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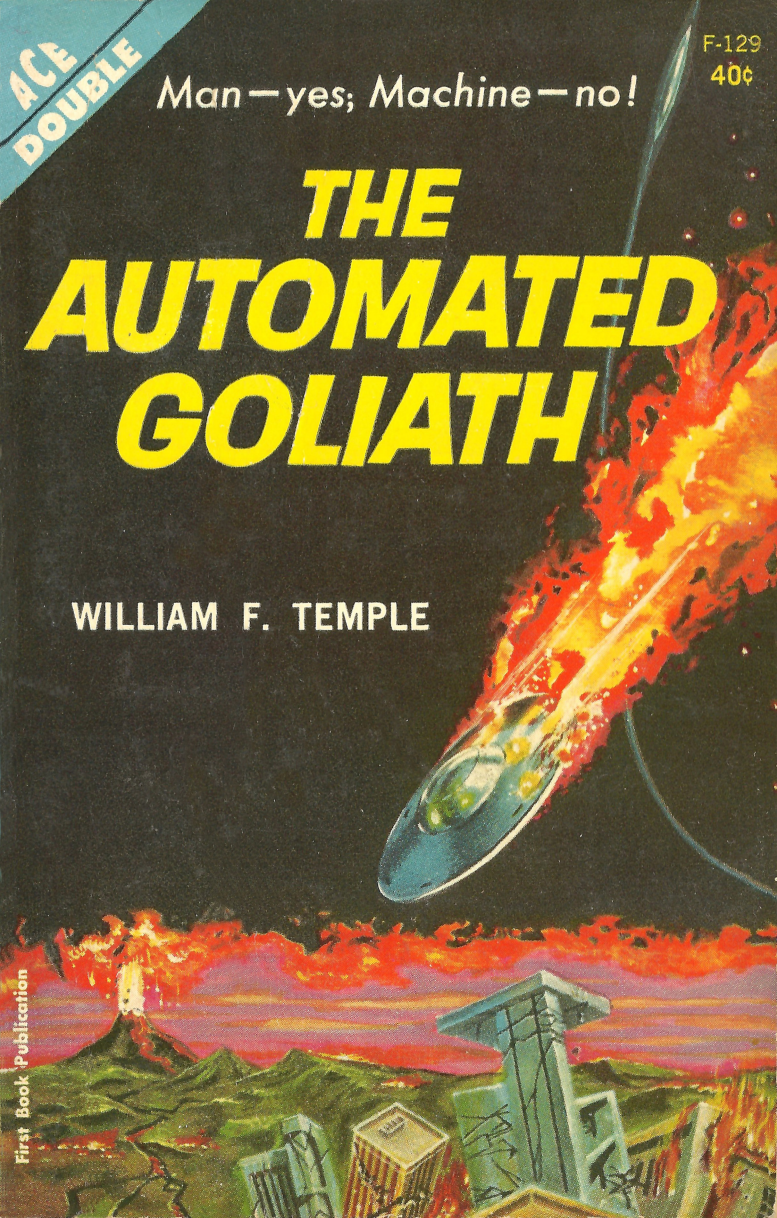
Man—yes; Machine—no!

THE AUTOMATED GOLIATH

WILLIAM F. TEMPLE



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"LET THE SUN BE DARKENED!"

While the age of automation had brought leisure and luxury to Earth, it was also bringing disaster down upon the human race. For a group of unmerciful migratory monsters settled down on Earth, to enjoy for themselves the results of our progress. In no time at all, they would be able to turn the world of automation into one single master machine, which they alone would control.

Only a few humans, among them Charles Magellan, were aware of what was going on. But how could they combat these insidious invaders? And how far into the vast cosmos would they have to chase their foes to make sure they would not return?

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WILLIAM F. TEMPLE is a London-born Englishman, who was publishing science-fiction long before it became a respectable word. His youthful friends and fellow-authors were Arthur C. Clarke, John Wyndham, and John Christopher. Before World War II the Temple-Clarke flat was the headquarters of the British Interplanetary Society (Temple edited its *Journal*). Then, space travel was regarded as beyond the lunatic fringe. Now, the B.I.S. is as respectable as science-fiction. Temple still lives in hopes of becoming respectable also.

He has had numerous science-fiction stories published on both sides of the Atlantic, and many have been anthologized. Besides four science-fiction novels, he has published a straight book on space travel, and a crime thriller.

He has written a good deal of (intentionally) juvenile general fiction, and has two perfectly legitimate children of his own.

For a brief dark space he was an editor but prefers to pretend it never happened.

THE AUTOMATED GOLIATH

by

WILLIAM F. TEMPLE

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PART ONE

Chapter 1

MY NAME IS Charles Wallace Magellan, which sounds like the kind of name that ought to mean something. My father was sure it would.

I always doubted it. But as things have turned out, he was right—but not in the way he expected. He'd always hoped I would follow his trade, and he taught me all he knew.

Well, I tried hard enough to follow him and be worthy of him. He was the greatest safe-cracker since the original of Jimmy Valentine. But the times were against me, as indeed they ran against Father during the latter half of his life.

A sort of febrile mechanical plague hit the world and the rash was permanent almost before anyone realized it. The plague was automation. After the initial delirium, mankind found it had been swept on into a very different world—the World of Plenty, the Age of Leisure. Adam's curse had been lifted.

Which meant that most people found themselves out of a job. "Most people" included hitherto hard-working criminals like Father. Everyone could just help themselves to most of the material things they wanted—from the mechanical cornucopia. They largely lost the sense of the value of money. They left it lying around. Anyone could pick it up.

Safes went out of fashion like castles and moats, and for the same reason: there was no longer a need for them. It all but broke my father's heart. It might have done so altogether, but he was good at kidding himself.

"It won't last, son," he told me, too often. "People have got too much of everything right now. Soon they'll get bored to death. Why? Because men aren't meant to be all on one

level. Most folk just *got* to have something the others haven't got—a *better* diamond necklace, a *better* gold watch."

My father was brilliant, but only in his own particular rut. Like most criminals, he was a creature of habit. Jewelry was his line. He knew the safest and least greedy fences. But machines could and did produce artificial gems bigger and better than the naturals. You could get them for a song.

The fences retired to grow tomatoes in their backyards. The professional ice-lifters turned to poker for excitement.

My father wasn't fond of cards. He became aimless, introspective about the good old days. Often I happened on him brooding over his press clippings, with their gratifyingly large headlines: *Cat-Burglar Lifts Hopeworth Rocks.*

Then he'd tell me, over and over, just how he'd done it. But I never actually screamed out loud with boredom, because I loved him. One day the endless stories ended. I found him sprawled across one of his fat albums and thought he was asleep, until I saw the empty vial lying under his hand.

He didn't leave a suicide note. He didn't have to. I knew how the World of Satiety had stifled him with frustration. Until then, I'd taken that world as it came. Then, because it had killed my father, I started to hate it too. Irrationally, like a born criminal, I took my revenge on society.

I robbed people, manipulated them, made fools of them, and relished the resulting sense of power. I did it in the only way possible in such days. I was Magellan the Medium.

I read people's minds and told them what they already knew—I never could see why they assumed that was evidence for survival. I made tables rap and levitate. In dimly lighted rooms I let "ectoplasm" assume whatever form my overeager sitters willed to imagine. Everyone was so anxious to perform my miracles for me.

In direct-voice sittings I was deceased uncles, aunts, wives, paramours. Never anyone's kid, though—I'm sentimental. I found there was a widespread desire—and not only from the old folks—for assurance that another world existed beyond this land of milk and honey.

To relieve the tedium, I would introduce tonight's celeb-

rity. Julius Caesar, maybe, though I did a better job on Lincoln. My personal favorite was Napoleon Bonaparte. But the great were seldom a hit. The ordinary run of customers preferred to get the dope direct from the lips of Uncle Fred.

Oddly, the modern conception of paradise was a place where you weren't just one of a pap-fed herd, but an individual allowed to do some sort of work for your living.

"I bake all the bread for our happy little community," I would croak in the role of the late Mr. Guggenheim. And Guggenheim, Junior, all ears, would sigh enviously and mumble, "Sure wish I were there with you, Dad."

I told the Guggenheims, the Smiths and the Jacksons what they wished to believe, made them happy, and made myself happy by accepting the gifts they offered in gratitude. I was a real benefit to the community I robbed. After a few years in business, I had the best collection of art and antiques in London, and a fine Georgian house on the heights of Hampstead.

My antiques included a Rolls car, the kind which ran by internal combustion. I got a kick out of steering it myself. The modern electronic self-driving car, which never ran into anything or broke down or lost the way, bored me. I'd as soon walk.

Hampstead, as ever, had a shifting population. Little colonies of foreigners were always forming, growing, fading, disappearing. A new one puzzled me somewhat. They were all weedy, undersized, sallow-faced men—I never saw any women. They conversed little in public. When they did, it was in a sibilant whisper. Their grammar and pronunciation were impeccable, but they were certainly un-English. Every *s* was a hiss. And they spoke flatly, without expression, like stage Chinese.

I couldn't place the country but I guessed it was a hot one. Even on scorching summer days these people wore kapok-lined coats. If there was the slightest zephyr blowing, they'd turn up their collars and huddle in doorways.

I met more and more of them in the avenues around my house.

One day one knocked at my door. I opened it. There was

something odd about his eyes—I'd noticed it with all of them. The irises were so black that the pupils hardly showed against them. The effect of two glassily blank disks regarding you was disturbing.

"Mr. Charles Magellan?" He said it with a pneumatic hiss.

"The one and only," I admitted.

"I wish to discuss some business." That bit sounded like a fight in a snakepit.

"By all means. Come on in."

He came, treading so silently and closely behind me into my living room that I started when I turned and found him breathing in my ear.

"My name is Willoughby," he said. It seemed highly unlikely, but I nodded and asked, "You wish to arrange for a sitting?"

He didn't reply at once. His black marble eyes were taking in the room. Then he swung them on me and hissed, "I meant serious business."

I liked him rather less than before, which was difficult. I put on my best bland smile and said, "My dear Mr. Willoughby, what can be more serious than conversing with the departed?"

He disregarded that. "The Government has need of this house. Perhaps we can arrange terms."

My smile slipped somewhat. " 'We?' *You* are the Government?"

"Part of it. I'm Assistant Under-Secretary to the Director."

"Well, please accept my congratulations."

"Possibly you aren't aware that the Government owns all the houses in this vicinity except yours."

"I wasn't, Mr. Willoughby, but I am now. You want to complete your collection?"

"You might say that."

"I just did say that. Tell me, aren't the Houses of Parliament big enough to cage you these days?"

Willoughby began sibilantly to explain that the Director thought it expedient to have the members of his inner circle

living in the same neighborhood so that extempore meetings could be held.

I lent him but half an ear—the one he had breathed in. Politics no longer interested me nor anyone else very much. They had gone from bad to worse.

You were allowed to vote for your local scientific director. To show that democracy was still breathing, you had a choice of three. On polling day you were expected to press any of three buttons on the election panel, standard in every home.

Somewhere a computer would compute, and at midnight the lamp of victory would light over the winner's button. I hadn't waited up for it for years. I hadn't pressed a button for years.

I—and most people—knew Mr. Green Button didn't represent Smith, Jones, or Magellan. He represented an abstract called Science. Who really cared? There were no oppressed minorities, no shortages of anything, no injustices to get het up about.

Yet, aloofly listening to the fluting Willoughby, I began to ask myself if we shouldn't have cared a bit more. Who knew, exactly, who the Government leaders were or what they were up to—excepting themselves?

Did whoever voted for this spindly, glass-eyed brother to the snake know who they were voting for? Were there any more in the Government like him? I began wondering about this colony of sallow runts. Recalling how they whispered conspiratorially when they met, I felt that there was something in the air and it didn't smell like attar of roses.

I returned my whole attention to Willoughby. He was suggesting that in exchange for my Hillcrest the Government would hand over to me a fine mansion in Regent's Park.

"Suppose I say no?"

"Then the Director would move that the Government employ its plenipotentiary powers to requisition this house."

"In English, throw me out on my neck?"

Willoughby shrugged his almost nonexistent shoulders.

I decided it was time someone poked his nose into this viper's nest, and that it might as well be my nose, it being

immediately available. "Look, Willoughby, I'd like to discuss this directly with your Number One—the Director himself. If he can put it to me reasonably, then I'll try to be reasonable too."

"The Director," said Willoughby icily, "has no time to waste on discussing minor issues like this."

"I quite understand. I'm a busy man myself. Good-bye, Willoughby. When you call out the troops, tell them to apply at the tradesmen's entrance, will you? Thanks."

I hustled him out of the house and shut the heavy front door on him. Solid as it was, I knew it couldn't shut out the Government. But I thought they'd tried to parley before they brought on the battering rams.

And they did make another approach, that very afternoon, through a more attractive medium than Willoughby.

The visaphone gong sounded melodiously, and then framed in the screen was the face of Helen of Troy—as I'd always pictured it. A truly classic blonde, with an exquisite coiffure of tight curls, a noble brow, a ruler-straight nose, a Grecian mouth, and azure eyes, calm and wide-set.

The vision spoke—and remained a vision. Her voice was as calm as her eyes, soft as her hair, sweet as her mouth. The words were everyday office jargon, but the way she said them they sounded like a Shakespearean sonnet.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Magellan. I am Sarah Masters, personal secretary to the Director. I understand you wish to see him about a matter concerning your house."

Like Brutus, she paused for a reply. Like Romeo, I said, (but to myself): "Shall I hear more, or shall I speak at this?"

She smiled, and I—impressionable fool—was put altogether beyond speech, though she waited patiently for it. At length, she said: "Perhaps you would call on me first?"

I nodded stiffly.

"Say at five o'clock this afternoon?"

I managed another nod.

"The house is called Moravia, the next but two from your own, eastwards. Good-bye for now, Mr. Magellan."

Properly then, the vision should have faded like a dream.

Instead of which it was cut off by the visaphone's sharp disconnecting click. The screen and I were left staring blankly at each other. No woman had ever done anything like this to me before. In fact, I thought I had a natural gift for handling them. Charm was my most valuable stock in trade. Yet there was something about Sarah Masters which left me feeling like a bumbling adolescent.

I told myself I was a fool, but there I was at five to five hurrying along the old-fashioned gravel drive that led to Moravia. It was the second biggest house in the road; mine was the biggest.

As I climbed the steps, the front door opened by itself, welcomingly. Somewhere in the house someone was watching my approach—perhaps the divine Sarah herself. The coltish self-consciousness came seeping back. I beat it off and strode into the house as though I were royalty.

I was in a hall which ran through the house. At the far end of it another door was swinging open for me. I felt a touch of disappointment with the golden girl. I preferred to push a door rather than a button. I disliked the modern belief that opening and shutting doors by hand was manual labor.

Halfway along the hall, I paused. For coming faintly through a closed door on my right, was the sound of sibilant voices. Quite a gathering, it seemed to be.

I was never afraid of manual labor, so I opened that door by hand, very suddenly. A body of warm air flowed past me. I had crashed a committee meeting of maybe a dozen little snake-men with dirty yellow faces. They were seated at a long shiny table, hissing together in chorus, but not in English. It was a tongue unknown to me.

Only one was motionless and silent. He sat at the head of the table, facing me, and saw me at once. He raised his hand, palm outwards, and in an instant the rest became as silent as he. They turned to regard me with those black, pupil-less eyes. It was an eerie moment.

They remained as frozen as a tableau in a wax museum. They looked skinnier than ever, reed-slender. This was because they'd discarded their kapok-padded coats. They didn't

need them here. The heating was on full blast and the air was torrid.

The head man opened his small mouth tightly, the merest fraction, as though he were afraid I might see his tongue. Perhaps he was. Perhaps it was forked.

"You are?" he demanded, with authority.

"Yes, I am," I admitted, with what in friendlier surroundings might have been a winning smile. Here I won nobody, least of all the head man.

A much pleasanter voice than his suddenly spoke behind me. "This is the wrong room, Mr. Magellan. Please come this way."

Sarah, of course. When I turned and saw her, I gladly shut the little men up in their room again. She was of royal height, which meant that she was quite four inches taller than me. And her figure certainly needed no kapok padding.

She wore an ankle-length dress, tight-fitting, yet with long voluminous sleeves. It was pale yellow, filmy and insubstantial stuff. To my bemused mind she seemed to float down the hall ahead of me like an ethereal being.

We entered the room at the back of the house that I was intended to enter in the first place, and the door shut itself behind us with a vicious bang. It startled me, but not so much as the sight of the room did.

I'd had only the vaguest anticipation of what her room would be like. Something exotic, perhaps. Something very feminine, certainly. Instead of which it looked like a cross between an electronic laboratory and the control tower of an airport.

Two walls were like the multi-faceted eyes of a giant insect. Every facet was a TV or visaphone screen. Half of the screens were showing live but silent pictures. A third wall was mostly a control panel of switches and winking lights.

The fourth wall was a room-long window, framing much the same southern panoramic view visible from my own house: London, a few miles away and hundreds of feet below. The gray bubble dome of St. Paul's was still a focal point in this London of 1986.

The floor was bare, brown marloneum, cold and business-

like. Plumb center stood a severe metal desk barnacled with buttons. Beside it was a solitary chair. One of us was going to have to remain standing. Sarah decided who. She helped herself—but not me—to a cigarette from a box on the desk, seated herself, put her feet up on the desk, tilted her chair back so that she could lounge comfortably, lit up, and blew smoke at the ceiling.

This was not the way for a near-goddess to behave. I sensed the approach of disillusionment.

It came like a rocket. She turned hard eyes on me and said in a diamond-cutting voice, "Why the hell do you go out of your way to be awkward, you silly little man?"

I gaped at her, like a silly little man. The transformation had been so sudden. Nothing was left of Helen of Troy except her shape. This new personality was as tough and crude as a harpy and as friendly as a wildcat. The blue of her eyes had frozen to an ice-blue.

"I'm going to have your house, with or without your consent," she said. "Make no mistake about that, Mr. Magellan the Medium. It makes no difference to me, either way, but it will to you if you don't move out."

I groped around inside and found my lost voice. "*You* want my house?"

"The Director promised it to me for my own use. For being such a helpful secretary." She sounded ironical.

I felt I needed a cigarette and took one from the box.

"You and the Director can go jump in the Whitestone Pond. Arm in arm."

She jumped, but not into the pond. She sprang up and hauled off at me. My unlit cigarette went spinning across the room. My ears rang like a peal of cracked bells. There was nothing ethereal about her right arm.

I stared at her contemptuously. This might have been effective if I hadn't had to stare *up* at her. Then I turned to stalk with silent dignity from the room. I didn't get far. The door was locked. I suspected it had locked itself when it slammed. No doubt it could be opened from inside the room at the touch of a button. But there were hundreds of buttons, and I was never lucky at games of chance.

I knew other ways to open it, but I needed tools.

Grim as an eagle, Sarah watched me. Hanging on to my dignity with both hands, I did an about face, walked back, picked up the chair and flung it at the wide window. Clank! The chair rebounded and thudded on the floor. The window wasn't even cracked; it was clearplast, tough as steel.

We both looked down at the chair, then up at each other. Suddenly, she threw back her head and laughed. Not an unpleasant laugh, either; there was real humor in it.

I grinned for no reason.

She picked up the cigarette box and proffered it. "Try another one."

I did and lit it successfully.

She said, in a voice several degrees warmer, though still lacking the old poetry, "As you refuse to be reasonable, I'm to keep you here another hour—on the Director's instructions. The general transmission has been delayed an hour, you see, and Willoughby reported you haven't a TV set in your home."

"Did he now, the old telltale! True, though. I've no use for TV or anything it stands for. And I don't want to see any transmission, general or particular."

"I'm afraid you're going to have to, Magellan. While we're waiting for it, we may as well have a friendly chat. As one charlatan to another, how's tricks in the spirit world?"

"Hm. So you've been checking up on me, Sarah. As one charlatan to another, what racket are you mixed up in here?"

She looked at me narrowly, then drew at her cigarette.

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you. So I'll tell you—some of it. They're letting the cat out of the bag today, anyhow."

So she told me, and at length. And duly I didn't believe her. It was a mad story; the little men were mad, and she was maddest of all.

The little men, she said, certainly came from a hot climate, but from no tropics of Earth. She didn't know the point of origin but according to a prearranged plan they were spreading over the Galaxy. And they'd been following this plan for hundreds of thousands of years.

They were the Makkees.

Compared with a Makkee's span of life, a man endured no longer than a butterfly. Yet they were humanoid too. And they were assuming the direction of every humanoid race they had discovered in their enormously long history of space exploration.

They always began by sending an advance party which infiltrated into such governmental bodies as they found—and ended by becoming those governments.

"Top-flight con men, huh?" I said, humoring her. "How do they go about it?"

"They have their methods," she said cryptically. "And I'm not such a fool as to blab about them, either. Physically, the Makkees are soft. They like their comfort. You might call the press-button their emblem. Don't let that give you any wrong ideas. In every other way they're tougher than clearplast, harder than marloneum. Words like 'mercy' or 'pity' or 'justice' simply aren't in their dictionary. But neither is 'cruelty.' If it would further their ends they would kill any man, woman or child. But not from cruelty. Only from logic."

"Moral morons, you mean."

She laughed, but there was no humor in it this time.

"Morality is for morons—you've got your wires crossed," she said, and the rosebud lips took on an ugly twist. "Morons! Men are the morons, not the Makkees. I'll tell you this. If it weren't for the Makkees, men would still be living in the trees with the apes. The Makkees haven't come to conquer this world—only reap the harvest they sowed.

"Here machines have mastered men. But the Makkees are the masters of all machines. Automation is their slave, their tool. They can make it do anything they damn well please. That makes them, for my money, supermen. I know which side my bread is buttered. I'm playing along with them, against mere men. I never had any use for men. Men never had any use for me."

"That last remark," I said, "is quite the most unbelievable thing you've told me."

But she was brooding and didn't seem to hear.

I tried again. "I take it the Director is the head of that detachment from the advance party out there?"

She stubbed out her cigarette absently. "Yes. He's the boss-man of the whole party. There are other detachments taking over other countries. They're all in touch with HQ here."

She indicated with a nod the massed battery of TV screens. "I'm on the network, you see. It's part of my job. Anyhow, I'm a woman and like to hear all the gossip. It's nice to be on the inside, for once." She was brooding again. "I've been on the outside for too long. Left out of everything. It's cold and lonely on the outside, you know."

I stared at her sharply. She was far away in another world, in another time. So much beauty—it was a shame that there had to be a worm in the bud. Sarah Masters was as neurotic as they came. A glaze had come over the wide blue eyes. I could see that contact would be difficult to re-establish. I let her wander off on her private mental journey while I took a good look at that array of screens.

Some of them showed only complex and ever-changing patterns which presumably meant something to whomever held the key. There were plenty of thin, ugly Makkee faces mouthing silently, perhaps from all parts of the world. Perhaps from other planets. Perhaps from ships in space.

I wondered where the main invasion body was at this moment. Maybe as far as Alpha Centauri, maybe as close as Neptune, cruising, waiting for the final signal confirming that moving day had come at last.

I had to check myself. I was beginning to swallow this fantasy from the clearly not-too-stable mind of the lovely Sarah.

Yet, what else explained this colony of creatures who certainly didn't seem quite human? What explained those screens and their lively evidences?

More immediately, what explained Sarah Masters?

Best let her explain herself. Some neurotic types were prone to do little else, and I had a feeling she was of that type. With a little encouragement . . .

"Sarah," I said gently, trying to sound like her only

friend in the world, "it's obvious you've had a tough time of it. You don't have to tell me about it, but—"

The dam burst over me. I didn't have to say another word. I didn't get a chance to for some time. She'd been all pent up. She had to unburden herself to someone or burst. I just happened to be there.

So were the Makkees, but she couldn't tell them. They were humanoid but not human, not *simpatico*. They wouldn't be in the least interested in the conflicts of a mixed-up human girl.

Chapter 2

It was the old story; unwantedness in childhood, an initial imbalance that time had never righted. She was an only child. Her mother was a brilliant artist, her father a brilliant concert pianist. Both had colossal egotism and prima donna temperaments. Both put themselves and their art before anybody or anything. Neither had any parental sense whatever.

They took pains to make it clear to Sarah that she was an encumbrance to them in their careers. She was not even a love-child, merely an irritating mistake, and it was unforgivably selfish and thoughtless of her to have thrust herself upon them. Quite openly they deplored her very existence.

