that people needed a bit of rough treatment now and then; it was good for them.

Morton drank, too, turning his head inside the helmet and sucking insipid water from the suit's tank. Blah. Maybe he should chance taking off his helmet, so he could get a real drink—

"Look! There!" Magnuson was crouched, his body tensed, pointing.

Morton whirled, sending up a spray of water. A few hundred yards away, a figure moved along a steep hillside. An Earthman, tall and blond and nearly naked.

Morton hesitated momentarily.

"Go after him!" urged Magnuson. He straightened. "There's something burning near there—see all the smoke?"

"So what?" Morton took some slow steps toward the distant figure. "I can get him!" Rage came to a focus. Running, the suit's legs ripped sheets of water from the river. Morton sprinted up the bank, smashing aside brush and saplings, his eyes fixed on his enemy, at last in sight. The figure soon vanished behind some rocks, as if Brazil had seen him coming. Morton exulted. Go on, run, try to get away! This time, I've got the suit!

Running in the groundsuit was an athlete's dream come true, a joy that Morton felt more keenly with every trial. Almost effortlessly he now made the rough hillside flow down past him. Rocks flew back like missiles from his heels.

He pounded along the top of a rocky ridge, toward the broken hills and pinnacles where Brazil had vanished. Something was indeed burning there, something big judging by the smoke-pall that hung between rocky hills.

Was Brazil signaling? Morton stopped, anxiously scanning the sky. There were no copters in sight.

Was the smoke some kind of trick? But he was invulnerable! Morton laughed, and flew on. At the end of the ridge, he recklessly leaped across a ravine; landing on the other side, he fell, sprawling and sliding among rocks. He was unhurt, but even a second's delay was maddening. Cursing and scrambling, he rushed on.

Here was the spot where he had seen Brazil. And now—there he was! The tall figure hurried away along a dangerous rocky slope, toward the heavy smoke. Morton saw now that the dark gray clouds rose from a row of fires banked with smoldering greenery along the foot of the hill. Did Brazil hope to confuse him with smoke? Morton laughed at the futility of such a plan, and hurled himself after his enemy.

Something struck a clanging blow against his helmet. On the slope above Morton, a hominid snarled and jabbered, hurling rocks down at him.

Morton growled in rage and charged the hillside. Loose



gravel and sand flew from under his metal feet; he fell, then slid down into the greasy-looking smoke.

The air inside his helmet stayed as fresh as it ever got, but it was difficult to see. Again, a thrown rock clanged from his suit. He saw no one, but he heard the chittering of his enemies, as if they were laughing at him.

Were hominids helping Brazil? That was fine, that would mean more targets for Morton's revenge. He stood up, trying to see through the smoke, smiling coldly. Let them laugh; let them think they might escape. He could afford to wait a little longer.

He climbed carefully, and when he emerged from the smoke found that he had gotten turned around somehow, and was on a different slope. Over there was the hominid—but here was another one on another peak. He tried to decide which one to go after first, while more rocks clattered insultingly around him. He started after the nearest hominid, and heard a shout behind him. Brazil was there, on another pinnacle, hurling rocks like an ape himself. Sol Hominids forgotten, Morton reversed himself again. He had to go down through the fires to reach Brazil. When he had kicked his way through the smoldering brush-piles, he found his faceplate fogged over with greasy soot and adhering dust, so he could hardly have distinguished a crouching man from a boulder. He stopped, fumbling inside the suit. There should be a washing system for the faceplate.

A hominid raced by, not twenty feet away, and hurled some filthy-looking muck at Morton. It splattered all over him, and part of it hit his faceplate, obscuring his vision further. Morton roared, and gave chase. But where had the ape gone? He had to stop for a moment and get his faceplate cleaned. Forgetfully, he brought his left arm up in a wiping motion, to try to scrape off some of the mess. The erratic arm smashed against the faceplate glass and the helm just above it. That did it. In a frenzy, Morton pounded his own helmet again and again, with raging fists. The suit-builders had turned out junk, useless junk!