Mother—a born nomad—would feel the urge to join a faraway artists' colony and live the free Bohemian life. She would try to palm Sarah off on Father. But he was planning a concert tour of Australia.

"It's a tough schedule; it wouldn't be fair to the child," he'd protest, and Sarah would be planted again on some reluctant relative.

For a long time, she strove pitifully to enter their worlds and their minds, hoping also to enter their hearts. But the Fates had played another joke on her; she was both color-blind and tone-deaf. Her parents spoke a language she could never learn.

She fared little better in the world at large. Every attempted friendship ended in a fight. She blamed the others, but I

could guess where the trouble lay. She'd experienced nothing but hostility, and subconsciously expected nothing but hostility. If it wasn't apparent, she'd suspect it was concealed—and that was treachery.

She was always the great misunderstood. I doubted that she could hope to become anything else. She would go on projecting from her imagination a pattern of enmity; she would twist people and circumstances to fit that pattern—then fight them like a wildcat.

"In time," she said, "I really came to believe that I was a creature from another world, a changeling. Nobody on this earth wanted me, nobody would claim me. I hated everybody, especially my parents. What right had they to toss me around like a medicine ball? Or anyone else? Why should *any* human beings have the power to kick me around? I resolved to fight them until it was *I* who had the power over them. All of them—including my so-called parents."

As she spoke, with acid bitterness, she was squeezing her hands hard together as though imagining that the whole human race had but one neck and she was throttling it.

She went on, "I worked hard and got a secretarial post in the Government. Then, from nowhere, came the Makkees, and they became the Government. I stayed with them. I regarded them as avenging angels, come to knock the *hubris* out of the humans. Well, they're not angels, neither are they avengers. But they are going to put the stinking, self-important humans back in their humble place in this universe. And I'm all for them."

I said, "Making all due allowances for your raw deal, it still adds up to the fact that you're a traitor to the human race, Sarah."

She turned a freezing regard on me. "I should have saved my breath. Is it impossible for you to understand that I don't—and never did—belong to the human race?"

I laughed, sympathetically, but her Medusa stare became even more intense.

I should have been petrified. Instead I said, "I'm sorry, Sarah, but in fact you're only too human. You remind me of a little girl who's dressed herself up in the mantle of Milton's

Satan, and is half-smothered by it, but insists on striking suitable poses. It's strictly a male role, you know, and even at that it skates perilously near the absurd. Hitler didn't escape absurdity. Neither did my favorite clown-hero, Napoleon. But you, my dear, aren't evil—and not really comic, either. Just touching. You're still a hurt and bewildered child. I understand and I really am sorry for you."

She said between clenched teeth, "Save your pity, Magellan, for yourself. You're going to need it, I can assure you."

She glanced at her watch, although there was a chronometer on the control panel. We'd been talking for an hour. She went across to the panel and began to snap switches. The TV screens blinked out one by one until only two were left alive. One pictured the drive at the front of the house; obviously it was the screen which had registered my approach.

The other was just a blank, illuminated rectangle, at first. Then suddenly it glowed with extraordinary brilliance, faded to grayness, then glowed, faded, glowed, faded, regularly, like the beam from a lighthouse.

A voice spoke dictatorially from it, "Attention, everybody. Watch this screen, watch this screen."

It was hard to avoid doing so. The rhythmic beat of the light seemed to draw me to it, as a gull is drawn to the lighthouse. The room, Sarah, things on the periphery of my field of vision became blurred, then seemed to dissolve away. There was nothing left but this fierce pulsation of light, dominating my attention.

The same peremptory voice said, "You will now raise your right arm above your head."

I felt my right arm lifting automatically.

Then my conscious self rebelled. I was angrily resentful of the unequivocal tone of that voice, of its implication that I was no more than a puppet.

The spell broke. "Like hell I will!" I growled, and thrust my hands deep in my pockets.

The voice continued, "If you are with other people, note those who have *not* raised their arms. They are enemies of the country. Report them to the police at once. If possible, detain

them by force and send for the police. That is all. Drop your arms now."

The glow faded, and this time the screen remained gray. I swung round to Sarah. "Okay, what was it all about?"

Her hostile attitude had been replaced by thoughtful appraisal.

She said, in a quiet tone that made me feel more uneasy than her Gorgon glare, "That was the general transmission we were waiting for. It was an experiment in mass hypnosis. Like myself, however, you're impervious to hypnosis. You passed the test—alpha plus. Congratulations."

"Thanks. Was that all you wanted me for?"

"Yes. You can go home now."

She pressed one of the desk buttons and I heard the door lock click open. She pressed another button and with a faint whirr a tray bearing a whiskey decanter, a soda siphon, bowl of ice cubes, and several glasses surfaced on the desk.

She poured herself a finger and tossed it down neatly.

"Good-bye, Magellan."

But now that I could walk out, I perversely chose to linger.

"Your hospitality is pretty rugged, Sarah. You might at least offer me one for the road."

She poured herself another. "In this hard world you've got to learn to help yourself—didn't I make that clear, either?"

"I see. Have a drink, Magellan? You will? Good." And I helped myself. I don't take my whiskey straight, so squirted in a fair splash of soda-water.

"To our better acquaintance," I said, and took a gulp. It wasn't a big gulp but it was enough. Something solid seemed to hit my brain from behind the nostrils. My mouth burned, my eyes streamed. I reeled back, choking, and dropped the glass.

Tear-blinded, I stumbled about trying to locate the door. But I'd lost all sense of direction. My groping hand met a hard, smooth surface. I rubbed my tortured eyes and saw blurrily that I was right up against the window.

I tried to turn away—and couldn't. Paralysis hit me with the suddenness of a stroke. The window ledge held me up, else I should have toppled stiffly to the floor like a felled

tree. I lay rigidly against it, staring out through the clearplast. To anyone in the garden I must have looked like a tailor's wax dummy in a store window.

But there wasn't anyone on those great treeless lawns.

Sarah spoke behind me, cynically, "The initial effect of curare is odd. It paralyses the body completely, yet leaves the brain working unimpaired. You know, it's criminal to ruin good whiskey with gas-water. Appalling taste—and I'd heard you shared it. I usually arrange for all such criminals to get paralytic on the soda instead of the whiskey. Poetic justice, I think."

I was in no condition to discuss my symptoms, but I couldn't agree that my brain was working unimpaired. It felt pretty punch-drunk to me.

But I was aware that curare was a fatal poison. Well, I wasn't fond of this press-button world, but this seemed a shockingly sudden way to quit it. It was like stepping off a curb and discovering that actually you'd stepped off the parapet of the Empire State Building.

So, murdered by their crackpot agent, I was going to have to leave this world to the little yellow creeps, after all.

One of them had just come into the room, for I heard his voice fluting, "So it didn't take, Sarah?"

The black clouds came rolling across my mind. Only in snatches could I hear Sarah replying. Dazed as I was, bitterness stung me to hear that special calm sweetness she assumed as the Director's secretary.

She called this creature, phonetically, "Drahk."

Between even more rapid mental blackouts, I heard Drahk whistling away to her. "Things are moving now . . . more likely than not a fraud . . . physical research . . . have heard interesting reports . . . no time to investigate now . . . the western concentration center. . . ."

The garden beyond the window looked to me as swimmy as a view of the sea bed. A huge, round, black shadow was appearing in it which I took to be a projection from my darkening mind.

But it wasn't.

Something like a gigantic humming top lowered itself

vertically from the sky into the pool of its own shadow on the lawns. It appeared to me to be spinning, but more likely it was my head that was spinning. There was a row of ports along the rim of the thing and a bulbous protuberance on top like the knob of a kettle lid.

I just had time to register the impression that I was seeing my first flying saucer. Then I had a blackout from which I didn't emerge for a long, long time.

When I did, it was some other day, some other place.

Which day, precisely, I'll never know. The place was a small, white-tiled cell.

I was lying flat on my back on a straw paillasse that somehow was a man's height from the floor. I sat up and gazed around. My head was clear, and I was hungry and thirsty. For a man who'd been poisoned to death, I felt remarkably fit.

There was a small window—just one—set so high up that I couldn't see out of it. There was a cubicle with a toilet, a door with a grill in it, a bench with a cut loaf and a mug on it, and in the corner, a washbasin. The faucet over the latter looked to me like an oasis in a desert. I licked dry lips and started for it.

I began to lower myself from my perch. My dangling right foot found a stepping stone of sorts. It was soft, but seemed firm, and I let my weight rest on it as I stepped down to the floor.

Then I learned I wasn't alone. My bed was only an upper berth set in a wooden frame. The occupant of the bed beneath was sitting up slowly, rubbing a reddening ear. I had trodden on that side of his face.

He was a young, blond fellow. He seemed only mildly annoyed as he said in a varsity voice, "And I'll be damned if I'll turn the other cheek."

I apologized, sincerely because I was still wearing my shoes, briefly because I was so thirsty. I filled and drained the mug twice, then tore a hunk off the loaf and chewed.

"Where the hell are we?" I asked, with my mouth full.

"Dartmoor. My old man always said I'd end up here."

I stopped chewing. "You mean . . . the prison?"

He nodded.

"Well, I'll be . . . Thought this dump had been demolished years ago."

"Oh, no. They preserved it as a historical building, to show what a wicked world it used to be once upon a time."

"Hm. It still is, believe me. How did I get here?"

"On a stretcher. Unconscious. How you got that way you should know better than I."

"How did *you* get here?"

"By putting one foot in front of the other—with a needle-gun in my back."

"Who was carrying the gun—a Makkee?"

"A *what?*"

He hadn't heard of the Makkees. I said "We'd better swap stories. You start."

His story was simple. He was staying with friends in Exeter. "Tom Whitaker and his wife, Anne. Known 'em for years. Few days back we were in their lounge watching TV—some song and dance show. The screen went blank white. Then faded. Then became very bright. And so on. The picture had gone altogether, but this queer brightness trouble increased to a pitch you wouldn't credit—"

"I would," I interrupted. "I saw it too. You didn't raise your hand?"

"Of course not. I was baffled. I turned to Tom, saying, 'What kind of gag is this?' And there he and Anne were sitting with their arms raised like a couple of kids in a schoolroom. They had a glazed look in their eyes."

"Hypnotized," I said.

"So I gathered. I couldn't get any sense out of them after that. They wouldn't talk to me. Tom visaphoned for the police. I got the hell out of it and headed back for London in my car. At least, I set the buttons that should have taken the car to London. A couple of miles from Honiton the car suddenly developed a mind of its own and wheeled back in a semicircle towards Dartmoor. I tried to stop it. The manual controls wouldn't work. I tried to jump out, but somehow the doors had locked themselves. Even the windows

wouldn't wind down. The car seemed to be under some kind of remote control. I still don't get it."

"Neither do I. But the Makkees are behind it. Seems machines do tricks for them like monkeys in a circus. But go on."

"Not much more to it. The car headed across the moor straight for the jail. I noticed three or four other cars following me a mile or so behind. Maybe they were other tumbrels conveying trapped victims here. Didn't have a chance to find out. Soon as my car rolled through the main gate, a couple of men ran alongside. The car stopped for them, all right, and the doors opened for them, too."

"Did they look hypnotized?"

"Yes, they had that same dopey look. I asked them what the hell, and all that. One ignored me, and the other jammed a needle-gun against my spine and marched me in here. Haven't been outside since. We get no exercise."

"But they come and feed you?"

"Do they heck! Nobody comes. The bread comes through the chute, the water comes through the faucet. And that's all there is. Punishment diet."

"Were the men in any sort of uniform?"

"No, just business suits. They looked like a couple of civil servants."

"Maybe they were," I said. "Hypnotized stooges from Whitehall, sent by the Makkees when they took over. The little devils sure had it planned out. You seen any of 'em—skinny little yellow men?"

"No. I've seen nobody except the two men I mentioned and another two fish-eyed stretcher-bearers who dumped you in here and never came back. There must be other prisoners here. But the field of view beyond that door grill is very narrow and I've never seen anyone cross it."

I looked. He was right. The door was thick. The metal grill was clamped over this side of the small aperture, and a pane of clearplast was fitted at the far side. I could just make out another cell door, opposite but distant.

"I've shouted myself hoarse through it," said the young man. "If anyone heard, no one cared."

"No one heard. Clearplast is soundproof. What's your name?"

"Butler—Peter Butler. What's yours?"

I cleared my throat. "My name is Charles Wallace Magellan, which sounds like the kind of name that ought to mean something. . . ."

It made a nice little story. Butler was more credulous than I—he didn't call me a liar. He was intrigued by my description of Sarah Masters.

"Zounds, if she's really like that what a model she'd make!"

"Model?"

"I'm a painter, of sorts. Mostly for my own amusement."

"Oh. Don't happen to have a palette knife on you?"

"Good lord, no. Why?"

"If I had a long thin blade I could beat that type of door lock. Pop showed me how. Darned if I'm going to sit here on my hams living on bread and water while the Makkees just help themselves to our world and all that's in it. I might be able to work the trick with a large penknife."

I looked at Butler hopefully.

"Sorry, Charles."

"Pity. Perhaps we can make a knife out of something."

I began to look around.

Peter Butler said, "You're wasting your time. This room's as bare as the Venus de Milo."

He was right again. Foxed, I began hauling at the two-tiered bedframe.

"What now?" asked Butler curiously.

"Let's get this under the window, climb up and take a look outside."

"But that thing isn't tall enough."

"Were you a born defeatist, Pete, or did college do that to you?"

He looked hurt, then grim. He flung himself angrily at the bed and dragged it under the window. I rolled up both paillasses, piled one on top of the other on the upper shelf. Then, like a Chinese acrobat, I mounted the shaky heap. On tiptoe, I could just touch the window ledge with

extended fingers. With a little jump, I hooked my fingers over it, hauled myself up to peep out through the inevitable clearplast.

We were several floors up and I had a fair view of the prison yard and the moorland stretching beyond to the horizon. There wasn't a soul in sight. My mind remained as empty as the landscape. I could see no way of escape via the window; it was too small even for me to wriggle through, and anyhow clearplast was unsmashable.

I hopped down, and chewed some more bread thoughtfully. In my time I had materialized Richard the Lionheart, complete with his crusader's sword. Yet now I couldn't materialize even one little knife.

Pete got tired of watching me chew things over physically and mentally. He began to peer restlessly through the door grill.

"Say," he said, presently, "I think there's someone in that other cell. I could swear I saw a face looking out. But it's hard to see at this distance."

I took a look. The lighting was very poor inside the prison. The other door was way off, and there was a hindering reflection from the clearplast. A hawk would have had trouble trying to descry another hawk beyond that far window. I looked hard and long, and decided there *was* a vague shape moving there.

"Yes, a fellow-prisoner," I said. "Maybe more than one. Reckon there must be quite a few here now. That Makkee, Drahk, said something about the western concentration center. Obviously, Dartmoor Prison is it. All the other folk who couldn't be hypnotized, and therefore might give trouble, will be herded in here. Somehow we've got to contact them."

"I was never much good at telepathy," said Butler.

I searched my empty pockets again. Nothing, just nothing, not even pen or pencil. Poor fool, I'd so wanted to make a good impression on Sarah Masters that I'd changed into my best Savile Row suit to keep the appointment with her. I hadn't stopped to transfer any of the knickknacks which usually cluttered my pockets.

Then I noticed the starched white handkerchief I'd so

carefully arranged, three corners showing, in my breast pocket to look my sartorial best. It was a bit crumpled now, but still pretty clean. I opened it out. Its square was about the same size as the door grill and that gave me the idea.

I hung the handkerchief over the grill, raised it, dropped it, raised it again, as though it was a window blind gone mad.

Pete thought it was I who'd gone mad. He looked at me strangely.

I explained, "I'm trying semaphore. The other guy mightn't be able to distinguish my rosy cheeks in this gloom, but he should be able to see this white handkerchief."

"Well done, old man!" Butler applauded as though I'd just hit up a century at cricket.

The man in the other cell was smarter than Pete. He got the idea at once, and responded. His handkerchief wasn't as clean as mine, but it was visible. We flapped at each other for a bit, and then I got down to serious work.

For my fake mind-reading acts I'd memorized several codes, including the near-forgotten Morse code; my accomplice and I had often found it useful.

I let the handkerchief hang down over the grill for three seconds. That meant a dash. A mere dip and snatch up meant a dot. I signaled A R E Y O U A L O N E and waited, with incredible optimism, for an answer.

The other fellow signaled back only aimlessly. He didn't know the Morse code. Neither did Pete. He'd never heard of it.

"What *do* they teach you at college these days?" I growled, and attacked the last of the loaf savagely. "Only one thing for it now. If we're going to get anywhere, I've got to teach that other guy the code first."

And I did it. I kept sending a dot immediately followed by a dash until at last the other man divined that I wished it repeated back to me. Then I proceeded to send *b*. After some hesitation, my wondering pupil copied me.

Somewhere about *h* he cottoned on to the fact that I was going through the alphabet, and flapped *a*, which luckily he remembered, repeatedly as a sign that he wanted to go back to the beginning. I complied.

Obviously this time he or a companion was noting down the dot-dash combination for each letter, for there was a pause after z and then I received my first slow, shaky message, "Who are you?"

I told him, even more slowly, for I knew he'd have to search his list to indentify each letter.

I learned he was Gerald Cross, and he'd been there two days in company with another man named Watts. They were wondering why everyone had gone crazy, what it was all about; they were eager for news.

Instead of satisfying them, I signaled, "Do you have a knife of any kind?"

Watts—who turned out to be a gardener—had a sizable clasp knife. I feared that the blade would be too thick for my purpose. Still, I passed instructions for its application in springing the lock on their door, for the odds were that the lock was of the standard type like ours. As an incentive, I told them I'd tell them the whole story, verbally, as soon as we could meet up.

I didn't get far with the instructions. It was a dull day and evening came early. The light became too poor to make out signals and no artificial lights came on in the prison.

I was glad to rest my tired arms, anyhow. Fatigue and frustration made me irritable. When Pete began wondering audibly what the Makkees would do with us, I snapped, "You should be asking what we'll do with *them.*"

He shut up, and we went to bed in silence. In the darkness a loaf thumped through the chute. Did that prove that there was at least one button-pressing warden on duty? More likely, the food supply was entirely automatic.

I slept badly. Despite my crushing remark to Pete, I spent half my waking hours wondering what the Makkees would do with us. The other half I wondered about Sarah. What was she doing now? I presumed she had already confiscated my house. Maybe at this moment she was going curiously through my boxes of tricks, my gadgets to make tables float and luminous trumpets speak. I writhed at the idea of her reading my notebooks and diaries. Some of my frauds were pretty mean.

Yet, who was she to condemn me? We were two of a kind. We'd both taken our revenge on society by tricking it and using it.

The difference was that she was still doing it, and on a far greater scale than I'd attempted to do. Despite my contempt for society, I could only ally myself with it against the far more poisonous Makkees.

And she had ranged herself on the other side.

But my thoughts weren't confined to ethics. The old Adam wouldn't stay out of it. I tossed around restlessly on the straw bag. The bedframe squeaked and creaked. In the end, I had to accept it; on the physical level, anyhow, I'd fallen in love with her. I ached to see her again, and vowed I would, even if I had to fight my way back to London alone.

Chapter 3

WHEN PETE awakened me, it was morning.

"Our friends across the way are trying to attract your attention. Why didn't you teach *me* the code?"

I snorted. "If you had any nous at all, you'd have picked it up at the same time."

He was chagrined. I pushed him aside and resumed signaling. This time we really got places. About an hour later I saw with delight that other door swing open. Two men emerged. Very soon, a face was peering through our grill. It was as round as the grill was square, a beaming full moon of a face. Cross contradicted his name; he was always good-humored.

The door remained a barrier to verbal conversation. Signs and attempted lip reading didn't get us far. Preposterously, we had to fall back on the flapping handkerchiefs, although only a few inches apart. But not for long. Cross quickly absorbed the technique of tackling the lock from outside. Watts helped him.

They got our door open.

"Come on in," I whispered. "That's it—shut the door."

With the exception of Watts, we all tried to start talking

at once. Unlike the beefy and alert Cross, Watts was slight, slow of speech and thought. Both men were in a bar when the Makkees' TV transmission came over. Both were unaffected by it, were hounded by their neighbors and tried to escape by car. Their cars took them captive, brought them here.

I deduced there was no single common quality of character or mental strength which gave us immunity against hypnotism. We had nothing to congratulate ourselves about. We were only freaks.

One thing we shared: an urgent wish to escape. Over a bread and water breakfast, we planned the breakout.

Then we tried it. We ventured out cautiously, our only weapon the clasp knife. Our cell was at the end of a long gallery and we'd been looking the whole length of this to Cross' cell. In between, a well, four floors deep, crossed by catwalks. Along either side were rows of cells.

No one was in sight, and we became bolder. It seemed that our captors had been instructed to lock us up, and that was all. These zombies seemed incapable of caring what became of us after that.

We found most of the cells were occupied—all by male prisoners, all trance-proof. We freed them. It took time, but we acquired more knives on the way, and Cross and I showed others how to use them.

As the day wore on, we became a sizable crowd. As our numbers grew, we became noisier and even boisterous. At the end of the gallery a tough gate of steel bars won an hour's sweat from me. But Dad's training paid off. We thronged through into another gallery, and repeated the story.

Then we reached the female ward, and the multitude became noisy indeed. I tried to keep it reasonably compact, and led it down a broad main corridor. And still no one had tried to stop us.

We poured through the reception hall, through the doors, out onto the wide concrete expanse of the prison yard. We were yelling like kids let out of school.

The high boundary wall, with its barred main gate, stood between us and complete freedom. I was content to let it, for the moment. I didn't want this crowd to get out of hand, and

go streaming out into the endless, treacherous moors. The sun had set and soon it would be dark.

We had to get organized.

When everyone was out in the yard, I climbed onto a ledge of the main gate, and signaled for silence.

Then I shouted, "Listen, friends, we're all in the same boat. And we've got to stay that way for a time. If we try to go back to our homes individually, we'll only end up in jail again. We've got to live together like an army. We've got to get food, transport, weapons. First we'll have to fight to keep the freedom we've just won. Then we'll have to fight to get our old life back."

And, in the thickening dusk, I told them about the Makkees.

They hung on my words. I found myself listening to myself with interest, too. Man, what an orator! They cheered. They wanted me to be their leader. I approved their choice. I began to feel like Napoleon addressing his troops on the plain of Austerlitz. Another ten minutes and I should similarly be exhorting my followers to name their children after me.

The ten minutes weren't granted.

High up on the prison roof appeared a small figure bundled up like an Arctic explorer, with a thin yellow face clamped between ear muffs. Four zombies flanked him, carrying things like disconnected automobile headlights. They stood in a row against the dulling sky.

I pointed dramatically. "There, my friends—a Makkee! Go! Drag him down."

The crowd wheeled round with a hunting cry. Immediately, it became a cry of pain, and I was yelling with the rest. For the zombies were pointing the objects down at us and four wide-spreading pale green beams of light played over the prison yard.

I came off my perch like a shot pigeon and writhed on the unsympathetic concrete. My erstwhile followers were doing the same. Even now, we don't know quite how those rays affected the human spinal cord. I can vouch that they did, in a highly unpleasant way. My nervous system became a web of glowing hot wire. My muscles contracted into hard lumps of pain.

Five seconds passed, each an age. Then the lights snapped off.

I felt as if I'd just crawled out of an electric chair.

Cross' bulky figure lay beside me. I managed to mumble, "I'll get that devil when it's properly dark."

He gasped, "I'll come with you."

Night came slowly with the stars. I'd passed the word around that no one was to move. The five on the roof could no longer be discerned.

"Right, Gerry, let's go."

We began crawling towards the prison door. The plan was to gain the roof from within and jump the five from behind. We each carried a knife.

We covered all of four yards. Then a pale green beam smote us—and those near us. More paralysis and unendurable agony. This time it was more prolonged. I passed out.

I came to, threshing wildly. Cross, grunting with pain and effort, pinned me down.

He whispered, urgently, "For Pete's sake, keep still. They can see in the dark—at least, the Makkee can."

"The hell they can? That does it."

I felt profoundly depressed. Oh, what a fall was there, my countrymen! Which way to St. Helena?

It was horrible to lie there, seen but unseeing, afraid to move, desperately seeking a way out for all of us and knowing there was none. In the morning light we would be herded back to the cells or pinned on a rack of pain if we tried to make a break for it.

I wished I'd never opened my big mouth. I'd only let them all down.

The bitter night dragged on. There was continual whispering all around me. I heeded nothing until a hand tugged at my ankle. It was Peter Butler.

"Charles, they want you to know they're all still with you. They say sometime there'll be another chance and we'll do it properly next time."

I let that sink in. It was like a stiff peg of rum. A warm glow stole over me. I took heart again.

"Thanks, Pete. We'll get out of here yet. And I'm sorry

for those cracks at you. Forget 'em. I'm one fool of a loudmouth."

He chuckled. "Not a fool, anyhow."

We lay waiting for the dawn. I still kept trying to cook up some plan that might work when we could see what we were doing, but could think of nothing that stood any chance of success.

"Look!" said Gerry Cross, suddenly.

I started. I could see the dim shape of him, pointing. Somewhere in the sky out over the moors a greenish glow was growing. It was a familiar green, and I felt uneasiness stirring through the crowd. They were bracing themselves against the shock of pain. But although our nerves tingled and our muscles twitched, the source was too distant to affect us.

We stared at it apprehensively. The glow was emanating from a number of faint pinpoints moving in the sky.

We began to speculate. Then we gasped as a sheaf of dazzlingly bright rockets shot across the sky, coming from the west. The green pinpoints scattered, then began to fly before them. But the rockets were far faster. Like intelligent comets, they overtook and hunted down their prey.

There came a rapid succession of eye-dazzling flashes. At each flash, a rocket and a green pinpoint died together, until only the stars remained. And they began to fade in the dawnlight as we all talked excitedly, trying to guess what had happened.

It was generally agreed that the pinpoints had been flying saucers, belonging to the Makkees. Many people, I learned, had seen flying saucers of late. Then there was that one I had myself seen at Hampstead.

But who had destroyed them?

Somewhere there was somebody on our side—and a powerful somebody.

Full daylight came. The Makkee and his zombies were still on the roof, but now they were crouching behind the parapet wall so that only their heads showed occasionally.

Gerry watched them critically. Presently, he said, "That little horror can still see where we can't see. He's observing

something that's out there on the moor, which the boundary wall hides from us."

"Think you're right," I said.

And then there was an almighty explosion at the main gate. A fountain of fragments whirred up through the air. At the foot of the fountain the massive gate itself collapsed gracefully into a pile of broken stone and twisted metal, a cloud of dust spreading from it.

Pieces began to fall on us, clunking on the concrete, thudding into bodies. I disregarded them, for dim shapes were advancing through the cloud. The emerged into clear air.

"Men!" I exclaimed. "Men—not zombies."

I yelled and waved both arms. "Go back, go back!"

They hesitated. Then what I feared happened. The green beams, barely visible in daylight, shot down from the roof and caught them. They went down like skittles and rolled in agony.

I swore and looked angrily up at the Makkee. He wasn't even looking at the men; his attention was still on something distant. I strove to see through the settling dust cloud. It thinned, revealing a great gap in the wall.

Miles away on the moor was a scattering of tents. It looked like a military camp. New hope and spirit came.

I shouted, "It's all right, folks. They're all on our side out there. They're going to get us out of here."

"Look out, the Makkee's got his eye on you," Gerry murmured.

I shut up. No sense in asking to be put out of action again. But I wondered what we could do to help.

The initiative was again taken by our unknown friends. From the distant camp a large vehicle headed towards us, straight across the grassland.

"Isn't that a—a tank?" asked Peter Butler hesitantly. He'd never seen one outside of a museum.

"You're right, you know," I said. "Left over from the last war. Where on earth did they dig it up from?"

"What good can it do?"

"It can shell from a distance. Unfortunately, we're too close to the target."

The tank made straight for the gap. I watched the Makkee watching it. He seemed unperturbed. But I became perturbed about the men who, still semiparalyzed, were trying to crawl away from the gap. They just made it, and took shelter behind the wall as the tank started to crunch across the rubble of the gate. Its turret hatch was shut, its long gun remained silent.

The Makkee stood up and raised an arm. His zombie crew aimed their ray-emitters, and four faint beams converged on the tank. It trundled on, its engine roaring.

My crowd parted like the Red Sea, leaving a path for it. The concentrated rays followed it like limelights on a star moving downstage. The tank plugged on sturdily. Just before it came abreast of me, it slowed, then deliberately turned a fraction to aim itself at the main door of the prison.

That told me something; its occupants weren't affected by the green rays.

I took a gamble. As the tank, picking up speed, passed me, I dodged behind it. There was an empty equipment rack at the back of the thing, and I hauled myself into it. The rays playing on the front of the tank didn't affect me. The gamble had come off; the rays couldn't penetrate thick steel.

A minute later came a crash and the tank jarred to a halt. It had bulldozed its way into the wide reception hall, carrying the doors before it. The rays couldn't reach it now.

I dismounted as the hatch clanged open. A sparely built man climbed out. He looked about sixty, seemed sad about it, and had tired blue eyes. He glanced at me disinterestedly, then called through the hatch, "All right, Junior, we're in. Tell 'em. And tell 'em to send a hundred men in trucks with scaling ladders to surround the whole dump. They're to set the ladders against the boundary wall. There are Makkees on the roof with ray guns. Our boys' job is to snipe them from the tops of the ladders, using the wall as a shield. It should be thick enough to block the rays. They're not to

expose themselves. Just bob up, take a potshot, bob down. Meantime, we'll see what we can do from the inside."

I heard a muffled voice inside the tank repeating the orders over a radio.

The man turned to me. "I'm Major Brewster, commanding that bunch out there. What's the setup here?"

I told him concisely. He already knew about the paralyzing rays. "We had a bellyful of them ourselves during the night. But they're only effective in the open. They haven't much penetration power. A suit of armor could probably stop them."

Another oldish man climbed out of the tank. "This is Junior, otherwise Captain Madden, my understrapper," said Brewster.

"What a way to run an army," I said.

Brewster stiffened. "What d'you mean by that?"

"That tank might have been knocked out. Immediately, your army becomes leaderless. No chief, no deputy. An army without leaders is a rabble. Napoleon wouldn't have made that mistake. He wouldn't have stuck his neck out. He might have sent one of his generals. Certainly not two."

Madden grinned, but Brewster said harshly, "I seem to recall that Napoleon singlehandedly rushed the bridge over the Alpone when his troops couldn't get past the Austrians."

"*Touché,*" I said.

Madden said, "One war at a time. Right now we're fighting the Makkees."

"True," I said. "But I think there's only one Makkee here. Come on." I started leading the way to the roof. I heard Brewster muttering, "Got to watch this chap or he'll be running the show. Damn all fools with the Napoleon complex!"

The next battle was brief, its end unexpected. We were at a disadvantage on the open roof; the Makkee could sweep it with the rays. We used chimney stacks as cover, making little rushes from one to another, trying to corner him. It kept his attention split between us and the long line of men behind the boundary wall. They kept popping up to snap a shot at

him, and he was trying to keep their heads down with the rays.

He was the sole target. Brewster yelled at his men not to shoot at the zombies, who knew not what they did. But the way the rifle bullets ricochetted about the roof, no one's skin was safe.

The end came suddenly. As we learned later, the Makkee was isolated in this area with no hope of help in time. He judged defeat inevitable. I suppose he did the logical thing from his point of view. He stepped onto the parapet and dived off. He hit the concrete yard and became a small, crumpled thing.

The zombies just stood there, vacantly, waiting for orders that didn't come. They still carried their ray-emitters, and that made me hesitant about approaching them. Major Brewster didn't hesitate; he walked quietly up to them. He had a queer sort of pistol but didn't threaten them with it. He applied it gently to the base of each zombie's neck, in turn. There was no sound, but at its touch each zombie fell unconscious.

Madden explained to me, "That's a circuit breaker. It breaks the closed ring of hypnotic suggestion in their minds. Sort of shock treatment. Only knocks 'em out pro tem. We're banking heavily on this gadget in our scrap with the Makkees. In time, we hope to recover all the hypnotized stooges."

"You seem to know a lot more about the Makkees than I do, Captain Madden."

"A damn sight more. Bill Brewster and I . . . well, we happened to get the inside story. And it's a long one. I'll wise you up, as you would say, soon as we get a breathing spell. You *are* an American, aren't you?"

"My mother was born in Kalamazoo. I didn't realize it showed. My father was a famous British character."

Brewster came back. "That was thirsty work, Junior. Let's get back to the camp and tap a barrel."

"Reckon my mob could use a real drink, Major," I said. "They've been on bread and water long enough. Got any real grub in the camp, too?"

Brewster looked at me gloomily. "*Your* mob?"

"Well, they kind of look to me—"

"Plenty of trucks just outside. Tell 'em to pile on," said Brewster, impatiently. "Come on, Junior." He strode off.

"Bill gets edgy when he's separated from his beer," Madden chuckled. "He's a different man with a tankard in his hand. You'll see."

I saw when we got to the camp and had a council of war. Maybe I drank too much on that occasion, for I can remember little of it. Yet it was an important occasion. It was then we mapped out our plan of campaign against the Makkees and dealt with the logistics of the long march to London.

And certainly I ate too much. I can still see that rough wooden table heaped with food, mostly from cans. Also the fat barrel of beer, presided over by Major Bill Brewster. He personally drew off each glassful with the concentration of a surgeon.

I remember the sudden squall which swept across the bleak moor, the tent flaps cracking like whips, the rain drumming on the canvas, and the cosiness within. Yet, apart from Brewster, Madden, and jovial Gerry Cross, the faces of the company remain to me now as blank ovals. Butler and Watts may have been there.

I know I gave an account of my visit to the London HQ of the Makkees, and I recall my attempt to show Sarah in a better light than the facts warranted.

Captain Madden told me something of his and Brewster's story, but my mind was drink-clouded and I never fully grasped it until the night after he was killed and I lay awake until dawn reading his private journal. I had kept a journal of sorts myself—a much more personal thing than Madden's. I shouldn't have wished anyone to read mine—although, later, someone did. But Madden's was a far more objective account, obviously written for an audience.

Madden was a writer thwarted by modern conditions from reaching his true public. His self-expression found its outlet in this journal, which he wrote until the day of his death. He was one of the most likable men I ever met. I always regretted

that our friendship was so brief. He was English to the marrow, with an astringent, self-deprecatory humor.

He and his old friend Brewster played a vital part in the war against the Makkees. Without it, my rabble-rousing activity wouldn't have gotten far. For one thing, we should never have known of the existence of Prospero. Never have secured the circuit breaker. And never have learned to know our enemy, which is imperative for victory.

We would have lost the war, and today the Makkees' pet monster, Goliath, would stand in complete possession of the world.

Madden's and Brewster's part joins onto mine in the general history. The following edited extract from Madden's journal shows how. I was the editor. I cut and transplanted entries, and performed general literary joinery to form a continuous narrative.

PART TWO

Chapter 4

BILL BREWSTER and I were demobilized from the Army in 1946. That was the year when Ford Executive Vice-President Delmar S. Harder coined a new word—automation. By it he meant only the automatic transfer of Ford car parts from one metal-working machine to the next.

The night we were demobbed we crawled from bar to bar through London's West End. In Piccadilly Circus at 2 A.M. we were howling the Harrow School anthem. We'd sung it together the day we left Harrow. It's called "Forty Years On."

"We'll meet here again, under Eros, forty years on, Junior," said Bill, trying to give me a comradely pat on the back. He missed.

"That's a date, B-Bill." Emotion and alcohol thickened my voice.

But 1986 found us some 280 miles from Eros with little desire to see him again. In four decades, he and the Circus, London and most points of the compass, had been engulfed by Mr. Harder's new word.

We were at a point just about as far west as we could get without actually paddling in the Atlantic.

The new word that drove us there had sounded in our lives from time to time even in the earliest years. It had a first cousin, cybernetics. It ate its cousin, and automation came to stand for the whole evil process.

There was the day Bill and I got talking with an American Air Force brass hat at the Savoy American Bar. Discovering we were ex-artillery officers (Bill a Major, I a Captain) he sought to impress us. He told us he'd just seen a fighter plane manufactured and assembled without a human finger being laid on it.

I was impressed, all right. I don't know about Bill; he's a tougher case.

But maybe not so tough. For when it got so that I couldn't take London any more, and decided to quit, I learned Bill had already quit. That was in the winter of 1980.

I'd not seen him in months. I visaphoned his house. Instead of Bill's lugubrious face, the visa-screen presented me with a scrawled note, "Gone west, young man. Shan't be back."

When Bill, at Harrow, found he was a month older than me, he called me Junior. He still did. Now he was sixty-three, he called everyone else young man.

I puzzled out the meaning of the cryptic note. Bill often said he'd like to retire to Merthavin, a small town on the coast of Cornwall. Now, it seemed, he'd retired there. I felt hurt he'd not informed me directly.

I had no relatives who cared whether I was alive or dead. So I decided to go west, too. I went to my bank and wrote a check to myself for the whole of my deposit. As usual, I made a blot with the confounded magnetic ink.

I slid the check into the slot labeled "CASHIER," and waited. There were no other customers and, of course, no

staff. All banks were automatic. There might have been a maintenance engineer playing solitaire in a back office.

Here in 1946 I'd banked my Army gratuity. Then the cashier had greeted me politely and remarked it was a warm day. On my way out the manager had nodded to me, a blonde typist smiled at me, and the doorman opened the door for me and called me sir.

All very friendly, warm, human. They were pleased to look after my money for me.

Now there was nobody to care a damn. Somewhere a magnetic pickup was scanning the check's number, checking my signature, noting the amount. An electronic computer was searching the memory of its magnetic drum for my account, computing and passing information to a tape recorder, and the recorder was feeding its tape to a high-speed printer, and—

Flop! A bundle of bank bills of high denomination dropped to the counter from the mouth of a compressed air tube. My bank statement, like a rudely protruding tongue, came sticking out at me from between the lips of a pair of rollers. I glanced at it, knowing there wasn't a chance in hell of its showing a human-like error. Balance—nil.

Correct. A multitude of tiny brains, knowing only 0 or 1, had gotten together to assure me of that.

I picked up the notes—no need to check them, either—and screwed up the statement. Feeling sad, yet relieved, I walked to the door. The infrared ray my body broke didn't call me "sir," but it opened the door for me. I was through with automatic banks now—and with London.

Traffic was thin and there weren't many people about. Mostly people rode only for social calls. You needed to walk only for exercise.

I blew my taxi whistle. The nearest taxi swerved in and stopped for me. The others drifted past disinterestedly; their radar scanners had noted the reaction of the nearest taxi to the point of origin of the sound waves, and it released them from obligation.

The door opened for me. I relaxed inside and the door closed. The taxi awaited my directions.

You decide; the machines will do the rest. That was the slogan of the age of automation.

Well, I'd decided to get the hell out of the age of automation, and the machines could carry me a good part of the way.

These vehicles carried an illuminated panel map of Central London. To reach any point, you juggled a moving light spot to settle on that point, pulled the start lever and off you went. You didn't have to do a thing after that but sit back. The route was stored in the taxi's memory. It made its own way and the radar scanner watched the traffic lights and kept it from hitting extraneous objects, human or insensate.

For Outer London, you pressed the right studs and the required map section moved onto the panel.

Cornwall wasn't on the map, of course. Not that I'd choose to go by taxi, anyhow; I wanted the fastest route. I pressed a stud labeled LONDON AIRPORT, and the taxi took me there.

The direct descendant of "George," the automatic pilot of World War Two, flew me down to Cornwall. I chose a single-seater plane to be alone.

The monorail train took me from Truro Airfield to Merthavin. It actually had a human driver; the full blessings of automation hadn't reached the wilds of Cornwall. The other passengers exchanged cracks with the driver and called him "Bob." I felt twenty years younger.

I knew where Bill Brewster would be at this time of day. There were three public houses in Merthavin, and I located him in the second, the Piskie House. A piskie is a Cornish fairy.

"Hello, piskie," I said.

Bill's watery blue eyes sometimes looked thoughtful, sometimes blank, mostly just sad. They never showed alarm or surprise. He was too well-disciplined a soldier. He looked at me sadly.

"What's been keeping you, Junior? Madeleine, a pint of bitter for the foreigner."

To the Cornish, anyone not born in Cornwall is a foreigner.

The cheerful young barmaid pushed a tankard of bitter across the bar to me. I sat down, sipping it.

"Seems I'm destined always to be a month behind you, Bill."

"At least, Junior. D'you remember that time we—"

By the fourth pint we were reliving battles long ago in the Western Desert, on the plain of Catania, at bloody Anzio, and cracking the Gothic Line again.

"Life had a purpose then," I said. "Anyhow, we thought so. How could we know that we were only fighting to hand the world over to Rossum's Universal Robots?"

"The shape of things to come was there in those days, but we didn't see it. Remember those self-propelled, unmanned midget tanks the Krauts launched against us at Anzio?"

I nodded. "They were packed with H.E."

"In more ways than one. The Krauts had a name for that type of robot tank. 'Goliath.' And now Goliath is overrunning the world, grinding all the little Davids into dust. General MacArthur was defeated by a species of Goliath."

"How do you mean?"

Bill took a long pull, wiped his mouth, and said, "I'm talking about the Korean War now. History says MacArthur was relieved of command by President Truman. Not so. Goliath decided it. MacArthur's policy risked world war. They shoveled statistics into a computer in Washington. It told them the answer. The American economy was in no position to face the risk of another world war at that moment. *Ergo*: MacArthur had to go. The computer said so."

"I never knew that. But I can believe it."

Bill nodded, and switched the topic. "Well, Junior, now you're here, how are you going to pass the time?"

"What do *you* do?"

"Oh, I fish, garden, sail, read old war books, and—and—"

"Drink beer."

Bill's lips twitched. "Working is better than doing nothing, but drinking is better than either."

"You may be right," I said, and sat reflecting.

What was I to do? Nobody in this robot-coddled world had to work if they didn't want to. Design engineers

and inventors obviously wanted to. They seemed demonically driven to enmesh the world with automation. They cared little for money. Yet money for a few extra luxuries was largely the incentive for the other voluntary workers like maintenance engineers, doctors, midwives.

And writers.

In London I'd been writing TV plays for years. Why shouldn't I have the larger TV set, the plushier carpets, the rare antiques that money could buy? Money was the only real response to my work. No one bothered to read much. TV was too easy. Printed journals were rare. Critical reviews of TV plays were rarer. Perhaps my plays weren't so hot. To see a printed review of one was like seeing a snowflake in July.

Once in a blue moon I'd meet someone who saw a play of mine. He might even recall what it was about. There were just too many channels. In the flood of stuff pouring through them, my creations stood out like drops in a river.

Besides, I was getting hard up for themes. My line was the problem play. But where were the problems today? Automation had ironed out most of the social and human ones.

No poverty, no insecurity, no wars, no politicians of the old school. A round century was the expected span of life. Old age wasn't a tragedy and dramatic illnesses belonged to the past—you couldn't write a modern *Lady of the Camellias.*

A doctor couldn't do anything more romantic than setting your broken leg.

No problems, no heroes to overcome them.

Yet I had a problem: what to do to feel that I was alive?

Bill said, "You have to do your own shopping here. No processed, tasteless, packaged food sliding to you through conduits from Distribution Center."

"Good," I said. Trains with drivers! Pubs with barmaids!

"Some houses don't even have TV."

"I'll get one of those houses," I said. To hell with TV, and the pseudo-historical romances which meant nothing,

and the "modern" plays which were only tired tricks with the eternal triangle and meant less than nothing.

"To Merthavin, and the hope of real civilization," I said, and raised my tankard.

Bill raised his, too, but not to Merthavin. He was saluting a newcomer to the bar, a slow-moving old chap, leathery and wrinkled, who'd obviously celebrated his own centenary years ago.

"Hi, Cornelius, what's the news?"

"Buy the *Messenger* and find out," grunted Cornelius.

"I'd rather buy you a pint, you miserable old man," Bill retorted, and did so.

Cornelius, I discovered, was a character.

He disliked most people and had found an ideal way of telling them so. He owned and edited a weekly local newspaper, the *Merthavin Messenger*. Such papers were rare these days. There certainly wasn't another like this one.

He had a copy with him and showed it to me. There must have been acid even in the printer's ink. The news was all about local people, put viperishly.

Sam Coates, of Pentagon Street, fell off his bicycle three times on his way home from The Piskie House on Thursday. But he wasn't riding a bicycle. He only thought he was. Men who can't hold their liquor should stick to weak tea.

Elizabeth (Liza) Pettsworth, of Walsham Street corner (hours, 7 P.M. to midnight), is expecting again. So are Bill Foster, Tom Trelawney, and Simon Meek. Rumor has it that they will cut the cards to decide who will be the happy father.

On Sunday, Percy Browne, of Loomis Cottage, beat his carpet, his wife, and it out of town.

That sort of thing.

"How many times a week are you sued, Cornelius?" I asked, handing it back.

Cornelius just growled into his beer.

"They never sue," said Bill. "They love it. They lap it up. They're flattered to see their name in print. It makes them feel they're *someone*. In this world, that's a rare feeling."

"I'm killing the *Messenger*," said Cornelius, suddenly.

"I'm getting too old for it. Anyhow, I'm tired of running a scandal sheet. It was a good paper. I ran some good stories. But nobody really wanted good stories—only dirty ones. Small towns are only interested in gossip. Nasty people. I hate everybody."

"Then confound you, Cornelius!" exclaimed Bill. "The *Messenger* is part of my life here. I'll miss it like hell. Junior, I've got an idea. You need an occupation. You're a writer. You take over the *Messenger*."

"Me?" I was startled. "Sorry, it's not my kind of thing. I want to settle down peacefully here. I don't want to start by libeling the local folk, especially as I don't know any of them."

"Don't worry, Pam will dig out the dirt for you," said Cornelius. "She's been my right hand these last couple of years."

"Pam?"

"My great-granddaughter."

"Hm." I visualized a stringy, sharp-nosed, narrow-eyed malicious vixen. If I was fool enough to take over the paper, she'd go out on her neck.

"Best story I ever ran," said Cornelius, "was *The Flying Saucer of Moble Island.* The strangest thing—saw it with my own eyes. 'Bout ten years ago. Big ball of white fire—like the sun itself—came down from nowhere, in broad daylight, settled on the island, seemed to sink right into it. I was out fishing that way, alone. Made for the island right away, walked all over it. Not a sign of anything out of the ordinary. Not even a twig burnt."

"You deserve another pint for that yarn," said Bill. "Madeleine!"

Cornelius scowled at him. "Nobody else believed me, either. They kidded the life out of me. But I've made 'em squirm since. Don't put your thumb in the beer, damn you, Madeleine."

I said, "It sounds more like some meteorological phenomenon—globe lightning, say, than a so-called Flying Saucer."

"What's so-called 'bout Flying Saucers?" growled Cornelius. "Everyone in these parts has seen 'em. Seen three

myself. But they're not balls of fire, but solid flying machines."

"I saw one only last week," said Bill casually. "Going over pretty high. What kind of new plane is it, Junior? I'm out of touch, I'm glad to say."

"I must be out of touch, too. I don't know of any circular type planes. It's hard to keep abreast of these times."

We got to talking about these times. In the end, I felt Cornelius and I were old friends and accepted his invitation to see the *Messenger* office.

Everything was jammed in the one room. There stood an aged linotype, two desks, two chairs, many files, a typewriter, a visaphone, two dozen empty beer bottles—and Pam. Everything except Pam was pretty much what I'd expected to find.

She was around twenty. Not stringy, but nicely rounded. Her eyes were round also, brown and innocent as a fawn's. She was pretty and demure; her voice was soft, like a shy schoolgirl's, when Cornelius introduced us. Her hair was long and raven-black.

Cornelius said, "This pile of junk you see around you is the *Messenger*. Nine thousand the lot—that includes the bad will."

"Does it also include Pam?" I asked, with the brashness of the semi-intoxicated.

"If you take her with it, the price is only eight thousand."

I laughed, but that seemed nasty, even for Cornelius.

"You're chiseling again, Cornelius," said Pam in a voice like velvet. "I'm sure the London women are accustomed to pay far more than a thousand for the pleasure of Mr. Madden's company."

"Tush, child, your claws are showing. What will Mr. Madden think?"

I happened to be thinking that this must be how you feel if you're suddenly stilettoed by some church mouse of a Sunday school teacher. Behind those sweet lips Cornelius's inherited tongue lay in wait, ready to dart and strike.

"I'll take the lot," I said, heavily. "Cat and all."

Pam gave me the loveliest smile I've ever seen. " 'Ban, 'ban, Caliban has a new master," she murmured.

After which, we got along fine. For years. Things happened in those years, mostly not for the best. I got older, and Cornelius got so old he died.