But the helmet and faceplate withstood the beating; and when Morton finally found the interior control for the washer, even it still partially worked, cleaning half of his faceplate.

He looked up and saw Brazil, rolling a boulder down at him. With a yell, Morton charged. He would catch the rock

and hurl it back, flattening his enemy like an insect on a wall.

The rock hit him before he realized it was too big to catch, on this loose footing. The boulder bore him downhill, and he screamed in terror as it bounded with him, rolling him among other rocks, shooting him finally against immobile masses of stone, with a clanging like the end of the world.

He lay gasping there for long seconds, before he could feel sure he was not killed or maimed. In fact he was hardly hurt at all, just bruised and with the wind knocked out of him.

"I'm gonna break your arms and legs, Brazil, and then your neck!" he called aloud, when he got to his feet at last. He knew his enemies were somewhere nearby. They would be laughing at him, and getting ready to roll more rocks at him.

Both sides could play that game! With a sudden inspiration, Morton picked up some small rocks, and looked around for a target. Where was Brazil? Now it was hard to see anything through this smeared and damaged faceplate. Morton would like to get his hands on the madman, the degenerate, who built this suit, and—

There was a hominid, looking down at him! Morton threw an egg-sized stone; it seemed to go like a bullet, but it missed the target, and whizzed away into space.

He could swear he heard them laughing. Maybe they were getting another boulder ready to roll down at him; he had better get back up to the top of a hill. He picked up half a dozen throwing pebbles, but his maniacal left arm dropped and scattered them, half way up the slope. Another rock hit him. Smoke drifted around him.

Morton was beyond rage. He made a crooning sound, like a lover singing. When he saw Brazil, he charged at full speed paying no heed to anything else. A wide chasm was almost under his feet before he saw it. Morton leaped desperately, and the edge of the far side struck him in the chest. He slung there with his arms, emptiness under his feet, and the suit's left arm failed him, just as Brazil hit him with another big rock. Then Morton was endlessly falling, bouncing and falling again, the world of rocks and sky spinning around him and suddenly going dark.

"Is the shining monster dead?" asked one of the young men with Boris.

Boris sat down shakily on a ledge. His hands were bleeding from the edges of that last rock, and his chest was heaving. It had been a very near thing.

"I doubt it," he answered. "But I think he will be tired of fighting us."

"It will take—" The hominid held up a hand against the course of the sun. "This long, for us to climb down and see if the monster is dead. If the river does not carry him away. I think he finished falling in the river."

"You are a good fighter, Yellow Monster," said the other hominid.

"Thank you. Let's leave the Shining One where he is. I want to lead some of The People downstream against the villages."

An hour had passed since Morton had gone charging away after Brazil. Magnuson was crouching behind a log, within earshot of the murmuring Yunoe, the six warriors scattered near him in concealed positions. Shortly after Morton had left, the hominids had launched a stone-throwing attack, but the villagers' arrows had driven them off.

Now all was quiet. Could Morton be still venting some fiendish vengeance on his enemy? Or had Brazil out-thought him and escaped him, or even found a way to defeat him?

Magnuson rather suspected the latter. It was hard for him not to admire a man like Brazil. Maybe Brazil hadn't simply broken and fled from the ordeal. Maybe there had been some deeper reason—

"Magnuson, someone comes."

The warriors were stirring, turning their attention downstream, to the south. Were the hominids trying to encircle and trap them?

But it was Red Circles who came into view on the river-side path. He was leading a strong war party, twelve or fifteen men, all carrying the painted buckets that Magnuson knew were used only on raids after the Water of Thought.

Red Circles came forward, walking tall, his eyes scouting the woods. He stopped, and Magnuson stood up to greet him.

"Magnuson, the Earthman Ka-le-ta is dead."

"What? How?"

Red Circles put a hand to his belt and pulled out a machine pistol, holding it awkwardly. "Ka-le-ta killed three men with this, and he violated the temple. So I killed him."