The *Messenger* had its ups and downs. Its ups when I gave Pam a free rein. Its downs when I mounted the editorial soapbox and campaigned. Mostly I campaigned against the ever more rapid encroachment by Goliath—as Bill and I now termed the system—from the east. His victims seemed to vanish overnight. Bob, the monotrain driver, was one. The monorail became automatic right to Land's End.

Automation took over the tin mines and the china clay pits. The clerical staff of the bank in Truro was replaced by an electronic brain. Merthavin's bank was next on the list.

I got het up about it, though none of my reluctant readers seemed to. Like Tom Smallways, they'd come to accept that this here Progress, it goes on. Even Bill seemed resigned at last, until one day he came striding into my office, thumped on my desk, and, red-faced, yelled, "It's got to stop!"

Chapter 5

IT TURNED out that the Piskie House had been automatized.

"Madeleine's gone—replaced by a battery of press buttons," said Bill, furiously. "Dial BIT for bitter beer. How can you enjoy beer in a damn visaphone exchange? It's got to stop."

"Did you see Gregory?" asked Pam. Gregory was the landlord.

Bill nodded. "Not his fault. Some Government VIP called and read Section 23, sub-section 14 (a) of the Automation Act at him. All public houses to be automatized by the fifteenth of this month. The engineers worked all night. They've ruined our date for next Monday, Junior."

I frowned. That was the date we'd fixed under Eros forty years back. We'd settled for a binge in the Piskie House instead. We'd been refugees in the West Country for six years now.

"I'll write an editorial," I said firmly.

"Much good that'll do," snarled Bill. "I'm going to get my Luger and shoot this VIP right through the liver. Wonder where he is now?"

"Here I am, sir," said a cheerful voice from the doorway. We turned. There stood a good-looking young man. He was neatly dressed, smiling, and carrying what appeared to be a brief case. "Complete with liver," he added. "The name is Arthur Coney, Assistant-Deputy Scientific Director for the West Region."

A silence.

"He *looks* human," said Pam. "Probably a robot, though."

Coney shook his head. "My liver is non-mechanical, I assure you. But please don't shoot a hole through it. I'm only here to help you."

"In what way, exactly?" asked Bill, dangerously.

Coney beamed at him. "Are you Mr. Madden?" Bill scowled, and indicated me.

Coney transferred the beam to me. "I've come to automatize your newspaper."

"Like hell you will! And don't bother to read sub-section 14 (a) at me, either."

"Sub-section 21(e)—automatization of newspapers," Coney corrected.

"This newspaper is privately owned—by me," I snapped.

"The Government isn't taking it from you, sir, only increasing its efficiency, cutting out superfluous staff—"

"I have no superfluous staff."

"Thank you kindly, Mr. Editor," murmured Pam.

Coney was taking a look around. I'd made a few changes, but not many. The old typewriter had fallen apart and I'd got the latest electric model. The linotype had been even older and lousy with gremlins, and I'd replaced it. Sometimes when I wanted to dictate one of my crusading editorials, Pam wasn't available to take it down. So I'd bought a tape recorder. That was about all.

"Your equipment isn't too bad, Mr. Madden," remarked Coney.

"Thanks," I said, curtly.

"But you don't seem to have made the best use of it, sir."

The typewriter and tape recorder were both standing on my desk. Coney pushed them together, back to back. He fumbled a bit, then there was a click. Somehow, the two machines had snapped together and become one unit. He switched on, slipped paper into the typewriter, and began speaking into the recorder microphone.

"As you see, these two units were designed to form another machine: a robot typist-secretary. My words become magnetic patterns on the tape, the tape passes under a magnetic pickup in the back of the typewriter, and the resulting electric impulses operate the relevant keys."

As fast as he was speaking, the typewriter was tapping out the words on paper. The rest of us were bereft of speech. I'd wondered about certain catches and projections on the two machines, which seemed to serve no purpose. But now I saw their purpose.

"So much for that," said Coney. "You don't need a typist. Neither do you need a linotype operator."

He opened his case. It was full of slim tools, plugs, and lengths of thin cable. He plugged the tape recorder straight into the linotype. I'd also wondered why *that* mysterious socket was there. "Feed your copy directly," he said, speaking into the mike, and the brass letters began dropping. "Now I'll show you how the print can best be fed to the press—"

"Don't trouble yourself," I said, recovering my voice. "We're sentimental; we're going to stick to the old-fashioned methods."

"That's against the Government's policy," said Coney, reprovingly. "The Automation Program—"

"To hell with the program," I said.

"If you try to block it, you'll only cause blocks elsewhere in the setup. One is sure to arise on the paper delivery line to your good self, for instance."

"Intimidation!" snorted Bill. "I'll go get my Luger, Junior."

"Never mind, Bill. Pam's out of a job and so am I. I refuse to play a one-man band for the Government. So I've just fired myself. No editor, no paper."

"Not necessarily," said Coney. "If you won't run the

paper efficiently, Mr. Madden, then the Government will. I'll show you how."

He got through on the visaphone to a Government news agency in London, and asked for general service. He clipped the recorder mike to the visaphone speaker. Someone in the news agency began reading out general news items, dull stuff overloaded with scientific progress reports. The linotype dutifully set up the type.

"That's only the rough idea, sir," said Coney. "There are technical short cuts, of course, and we must arrange distribution at this end. The agency supplies the latest news from all over the world; foreign reports come via automatic translators, naturally."

Pam said, "That stuff will bore everyone dead around here. Nobody will buy the rag."

"They won't have to," said Coney gently. "Like all Government services, it'll be free."

I looked at the long, black cable of the visaphone and saw it for what it had been all the time—an early exploratory tentacle of Goliath. Now it had tightened its grip on the *Messenger* and choked it to death.

"Let's get out of here," I said between my teeth.

The three of us left Coney to play, and walked in silence towards the Piskie House. Halfway along the road, Bill gripped my arm and pointed up. Pam was already staring at the five flying saucers in V-formation which were traversing the sky very high and yet swiftly. They looked like blobs of mercury and gleamed in the sun. Making no sound, they vanished towards the east.

"Something's happening," I said. "Something mysterious and mighty important. We're beginning to see the effects, but the causes aren't dreamt of in our philosophy."

"I feel that too," said Pam. "I've felt it for a long time."

The Piskie House was dehumanized now but at least you could get free beer. We stung the Government for plenty. We sat by the window and let the robot servers work hard.

"That insidious contraption wasn't there last time I came," said Bill, jerking a thumb at the big TV set above the bar.

There were no other customers and the set wasn't switched on. We left it that way.

"Cornwall's finished," I remarked, gloomily. "It's Goliath's territory now. We'll have to move on again, Bill. What about the Outer Hebrides Islands?"

"That's an idea," said Bill.

"Take me with you," said Pam.

"That's an idea," said Bill, again.

"Doubt if we'd be safe from Goliath even there for long," I said, still depressed. "These automation maniacs have more subtlety than I suspected. Look how they crept up on me! The typewriter, the recorder, and the linotype were all mass-produced models. Heaven alone knows how many of 'em are scattered around the world. And all designed to fit into each other as part of the Goliath hookup."

Bill said, "Any new invention is usually an amalgam of two old ones. Once, you had a pen and a bottle of ink—two separate objects. Then some genius got the idea of fitting the bottle of ink onto the pen. Hence, the fountain pen. That's how it goes."

"A plague on all inventors," I said.

"Except the man who invented beer," said Bill, finishing his.

Pam had drunk more than she was used to. She was looking out of the window with slightly glazed eyes. She said, suddenly, "Coney's very handsome. I could go for him. Pity he's a Government man. Where's he taking our files?"

"What?" I swung around and looked out. Coney was driving past in an open tourer. The rear seat was piled high with newspapers. I blundered out and shouted after him. He accelerated and shot off down the Truro road.

Pam joined me, not too steady on her feet. "Let's go see what he's been getting up to."

We made for the *Messenger* office. It was empty, the machines silent, and the long file shelves were empty, too.

"I get it," I said savagely. "He's going to search for anything I wrote which could be twisted to mean sedition. Then the Government would have a so-called legal excuse for confiscating the *Messenger*. No compensation for me."

Pam sighed. "Such a good-looker! It's a shame. Let's go back and drown our sorrows."

Back in the Piskie House Bill listened to our woe, then said, "The game's up here. I'll get the *Pinto* provisioned up and tomorrow we sail for the Hebrides."

The *Pinto* was his boat. We drank to escape and a new life.

Next morning I wished I had a new head. The old one was throbbing like a war drum. Someone wasn't helping by banging in the next room. In my pajamas, I went to see who.

Arthur Coney, freshly shaven, smart, with a newspaper under his arm, was supervising a workman installing a TV set. He turned and smiled pleasantly. "Good morning, Mr. Madden. Nice job, don't you think? Rosewood case, to match your furniture."

"What the devil are you doing in my house?"

"It's not your house, sir—it's the Government's."

True. Having used most of my capital to buy the *Messenger*, I'd been forced to take a rent-free, Government-owned standard house.

"Then take that box of tricks right back to the Government. I don't want TV."

"You don't have to *use* it, Mr. Madden. But a new order says all standard houses must be fitted with TV. Most of them are already, of course—this must be one of the last. It's all part of the plan to raise the standard of living."

"Either it goes or I go."

Coney shrugged. "That's up to you, Mr. Madden. You're free to go anywhere—including the Outer Hebrides."

I looked at him hard for a moment. "Coney, I want to speak to you privately. Come into the next room."

"Why, certainly."

In the bedroom, away from the workman, I said, "I don't like my conversations monitored. I'll take a bet these new sets—that one out there and the one in the Piskie House—have a microphone concealed in them. You're spying on me. Why?"

"I'm not. But I'd like some information from you."

He unfolded the newspaper. It was a very old issue of the

Messenger. He pointed to a headline: *The Flying Saucer of Moble Island.* "D'you know anything about that, Mr. Madden?"

I looked it over. It was Cornelius' story, of course.

"Why should I? It happened ten years before I came here."

"I know. But I've heard Cornelius used to talk about it a lot. You knew him well. Did he ever mention it to you?"

"Yes. But he said no more than he said here in print. He had no theories—he was baffled by the whole thing."

"I see." Coney retrieved the paper. "Perhaps he told his great-granddaughter more. I'll try her."

"She may even like it."

He grinned. "I like her, too." And I wondered if the concealed ear in the Piskie House had registered Pam's opinion of him. He left with the workman. I went looking for Bill. He was on the beach fixing a fresh water keg in the *Pinto.*

"We sail with the evening tide," he said.

"I'd like to take a short sail before that. Moble Island is only about four miles out, isn't it?"

"Yes. Why?"

I told him about Coney, and added, "That Moble Island story means something to the Government. I don't think they're happy about it—they're trying to ferret something out."

"Okay. Help me roll her out."

We heaved *Pinto* over the rollers into the sea, and headed for the island. It was hardly more than a rock with a thin layer of topsoil. Still, there was enough earth to support a few stunted trees, bent over by the prevailing sea wind, and some spiky undergrowth.

I noticed a black shape cavorting in the sea near the little beach. "Look, a seal."

"A queer-looking seal," commented Bill, shading his eyes.

It did look a bit odd, with a roundish head. It was hard to see because the sea was reflecting sunlight. The creature rode the breakers to the beach, then squirmed up the sandy slope. It vanished behind bushes.

We landed there ten minutes later. I saw the track of the thing, a shallow trench in wet sand.

"It was big and heavy—" I began, and then stopped, amazed.

On either side of the trench, regularly spaced, were the imprints of great hands, with the thumbs as long as the fingers.

"A *very* queer seal," said Bill slowly.

In silence we followed the track until it faded out on hard ground. We searched the whole islet. Nothing there but dwarf trees, bushes, weeds, and large spurs of mossy rock.

"It went back into the sea on the other side," said Bill.

"It must have," I said. On that side was only a low cliff. "Well, we've drawn a blank all round. There's nothing here to interest the Government. Let's go back."

We sailed back to Merthavin beach, and for a time I helped Bill stock the *Pinto*. "I'll finish this," said Bill, at last. "You find Pam. We'll be ready to sail in an hour."

Pam wasn't at home, so I made for the Piskie House. Coney's car was outside it. In the bar was Coney himself, talking with Pam. Trade was fairly brisk. Gregory, the landlord with nothing to do, was sitting in a crowd, drinking.

I said to Pam and Coney, "You two been talking all this time?"

"Yes. Arthur's good company when you get to know him," said Pam.

"You've got to know him? Dear old Arthur?" I was incredulous.

"Not a hundred per cent. I still can't get why he thinks Goliath is a good thing and the Government can do no wrong."

"It's simple enough," said Coney, smiling. "I believe in the greatest good for the greatest number—and not just a few awkward individualists like you two."

At which moment the TV set, which no one had touched, switched itself on. The screen glowed brightly and blankly, faded, glowed, and faded with a steady rhythm. A voice from the set commanded, "Attention, everybody. Watch this screen, watch this screen."

The command was unnecessary. Curiosity drew everyone's attention. The light maintained its periodicity.

Presently, the same voice ordered, "You will now raise your right arm above your head."

To my surprise, not only Coney but all the others present did exactly that. Except Pam and me.

"What goes on, Coney?" I demanded harshly.

He ignored me, and the TV voice said, "If you are with other people, note those who have *not* raised their arms. They are enemies of the country. Report them to the police at once. If possible, detain them by force and send for the police. That is all. Drop your arms now."

The light died, the set went silent. There was silence in the bar. It seemed full of hostile eyes watching Pam and me. And these people were our friends and neighbors. Grimly, Gregory got up and started to approach us. Coney waved him back.

"All right, Gregory," he said, easily. "Leave this to me." He stepped back a pace and drew a needle-pistol on us. "Right, you two. Walk slowly ahead of me to my car. Just that and nothing more. These needles can knock people out for an hour, but they'll feel bad for twenty-four hours."

"You were right, Pam," I said. "You never got to know old Arthur one hundred per cent."

"Maybe it's just as well," she said, with a little sigh.

Coney shepherded us to the tourer. He motioned me into the driving seat, and got into the back seat with Pam. "We'll go and pick up Mr. Brewster—he's still working on his boat—and make up a little party to go to Truro."

"And then?" I asked.

"My responsibility ends then. They'll probably send you to the concentration camp at the old Dartmoor Prison."

"For what crime?" asked Pam.

"For being immune to hypnotism. Get going, Mr. Madden."

I drove slowly to give myself time to think. About the treacherous TV sets planted by the Government—from where were they switched on by remote control? How wide was the network? More pressingly, how were we to escape the net? I thought of a just barely possible chance.

I stopped the car at the edge of the beach, ten yard from the *Pinto*. Bill was levering a heavy case of provisions into

place with an iron bar. I began to whistle Schubert's *Ave Maria* mournfully.

Long ago, Bill and I were on the run through Germany after escaping from a prison camp. We were trying to pass ourselves off as German civilians. If either of us noticed we were being watched or followed, we whistled that warning tune casually, and just as casually indicated with the right thumb the suspected enemy.

I hoped Bill would remember.

"Mr. Brewster," Coney called. From the corner of my eyes, I saw he was holding the needle-pistol low out of Bill's line of sight. I rubbed my cheek thoughtfully, keeping my thumb pointing back at Coney.

Bill sauntered over, carrying the bar. I was worried. He didn't look at me. "Well?" he said coldly to Coney.

Coney began to raise the pistol. Then Pam grabbed his wrists with both hands, and Bill tapped him smartly on the skull with the bar. Coney groaned and slumped back.

"Good work, my friends," I said. "Thought you'd forgotten, Bill."

"Old soldiers never forget. Thanks, Pam. What's going on?"

We told him.

"We'll have to take Coney with us," said Bill. "He knows where we're bound for. Maybe others know, too, and maybe not. We can't help that. Also, we can hold him as a hostage. Anyhow, we've got to wring out of him just what the Government's trying to pull on everybody."

He reached in and secured the pistol. Between us we carried Coney to the *Pinto* and bound him with rope from the locker.

Then we set sail.

There was a small gash on Coney's temple. Pam bathed it.

"You still gone on that quisling?" I asked.

"I'm afraid so. He's such a nice hunk of man. I'm hoping Bill's knocked some sense into him. Then he'll be perfect."

Coney opened his eyes soon afterwards. "Thanks, nurse," he said to Pam. Painfully, he took stock of the situation. We were a couple of miles out to sea. "So I've been press-

ganged. You won't get away with it, though. There'll be a reception committee waiting for you in the Hebrides."

We looked at each other. "I was afraid of that," I said.

"There are other islands," Bill said grimly.

"Wherever you go, the Makkees will find you," said Coney.

"Who—or what—are the Makkees?" I asked.

Coney looked up at the blue, empty sky. "You'll learn before very long."

We were abreast of Moble Island when the Makkees tried to contact us, and it was no friendly approach. From the gray line of Cornwall, three flying saucers in formation came skimming. Without knowing their size, it was hard to judge their height. But each had a visible row of ports.

They wheeled around, and the leader peeled off and plunged soundlessly toward us. It was big, all right, and in moments was rushing darkly over us, eclipsing the sun. Something like a white-hot harpoon darted down from it as it swept past. The shot missed, and flashed into the sea fifty yards away.

There'd been no sound, no disturbance. Now suddenly we were smitten all ways. The displaced air in the saucer's wake rushed together with the sound of twenty thunderclaps treading on each other's heels. There was a concerted screaming, like a thousand pieces of flying shrapnel. *Wheeeeee!*

The *Pinto* tossed and twirled like a stick in a cataract.

And fifty yards off, with a bang to end all bangs, the sea exploded into steam and began to boil. Bubbles rose and burst, and a stinging veil of white vapor closed around us. The seawater which slopped over the sides was scalding; we yelled out loud when we were splashed.

I was more scared than when the *minnenwerfers* caught me in open ground at Anzio.

Then the turbulent air shredded the steam clouds apart. Through streaming eyes I saw the sky again, and a group of maybe a dozen other saucers circling like gulls, high, high above.

Then the blue sky began to darken. It became mauve, then indigo. In it the white spots of the saucers swam dimly now, like fish in murky water.

The *Pinto* began to settle down, the sea-swell was subsiding. Bill, with red scald marks on his hands, was cutting Coney's bonds. Pam, her long black hair in wild disorder, was fumbling in the medicine chest. She eased our pain with a cooling salve.

A purple twilight had fallen on the world. Yet the sun was still way above the western horizon; it looked pale blue.

Coney sat up, rubbing his arms.

"The Makkees?" I asked, indicating the misty saucers.

He nodded silently.

"They don't seem to mind if they kill you as well as us."

He shrugged. "That's my own fault. I shouldn't have fallen down on the job."

"Which was?"

"Apart from generally supervising automation in the Merthavin area, to round up non-cooperative people like yourselves—not to be rounded up by them."

"Why did you take the *Messenger* files?" asked Pam curiously.

"I was ordered to collect the files of any local newspaper and take them to Truro for electronic scanning. The Makkees are systematically reviewing all news items relating to flying saucers which have ever been published anywhere."

"What's the point?" I asked. "They run the saucers; they already know all about them."

"That's *their* business," said Coney calmly.

"Save the cross-examination till later," cut in Bill impatiently from the tiller. "Keep an eye on those saucers. It won't take a direct hit to sink us and boil us alive."

He was steering for Moble Island. He went on, "We're sitting ducks out here. We'll be safer in fox-holes ashore."

The saucer which had attacked us had rejoined the other two. Suddenly the three of them climbed steeply up the purple sky and joined the group circling at high level.

Bill frowned. "Have they been called off? Strange—they had us at their mercy."

"The Makkees," said Coney, "have no mercy."

There was a short silence. "This purple haze is very odd," I said presently.

"It's eerie and unnatural," said Pam with a little shiver. "I suppose the Makkees have caused it. Why? What are they up to, Arthur?"

Coney compressed his lips and shook his head.

"Damn you, Coney, who *are* the Makkees?" I burst out. "Are you one of them?"

"No," he said and would say no more.

We landed on Moble Island. As we stepped ashore, the flock of flying saucers made off towards the mainland and were lost in the haze.

"Maybe a feint to lure us out again," Bill commented. "We'd best stay here a while and see what develops. One development is for sure. Coney here is going to *talk*. Or else I'll tear his tongue out by the roots."

A voice behind us, deep as the bass pipes of an organ, said cynically, "And that, of course, will teach him to talk. Except that he won't be able to."

Chapter 6

WE SPUN around. At the top of the beach's gentle slope sat a figure in a kind of bucket chair that hadn't been there two minutes ago. To me he looked like the king of the Zulus as I'd imagined him from an old Rider Haggard romance. Shining black and hairless, he was naked except for a harness of straps and pouches gleaming with studs.

His eyes had disconcertingly pale irises. His ears were hardly more than orifices. His feet and hands were strangely formed. With a little shock, I noted that his thumbs were as long as his fingers.

He was no malformed Negro. I sensed he belonged neither to our world nor our time. Like the He-Ancient in Shaw's *Methuselah*, it was as though time had worked on him incessantly through whole geologic periods. He wore the authority of infinite experience.

He was patriarchal but not benevolent. He regarded us with weary, half-humorous contempt.

As usual, Bill was less impressed than I. "Who the devil are you?" he snapped.

"It's not incumbent on me to explain myself to so-called *homo sapiens*. Push your boat out and leave my island."

"Your island?"

"I took possession of it some years ago."

"Are you a Makkee?" Bill demanded, producing Coney's pistol.

The Ancient smiled briefly. "Evidently you've never seen a Makkee." He looked at us intently in turn. "But *you* have." He pointed to Coney. "The *kuro* is plain."

We looked at Coney too. He remained expressionless.

"Look at his eyes," said the Ancient. "That slightly distrait aspect means that he's not wholly with us. He's in a hypnotic trance the Makkees call the *kuro*. He's acting under their implanted suggestions. It's their traditional technique. How is it that the rest of you have escaped it?"

"We were immunized as kids," said Bill shortly.

Pam clasped Coney's hand. "I understand now, Arthur. It's not your fault, poor man."

Coney made no response.

The Ancient said, "You'll have to watch him. Now, please go. Formerly, time meant nothing to me. But now, it so happens that I have little to spare. You're wasting my time. Go. Leave my island."

"Look here, Prospero," said Bill, "we're staying on your island for a bit, like it or not. We're not going back out there to be shot up by flying saucers again."

"What makes you imagine the Makkees were attacking you?"

"No imagination about it. They damn near sank us with a thunderbolt. They were gunning for us because we shanghaied this fellow, Coney, who's their agent. And because they failed to hypnotize us too."

"You surprise me, on two counts," said the Ancient. "First, to learn that there are humans impervious to the Makkees' mind control technique. Second, because I believed the Makkees were attacking me, not you. That's why I set up a force shield."

"The purple haze?" I asked.

"Yes. It's a shallow dome of force, around three miles in diameter, centered on the island. Nothing can penetrate it. The Makkees know that. That's why their saucers went away. Still, it's a nuisance. I didn't want them to know I was on this planet. Now I've shown them I am, and given my position away too, because of you interlopers. Why did you have to pick on *this* island?"

"Why did you?" I countered. "You came here about sixteen years ago, didn't you, in a kind of—I don't know what—comet? Anyhow, a globe of white fire in appearance."

"So I was observed then."

"Then—and again earlier today. We saw you swimming. We saw your tracks on the beach here. And the Makkees had a pretty good idea that you were here, too."

I explained how, in checking up, they'd come across *The Flying Saucer of Moble Island* story. And that Coney had begun to investigate it for them.

"I see," said the Ancient thoughtfully. "They would have got on to me, in any case. I've been fighting them for a long time, but it's plain I'm getting too old for it now. All right, I shan't throw you back in the sea. Follow me."

Then he, and the chair with him, seemed to vanish. I got the impression that they'd been snatched back over the crest of the slope.

"Maybe it *was* Prospero!" exclaimed Pam with a little gasp.

I climbed the slope and looked over. One of the big mossy rocks had split apart, and the halves swung wide on invisible hinges. They formed the mouth of a tunnel which sloped steeply into the rock of the island itself.

There was yellow light down there. Black against it, the Ancient came gliding up the ramp, still in his chair, which skimmed a bare inch above the ground. I could detect no means of propulsion.

He beckoned. "This way."

I called to the others. Coney was reluctant to move, but Bill jabbed the pistol in his back and forced him on. Pam clung to Coney's arm. Together we walked down the ramp

into Prospero's underground cell, and the rock healed magically behind us.

It was midnight. Outside, the force shield would be dimming the moon. And I was glad it was out there, keeping the Makkees at bay. For now I knew who they were.

The palaver had ended a half hour ago. We had all talked our share, but Prospero had talked most. I was dog-tired, and lay on one of Prospero's soft couches in this womb-like shelter. But I couldn't sleep. My head felt as though it would burst from trying to encompass all I'd learned.

We hadn't been able to get our tongues around Prospero's real name. We'd fallen back on Prospero, and he'd accepted it with humor. He knew about Prospero—and about most of Shakespeare's plays—and a great deal more about the human race, its arts, languages, achievements, and history. And he had a pretty low opinion of it all.

He came from a small planet circling a sun on the far side of this galaxy. He was a lone explorer making an extensive tour of the galaxy. Too extensive, in fact; his wanderings had brought him close to the point of death 95,000 light-years from home.

He reckoned himself to be some two thousand Earth-years old, a normal span for his kind. But his heart had begun to miss beats, and would soon stop altogether. "Any year now," he said.

He'd have preferred to die on his own planet, but he'd left it too late to return. "Curiosity about the next planetary system always lured me on. The exploring itch has lately died away completely; that confirms I *am* dying."

So he cast around for a planet on which to spend his last few years, preferably a planet which reminded him of his own. It wasn't easy to find. If the planets weren't naturally inhospitable with poisonous atmospheres, then generally the Makkees had already moved in and had full control and there was no spot for him.

Earth was a compromise. It had drawbacks. It was infested with *homo sapiens*, a weak and stupid race, doomed to domination by the Makkees who had already prepared the ground for their eventual invasion and coloniza-

tion. Its gravity was thrice that of his own planet, which meant that crawling was easier than walking. He overcame that by becoming literally chair-borne. And he could still exercise by sea-bathing; swimming was his favorite sport.

He settled on deserted Moble Island. The advance party of the Makkees were beginning to infiltrate, but from past experience he judged it would be twenty years before the mass invasion began. He expected to be dead by then. If not, it was doubtful whether the Makkees would stumble on his hideout.

He'd had trouble with the Makkees all the way. They just didn't want him around. But his science was superior to theirs. He had weapons and a force shield to make them keep their distance. However, sometimes they tried to catch him by surprise. He'd thought they were attempting it again today.

"The locusts of space," he called them. Their ambition was to colonize the whole galaxy and they'd been working at it for eons.

"Using ten million Coneys for tools," nodded Bill.

"Countless millions." Prospero stared at Coney, who'd sat quietly listening to this without any reaction at all. "It's time we redeemed him," said Prospero. He began searching among the maze of electronic apparatus for which he obtained power by breaking down the atoms of sea water. Finally he ran to earth a gadget which looked like Bill's old Luger.

"A circuit breaker," he said. "There's a powerful battery in the handle."

Suddenly, he pressed it against the base of Coney's neck and thumbed a button. Coney collapsed into a limp heap.

Pam started up. "If you've killed him—"

"Nonsense," said Prospero. "He'll recover soon, and then he'll be a man again—not an automaton."

He explained that an electrical discharge had passed through Coney's brain, breaking the closed circuit of hypnotic suggestion for good and all. He added that other thought patterns would also be disturbed, and there would be initial confusion, but memory would reassert itself.

We waited till Coney came round. He recognized none of us at first, but gradually his mind became integrated and then alert. His eyes looked much brighter.

Pam watched him fondly. This was the real Coney, whom she'd never seen. He remembered her, though, smiled at her and drew her to him.

"The *kuro* has gone, you'll observe," said Prospero.

"Coney," I said, "tell us about the Makkees and what they did to you."

He ran his fingers through his hair. "Well, it's rather a long story."

It was. Coney had been employed in the Scientific Directorate at Plymouth. One day a new Director came, a scrawny man named Lucas, jaundiced-looking, with cold eyes that bored through you. He took over everything and everybody.

"At what point I became hypnotized, I don't know," said Coney. "I think it was a gradual thing. But I came to believe Lucas was infallibly right. And so was the Government. I presume something of this kind happened to lots of people when the Makkees took over the Government."

"Well, we're wise to their game now," said Bill. "They've gone as far as they can go. They'll learn they can't push man around any more."

Even seated, Prospero was as tall as Bill. His pale eyes—startling in that black face—stared straight into Bill's for a moment.

Then he smiled suddenly and said, "For years I've been sampling this world's television programs. If your race had any spirit once, it's lost it now. Whatever happened to that glorious conquest of space program of a couple of decades back? Two crash landings on the moon, two failures to reach Venus. What since? A lot of fine talk. You've become a race of talkers. You sit back in armchairs and press buttons and don't even have to reach for the next drink. And you talk of the coming conquest of other worlds. Imbeciles!

"Most of those other worlds were conquered by the Makkees when man was still half-ape. In fact, man himself was conquered at that time, and has only been living on sufferance since. On the surface the Makkees have been

softened by automation, too. Physically, they're frail and can't stand hardship or cold. But their tenacity of purpose makes man a wind-blown puffball by comparison."

Bill said, "Nobody with any sense would watch our TV programs, still less imagine they were representative. Idiots broadcast them—to idiots. I don't wonder that section of the public was easy to hypnotize—it was hypnotized by TV already. But I'm pretty sure there are plenty of others like us who own our own souls. The hard core of mankind may have become disorganized from lack of a purpose. But faced with a challenge, it'll become organized, all right. Wait and see."

"Talk," said Prospero cynically.

"You said man was conquered by the Makkees long ago," said Coney. "What do you mean by that?"

"That, too," said Prospero, "is a long story. But I'll tell you something of it."

It was more than a long story; it was breathtaking. It seemed that the general humanoid form to which we, Prospero, and the Makkees themselves belonged, was a common one throughout the galaxy. The Makkees, cruising in their flying saucers, would seek it out in its primitive stages. They would subject batches of savages to a radiation which changed the pattern of their chromosomes. On part of that pattern was imposed a standard.

"Man," said Prospero, "in his brief life is just a host to immortal chromosomes. He acts according to the pattern he receives and passes the pattern on, through the generations. The Makkees' standard pattern runs thread-like from the original recipients through the common weave of humanity. Everyone that particular thread enters is compelled to become a certain kind of person. That person has the makeup of a born inventor.

"The near-ape who conceived the wheel, the axe, the hollowed tree trunk boat were driven by the same goad which kept Edison working and sleepless, spurred the same type from da Vinci to the Wright Brothers and on to the automation fanatics of today.

"Seeded oysters—little more," said Prospero.

"But why?" Pam asked.

"So that the Makkees, in the fullness of time, could come and collect the full-grown pearl. That's the way they've conquered most of the galaxy. A pearl to them is a whole new comfortable world, nicely warmed and furnished, ready for them to move in and take over. A fully automatic world, from food supplies to transport, heating, lighting, communications. Everything laid out so that they can live in the style to which they've become accustomed."

A silence, while we absorbed this.

"England, at least, is too cold for them," said Pam hopefully.

Prospero smiled. "Within a month, I predict, you'll find England's climate has changed. The heat will be equatorial. Unknowingly, your inventors have laid the ground work for weather control. Your great radio telescopes, your atomic power stations, your TV broadcasting stations and the visaphone network—these are meant to be linked together in ways that haven't occurred to you. Your mass-produced inventions, from automobiles to teleprinters, are only parts of a gigantic jigsaw puzzle. designed to interlock and form the whole you call 'Goliath.' The Makkees long ago discovered the secret of success, which is to get others to do your work for you believing that they're working for themselves."

"Man, the sucker!" said Bill bitterly. "What happens to him when the Makkees move in?"

"Another change of chromosome pattern—and man simply ceases to breed. The present generation is the last generation. That's been the fate of all conquered humanoid races so far."

"Well, it's not going to be the fate of this one," I said. "To begin with, we're not conquered yet. For another thing, I'm not so sure that original chromosome pattern took so well. Remember the Luddite riots—the Luddites who smashed the new power looms because they felt the machines would make them redundant. There's still something of that spirit left. Damn it, we won't let ourselves become redundant."

"Hear, hear!" A chorus from Pam and Coney.

"And three rousing cheers, Junior," said Bill. "Up, guards, and all that."

"Talk," said Prospero flatly. "There's nothing you can do about it, and you know it."

"We could with your help," said Bill.

"No. I can't help you. I've been fighting the Makkees most of my life. There can be no decisive victory over them. They're too strong and too numerous. I'm too old and too tired to do more than keep on the defensive for the short time left to me."

"Then hand your weapons over to us," Bill suggested.

Prospero smiled derisively. "It would be like giving a monkey an atomic bomb. You lack the necessary mental equipment. Anyhow, why should I? *Homo sapiens* means less to me than the fish in the sea. I don't care what happens to it. When I die, that's the end of everything that matters to me."

We stared at him.

"Such egocentricity must come from living alone too long," I said.

"*Homo sapiens* has many weaknesses," said Prospero. "The most despicable is hypocrisy. Everyone thinks only of himself. Why pretend otherwise?"

"Confucius, he say otherwise," said Pam. "But it wouldn't do any good to give you a volume of Confucius, would it? You lack the necessary moral equipment."

For once Prospero looked a little uncertain. He spread his peculiar hands. "The discussion has become illogical, and there's no point to continuing it. I suggest we all get some sleep. Don't worry about the Makkees tonight. The force shield is still there. You can sleep soundly."

And, of course, I couldn't sleep soundly. The discussion still went on in my head, over and over.

I don't think Prospero slept all that soundly, either. Next morning, he addressed us tiredly, "I've reached a decision. My spaceship is still available but I've no further use for it—I shall end my days here. You wouldn't understand anything of its working; it becomes transformed into pure energy in transit. However, its controls can be pre-set to take you automatically to any of the nearer planets.

"I suggest Venus. I was tempted to settle there myself,

because it's free of Makkees. But it's too unlike home, too sunless and sealess. Still, there's flora and fauna. You can have some sort of life there, even start a tribe. But keep out of sight of the Makkees. Don't ever let them know you exist."

There was a long pause.

"That's very good of you," said Coney politely.

"So you've had a change of heart, Prospero," said Pam.

"Meaningless phrase! I've not changed my attitude in the least. I'm losing nothing but your company, and I shall be glad to do that. I've lived as a lone wolf, and wish to die as one."

"Thanks, all the same," I said. "But I'm not going. Neither, I'm sure, are my friends."

"Too true," said Bill, and Coney and Pam nodded approvingly.

Prospero was astonished. "Why not?"

"Because we have a job to do here, and we're not running away from it," said Coney. "We've got to do what we can to free our people from the Makkees."

"Sprats against a whale!" scoffed Prospero.

"No," I said. "Men against Goliath."

So Bill became a Major again and I a Captain. All we had to do was find an army.

The four of us left Moble Island under cover of darkness and landed back on the mainland. "A Second Front—all to ourselves," Bill cracked.

Our vital weapon was the mental circuit breaker. Prospero had agreed he had no further use for that, either. We found plenty of use for it as we marched through Cornwall, breaking hypnotic bonds, picking our men.

But we lost two in Devon. Pam and Arthur Coney were in love and wasted no time about it. They were married in the church in Widecombe, and Bill and I insisted they have a honeymoon. We didn't want any tragedy at that moment. We were deploying our forces for an attack on Dartmoor Prison, once known as the Granite Hell."

In there, we'd learned from Coney, were imprisoned the greatest concentration in the West Country of the type of

men we needed for officers; the type with proven immunity to hypnotism. Our present army, though bold and vigorous—all along our march we had smashed the links of Goliath, tearing up the monorail, raiding airports, overcoming all zombie opposition—had a certain weakness. Most of its members had been recruited with the help of the circuit breaker. And if the Makkees got anywhere near them, those people could be hypnotized again.

We needed a nucleus of impervious and completely reliable officers.

Dartmoor might be a tough nut to crack. On the miles of open moorland there was no real cover except darkness. After sunset we pitched camp a few miles from the Prison and in sight of it—at least, we should be in sight in the morning. So we planned a dawn attack.

We had a fair armory, plenty of rifles, trucks, and even an old tank we'd dragged out of a War Museum and got in working order.

We waited for dawn. The Makkees, however, didn't. They made their own dawn and caught us with our pants down. A greenish glow appeared in the eastern sky and moved steadily our way until it was directly overhead.

Bill and I stood outside our tent looking up at it.

"Flying saucers," said Bill. "Ten, I make it. The Makkees, of course."

"And you bet they know we're here," I said uneasily. "It might only be a routine patrol of the prison area."

"Or maybe they're just out shopping. Come off it. If we can see them, I'm pretty sure they can see us. Wish we had some ground-to-air missiles. They're too high for rifle fire. Not much we can do."

"Only dig in fast. Tell the men. Put it out over the loud hailer."

I turned and went two paces when the pale green light suddenly became brighter. Simultaneously, a paralysing pain hit my spine and crumpled me up. I heard Bill fall to the ground behind me. I rolled over in agony. It was far worse than the worst lumbago attack I've ever had.

I glimpsed Bill, gripped by the same torture. There were

cries coming from all over the camp. I realized that the saucers were raying us. Invisible pulses were racking our spinal cords. Our little army was out of action and lay at the mercy of the Makkees.

Then I remembered Coney saying, "The Makkees have no mercy."

I was glad Pam and Coney were out of this.

Prospero had been right. We were sprats against a whale.

I lay on my back, glaring up. The screws were tightening and I was near to screaming. The saucers hovered over us like bees over flowers.

Then, incredibly swiftly, a shower of sun-bright comets came streaking across the pale green sky.

The saucers suddenly began to move too, and their glow moved with them. But they didn't move fast enough to get away. The comets overtook them and hunted them down in the wastes of the sky.

There was a series of very bright flashes. The comets, the saucers, and the green glow all vanished together, and it was black night again.

I found I could move once more, although my back ached like hell. Bill called to me through the darkness. "That was Prospero."

"Yes," I said. "It couldn't be anybody else."

A long, black arm, no longer neutral, had reached all the way from Moble Island to intervene. How, we should probably never know. Why, we could only guess.

Would he continue to be our ally? Or was this an isolated, farewell gesture? Tomorrow he might be dead.

So might we.

Tomorrow came. The sappers moved out of their forward positions, carrying the high explosive to the grim main gate of the prison. We could have shelled it, but we didn't want to risk killing any of our future officers.

As it happened, things had been moving in the prison and most of our future officers had made a partial break-out. Under the leadership of a very efficient, vigorous little man named Maggelen, whose initiative was equaled only by his bumptiousness. . . .

PART THREE

Chapter 7

THE BUMPTIOUS little man has now to resume the narrative, because Captain Madden didn't live to carry it much farther than that.

I don't know whether I left in that last paragraph because of honesty or vanity. I think Madden lived just long enough to know me better. He was a really nice guy. But I wish he had spelled my name right. Peter Butler became thick with both him and Brewster, because they all wore the same old school tie of Harrow.

Personally, I got along with Major Brewster only so-so. He pulled his rank a bit too often. He was friendly in his cups but hostile most other times. He poured tepid water on almost everything I suggested in the shape of strategy, reminded me that he and Madden had spent six years in a shooting war, implying that I was a raw amateur.

I pointed out that this was a different kind of war.

For one thing, we had to avoid battle in open country. Our chosen ground had to have plenty of brick walls on it for protection against the green rays. There would be much house-to-house fighting. Between our picked spots, we had to make a series of forced marches.

We had no air defense to speak of. The Makkee saucers came skimming low, spitting white-hot spears which exploded and threw off waves of intense, killing heat.

When the saucer attacks were heaviest, Prospero's own flaming arrows would hurtle from over the western horizon and smash them. But this help became infrequent, and after the battle of Salisbury we had no more of it. Either we'd moved beyond Prospero's effective range—or he was dead.

Hating it, we'd cut our way bloodily through masses of zombies. Only a few of them had ray guns—plainly, the Makkees had counted on little or no resistance. Like ourselves,

the zombies were armed with whatever weapons came to hand.

Madden got his on the road to Stockbridge—from a machine gun nest in a farmhouse. Brewster went mad with rage and grief and charged the house singlehandedly with a canvas bag full of grenades. He killed the lot of them. Then, coming away, he trod on a mine in a field he had just crossed unharmed. He died within minutes.

I was genuinely sorry, and yet relieved. It left me in sole command and forestalled clashes that would have been inevitable between us.

Gerry Cross, Peter Butler, and the taciturn Watts became my commanders. Watts later had a grenade to himself at Bagshot. He was an able officer. He moved and thought slowly, but on the right lines. Unfortunately, he moved a little too slowly at Bagshot.

Basingstoke was my classic battle; a double feint, then an overwhelming attack from an unexpected quarter. My troops, actually, were numerically inferior, but by switching them I always outnumbered the enemy at the point of my attack.

All along the way, we smashed the web of automation Madden and Brewster called Goliath. We demolished every TV station—we couldn't risk further mass hypnosis at the rear of our advancing army. It was a kind of scorched earth policy. The ultimate aim was to present the Makkees with a wilderness in place of the comfortable home they sought.

As for mankind, for its soul's sake it needed a period in the wilderness.

We set free the minds of the zombies we captured, and recruited them. By the time we drew near London we were producing a number of effective copies of the circuit breaker. Sometimes when I fingered mine, I considered employing it to break up the neurotic patterns which had warped Sarah's mind.

For I never doubted that I should see Sarah Masters again. She was constantly in my thoughts these days. I talked of capturing London. But I meant to capture Sarah, too.

We crossed the Thames at Windsor and wheeled to approach London from the northwest, aiming at Hampstead.

We came to Harrow in the mist of evening and camped for the night, planning to launch an all-out attack on Hampstead at dawn.

Only dawn never came.

It had been a cloudy, moonless night. The mist was thickening into fog. I went to bed not too happy about the unseasonable weather.

I awoke in the small hours, breaking free from a nightmare in which once more I stood paralysed by the window in Sarah's room. The black shadow of the descending flying saucer was growing over the garden. But this time the thing landed on the roof, and began crunching down through the floors to get at me, and crush me. And I could only wait, unable to move . . .

Yet somehow, too, I was Richard III in his fear-haunted tent on the eve of the fatal battle of Bosworth Field.

The lights burn blue—It is now dead midnight.

Cold fearful drops stand on my trembling flesh . . .

I could feel the cold drops, all right. The room was pitch-black. I reached out and snapped on the electric lights.

They burned blue.

Dark blue, almost purple. The room was full of black fog. I could hardly see the foot of the bed, and the far wall not at all. Shakily, I groped for my clothes and dressed.

A dim figure came into the room, and my heart jumped. But it was too big for a Makkee. Could be a zombie sent to kill me in my bed.

"Charles?" It was the anxious voice of Gerry Cross.

"Here," I said, and waved a near-useless torch.

He came over, cursing as he hit his knee against a bedpost.

"Something's afoot. This is no natural fog. Must be some kind of smoke screen the Makkees have laid down on us. It's damned effective—the whole army's immobilized. You can't see to drive a truck through this."

"It cuts both ways," I said calmer. "They can't attack us either."

"But they can see in the dark."

"So can a cat, but it can't see in a fog," I said.

"Hm. But suppose the Makkees have got infrared search-

lights and special observing instruments. They're wizards with radar, and all that kind of thing."

"Radar won't tell them friend from foe in the streets," I said. "And I doubt if infrared light could get far through this."

I couldn't see Cross' expression but he still sounded doubtful. "I've alerted the guards, anyhow."

I looked at my wrist watch. I had to stick its luminous face almost into my eye. "It's just after three. I guess we'll just have to sit it out till daylight."

We sat it out, with the aid of a bottle of whisky, until at last we realized daylight wasn't going to come—not in these parts, anyhow. Then I called a conference of officers.

"Does anyone have a clue about the nature of this fog?" I asked.

A bespectacled lieutenant, Tyson, said, "Natural fogs are composed of globules of moisture formed around dust particles. There's very little moisture in this stuff. It's more like smoke. But it doesn't behave like smoke, nor fog, come to that. There's an intermittent breeze blowing. Normally a gust of wind would drive fog into a dense bank, with a correspondingly clear patch. But this stuff is hardly affected by the wind. It's as if each particle of it is trying to remain in its own particular place."

"Okay, then, it's a Makkee brew," I said. "Any chance of clearing patches by burning gasoline?"

"None, I'd say," said Tyson. "I've a theory these particles are electrically charged and held in place by the earth's magnetic field. We dislodge them as we move around, but they drift back to their respective lines of force almost immediately."

"How far does the earth's magnetic field extend?"

"We still don't know, precisely," said Tyson. "Well into space and well below ground—I can't be more exact than that."

"Thanks, anyhow." I pondered, then said to Peter Butler, "You were at school here. D'you know the Harrow area well?"

"Yes. I could find my way around blindfolded."

"Good, because that's what you're going to do—lead me to the top of Harrow Hill."

Tyson cut in, "I doubt if that'll take you above the fog—it's probably miles thick vertically."

"Maybe, and maybe not. We'll find out. Come on, Pete."

We took powerful hand lamps. They helped fractionally. But I should have got lost without Peter, although I knew the general direction of the hill. I'd seen it yesterday. The crooked spire of the old church on the summit was visible for many miles around.

We stumbled up the hill through the gloom. The higher we went, the lower my spirits sank. For right until we reached the churchyard wall, the fog remained as impenetrable as ever. We went through the lych gate and climbed the slight rise on which the church stood. Those last few feet of elevation worked the miracle.

The fog thinned and vanished abruptly. It was like rising to the surface of a lake of ink. Suddenly, our heads were in bright sunlight and we could see for miles across the level upper surface of the fog layer, although we could scarcely see our own feet.

"What an amazing thing!" Pete exclaimed.

"I expected it," I lied. "Let's go higher."

We entered the church, climbed the tower, peered out through a small window. It was certainly amazing. The sky was light blue overhead, yet to the southeast all London lay drowned, spires, domes and all, beneath a flat calm blackness.

"They made a thorough job of it," said Pete.

"Yes, but they carefully left themselves out of it. See there." I pointed to a distant archipelago of small wooded islands in the black sea. "Those are the heights of Hampstead. The Makkees are basking in the sunshine there while all London gropes in the darkness below them, except on a few other high points, like Shooters' Hill and Sydenham Hill way to the south."

Pete looked at the miles of fog between us and Hampstead.

"They've killed our attack before it could begin. We can't get at them. I know the northwestern quarter of London pretty well, but I wouldn't give a bean for my chances of

reaching Hampstead through that maze of streets in that kind of fog. But I might make Northolt Airfield—that's near here. We could grab some helicopters—"

I was shaking my head. "The same thing would happen to us in those 'copters as happened to you in your car. The 'copters would take control of us and dump us anywhere the Makkees chose—maybe in mid-Channel. Too risky altogether. No, I suggest we take the monorail—it's a direct run to Hampstead from Harrow-on-the-Hill Station."

"But surely the Makkees will have cut the power?"

"You bet they have," I said and added cryptically, "But that won't stop us from taking the monorail."

I left Pete in the dark as we descended into the more tangible dark of the fog. I wanted to think over my idea. I'd have taken a bet that all London's transport system had been shut down. It was part of Goliath and the Makkees knew we weren't dumb enough to attempt to use it. The fog itself was the trap they'd laid. Any army advancing into that blinding blackness would slowly lose cohesion. Separation would lead to disintegration.

It was Napoleonic strategy to divide the enemy troops before annihilating them. The Makkees were counting on the fog to divide us. Then, I guessed, they would lift the fog suddenly and launch a zombie counterattack against my disorganized army.

I wasn't going to buy that one.

On the way back, Pete and I stopped off at Harrow-on-the-Hill Station. Our surmise was correct. The current was off, no monotrains were running.

We encountered nobody. The population of the district, presumably by order, was completely house-bound. Of course, they could see no better than ourselves in the fog.

Back at HQ I called another conference and presented my plan of action. Brewster would have grinned ironically. I meant to do exactly what I'd condemned him for; swan on alone into enemy territory, chancing my army being rendered leaderless.

In the event, Pete Butler came with me. It didn't matter that the trains weren't running. The monorail itself was the

important thing. It was an unbroken steel guide rope directly linking our camp to the enemy's HQ. We had only to follow it, never losing touch with it, and the fog weapon was defeated.

Quite literally we kept in touch with it. The rail ran waist-high on supports the whole way. You could run your fingers along its smooth cold surface without strain as you walked. And you had to. The dense cloud of motionless particles surrounding us kept visibility down to a yard or so, and made funeral lights of our big hand lamps.

In holsters I packed a circuit breaker and a needle-pistol. I carried a magnesium flash-pistol, which could extend the radius of our vision by another yard—briefly. It could be useful in an emergency, say a sudden attack.