"What of the hominid-man?" Magnuson asked. "Be careful with that weapon; it is dangerous." He couldn't see if the safety was on. Kaleta must have had the weapon hidden somewhere; then he had been drugged by the Water—

Red Circles curled his lip at the mention of danger; but he held the pistol out to Magnuson. "Maybe you can kill some of the Forest People with this, Magnuson, though you have no skill with the bow. Maybe you will kill your hominid-man, for he has run away."

"Run away?" Magnuson took a step forward, almost grabbing at Red Circles. "Where? How do you know?"

"The pen stands open."

Red Circles would not lie, but his tone was insolent. Magnuson accepted the pistol, put the safety on, and drew himself up.

"Red Circles, you will speak to me with respect. The Spirit of Man speaks to this world through me, and that is a greater thing than you can understand." Magnuson knew there was no Spirit, no God, and there would be none until Man had evolved himself upward to infinite power. But Magnuson's work brought that moment closer, so he was not lying to Red Circles. Red Circles could not know these things as a civilized man knew them, so their weight was all with Magnuson.

The war chief scowled, but he could not steadily look Magnuson in the eye.

"We must find the man-hominid," Magnuson said. "He is one of our tribe now. Have you any idea where he is?"

Red Circles gave the Kappan equivalent of a shrug. "Who can say where a hominid might hide?"

"We must search for him."

Red Circles shifted his feet uneasily, but his voice was stubborn. "I and these men are busy. We are going to get more Thought-Water. Ka-le-ta defiled the vat, and it must be restocked at once, so we are going to the Sacred Pool, all the way upstream. Once you asked many questions about the Water of Thought, Magnuson. Now you are one of us, and you can learn all about it."

This time Red Circles would not knuckle under. Still it was plain that he wanted no quarrel, that he was trying to

persuade Magnuson. Once Magnuson would have needed no persuading; he would have made a great effort to discover the source of the Water of Thought. Even now, the idea was tempting. This would be his last chance for any such discovery, for tomorrow or the next day the Space Force would be here, and he would be under arrest.

But there was no time to spare.

"We go downstream," said Magnuson, putting his full authority into his voice. "We must track down the man-hominid, and keep him with us. He is proof of a very great magic, more important than the Water of Thought; he is a man made from an animal!"

"You go downstream, if you want. But I am chief of these warriors." Red Circles turned and shouted commandingly to his men: "We go up!"

Boris was beginning to suspect that he might, after all, be the dynamic-leader type, for he had gotten about twenty-five of the younger hominid men to follow him downriver against the villages. It was against all the Space Force rules to exacerbate local warfare, but he could see no other course that offered him so good a chance of getting his pursuers off his neck and, hopefully, rescuing Brenda. He was gambling that only a few villagers would be at home, that they would flee, and that casualties on either side would be at a minimum. He would gamble more than that to help Brenda.

"Run forward and make much noise when we come to the first village," Boris told his company. "Remember to look for a female monster; she is my friend."

His boys grunted cheerful assent; following a determined leader was a new and exciting game to them.

They charged whooping downhill, and took the Warriors' Village by surprise. As Boris had hoped, there was not a warrior home. The women and children evacuated the huts with miraculous speed, and went screaming panic and murder down the path toward the Workers' Village.

Thankfully there was no real murder, nor even injury; the hominids were not culturally advanced enough to enjoy pillage and rapine. They shrieked good-naturedly to urge the fleeing enemy on, and waved good-by with clubs.

"Remember, look for female monsters!" Boris led a hut-to-hut search, aided by those of his irregulars who chose to

help. It did not take long to make certain that Brenda and Jane were elsewhere.

All this was fun! The hominids willingly followed Boris downhill again.

"We will frighten another village!" he shouted, encouragingly, waving them on. He had a hard time keeping up with them now, though he had stopped to borrow a pair of some warrior's new moccasins, which were an excellent fit. Shoes were a higher invention than the wheel, and he meant to insist on the point at the next scholarly meeting he attended.

Boris and his army swept into the Workers' Village to find that panic had preceded them, and the huts and workshops were already empty of people. From the direction of the quarry came a querulous hominid yipping; not words, but the frightened monkey-call of the young, though in deeper adult voices.

"It is the Dark People," said the hominid standing beside Boris. In the next instant he ran toward the quarry, yipping a response. The others cascaded after him.