Pete carried a field telephone. Radio was out, by my order; the Makkees could pick up our messages. Throughout our campaign we'd stuck to the old-fashioned field telephone, for security. Pete's one was a special. It could transmit without cable. Wire fences, iron railings, could be its medium. We used the monorail. Periodically, Pete would clamp the phone to it and we could speak to Cross, leading two hundred picked men two miles behind us. Cross would take over if anything happened to us.

Our mass assault had been stopped. There was no alternative now but a surprise commando-style attack on the Makkee HQ. It could settle the issue at a blow.

We continued to feel our way. The monorail, we knew, burrowed into the side of a hill at West Hampstead, where a new underground section had recently been constructed to link up with the old Hampstead subway station, which was our goal.

Mile after mile through the silent dark, awkwardly bypassing stationary empty trains. Once or twice we became confused over points, but regained the right track.

We saw no sign of living creatures. I found that unnerving. I imagined silent forces around us, letting us through, then closing in behind us. But Cross' men, from way back, reported a similar desertedness near the line.

At every station I located the name board and identified it

by the brief light of the flash-pistol. Each time, I reported to Cross where we were.

So we groped to the mouth of the new tunnel at West Hampstead, and there waited for Cross' crowd to catch up with us.

Cross congratulated us, and said, "That's the worst part of the journey over."

"Maybe," I said. "But I'd have preferred a little opposition. Seems to me things are going too smoothly."

Gerry laughed. "Some people are just afraid of their own good luck. Good luck and your good brain—it's an unbeatable combination."

I remained cautious. "Pete and I will keep a hundred yards ahead of you through the tunnel. We'll phone every few yards. Leave twenty men at this end as a rear guard. The rest of us to consolidate in the Hampstead subway station."

"Right," said Gerry Cross.

Pete and I set off. Being in a tunnel felt no different. It had seemed to us that we'd been walking through a black tunnel all the way from Harrow. Presently we came on a train standing in the tunnel. There was no room to squeeze past, so we climbed through the door at the back and fumbled our way through the communicating doors along the whole length of the train. Then we phoned Cross and warned him the train was there.

Eventually we emerged into the Hampstead underground station. All was quiet. We scrambled up onto a platform. As we stood there, a faint rumbling came from the tunnel mouth behind us. A fear spasm shot through me. I thought the Makkees had switched on the power and the train was beginning to move through the tunnel—to mow down Cross and his men. But the rumbling was brief and ended suddenly.

Pete was gripping my wrist. He whispered, "What was that?"

I didn't answer. I swung down from the platform and felt my way back to the tunnel mouth. I could go no farther: something was blocking the way. Pete joined me. Grim and apprehensive, we investigated. A massive metal door had slid across the tunnel, sealing it off.

I thumped at it. It gave a flat, dead sound and bruised my fist.

Pete said, "Cross' crowd can go back and out the other end. The thing is, can we get out at *this* end?"

"If we can, I promise you we'll find a Makkee reception committee waiting. We've walked into a nice little trap. Well, there's no way back, so let's give the reception committee a warm reception. I'm banking on Drahk being one of them. If I can put an electric needle through him, I'll have done something really useful—he's the mastermind."

We regained the platform. I had the flash-pistol ready in one hand, the needle-pistol in the other. At least I was on my home ground now. I'd used this station a thousand times and knew all its corners. But as we progressed, we found no committee hiding in any of them. The station seemed deserted.

We climbed the emergency stairs around the elevator shaft—still the deepest in London. Right near the top we emerged into dazzling daylight. We had to wait until our eyes became adjusted to it.

It was great to be able to see again. My tension eased. I realized just how hard I'd been fighting the old fear of the dark and what it might conceal. I feared much less an enemy I could see.

But there was still no enemy to see.

High Street was as bare as it might be at dawn on a Sunday. Heath Street contained only clear air and sunlight. This area of Hampstead seemed totally depopulated; probably the Makkees had cleared it.

We hesitated at the station exit. It didn't seem right to leave Gerry down there in the darkness. I said, "The only way we can open that door is locate the person who shut it. I think I know where we can find him."

I led the way up towards the Heath and the street I'd lived in. Away to our left was the vast black cloud which had engulfed London, an empty plain of jet with a few birds flying over it.

The windows of the houses watched us with a hundred blank eyes as we walked the naked roads. I felt that other

eyes were watching us also. That was a feeling I'd had even in the fog. Imagination?

I whispered to Pete, as though afraid of being overheard by the empty air, "They'll expect us to make straight for their HQ—a house called Moravia, round the next turning. They're probably tracking us now through TV cameras. But I've got an ace in the hole, too. Follow me."

I struck off sharply across the corner of the Heath which lay behind my road, and picked a way through close trees and heavy undergrowth. No watcher could follow us. It was years since I'd visited this spot but I remembered the way.

There was the flat stone slab, moss over gray so that it was scarcely visible in the long grass. I knelt beside it, fumbled, found the slight projection. The slab rose slowly on creaking hinges and disclosed a narrow well.

"The family vault, I presume," said Pete.

"In a sense. I told you my father was a crook. He always thought ahead of the police. Every house he built had its secret bolt hole. I'm a crook, too, so I followed his example. This is the rathole in my house, which a she-rat is at present occupying. Our best way to get at Drahk is through her. She's tough, our Sarah, but I'll make her talk. We'll find out just what the Makkees are up to."

Pete said dubiously, "From what you told me of her, I feel she won't be helpful—if she doesn't choose to be."

"She may choose to be. She likes to be on the winning side, and we're going to be the winning side. If she joins us, she may be able to reopen that tunnel before the Makkees realize what she's doing. It's ten to one the master control is operated from their HQ."

I lowered myself into the well, feeling with my feet for the rungs. It was only a short ladder and at the bottom I flicked a light switch. When Pete was safely on the way down, I tripped another switch which closed the trap door above us.

We walked along a low, dimly lit and roughly concreted passage—all my own work. The cracks seemed to exhale foul air at us, smelling of damp and rotting things. I found myself trembling with the anticipation of seeing Sarah again. My emotions were veering like a fitful wind that tried to

choose all directions. I knew it now as a truth that hate and love are the two sides of the same coin. But I could not tell which way the coin was going to fall.

The passage ended at a camouflaged door in my wine cellar. There seemed to be as many bottles as I'd left there. Good! I hoped soon to have something to celebrate with my friends. Treading as though I were afraid of awakening the children, I led the way upstairs. The place was even quieter than I was.

I tiptoed into the lounge. It was empty. I glanced at the wide window which once had offered a fine view of London. Then I called Pete softly.

"Look."

He came and looked. The tide of darkness had risen in the past few minutes and had lapped over the wall at the bottom of my sloping garden. Most of the streets we'd just climbed were now under it.

"Looks bad," said Pete quietly. "We're just about marooned here. Think they're deliberately cutting off our retreat?"

I thumbed the safety catch of my needle-gun. "Let's take a look upstairs."

As we climbed the stairs, I kept looking over my shoulder to see if the darkness were yet invading the house. I feared it might start climbing the stairs behind us.

My bedroom door was open. Cautiously, I peered in. Then, started; I saw Sarah lying on the floor by the window. At least, I presumed it was Sarah. Her back was towards me, but she wore that same pale yellow dress. And yet, something was wrong. There was no grace about her now, and no femininity. Instead, a sort of lumpishness. She looked dead.

Sick with uncertainty, I went over there, stepped across her, looked down at her face. My cry brought Pete running.

I pointed down dumbly, and found tears coming suddenly to my eyes. Another part of myself seemed surprised at this reaction, regarded me detachedly and thought, Did she really mean as much as this?

I felt again all the anguish and horror of that moment

when I saw my father lying dead. And the same sense of awful loss.

But at least my father had died without pain. Sarah had died horribly. Every joint of her body was twisted, every muscle a hard knot. She had bitten through her lower lip, and her eyes, lifeless as glass, were turned inward.

"My God!" Pete muttered and turned away.

Quite gradually, it seemed, we became aware of the little figure standing in the bedroom doorway.

"These tedious human emotions," said Drahk's thin, whistling voice. "They killed Sarah, you know. A little more self-control and she would still have been with us."

Pete started for him, but couldn't brave the ray-emitter which Drahk instantly levelled at him. He had tasted that pain and had just seen how it could kill. For myself, I was in the grip of another kind of pain. I couldn't even feel hate. I gazed at the Makkee but hardly saw him. He might have been an actor in a play I was no longer following.

"This," said Drahk, glancing at Sarah's body, "is not a congenial setting for social intercourse. Come along to my place, Magellan. I want to talk to you." He addressed Pete. "You had better come also, if you wish to stay alive."

Pete looked at me questioningly. Like a zombie I began to walk from the room. Drahk stopped me, took my needle-gun and circuit breaker and tossed them on the bed. He made us walk before him down the stairs under the threat of the ray-emitter. We went out into the road. Dully I noticed that the fog had ceased to rise and lay at road surface level. Drahk shepherded us along and up the gravel drive to Moravia. The front door opened and admitted us to the clammy heat within.

Chapter 8

THE RECEPTION committee, waiting in the control room at the back, was smaller than I'd expected—just Willoughby and two other jet-eyed Makkees who might have been his brothers.

The wall of screens was alive with images. Some flickered

with the meaningless patterns I'd seen before, others showed street scenes and people moving slowly and seemingly aimlessly.

Pete exclaimed and pointed, "There's Gerry!"

I stared dazedly at the screens. The streets were familiar; they were all in the vicinity of the Hampstead underground station. The faces of some of the men were familiar, also. They were my men. Gerry Cross had a screen all to himself. From the waist down, his clothes were soaking wet, in common with the others.

"Yes," said Drahk, "there's your deputy leader, in full command now. A case of the blind leading the blind—literally."

"You've blinded them?" I whispered.

"Only in the way you were all blinded—by fog. They look as though they're in daylight, but they're under the fog. You're seeing them by courtesy of our light amplifiers, just as we watched you feeling your way along the railroad. We saw you, and heard you, all the way. Perhaps you overlooked the fact that your telephone sent signals along the line ahead of it, as well as behind it. We'd tapped in, as signalers say, at this end of the line."

I hadn't overlooked it, but I'd thought the risk minimal. And now, because I'd underrated Drahk, I was a captive watching the dissolution of my own commando raid. There was Gerry Cross groping his way, with the dubious help of a hand lamp, along the shopfronts. He didn't know Hampstead, was quite lost and wandering away from us. Now and then he stopped to call out, as others did, but they were all losing contact in the dark. Some had formed small groups and were walking hand in hand. But I, who knew those streets, could see that they were unconsciously walking in large circles.

Still, it was a relief to see them alive and realize that somehow they had got out of that tunnel.

Willoughby suddenly piped up, all malice. "How do you feel now, Mr. Napoleon Magellan? We've been looking up the records concerning your favorite military genius. I'm afraid that, like him, you've come to the day of Waterloo."

"We admit you've fought well," said Drahk, "but you owe a lot to your ally, whom you call Prospero. Beside him you are pigmies. He's always been difficult. But time has conquered him for us. Uvova informs us, from the evidence, that he's dead. You can expect no more help from him. Uvova is never wrong."

"Uvova?" I repeated mechanically.

"Our name for the electronic computer which is the mastermind of our network of automation. It gives *all* the answers. For instance, we fed into it all the information we had concerning your battle tactics. It analyzed them and predicted your future moves before you consciously planned them yourself. Before you reached Harrow we knew you would attack from that direction. When we added the fog factor to the data, Uvova made exactly the decisions you would make. It told us you would follow the monorail here. So we prepared to receive you. You walked into our trap—that section of tunnel. We purposely let you and your friend here emerge. Then we sealed both ends of the tunnel, capturing your whole commando force."

"I see, and yet I don't see," said Pete. "You sealed our men in the tunnel. Yet now they're wandering loose."

There was a short silence.

Then Drahk said, "Uvova is never wrong when in possession of all the facts. It happened that one fact hadn't been fed into it. A water main passes over the tunnel. We made a connection fitted with valves which could be opened from this room. We meant to drown the elite of your army in the tunnel. That would have decided the war in our favor; Uvova guaranteed it. The fact that upset calculations, the one thing we didn't know, was the fact that Sarah Masters had become infatuated with Magellan here."

That penetrated my apathy like the stab of a sword. I stared at Drahk. His blank eyes remained as expressionless as holes.

He continued, "Mistakenly, she thought you, Magellan, were trapped in the tunnel with the others and about to be drowned. When the water poured in, she turned the switch to reopen the tunnel doors—then smashed it and ran from

the house. Your men escaped with no more than a soaking. But to no avail; we've drowned them again—in fog, this time."

"And Sarah?" I asked strainedly.

"She was no longer to be trusted. She had reverted to type. I went after her. She tried to take refuge in what was previously your house. I cornered her in the bedroom, and rayed her to death. A few moments after she died, I heard you two moving about on the lower floor. I stood behind the door of another room, and waited for you to come up."

It nearly broke my heart to realize that Sarah had been alive while I had been within yards of her. And that she hadn't known I was there, nor that I had fought this long battle to London as much to see her again as to defeat the Makkees.

To have missed her for ever—and by so little!

A few minutes earlier and I might have saved her.

And yet I had wasted no time. Fate itself seemed the ally of the conscienceless killers of this universe, like Drahk.

A cold and merciless hatred took possession of me. I resolved at that moment that, although it took the rest of my life, I should take vengeance on Drahk.

I started to go for him. He raised the ray-emitter, holding it at arm's length, taking deliberate aim at me. Its big, round, translucent eye stared coldly into mine. I felt no fear of it. I was icily in command of myself. I became still. Suicide was pointless. My moment of vengeance would come when it would come, and I felt certain of it.

Peter Butler had no second thoughts. He launched himself at that stiffly outstretched arm. Maybe he thought Drahk was about to ray me. Drahk merely dropped his arm. Pete lunged at nothing and fell. Drahk rayed him briefly where he lay, and immediately covered me again.

Willoughby and the other two Makkees watched this without the slightest reaction. It could have been a sort of game. I understood then how much Drahk was the head man. So long as he was around, no Makkee was expected to do anything except wait for orders.

Twisted with cramp, Pete cried aloud. He had faced this

agony on my behalf, this man I'd once called a defeatist.

Drahk motioned towards the single chair at the desk. "Sit there, Magellan. People leaping constantly at one's throat tend to disturb the flow of conversation."

I obeyed silently. Drahk said something to the two nameless Makkees. They went and returned with lengths of nylon cord. They bound my wrists to the chair's arms and my ankles to its legs. Then they hog-tied Pete.

Meantime, Drahk and Willoughby were whispering sibilantly by the control panel. They were dividing their attention between us and the TV screens. The changing patterns were obviously conveying sense to them. Whatever the messages, Drahk made no attempt to answer them. He went to the window, peered at the huge flying saucer still reposing on the wide lawn. His expression was as wooden as ever but I sensed he wasn't entirely happy.

I studied the screens. Gerry Cross had realized he was wandering down hill and therefore away from the crest where I'd told him the Makkees' house was. He had about-faced and was coming uphill on the road that passed this house.

Unknown to him, five of his men, hands linked, were slowly mounting the slope from another direction, which would bring them to the bottom of the garden behind the house. I wondered if they would let the fence there divert them. And if it didn't, and they came on, the Makkees would be waiting for them.

Rescue was a slight prospect. More hopeful to me, as I regarded Drahk, were the faint but detectable signs of his unease.

I suddenly said, "My men are considerably nearer than your reinforcements, aren't they?"

It was a shot in the dark which he ignored. But Willoughby shrilled, "Your men can do nothing, Magellan, even though there are only four of us left—"

"Be quiet!" snapped Drahk, rounding on him and making the mistake himself of speaking in English.

I smiled grimly. "So Prospero wiped out your vanguard."

Drahk came across to me, ray gun uplifted. I tried to

brace myself to take the rays. But he changed his mind and just stared at me. As I was sitting, his eyes were on a level with mine. The direct gaze was certainly hypnotic. I had to resist that, instead.

He said, "Prospero's missiles destroyed our ships, but you incited him to do that. It was to put down your rebellion that I withdrew our limited forces from other countries. If it flatters your ego, Magellan, you're primarily responsible for the chaos in our plans. But Earth isn't the only planet ripe for settlement. The fleet on its way here is twenty hours from a point where it can divert to another planetary system without loss of time. I could instruct it to do that, and get away from here within five minutes.

"But then I should have to admit to failure. My pride forbids it. Therefore, within twenty hours I shall end this rebellion. I can do this in either of two ways. I can wipe out you and your friends, who are the ringleaders, and the rebellion will collapse. Or I can spare you and your friends on condition that you cooperate with us. You can have seats on our Council—under myself, of course, but that will still leave you with far wider power in the world than you can hope to achieve without our help.

"And you like power over people, don't you, Magellan? Even the little power which posing as a medium gave you. You had no scruples about defrauding the same public before which you now pose as a liberator. You should have no scruples about joining us."

"And sharing the fate of Sarah Masters?" I said deliberately.

"We should have treated Sarah Masters well if she had stayed with us. But she betrayed us. She brought her fate upon herself. Remember that—as an example."

"I shall remember it, all right, Drahk. Now let's talk some sense. I defrauded my people, but in return gave them hope at best, entertainment at worst. You will give them death. So there's no comparison. So, far from joining you, I'm going to kill you if I get half a chance. So the only sensible thing for you to do is kill me first. Why don't you? Because you know that won't stop my people from coming after you. They

think rather a lot of me; they'll want vengeance. So you'd better do the next sensible thing—swallow your pride, reroute your fleet, get to hell out of here and stay away from Earth. If you ever return and I get hold of you, I'll show you no mercy."

"Good man," gasped Pete, white-faced but still true-blue Cambridge University all the way.

Drahk said, "True, your men think a lot of you, Magellan. So while we hold you as hostage, we can keep them in check—probably until my reinforcements arrive. I'm a Makkee. I don't give up very easily."

Neither do humans, once they're roused, I thought. My men understood me well enough to know that I counted my safety nothing weighed against the safety of the human race. But I made no comment. Let Drahk continue to fool himself while I gained time. Covertly, I'd been testing my bonds and knew now I could get free of them. I'd been bound to my chair many times under test conditions as a medium, and was no mean escapologist.

But it would take time. And there had to be a right moment.

Willoughby called Drahk's attention to one of the screens. The five men had reached the garden fence, deliberated, climbed over it. They were keeping to a beeline up the gradient of the great lawn. Cross had picked his men well.

Drahk said something quietly and Willoughby turned a large dial on the control panel. Drahk was looking toward the window. I followed his gaze and saw the black fog dropping away down the garden like a swiftly ebbing tide.

Drahk turned with an angry hiss, shoved Willoughby aside, and spun the dial in the opposite direction. The fog came flooding back higher than before, crept up to the base of the flying saucer, then stopped.

Willoughby had been dumb enough to turn the dial the wrong way.

Drahk had laid another few feet of fog over the heads of the men, which would delay them. But he was reaching the limit. If he raised the level much more, he would en-

gulf himself also. The light-amplifying screens, naturally, would be useless when their operator couldn't see them.

Gerry Cross came steadily up the road alone, the camera tracking him. Soon, his head broke the surface. He stopped, with a surprised and relieved expression on his fat face. He looked around, taking his bearings.

I'd described to him the appearance and layout of Moravia, the Makkees' HQ, in case he had to take over operations. The road surface was now a couple of feet under fog, but this row of houses stood just out of it.

Cross saw enough to satisfy him. He pulled back the safety catch of his rifle and began walking purposefully along the road towards us. He looked as though he were wading thigh-deep in black water. He was a good deal nearer than the men climbing the lawn in the darkness.

Drahk strode over to my desk, took needle-guns from a drawer and distributed them to the other three Makkees, fluting instructions. He retained his ray gun. He glanced briefly at the window. This was a completely air-conditioned house and the window wasn't made to be opened. It couldn't be fired through. Needles wouldn't penetrate clearplast, and neither, presumably, would the paralyzing rays in any effective strength.

He beckoned the two nameless Makkees and hurried from the room. Willoughby remained to guard us. Keeping an eye on him, I worked quietly on the nylon ropes every time he looked at the screens. I tried to watch the screens too. I saw the trio split up on the fog-covered drive. Drahk remained there. The other two went around the side of the house, to the back. Through the window I saw them take up positions behind the massive saucer. They trained their needle-guns on the spot where they expected the five men to surface in the garden.

Although my hands were nearly free, my ankles were still tied and time was running out. I was pretty anxious. I turned my head just in time to see Drahk throw himself down in the middle of the driveway. Like a Malayan river pirate, he lay submerged up to his mouth, waiting in ambush for his victim. He kept his ray gun concealed under

the fog. From this point he commanded the gateway and part of the road. Now I understood why he'd raised the fog level by that small amount.

And Gerry came plodding on along the road.

Pete Butler exclaimed uselessly, "For heaven's sake, Gerry, look out!"

Willoughby tittered.

I got my hands free. Willoughby's whole attention was absorbed by the screen. As Gerry approached, Drahk crouched lower. Only the top of his head was visible, motionless as a stone.

I worked desperately at my ankle bonds as Gerry reached the gateway of my own house, Hillcrest. To my surprise and relief he turned aside there and started walking up my driveway. I didn't know what he had in mind and hadn't time to think about it. The disappointed Willoughby showed signs of returning his attention to me.

I slipped my wrists back through the loops which I'd left on the chair arms. To the casual glance they appeared still to be tied, but I could withdraw them when I chose. My ankles still weren't quite free—another few seconds of work and they would be.

Willoughby swung round to look at me, and then again his attention was diverted. From the fog lake in the garden the head of the first of the five men had begun to emerge. The two Makkees waiting behind the saucer hadn't the sense to hold their fire. They both shot at the tiny target and missed. It ducked below the concealing blackness and on the screen I saw the little group backing down the slope in confusion.

Then, faintly, I heard a sound which made me start with the shock of recognition—a blare from the Klaxon horn of my aged Rolls. It was muffled by the house but outside, splitting the silence of the fog, the harsh note could be heard a mile away.

Automatically, the tracking camera had kept Cross in focus. There he was, sitting in the driving seat of my car just outside the garage. The note became intermittent. Gerry was

sending Morse. He'd memorized the code and taught it to many of his men. It had been useful in action.

Now it was useful again. He was telling his men, wandering and lost in the streets below, to follow the sound of the horn. On other screens I saw them beginning to do just that. Before long, a telling force would rally to him.

Willoughby began hissing. He didn't like the look of it. I'd freed my ankles now and was considering how to jump him. He was nine or ten feet away on the wrong side of the big desk. I'd have to go round the desk to get at him and he'd hear the first step I took on that hard marloneum floor.

I'd have to do something soon for Drahk might return at any moment. He still lay waiting, but he'd lifted his head, trying to see why his victim hadn't shown up. Also, he must be disturbed by the staccato hooting of the horn.

The only hope seemed to be to stage a fake collapse. Maybe Willoughby would come to investigate—close enough for me to grab his gun arm. But he was a wary, suspicious type. He'd assume right away that I was shamming. The odds were that he wouldn't venture within reaching distance of me.

I was about to groan and sag when Pete, who'd been watching me, whispered fiercely, "Freeze him. Under the desk."

Willoughby spun around and pointed his gun down at Pete. "Be silent!" he hissed. "Another word and it will be your last."

Pete wisely shut up, which was unsettling, because I hadn't grasped what he meant. Freeze Willoughby under the desk? I said it over to myself, and it remained pure nonsense.

The moment Willoughby looked away, I peeped under the desk. In this time-and-motion study age, household controls were fitted within arm's reach of one's most frequented spot. This being the only chair, they were fitted under the desk. The moment I saw the air-conditioning knob, I got Pete's idea.

The room was at the tropical temperature the Makkees required for comfort. The range of the conditioner was

wide; for high summer weather the room could be cooled almost to refrigeration. Circumspectly, I spun the knob back to that point. Then sat up and tried to look innocent.

The thermometer mercury dropped as though the bulb had sprung a leak. I began to shiver a bit but Willoughby was shaking like a wall in an earthquake. Makkees just can't take cold. He guessed what I'd done and pointed the gun my way.

His teeth were chattering. "M-Magellan, turn the heat on again. Or I swear I'll k-kill you."

"Steady, Willoughby, don't get so het up. Let's keep cool heads."

He aimed at my heart—roughly. "I shall give you f-five seconds." He began to count down. It was a mistake. In five seconds the room temperature plummetted another fifteen degrees and all but paralyzed him.