"Wait! Not yet!" Boris had not foreseen this. "We'll get them out of there, but not yet!"

He might as well have shouted to recall the wind; his army was gone. But he could not blame them.

Seemingly alone in the deserted village, he ran from hut to hut.

"Brenda! Janel!" In one hut he found a quivering mass of bedding, but his probing uncovered only an ancient and terrified villager.

He took the downstream path again, this time alone. For the thousandth time he scanned the empty greenish day for any sign of rescuing copters. But there was no use expecting help beyond what he could give himself.

He scanned the stream closely as he neared the Temple Village, looking for the spot where Magnuson had made him throw in the second groundsuit and the energy rifles. Magnuson had not realized that an energy rifle would not be fouled by submersion.

When he came to the place, Boris waded out into the dark water, searching the muddy bottom with arms and legs. The current was not strong here, and what he sought could not be far away. Unless someone had beaten him to it.

He went under water to examine a deeper part of the bot-

tom. When he came up for a breath, Morton was standing on the bank twenty yards away, wearing the battered suit, watching Boris.

"The river's not going to hide you," said the suit's speaker.

"Are you still drugged, Morton?" Boris asked. And just then his groping feet found the second groundsuit on the bottom of the river. Neck-deep in water, he stepped back, moving his feet this way and that, searching further.

"Oh no," said Morton. "It's worn off. I won't knock myself out anymore. But you know too much about our little business; I can't let you stay alive. You and the others can be blamed on the Kappans."

"Where's Brenda?" Boris asked. And just then his foot found one of the energy rifles. His actions concealed underwater, he scooped the rifle up with his foot, into his hands. But Morton was still too far away.

Morton smiled, and in a clear pleasant voice said, in obscene fantasy, just how he had disposed of Brenda. In the next instant Morton rushed Boris, charging with resistless speed into the water. He came so quickly that Boris fired without raising the rifle above the surface.

There was a needle-jet of steam, and the groundsuit sounded, loudly, like a struck gong. A tiny hole appeared in its front. Morton fell forward with a great splash as Boris dove out of the way. The suited figure floated, face down, hissing, and Boris felt a wave of warmed water pass with it. The back of the cuirass, where the power lamp rode, showed a blackened place the size of a saucer; the suit's radio would be useless now, even if a way could be found to get at it from outside.

Holding the rifle, Boris climbed again from the river to the path. For a little while, before the suit sank, he and Morton kept pace toward the Temple Village and the quiet expanse of Great Lake beyond.

The wave of panic before the supposed hominid onslaught had emptied this village like the others. Again Boris walked among deserted dwellings, shouting for Brenda and Jane.

Pete Kaleta's head greeted him from atop a pole fixed in the ground before the temple. With shaky relief Boris made sure there was only one such pole. Brenda and Jane and Magnuson remained unaccounted for. Boris entered the tem-

ple, and poked his head and rifle into the inner room. Four trembling priests stood before the Water-vat, holding spears more or less leveled.

Boris had as yet absorbed next to nothing of the villagers' language, but he tried.

"Woman!" he said, or meant to say. "Woman. Me. Mine." He swept his arm around, asking where.

At last one of the priests appeared to get the idea, and raised a pointing arm.

## XII

RED CIRCLES AND his band were out of Magnuson's sight now, on their way upstream. Magnuson was walking alone in the opposite direction, back toward the familiar territory around the villages.

He had lived and worked in these villages for a year now. He recalled that last year's rainy season had been starting when he staged his disappearance; and even now he could see this season's first towering thunderheads in the eastern sky.

There were times when he wished he might have made some science as impersonal and plain as meteorology his life's work. But Man had called to him, giving him no real choice. He had buried himself in these hills; he had dedicated himself, even to the point of hunting for a man to kill him as part of the work. A strange way to serve the cause of Life. But not really strange when you saw it clearly, for death was a necessary part of life.

Civilization had much to learn about the need for a continuous weeding-out of its members. Magnuson would welcome his approaching arrest and trial, whatever the charges might be, because of the publicity. He meant to make his defense a lesson for civilization.

His defense would be based on the success of his work; he had raised an ape-like, gibbering thing to the rank of Man, and in the end the courts would not be able to deny the living evidence of that one hominid. Sooner or later, the work of refining humanity would go on, on every planet, and that was all that mattered.

When he came in sight of the Warriors' Village, Magnu-



son paused, sensing something wrong. The village looked completely empty. Seeing him, a couple of old women came timidly out from where they had been hiding in the bush, and in excited voices told him of great massacre and destruction by a thousand raging hominids, led by the yellow-haired Earthman who had so magically escaped from the ordeal.

Magnuson soothed the women as well as he could, and hurried into the depopulated village. No corpses and no damage were visible, though there were hominid droppings in several places. Making Brazil a leader of the enemy forces was indeed an imaginative touch. Of course it was possible that Brazil had seen the village empty and had dared to pass through it. Perhaps he had been fleeing from the animals.

The pen was undamaged, though its door stood open, and the one-handed hominid was gone. Magnuson had believed Red Circles, but seeing this for himself was still a blow. At least there were no signs of violence in the pen.

The hominid might possibly have gone back to the familiar laboratory-pen, near the quarry. Magnuson hurried in that direction, toward the Workers' Village.

From ahead of him, somewhere downstream, there came a sound as of a metal gong being struck, once. Magnuson paused, listening, but the noise was not repeated. Thinking vaguely that the wild hominids might be attacking the Workers' Village, Magnuson loosened the machine pistol in his belt and hurried on.

Food-Giver had followed downstream after the howling young men who had chosen to go with Yellow Monster. Food-Giver was not jealous—at least not consciously so—but he was curious. Yellow Monster said what he wanted done in a way that made a man feel it was wrong to do anything else. Even though Yellow Monster rarely gave food to anyone, the young men still followed him toward the dangerous villages, so there was great power in Yellow Monster somewhere.

It was wise to go slow when approaching the villages. Food-Giver carried a big club and was ready at every step to run for his life. When Yellow Monster and the young hominids ran shouting into the first village, Food-Giver stayed back and waited to see what would happen. Not much of anything seemed to happen; there were no sounds of fighting.

Food-Giver was not convinced. He skirted the empty

village suspiciously and slowly. The young hominids and Yellow Monster were now out of his sight, but his ears and nose told him they were going on downstream.

Remembering another raid of six generations ago, Food-Giver visualized the location of the next village. He was drawing near it when he heard a call like that of hominid children in distress, but in deep adult voices. It came from ahead and to his right.

"The Dark People," Food-Giver whispered aloud. He took a tight grip on his club. He was alone, and afraid, in enemy territory, but he could not ignore that cry. He was a leader because nothing meant more to him than helping his people, and now the Dark People were calling for help.

Food-Giver had a generations-old memory of their place of torture, a deep senseless hole dug into stone. He knew where it was, and he moved with slow caution toward it.

Ahead he saw a couple of elderly villagers in kilts hurrying in frightened silence through the woods. They did not see him, and he could have killed them. But a noise might bring others, so he hid and waited for them to pass. Then he went carefully on toward the quarry he remembered but had never seen with his own eyes.

Very slowly, sense alert, he came out of the woods near the lip of the quarry. Here he found much hominid sign, and recognized the scent of one or two individuals. He interpreted the tracks to mean that the twenty-five young men, or most of them, had here turned north again toward home, scattering back through the woods and taking with them other hominids who could only be the Dark People.

Food-Giver sighed with relief. All this was good, very good. The villagers had been robbed of their slaves. The Dark People could be given to drink from the Sacred Pool, and thought would come to their eyes and tongues, and they would be Real People. The tribe had been strengthened. Yellow Monster and his strange powers had done very well.

Moving forward to peek down into the quarry-pit, Food-Giver saw three gray figures huddled together far below him. He saw that they were not bound or penned up. They were alive, and free to climb out, but still they stayed in the pit.

"Hey there!" he shouted to them, forgetting caution for a moment. "Do you want to be Dark People always?"