This was the moment. I cast off the loose bonds and scrambled madly sideways. His aim tried to follow me but his gun hand was shaking uncontrollably.

Zip! He fired. The needle missed me by more than a yard. Then I tackled him and brought him down. His head hit the stone-hard floor with a loud crack. He lay still and blood began to seep from his ear.

I went to free Pete. "Forget it now," he said urgently. "Look—Drahk's gone gunning for Gerry."

I glanced at the screens. Drahk had abandoned concealment and was heading along the road, ray gun in hand, towards my house. Unaware, Gerry was still sitting in my car, hooting away happily.

Whole bunches of our men, fog-blinded but making for the common rendezvous, were feeling their way up the slopes on all sides of us. Some of them were pretty close now, but one thing was certain—Drahk was going to reach the rendezvous first.

"Hell!" I went headlong for the door.

"Hold it!" Pete yelled. "Lift the fog. Turn that dial."

I skated back to the control panel. It seemed Pete had taken over my thinking for me. I remembered the dial and which way to turn it. I turned it hard, and the black fog

dropped away from the slopes of Hampstead as though it were being sucked into the ground.

Drahk was exposed, a small isolated figure on the road along the crest, nearly surrounded by the riflemen below. An ideal target, but there was one small chance. He realized it and took it. The men had been in darkness for so long that the sudden drench of sunlight temporarily blinded them. Drahk spun around, hurled his gun away, put his head down and came sprinting back like a champion.

His speed was surprising. All the same, the rifle bullets began to hum past him.

"We've got him now," I said to Pete triumphantly, and went hurrying down the long hall to the front door. It stood ajar, as Drahk had left it when he went out. I slipped behind it, and waited. There was a small panel of one-way glass in it for the scrutiny of visitors. Through it I could see the driveway and the front gate. I watched them, tense as an overwound clock. My hands kept closing and unclosing, ready to hook themselves around Drahk's skinny neck as he came back through this door for sanctuary in his HQ.

And then to squeeze, and squeeze . . .

I waited, and no running figure reached the gateway and the drive remained empty.

I was losing my touch. I'd miscalculated again somehow.

I rushed out into the driveway. So far as I could see along the road there was no sign of Drahk. Rifle fire began at the back of the house and as suddenly stopped.

Then I remembered the flying saucer parked there and the two Makkees guarding it. I cursed myself for a fool. Drahk had been heading for them. The driveway would have been an unnecessary detour; he'd climbed over the low fence fronting the road and cut diagonally across the garden.

I cursed myself again for not stopping to bring Willoughby's needle-gun. No time to go back for it. In a blind rage I ran out and around to the back of the house.

In the shadow of the saucer one Makkee lay spread-eagled on his back, shot through the face. Two live Makkees were just disappearing through a closing aperture high up on the saucer. One of them was Drahk.

I shouted stupidly, uselessly, as the aperture shut tight.

The saucer rose slowly, hovered hugely over the house. It seemed to be spinning but that was an illusion. It reflected sunlight into my eyes, dazzlingly.

Then Drahk's voice came, strong and shrill through a loudhailer: "This is only a passing defeat, Magellan. You've won a skirmish, not a war. I shall come back for you—and I shall win the war."

The saucer flew up and veered away over London. Without interest I noted that the city lay clear and sharp in the sunlight. The disc shrank in the sky, became as small as the distant dome of St. Paul's, dwindled further and became a shining point that vanished far to the south.

I don't know how long I stood there, stranded by the anticlimax, emptied by disappointment. The immediate pressure of action and excitement had anesthetized temporarily the pain that lay deep down.

Presently Gerry Cross was there, and Pete Butler, rubbing the red rope marks on his wrists. Our men were appearing everywhere.

"Well, that's that, Charles," said Gerry.

"Willoughby's dead," said Pete. "His skull was very thin."

"Drahk got away," I said dully.

"And he won't be back in a hurry after that reception, I'm thinking," said Gerry.

"He'll be back," I said. And inside, a voice cried, "But *she* can never come back!"

The voice was right. Yet also, in a way, wrong.

Pete said, "Look at that black dust over everything."

I looked listlessly at the garden. On the lawn I recognized, now among their friends, the five men who'd attacked from that direction. One of them was a good shot, anyhow. There was a thin scattering of what looked like soot all over the lawn and the slopes beyond as far as one could see. Later I saw it lying thicker in central London. It was all that remained of the black fog when the power which had sustained it was withdrawn.

It was as though the whole city were in mourning.

"Pete," I said, "I can't go back there."

He knew what and where I meant. "I'll take care of it," he said quietly. "Look, Charles, get away from here. You need to rest up for a bit. You're welcome to my apartment in the Albany. It's central but quiet. Gerry will run you down there in your car."

"Yes, of course," said Gerry sympathetically.

"Thanks," I said. "Thanks a lot."

Later in the day, Pete came down to the apartment. Gerry was still with me and we were on the second bottle of whisky. The pain had been anesthetized again but remained a dull ache.

Pete said, "Think I could use a drink, too."

I poured him a stiff one. After all, it was his whiskey.

"Thanks. Well, we made a capture—got a prisoner."

We stared at him, a little blearily.

"Thought there weren't any Makkees left," Gerry said.

"We found this one in the basement of their HQ. He practically filled it. His name is Uvova. A robot. The biggest damn electronic brain you ever saw. When we find out how to handle him, he could be a useful ally. I'd like to take charge of him, Charles."

"The job's yours, son,"

"Thanks, Chief. Oh, by the way, I came across these on the bedside table up there. They seem to be personal. Thought I'd better not leave 'em lying around."

He laid three notebooks, bound in red leather, on the wide chair arm beside me, very carefully avoiding my eyes and reaching for his drink again.

I nodded. They were my journals. I hoped he hadn't examined them too closely. But then, he was a gentleman, and gentlemen don't pry.

The three of us talked for a while, about Uvova, about Britain liberated, about other countries, about the Makkees, and about our next moves.

But never about Sarah Masters.

At length I went to bed. I was tired but couldn't sleep, and lay there with my mind racing. Presently I turned on the light and looked for something to read. There was

nothing but my own journals. Distastefully, I began flicking the leaves over. The confessions of a cheap trickster, a case of mild paranoia, poet *manqué,* shallow thinker, and lonely man. A complete giveaway of myself.

And then I began to sweat. The margins were full of comments in a feminine hand—it could only be Sarah's. The earliest were brief, detached, witty, occasionally cruel. Gradually, they lengthened. While still humorous, they had less sting. Later, some argued my points quite seriously. And steadily they became more sympathetic and understanding.

And, in the third volume, affectionate.

On one page I read, and reread, "Charlie Magellan, you're a dear old fool, and I think I love you."

Queer, lonely, self-isolated soul, she'd got to know me through these brash and rash journals.

On the last page she'd written, "It's 2 A.M. and I'm just going to put out the light and lay and think of you—and if I'm lucky, dream of you—fighting your way back to London. Every morning I wake up and hope the night's battle has brought you nearer. We've got such a lot in common, Charlie boy, we'll talk for a week nonstop when you get here. And I know you're going to get here, because I know you now. You always get what you want, by fair means or foul. I'm hoping you'll want me, for I want you. Good night, darling."

Soberly, I turned off the light and stared into the darkness. Good night, darling. I always get what I want. That's good for a laugh—so why aren't I laughing? I feel like crying into my pillow like a kid.

"Drahk," I said aloud to the night, "I'm coming after you, wherever you've gone. And Sarah says I always get what I want. Do you remember Sarah? I'm going to make sure you remember Sarah."

PART FOUR

Chapter 9

IN THE morning I awakened with no clear idea of where I was, but a perfectly clear idea of what I had to do. My subconscious dreams, building on memory, had taken care of it. Again I'd lived through Captain Madden's story of Prospero and Moble Island, and my imagination had taken it from there.

There was immediate and necessary work to do in London. A lot had to be laid on the line. But when duty was served, my emotional needs would get the attention they cried out for. I would set off on the trail of vengeance, knowing it would be a long one, knowing that the rest of my life must be dedicated to it, if need be. Or else my life would be a story abandoned in the middle, and so a failure.

For a week I worked like fury night and day. That, too, was a kind of anaesthetic.

In default of an elected ruling body, we flung together a caretaker government. I was appointed Director, and spent half of each day at the visaphone communicating with other new-fledged governments. First, we worked to restore some order to the world, and having achieved a measure of it, agreed on a policy of calculated disorder.

The idea was to make Earth permanently unattractive to Makkees. They were gristle-tough and pitiless of soul but soft physically. The comforts of automation were as necessary to their way of life as electricity on tap had become to our world.

So a worldwide plan of taking apart the web of Goliath was put in hand. Decentralization was the aim. Standardization had all but caused our downfall. Henceforth it was out.

Everything was to become local and self-contained, a cellular society. Each cell had to create its own source of

power. Systems had to be various, so that no nationwide hookup could be easy again. We had to learn to live without central heating. That deprivation alone would make Earth a kind of hell for Makkees.

At first, anyhow, it wasn't going to be all that pleasant for us. But man was still young enough to be adaptable. The Makkees were an ancient race, set in their pampered ways, like very old people who'd been spoiled all their lives. They couldn't take it. All Makkees weren't as resilient as Drahk; he was an exception, which was why he'd won high rank.

I didn't wait around for him to come back. As soon as the new world disorder had begun its planned course, I delegated a lot of authority and set out for Cornwall. The journey was a foretaste of things to come, for our demolition squads had already been over this ground in the wake of the long battle to London.

I started out with Gerry in the old Rolls. We left Pete in London, absorbed in the mysteries of Uvova. It came as a surprise to me to learn of Pete's interest in electronics. I'd thought all artists were too vague for the exact sciences. But, years before, a critic surveying Pete's abstract designs, said, "Wave motions—nothing but wave motions. You should have been a goddam physicist."

And Pete told me "You know, he was right. That's my kind of mind. That stuff comes easy to me. But because painting was more difficult, I thought it was more important. Perhaps it is. But after this I stick to what I can do."

A tire blew on Salisbury Plain. The car swerved into a signpost. The world-famous shape of its radiator became totally unrecognizable. It would take a week to repair, if the job were possible these days.

I bit my lip (I'd already bitten my tongue) and said to Gerry, "We'll have to walk to the nearest monorail station."

He answered mufflledly through the bloody handkerchief over his nose, "Five miles, at a guess."

Between that station and Merthavin we had to change trains six times. That was the way it was going to be now.

We came to Merthavin around midday. The sunlight was glancing off the windows of the fishermen's cottages which

stared out at the Atlantic—and at the tiny point jutting from the rollers four miles out—Moble Island.

We lunched at the Piskie House, now reverted to the tavern pretty much as Madden and Brewster had known it. I thought of them constantly, and made inquiries about Pam and Arthur Coney. I had hoped to meet them, but they had never returned to Merthavin. Someone said they'd settled in Bath.

In the afternoon we hired a motor launch and cruised out to the island. As we neared the beach we saw Prospero's weirdly mobile chair standing seat-deep in the surf. I grounded the launch alongside it. We both heaved at the chair, but the wet sand kept its grip on the sunken base. The chair was sun-blistered and otherwise weathered and obviously had been in the open for some time.

"He can't get around without that chair, Gerry," I said.

"According to Uvova, he can't get around anyhow, old man. He's dead."

"Probably. But where's the body?"

"Washed away, by the looks of it."

I said, pointing, "From Madden's description, his den should be just over there."

I led the way, and was proven right. A large mossy rock was gaping open like a split bun. We'd brought torches, and needed them, for the power in there had been switched off. Prospero's cell,, with its mass of electronic apparatus, was as Madden had described it. On a desk we found a message on a long sheet of paper. It was in poorly formed block letters; possibly Prospero was unfamiliar with handwritten English.

It seemed to be addressed to the human race at large.

I think now you will drive the Makkees from your planet. I underestimated you.

Where I could, I helped your fight against the Makkees. I destroyed a hundred miles from this shore the big fleet of their ships flying here from North and South America. (This was the first we'd heard about that.)

But the Makkees will always remain your enemies. If they decide to attack again, they will come in force. You have

fighting spirit but your science is too primitive; it cannot save you.

I shan't be here to help you, for my heart stopped beating an hour ago. In your physiological terms, I am dead. And in truth I am. My consciousness is almost dispersed. But it has been in existence for a long time—a whole epoch, by your standards—and the sheer inertia and habit of thought temporarily survives the ceasing of the bloodstream. I am thinking in my nerves and can still command their function.

But this residual mind-power is steadily weakening. Soon I shall become mentally a child again, then a mere babe. Then will follow the falling apart of the last neural patterns, until Prospero will be nothing but a billion random motions among, and indistinguishable from, countless other random motions.

But something of my mind will remain here tangibly—the machines I have created. I bequeath them to you. Master the principles behind them—particularly the spaceship—and the Makkees can never conquer you. Perhaps my judgment is affected by my condition, but I do not dismiss the possibility that before the history of your still young race is closed, you may even conquer the Makkees.

As a measure of aid, I began writing for you a manual covering the operation and navigation of the spaceship. But it is a complex matter and impossible to render simply. Death is taking me before that work is half completed. You must use your brains to finish it; mine is no longer capable.

My last movements will be those of a child swimming in the sea he had loved as a babe. I was born in water and wish to end the way I began.

There was no expression of farewell, no signature. The last three paragraphs were almost illegible. The badly shaped letters zigzagged across the paper.

I imagined Prospero then gliding from his hideout for the last time, down to his beloved sea—and final dissolution.

I left Gerry still deciphering the document by torchlight while I explored further. Beyond the cell was a tunnel leading into a great cavern. And there was the spaceship.

So far as I recalled, even Madden and Brewster had not been permitted to see it. Old Cornelius had seen it long ago

as a ball of white fire at some stage of its matter-energy transition. But almost certainly I was the first human being to see it at rest,

It was unimpressive. Just an iron-hued sphere, looking as dull and solid as a cannon ball. I'm told that the atom bombs of old looked dull and solid.

I walked around to the other side of it and saw that it was far from solid. There was a sizeable open door and a ramp to it. The shell was incredibly thin; the thing was little more than a rigid bubble. Prospero had used it as a one-man ship, but he was a giant. There was room for half-a-dozen small men like myself.

I flashed my torch over the strange controls. This is it, I thought. This is what I came here to find. This, if its secrets could be learned, could be my instrument to track down Drahk wherever in the wide universe he might be.

Hate and distress returned. I became emotional and melodramatic.

I said in a fierce whisper, "I take possession of this ship and name it the *Revenge.*"

Detachedly now, I see the subconscious links of association. The *Revenge* was Sir Francis Drake's little ship, in which he set out against the huge invading Armada. Drake was the first Englishman to sail through the Strait of Magellan. Drake and Drahk . . .

But at the time I was conscious only of my consuming ache for revenge. And it seemed to me then it was in sight.

A whole decade later I stood in that same spot and still the *Revenge* hadn't sailed. It hadn't budged an inch.

I'd learned that scientific research is geared to a somewhat slower pace than melodrama. Pete Butler provided the right perspective. After endless irritating delays, I contacted him from Merthavin via a dozen buzzing visaphone exchanges—the picture was dim and flickering—and told him to forget Uvova for a while and come down and sort out the spaceship. I described it to him and read out bits from Prospero's manual, which were meaningless to me.

He arrived at Merthavin eventually with a whole gaggle

of scientists, theoretical and practical, headed by Gilbert Nunn, the best all-rounder in the country—atomic physicist, mathematician, cybernetician, engineer, and coward. They spent three days going over things, and then Pete came to me with their report.

"Right," I said, "when do we take off?"

"In anything from five to ten years. Maybe more."

"You're not serious?"

"Look, Charles, half the instructions are missing, and it's not a kid's toy. It's a damn sight more complicated than Uvova, but the real difference is that we know the laws by which Uvova works but hardly anything of the laws governing this thing. We've got to probe a new realm of physics before we can write the other half of the book."

I felt like a racing car at full pelt suddenly taken out of gear. There was a sickening sense of anticlimax.

Pete flicked over the pages of the report.

"I'm only an amateur scientist, so I can interpret this only amateurishly . . ."

I tried to attend to what he was saying. It seemed that it had long been known (but not by me) that electrons, tiny knots of energy, sometimes jumped from one orbit to another without taking any measurable time over the trip. It was as though an electron unknotted itself and the energy seeped across some timeless dimension and reformed itself in the same electron pattern in practically the same instant in quite another orbit.

Somehow, Prospero's ship and all its contents could be transformed into pure energy, flow across the timeless dimension and reform itself at some different point in the space-time continuum. Any point, in fact. Distance was irrelevant in this dimension, and time, of course, nonexistent.

Prospero had claimed his science superior to that of the Makkees. The claim appeared genuine.

When Pete finished, I said, "I'm correct in assuming you need only pick the point in space you wish to reach, pre-set the navigation controls accordingly, push a button and you're there—literally in no time?"

"In effect, yes. But—"

"Then why the hell didn't Prospero go home to die? He said he'd come here to die because there wasn't time to return home. Yet you say his ship could have shot him home in no time."

"I didn't say that, Charles. But it could if he had been able to pinpoint the position of his home planet in the flux of the whole expanding cosmos. You've got to set *some* figures on the navigation dials, you've got to have some idea of distance and direction. In stellar distances a small error in direction could land you millions or even billions of miles wide of the target. You could become hopelessly lost. Like crossing a river by hopping moving ice floes, you've got to do it in short stages, stopping to calculate each hop. Prospero was 95,000 light-years from home. He'd come by a devious, wandering route. To return, he'd have needed to plot his course stage by stage, stopping every so many light-years to take fresh bearings. The Galaxy contains over a hundred thousand million stars. He would have had to stop hundreds of times. He was right; there wasn't time."

I was silent, accepting the fact I'd known from the first and hadn't wanted to face. My chance of locating Drahk was infinitesimal.

Then I said, "Nunn's the best, isn't he?"

"The best."

"Then I want you to stand over him with a whip until he can hand me a working manual of the ship that even I can understand. Press Button A, count to five, press Button B—that sort of thing."

"Okay, Charles. Uvova is going to be an immense help, but even so . . . five, ten, fifteen years, maybe."

"I'll wait," I said, grimly.

As I said, it took ten years. I filled them as far as I could with my own kind of work, helping to organize the cellular society.

Even in a decade, these cells fostered the seeds of new cultures. Necessity had forced on us a way of life promising infinite variety. In his own cell a man felt, and could be, significant. Formerly, he was faceless, nameless in the world's multitude.

Communication between cells was always possible, but you had to make an effort; the only barrier was your own laziness. Travel could be healthy exercise, an aid to *mens sana in corpore sano*. In our small country, people rediscovered that they had feet, for walking or pedalling. In larger countries, there was more public transport, but it was still limited and disjointed.

Patience plus effort was the price to be paid for immunity from a Makkee take-over.

Patience, however, was never one of my virtues. As the years passed, I began to feel almost as much out of my element in this pattern of orderly disorder as any Makkee would be—though for different reasons.

In a world of live and let live, I had no opposition, no one to fight. And I was spoiling for a fight. I didn't even have a woman to tangle with. No one could take Sarah's place in my heart.

Every dawn I would find myself hoping this would be the day Drahk came for me, and that overriding issue would be settled one way or another. But the Makkee time scale was not mine. Tomorrow to Drahk could mean half a hundred years hence. I could die of old age before he came.

I spent more and more time on Moble Island. Had I a scientific mind, it could have been exciting. The research was mostly theoretical, and what was practical was largely dull; the calibration of dials and the instrumental checking of circuits. Nothing visually stimulating.

All the same, constant progress was being made.

Pete Butler had to commute between Cornwall and Hampstead, collecting data and taking it to feed to Uvova. I made an exception in his case and let him have a fast helicopter. At times when new data was in short supply, Pete continued his own research into the multiform purposes of Uvova. I remember his delight at the discovery that it could be used as a translating machine. This aspect was to prove more useful to my purpose than either of us could have foreseen.

One day in the tenth year, Gerry and I were sitting on the beach lethargically throwing stones into the sea when Pete

came looking for us. He was trying not to hurry and betray his excitement.

"We've just got the last answer, Charles."

I felt myself coming alive. "You mean you know what makes the spaceship tick?"

"Yes. The answers are as simple as BCA."

"Don't you mean ABC, old chap?" asked Gerry.

"No. They'll be as simple as ABC when we learn the correct sequence."

"Which you haven't as yet?" My hope began to dim.

"Not yet, Charles, but we shall. It's this way. Suppose we were unfamiliar with cars and were trying to discover how to drive your old Rolls. We've learned that the combustion of gasoline in a closed chamber is the driving force. What we're chasing now is the Otto Cycle, the sequence of control. Once we've got that, the transmission system and the use of gears, throttle, clutch, brakes, requires only straightforward deduction, aided by Prospero's handbook—what there is of it.

"The next step is to try to feed Uvova the questions in the right order. When we succeed, we'll get the answers in the correct sequence. ABCDEF instead of BCAFDE. That shouldn't take long. All the real donkey work is over, thanks to old Nunn. I'm flying him to London this afternoon. Together we'll keep feeding Uvova until the thing's so sick it'll throw up your manual, Charles."

"Fine," I said.

"You'll never persuade Nunn to step into your 'copter, Pete," said Gerry. "He's scared green of heights. Also depths, widths, and lengths."

"When the true scientific mind is hot on the track, it knows not fear," Pete smiled.

"You know not Nunn," said Gerry drily.

Soon after Pete had gone, Nunn—a small, old man who always seemed to be trying to look smaller and older than he really was—shuffled across the sand to us.

"Mr. Magellan, I'm afraid I don't feel very well. My stomach has been giving me trouble for some time now—"

"You don't have to tell me," I said sympathetically. "I've been watching the way you covered up so that you could

finish your work. Believe me, I'm grateful. So I'm going to rush you to the best stomach specialist in London, Bob Norris. He's a personal friend of mine. I'll have him meet the helicopter—Butler will fly you up, of course—so's there's no delay. I don't want to disturb you, but it may very well be appendicitis verging on the acute—"

"Oh, no, I don't think it's that bad, Mr. Magellan."

"Maybe not, but we can't afford to take chances at your age, Nunn," I said cheerfully. "Be ready to leave at two o'clock. Take a toothbrush. Don't worry—Bob Norris will whip out the appendix, or whatever, before you even know he's slit you open."

"Oh, dear," said Nunn miserably. He wavered, then shuffled off, shrunken and very, very old.

"You're a damn sadist, Charles."

"And a damn liar, Gerry. Oh, well, we don't get much fun these days."

Nunn had to fly with Pete, of course, and a long week later I got a visaphone call.

"We've done it, we've got the sequence," said Pete's triumphant but blurry image. "Give us another couple of days to dope out the manual, and then—"

I didn't hear the rest, for Gerry shouted through the hut's open doorway, "Charles—there's a flying saucer coming our way."

I rushed out into the sunshine. The sea was near blue as the sky, and the one silver dot on the all-blue background caught the eye immediately. It was traveling high and fast, coming in from over the Atlantic.

"A saucer—are you sure?"

"It's a Makkee-type saucer, no doubt of it," said Gerry.

His eyes were far keener than mine, and I trusted them.

"Drahk," I said, and though I'd wanted this moment, the thrill which went through my nerves was chilling.

"Hell, we haven't even a pistol on the Island," said Gerry. "He's caught us with our pants down."

We watched the silent oncoming saucer.

Suddenly, I said, "It's altering course slightly. *Away* from us. It'll pass over well to the north."

"Could be a feint, old man, so watch it."

We did, until it was heading away from us over the mainland, up the long foot of England.

"He thinks I'm in London," I said, and ran back into the hut. Pete was still hanging on.

"What the devil's going on down there, Charles?"

I told him quickly, and added, "Get the radar men onto him. Report tracking to me."

We had preserved a modest radar net around London against the threat of Drahk's return.

"Wilco," said Pete, and was gone.

"Actually," said Gerry, "on second thought, it's just as well we're here. The power's on and we can raise Prospero's force-screen against him. But surely he hasn't come alone. I guess that's just a lone scout cruising ahead of a whole fleet. Probably not even manned, just telemetering information back."

"We'll just have to wait and see."

We didn't have long to wait. Pete came on again, breathlessly. "The saucer's crashed—in Windsor Great Park. It's a wreck. Picked the biggest tree in the park to smash into. I've got some chaps investigating. Be back anon."

Gerry and I looked at each other.

"That," I said, "doesn't sound like Drahk."

"It was a Makkee saucer—I'll swear to it."