But they only huddled together and stared at him, as if they wanted him to go away.

So. If they refused help, he would not force it on them. He would go home. He had gotten only a few paces from the quarry when he saw among the trees a thing he did not remember. A strange big hut, not such as the villagers made but built of the branchless bodies of many trees placed close together. Curious as always, he approached it. The area smelled little of villager, but strongly of both monster and hominid. That seemed a friendly combination to Food-Giver, and he was emboldened to go closer.

There was a dark hole, like a cave, let into the cleverly arranged log-pile. Inside, someone moved, making timid sounds.

The freshest smell was hominid, so Food-Giver dared to go to the door and look inside. A one-handed male hominid was there, bedraggled and frightened-looking. Food-Giver noted the recent small wounds that marked the other's body, and stared at the old scar that ended the arm-stump. It was astonishing how neatly the hand had been removed, and how the owner had survived such a loss.

Then Food-Giver remembered to be courteous. "Are you Dark? Or do you think?"

The eyes of the one-handed hominid were strange and wild, as if thought flickered up and down like firelight behind them. His mouth worked uncertainly. "I . . . I . . . I . . ."

"Maybe you drank once and no more from the Sacred Pool," said Food-Giver. "That's not enough. You will come with me and drink more." Food-Giver tried to talk the way Yellow Monster did, stating positively what should be done. It seemed that such a method might accomplish great things. "Also you probably need food and ordinary water."

Something small squeaked and scuttled in a corner of the cabin. With an unthinking flash of movement Food-Giver knocked obstructions aside and struck at the rat with a hunting thrust of his club. The noise and sudden movement made the one-handed one scream and cower away into a corner.

Food-Giver had just made certain of the crippled rat when there were running footsteps outside the cabin. He turned sharply, but the breeze brought only a fresh whiff of monster. Food-Giver waited expectantly.

Walking quickly past the rim of the quarry, Magnuson peered down. Sledges and ropes and tools were scattered carelessly. There had been a hominid raid, evidently, and the kilted overseers and workers had fled. But three of the quarry hominids were still in the pit, perhaps because they knew no other place, perhaps because fear of their masters still held them when their masters were gone. Their upturned faces, expressionless as those of cows, followed Magnuson as he walked along the rim. I will not fail you, Magnuson thought, looking down at them. I will yet raise you up into the sun.

There came a sharp clatter and thump from ahead of him, and a hominid scream. Inside his laboratory! If the wild ones were in there, and the one-handed man—Magnuson ran forward. He found the machine pistol ready in his hand.

The one-handed hominid was huddled down in a corner, and looked up beseechingly as Magnuson burst in. Before Magnuson could say or do anything a big wild one lunged at him out of the gloom.

The automatic pistol hammered out a deafening repeated concussion in the enclosed space. One-Hand screamed once more, and was silent, cowering away from the noise. The wild one was hurled back across the room, and torn nearly in half. A table had already been upset, and a murderous club lay on the floor.

There were no others. Shakily, Magnuson lowered the pistol. He had come just barely in time, it seemed, but the new human life was safe.

Something curious struck his eye, and he prodded with a toe at the nerve-twitching gray hand that had almost reached him. Half the body of a rat lay beside the hand. Curious.

Boris, still following the direction in which the priest had pointed, halted when he reached the edge of the clearing and saw the copter under the trees on the other side.

"Brenda?"

"Boris?" Her blessed head appeared in one of the copter ports, and was joined a second later by Jane's. "Boris, this thing won't fly; the controls are all smashed. But whoever did it forgot the radio. I got a message off half an hour ago, when the villagers all ran away. The colony took a bearing on us; they're sending an armed copter. Oh, you look so

funny in that little net. But you're alive . . ." Brenda began to sob.

Boris kissed her, gobbled half of an emergency ration he found in the copter, kissed her again, ate the other half of the ration, found a spare coverall and put it on.

"Since I look so funny, let's start hiking, ladies. I don't trust any offers of rescue."

He went first, with the rifle ready; Brenda was just behind him, her limp almost gone. They had made three hundred yards east along the lake shore when the copter from the colony arrived and picked them up.

A week later Boris walked once more across the common of the Temple Village, through pouring rain. Now the landing clearing was full of copters, and the muddy villages swarmed with Space Force men. The cruiser had arrived at last and was in orbit above the greenish clouds.

In the middle of the common, Boris came to a villager who stood still as if too bewildered to shelter himself. The steady rain had washed the colored clay from his powerful arms, but Boris knew him. When Boris made a peace gesture, the war chief only looked the more bewildered. After a brief sullen stare he turned and walked heavily away, a man whose normal world had been yanked out from under him, never to return.

Some of Earth's old primitives had believed that a rain such as this fell to mark the death of a great chief. Magnuson was no dead chief; he sat alone in his well-built hut, his face tired but showing an inner content.

He looked up without much surprise, as if Boris had been in his thoughts. "Brazil. It wasn't personal enmity that made me help them to hunt you. You understand that?"

"You mean Morton forced you?"

Magnuson hesitated. "I won't say that."

"You mean it was for the cause. The purification of mankind."

Magnuson folded his hands on the table before him. "I told you once that none of us matter, much, as individuals."

Boris shook his head slightly. "Anyway, I've already given my statement to the Tribune. Have you read it or heard it?"

"No. I've been ordered to stay in this hut. They'll charge me formally when I've obtained counsel." Magnuson was sit-

ting while Boris stood, but still Magnuson seemed to be looking down at him. "You know, my hominid is alive and well."

"Your hominid?"

"I think I may claim credit for him. There are Space Force people examining him now. The day before the Space Force came, I succeeded in teaching him a word or two of speech. So you see the rite of passage was effective."

Sure now that Magnuson did not yet know the truth about the hominids and the Water, Boris stood there feeling weary, and found that he had no wish to destroy the smiling assurance before him. It would be short-lived before the Tribune's coming wrath, or it would perpetuate itself by sliding completely into self-delusion.

Magnuson said, "I was only just in time to save him from a wild one, you know. I wonder what name he'll choose, when he understands about names."

"'Food-Giver' is a good name," said Boris. "Might call him that."

"I don't believe I understand."

"No, I don't believe you do." Boris had just come from viewing Food-Giver's corpse. There had been no one to open the skull properly and in time, to drain and preserve the observations of his generous life for coming generations of his people.

His grunting, flea-picking, much abused and cheerful people. Nasty, virtuous, and short. They were Boris's people now, in a real sense, and he meant to do what he could for them in the future.

But Boris could also remember Brenda being led into this village, to this hut, helpless in the hands of those who might have killed her in their greed and lust. And Magnuson cutting the cord that bound her hands, throwing the cord aside, cursing whatever bound human beings, whatever stunted them or made them less than perfect.

"Magnuson, I'll do what I can to help you. You've drunk the Water of Thought several times; you may have been still under its influence."

"No, we both know the effect soon passes. My actions here have been sane and responsible. The credit or blame is mine."

"The big charge will be manslaughter, or maybe even murder." Boris could not stay in the hut any longer, and walked out into the rain.

Behind him he could hear the proud, dedicated voice: "Why, I don't see how they can base that. I didn't kill Jones. In fact, no one can now deny that I have *created* a new human life form . . ."

Back from a trip to hominid territory, where he had introduced the Tribune's men as friends, Boris found Brenda waiting for him outside the colony's main gate. She wore a rain hood, which he lifted to kiss her. She snuggled up against him.

So young. Never been anywhere, really. Such a small-town girl. In the last week he had seen her hunger for children and home-making.

Boris experienced a terrible sinking feeling, akin to drowning. Visions of future responsibilities rose before him, but he was helpless, as if again in the grip of the Water of Thought.

"Listen." He started to walk with Brenda in the rain. "I'm a planeteer. I'm stationed here and there, and I'm moving around all the time. I've never been married. I've never wanted to settle down—before. Do I have to struggle through this whole speech before you say yes or no?"

"Last time you said no to me."

"You little—that was because . . . *Are* you going to say no?"

"No," she said.