"Let's wait for the next report before we start guessing."

At last Pete came back. "Almost certainly a Makkee saucer. Only one occupant. They've got him out alive and they're bringing him to me. A white man, they said, but very odd and clearly from another planet. He's a bit bruised and shaken, that's all. What do you make of it?"

"Offhand—nothing," I said.

"Oh, I nearly forgot—he's asking for you by name. But he can't speak English. I'll be back."

Pete was off again.

I said, "I don't know whether Pete's deliberately trying to confuse me, but one thing's for sure—I feel confused."

"Curiouser and curiouser," said Gerry, and proferred me a cigarette. "Bite hard on this meantime."

Chapter 10

THE WAIT was so long this time I feared the uncertain communications had broken down. When the screen did become live, it framed two faces. One was Pete's. The other was so distorted that momentarily I thought there was interference on the line.

It was like a wax face beginning to melt and run. Every feature drooped, particularly the tapir-like nose. There was gray fur over the skull which I assumed to be a cap, and then found it wasn't. The brows were just hairless ridges. The eyes were red as a stoplight: one was encircled by a black bruise. The rest of the face was flour-white.

The being spoke a single word: a long one, full of clicks.

"His name," Pete informed us. "But we call him George."

"Magellanic," said George.

"Your name," said Pete.

"But is it?" I said dubiously. "It could refer to the Magellanic Cloud—a nebula. Maybe he comes from those parts."

"No, Charles, the sound originates from his glottis. The 'ic' suffix crops up in his language all the time. Don't let it mislead you—he's sober. But not, I think, overbright. He's a bit of a nut."

"Got any idea why he's come—or from where?"

"No. As I said, he doesn't understand English. He keeps pointing to the sky and repeating your name. Maybe he's trying to warn us that the Makkees are coming back."

"But how the devil did he get hold of my name?"

Pete shrugged. "Looks as though he must have had some contact with the Makkees."

"In which case," I said, "it's imperative we understand what he's saying."

"Magellanic," George said urgently, fixing me with his bright ruby eyes. An enormous hand, which seemed to have too many fingers, passed blurrily across the screen.

"He's pointing heavenward again," said Pete absently, and then, suddenly, "Let me have him for a few days,

Charles. I guarantee to learn enough of his lingo to understand him. It can be done through Uvova."

"But what about the manual?"

"Oh, Nunn can handle that. I'll still be able to give him some help."

"All right, but hurry it up. I'm tired of kicking my heels here."

"Mag—" began George, but Pete switched him off halfway.

"George seems to be a man of few words," Gerry commented. "It shouldn't take Pete long to learn 'em all."

It didn't, in fact, but time being relative the next few days spent in killing it were interminable to me. Gerry and I nearly wore out a deck of cards. And in the aggregate I spent hours gazing at the shineless hull of the *Revenge*, wishing childishly that it could carry me through time as well as space . . . back to her.

Irrationally, I'd come to regard time as an enemy. Had it been on my side, I could have saved Sarah. That small piece of it which had interposed itself between us had separated us eternally.

I craved to lose myself in action of a kind which might lead me to pick up Drahk's trail.

Then one day Pete visaphoned and sent me half crazy with hope.

He said, "I've got most of the story from George. It's quite a story, so I'm flying him down to you right away. The manual's finished. I'll bring that along, too. George knows where Drahk is, Charles, and he's on our side against him and the Makkees. If we can only get the ship to operate, he'll guide us to Drahk."

For a moment I just couldn't speak.

Then I said, gruffly, "I'll be waiting."

The helicopter was carrying a full load when it came—Pete, Nunn, and George. Nunn was out first, looking green. He handed me a thick little notebook and went at a tottering run to the lavatory block. Flying, or the fear of it, always made him literally sick.

Then Pete emerged and attempted to give George a

helping hand on the short ladder. George disdained it and jumped. When he landed his long legs bent almost in semi-circles to absorb the shock. He looked momentarily like a pair of callipers. His arms and legs were jointless, flexible as lengths of rubber hose. He was comic-grotesque. His white face, black eye, and furry head gave me the impression of a panda bear. The only prosaic thing about him was the black one-piece suit.

His walk, as he approached me, was an indescribable bouncy sway.

He seized my reluctant hand, wrapping seven or eight tentacle-like fingers around it. They were ice cold and I tried not to shudder. His red eyes burned into mine.

"Magellanic, gladic to meetic you."

His voice was thick, slurry, but apart from the involuntary additions, the pronunciation was good.

"You speak English now?" I asked.

"Yes, most goodic."

"Where is Drahk?"

George pushed a long finger at the sky, near to the zenith. "Vathic."

Pete supplied, "That's George's home planet, in the system around Alpha Centauri and Proxima. It seems when the Makkee fleet bound for Earth learnt from Drahk that we were up in arms against them, they turned aside and landed on Vathic instead. So we're partly responsible for George's people being engulfed by the Makkees. George himself escaped, being a man of unusual spirit."

"My whiskey is goodic," George remarked.

I raised an eyebrow at Pete.

"Whiskey—spirit," he said. "Afraid you'll have to get used to that sort of thing. It was a rush job. We went through the usual performance of pointing at things for nouns, acting out verbs, saying the appropriate words. Then I recorded Vathic words and their English equivalents on tape, and fed 'em into Uvova. When I spoke basic English into a mike, Uvova would search out the relevant sections of tape and play them through a speaker. So we were

able to hold conversations through Uvova—and incidentally memorize quite a few words."

"That was smart," said Gerry. "But George seems to have memorized the wrong ones."

"Not his fault," said Pete. "An electronic brain can't distinguish between, say, 'mine,' possessive, or 'mine,' explosive, or 'mine,' subterranean. A word like 'shy' might be translated as 'throw' instead of 'bashful,' or 'palm' as 'hand' instead of 'tree.' And so on."

"I see," I said. "Well, it makes for laughs. But perhaps we'd better hear George's story over a glass of spirit."

We settled in my hut and I got out the bottle.

"I'll tell it," said Pete. "George's English might confuse you."

He half emptied his glass, and began. He said the planet Vathic didn't rotate on its axis. Therefore, one face of it was turned perpetually sunward and the other was always in shadow. George sometimes described the sides as "the light and the dark," sometimes as "the light and the heavy" —another example of semantic confusion.

This planetary division had bred two distinct races—the sun-dwellers, the Nams; and the people of the shadows, the Danics. George was a Danic, as his white skin, denied sunlight, testified. The Nams were golden-brown people, taller and more rigid of frame.

The twilight frontier was accepted as a social as well as natural division. If a Nam crossed it into Danic territory, he was killed. And *vice versa*. Peace had been maintained for centuries by observing strictly the rule that the frontier was inviolable.

George, sitting shapeless on a couch, said, "It is bestic that way. If we do not crossic the splitting line one on his each, then we do not crossic it all on our many."

I looked at Pete. "Interpreter!"

"If we don't cross the frontier one by one, then we shan't cross it in masses—or armies. Isolationism plus, but it has its points. Or had—until the Makkees came. They occupied the Nams' sunlit side, subduing the Nams by mass-hypnosis, their usual technique. The Nams are scientifically well ad-

vanced—more so than the handicapped Danics—and their world is warm, comfortable, and automatic. Just what the Makkees want—the cold, dark, only partly automatic Danic half is useless to them."

"Half a world is better than no planet," I said. "But aren't they going to find it crowded, with the Nams and all?"

"On that same point," said Pete, "Drahk regained the prestige he'd lost through his defeat by us—apparently he was in the doghouse for some time. He came up with the idea of deporting all Nams to the Danic area. Each race is already more or less conditioned to kill members of the other on sight. The Nams will have this *idée fixe* strengthened by hypnotic suggestion. The Danics will have to fight back in self-defense. So both the redundant races will exterminate themselves in a killing-ground which the Makkees have no use for anyhow. That's Drahk's neat solution."

Gerry asked shrewdly, "How did George get to know all this? I can't see the Makkees taking him into their confidence."

"It was this way," said Pete. "Recently, the Danics had put a satellite in orbit around Vathic, a huge mirror with living quarters attached for maintenance. Orbital time—twenty hours, so for ten hours out of twenty, Danic-land had an artificial moon. It supplied only a weak general light, but it helped."

"For us, it is lottic moonshine," George observed earnestly.

"He means it's very bright moonlight, to Danic eyes, though it would seem feeble to ours. George was a technician in this satellite. Drahk attacked it by flying saucer, captured it, and took over. He was still in the doghouse at the time, and had been given the job no other Makkee wanted—to investigate conditions on the cold, dark side of Vathic. He side-stepped the assignment to some extent by pumping George for information. And made George guide him in the saucer to some of the more important centers.

"When Drahk returned to Nam-land to make his report, he took George along. The Makkees spoke poor Vathicanese; George had picked up a smattering of Makkee and was useful as an interpreter. Drahk hadn't yet conceived his face-saving idea, and was still a social outcast. He had no one

to confide in but George, and sometimes he let his tongue run on—about Earth, and how he was now in trouble because his plans had been thwarted by an Earth leader named Magellan.

"But when he had his big idea, and was reinstated as a Makkee leader, he ran at the mouth once too often. He boasted to George about how he'd regained his rank. And why. Until then, George hadn't realized how ruthless the Makkees could be. This planned genocide horrified him.

"In indulgent moments, Drahk had given him lessons in handling the flying saucer, perhaps with the idea of keeping George on as a reserve pilot. George was a good technician and his space station job had taught him a lot about astronomy. One day, alone in the pilot's cabin, he came across charts marked with the course to Earth from Alpha Centauri. Also maps of Earth, including one of England with London ringed—London, where lived the Earth leader, Magellan.

"He decided to escape to Earth and summon the mighty Magellan to come and crush the Makkees again—and perhaps save the Danics from total extinction. He prepared a cache of food, watched for an opportunity. It came, he took it. The saucer's top speed was near to that of light. The trip took four and a half years, though it didn't seem nearly so long to him because of the relativity effect. Rather typically of George, it ended in anticlimax; he misjudged the saucer's height and hit a tree. End of saucer. Might have been the end of George, too, if he'd possessed any bones to break. He got away with a black eye."

"An honorable wound," I said and nerved myself to reach out and grasp George's chilly, flabby hand. "Yes, I'll come back to Vathic with you, George. I will punish Drahk, I promise. Later, all the Makkees. But I cannot take an army to Vathic yet, because I have only one ship."

"Killic Drahk," said George.

I nodded. "I'm glad we feel the same way about it."

I took the little notebook manual from my pocket and studied it.

Presently I said, "This seems straightforward enough. I

see no reason why we shouldn't start for Vathic today. Why, with luck we could even be back today, too. The round trip is nine years by saucer—but no time at all by the *Revenge*."

Pete frowned. "Isn't that rather like going off the thirty-foot board before you've learned to swim?"

"Yes," I said. "That's exactly how I learned to swim."

"Oh." Pete was taken aback. Then he said hesitantly, "I was thinking maybe we should make a trial run to the moon or, say, Venus. The margin for error widens with the distance."

"I can't see that footling little trips within the solar system can be anything but a waste of time," I said. "When it comes right down to it, the Alpha Centauri voyage will still remain one big leap of faith. We might as well make it to begin with."

Pete shrugged. Gerry asked, "How do we know the atmosphere on Vathic is breathable?"

"It can't be all that different from Earth," I said, "or else George here would be in trouble. If he can stand the change of atmosphere, so can we." I added irritably, "Look, I only want to see Drahk for a few minutes. That'll be enough."

"I can understand your impatience, Charles," said Pete, "but this spur of the moment stuff—things are liable to get overlooked. How about arms, for instance? Do you really think you'll get a chance to get near enough to Drahk to grab him with your bare hands?"

I'd forgotten there wasn't a gun on the island. I chewed my thumbnail undecidedly.

"All right," said Pete with a sigh, "I might as well tell you it occurred to me to bring a few needle-guns back from town. They're in the 'copter. I'll—"

"Drahk live alone in house," George broke in. "Easy to gettic him. I take you."

"Oh, ye of little faith," I said. "You see—it's a cinch. Drahk alone in the house, not expecting any trouble. We

materialize from nowhere. Four of us, armed, against one sitting duck. Why it's downright unsporting of us."

Gerry grinned. "Okay, let's have a bash at it."

Pete smiled wryly. "Charles Magellan, you'd talk a corpse into buying a life insurance policy. And yet, after over four years, will Drahk still be living in the same house? All right, all right, I'll say it for you—the only way to find out is to go and see."

Pinning Nunn down to the job of working out the calibrations for dial-setting for the maiden voyage was like trying to seize hold of a globe of water in a state of free fall. He trusted his own paper work. When the step from theory to practice had to be made, he became a lump of gelatine quivering with self-doubt. One thing, however, he had no doubt about; when I pressed the start button, he didn't want to be within range of a possible atomic explosion.

He said, "I'll have to check the astronomical calculations with the observatory. I can take the night train—"

"You can check with them by visaphone," I told him.

His gaze strayed to a seagull swooping past the window. Perhaps he was envying it its wings.

"The British Astronomical Association ought to be consulted—"

"I can raise them too."

He gave in. And yet he got away with it. I spent a long afternoon studying the manual and the controls. Then I came out of the cave for a breather. The sun was becoming misty pink over the Atlantic, and Pete was approaching with the final figures.

"Okay, I've double checked them all," he said. "It won't take me long to put 'em on the dials."

"But I thought Nunn—"

"He's left for the mainland. His son has been taken ill in Bristol."

"I didn't know he was married."

"Neither did anyone else," said Pete with a chuckle.

"Least of all, his wife," I said over my shoulder as I went to round up Gerry and George. Pete was at work

inside the ship when I returned with them. The ship was lit within, and looked cozy in the big, bare cavern.

Gerry glanced up at the rock ceiling and said, "Twenty-five million million miles—phooey! Nothing to it. It's the first hundred feet that bothers me. Supposing we materialize inside that—halfway through?"

"Then even old Nunn will hear the bang," I said, which amused him but not me. Graveyard humor never did take with me.

"All set," called Pete.

We shuffled up the ramp. Inside, I performed step one in the manual, and the ramp duly became a door which sealed us in the puzzle box.

Puzzle box it was. We were surrounded by mysteries. For instance, one of the safety devices was an altimeter which ensured that the ship didn't overstep a ten kilometer limit when approaching the planet of its destination. You were certain of at least that much margin of safety, and relieved of visions of the ship trying to materialize itself beneath a planetary crust.

How the altimeter could function while it, too, existed only as energy baffled me completely. I felt like an ape trying to resolve the impossible contradictions of wave guides. Or modern man trying to visualize the finite, infinite, bounded, boundless universe.

The big couch was roomy even for giant Prospero, but four of us—Gerry and George were both bulky—made a tight squeeze on it. I sat at the control panel end and scanned the TV screens which were depicting the cavern around us.

Then I took step two . . .

Step seventeen was press start button.

I took a deep breath, and pressed.

There was no sense of motion whatever. Just as though the TV had been switched to another channel, the screens immediately showed us another scene. A brilliant sun glared at us from one side. On the other, a seemingly walnut-sized planet hung against a silver-dotted black backdrop.

"Vathic," said George, promptly, pushing a whiplike finger at it.

"Good shooting," I said to Pete, with relief.

"Bad." He looked pale. "We're inside the orbit. Nunn and I aimed for about five hundred miles outside it. Lord, it's a risky game! An even much worse miscalculation could have dumped us in Centauri's chromosphere, and the altimeter wouldn't have saved us from becoming a puff of steam."

"Don't unnerve me," I said. "I've got to land her and I want to go in the right direction."

But piloting the ship in space turned out to be simple compared with handling the starting program. The *Revenge* dropped towards Vathic like a well-oiled elevator.

And sunlit Nam-land seemed to rise to meet us. Neat patterns appeared and resolved themselves into evidences of nature under tight control. About a kilometer above ground level, I swung the ship into horizontal motion across them.

There was a green forest which was as carefully trimmed as a garden hedge. The acres of park land were ironed smooth, like one enormous putting green. A perfectly circular lake mirrored the circle of the sun. All the rough edges of nature had been sandpapered away. It was all too formal for my taste. But I wasn't a Nam.

The horizon was noticeably nearer than Earth's. Somehow I got the impression that the territory beyond curved away and down unnaturally steeply.

I commented, "Judging from the horizon, a smaller planet than Earth."

George, studying the screens, said, "No. Vathic eggic like. We have come downic to brass tacks."

That stymied even Pete for a while. Then he got it. "No, not smaller than Earth. Vathic is egg-shaped. We have come to the point—of the egg, that is. Hence the queer appearance of the horizon."

"So? Well, where do we go from here, George?"

But George was undecided. The countryside, it appeared, was pretty much of the same pattern all over Nam-land, and so confusing. Finally he chose a direction and I turned the ship to follow it. We all began sliding across the couch, almost as though it had become glass. I had already been vaguely aware of this lessening of friction, but not till I'd been forced

off the edge of the couch and tried to stand up did the cause dawn on me. My leg action initiated a slight and gentle rebound from the floor. I rose an inch or two, then settled again.

"Gravity here is rather less than we've been used to," I said. "No much, but we're noticing it."

"So long as the gravity of the beer isn't weaker in these parts, I'm not beefing," said Gerry.

A Nam city lifted on the aberrant horizon. It was big, and George recognized it.

"Fronden." He indicated we should pass it. We surveyed it as we did so. Again there was too much geometrical precision for my liking, a city made from the building blocks of a child Titan. Not one intriguingly winding street, never a soaring spire or flying buttress. Squares, cubes, matching crescents, streets straight as ruled lines, all white and clean as a tiled washroom.

Vehicles, relentlessly rectangular, moved in the streets like tiny colored boxes being pushed along. Pedestrians were few, and insect-small from this height. Nams? Makkees? Both?

George gazed at Fronden, his red eyes glowing like embers in a draft. For once he managed a sentence of near flawless English.

"Is it not a beautiful townic?"

"Does Drahk live there?" I asked tersely.

He said no, but near Murges, another town some fifty miles on. When we approached it, it was such a close twin to Fronden that I wondered how George could tell them apart. The two shining threads of a monorail system linked the cities, and George indicated the area where they ran like needles into the side of Murges.

"There."

I headed the ship there, lessening altitude. At the city's fringes were some small detached houses, regularly laid out like tombstones. George placed the tip of a white, snaky finger against the screen, selecting one. "Drahk his house."

I noticed my fingers begin to tremble on the controls, and tried to calm myself. Gerry began whistling under his breath.

I landed the *Revenge* slowly but clumsily perhaps ten yards from the house and the long-restrained emotion boiled over and swamped ordered thought. I remember half-running, half-sliding down the ramp, needle-gun in hand, onto close-shorn, bright green grass. Then the atmosphere, which bore strange and dusty smells, caught me by the throat as fiercely as I wished to seize Drahk. I reeled, and fell to my knees, choking.

I heard Pete and Gerry coughing harshly somewhere close behind me.

Then the spasm passed almost as suddenly as it had come. Tear-blinded and gulping, I got to my feet and my head cleared quickly. I drove forward again in shallow, bounding strides, feeling as though I were crossing a trampoline; it was the weaker gravity. The door of the house was as black as Drahk's soul. I kicked it viciously and it sprang open. I strode through in a mad fury, like Romeo seeking out Tybalt.

From room to room I went roaring, "Drahk! Drahk!"

And each room was empty—empty, it struck me belatedly, of everything. There was no single piece of furniture. The house was tenantless. Bitter with disappointment, I returned to the central hall and there encountered Pete and Gerry.

"He *has* moved out," I said dully, after all the sound and fury.

"Then we had—" began Pete, and was cut short by the slam of the front door at the end of the hall. The sound echoed sharply around the bare walls.

And there had been no breath of wind.

I pushed between them and rushed to the door. It had neither handle nor window. I scrabbled at its edges. My fingernails tore. But the door was shut fast.

I turned slowly and looked questioningly at the others.

"I don't like the smell of this," said Pete. "What's going on out there?"

He went striding into one of the rooms which had an outlook upon the ship. We caught up with him at the window. George was out there leaning like a sack of rubbish against the ship's ramp, staring into the blue and cloudless sky. I thumped on the window to attract his attention. He turned

his head, saw us, and moved not even one flabby finger. He appeared utterly disinterested.

I beckoned and yelled, "Come and open the door, you Danic dope! Let us out of here."

Without change of expression, he returned to his contemplation of the sky.

"Hell's bells!" I looked the window over. It was set solidly in its frame, not designed to be opened. I smashed at the pane with the butt of my needle-gun. It was as tough as bulletproof clearplast.

"George has either gone completely nuts or else he's sold us down the river," said Pete slowly.

A Makkee saucer, which obviously George had been watching approach, came floating down to land alongside the *Revenge*.

Pete sighed. "That does it. I'll never fall for any more hard luck stories."

"We're all suckers," I said bitterly. "Here comes Drahk."

Three thickly-clothed Makkees were climbing out of the saucer. Drahk was the last. They came walking towards the house, passing George with no more than a glance. He remained as disinterested.

Two of the Makkees struck off somewhere around the front of the house. Drahk came right up to our window. His blank, black eyes showed no expression, not even triumph. After ten years, he looked exactly the same. He stared through the window at us as though we were fish in an aquarium.

I felt I should go crazy with the sheer frustration of being unable to get at him. I turned my back on him and walked out of the room.

"Look at him gloating, damn him!" I heard Gerry say.

I looked rapidly around the little house, but there was no way out. I called Pete and Gerry. "All we can do is rush them when they open the door."

We stationed ourselves in the hall. But nobody was fool enough to open the door. Presently, from half-a-dozen points scattered around inside the house, there came pouring steam-white clouds of gas.

"We seem to have walked into a killing-bottle," said Pete, and his voice shook a little.

"I'm sorry I got you two in this mess," I said.

They both tried to answer but the clouds rolled over us, merging into a single big one filling the house. I tried not to breathe but soon had to. And at once the cloud seemed to darken into a black thundercloud which pressed suffocatingly around me until I could not see, nor hear, nor think . . .

Chapter 11

I AWAKENED as from a long sleep, yawned, stretched my arms, and opened my eyes on a room I'd never seen before. Then I remembered.

"Good morning, Charles," said Pete Butler, dryly, on my left.

"You feeling all right, old man?" from Gerry on my right.

I looked both ways and saw we were sitting in three straight-backed armchairs. Facing us across a crimson carpet was a desk with a vacant chair behind it. Beyond was a room-length window showing a panorama of a typical Nam city, cubism rampant, with green pastures on the horizon that seemed too near. The room was as hot as a smokehouse.

My head was clear but my legs were numb and my throat hurt when I said, "I see the court's in session, but are we here to judge or be judged?"

"To be judged," said Pete. "Drahk's the judge. He was here a while ago, but he got tired of waiting for you to open your eyes and slipped out to the bar on the corner."

"Let's join him," I said, and tried to stand. But my numbed legs only hung there like numbed legs. "Hell—I'm paralyzed!"

"Take it easy, old man," said Gerry. "So are we."

"Only from the waist down," said Pete. "Drahk stood treat—a spinal injection all round. Except himself, of course. I gather we're not permanently crippled. It's just that he

doesn't want us to kick him to death before he's had a chance to say his piece."

"I'll find some way to do it, nevertheless," I said.

And then Drahk came back. He was wearing his indoor, lightweight suiting and looked as frail as a butterfly. He kept those hypnotic, pupil-less eyes directed unwaveringly at me as he seated himself at the desk.

The reedy voice sounded across a decade, "Only a passing defeat, Magellan. I shall come back for you—remember?"

"I remember. Most of all, I remember Sarah Masters, whom you murdered."

"Still the sentimentalist, Magellan? But I'm not really surprised at that. I was counting on your blind wish for revenge. I was too busy to come personally, so I sent my representative to fetch you; the Danic you call George."

"That lying double-crosser!" said Pete bitterly.

"He's not a complete liar. The only direct lie he told you was that he stole my ship. In fact, I provided it, together with full directions for reaching Earth—and you, Magellan. It is quite true that the Nams have been deported to the other side of this planet, where they and the Danics are in the last throes of mutual extermination. And my people occupy Nam-land in peace and comfort. It was true I captured George on the satellite station. And when he promised to bring you to my house, again he was not lying. This was, and is, my house, although I have retained it only as a trap for you. In the interim, I was offered better quarters here, at the heart of Murges, as you can see."

"I still don't get why he should do such a thing," Pete muttered. "We trusted him and treated him decently. Yet you slaughter his people and he knows it."

"Decency, justice—can't you understand that such terms mean nothing outside your society? To other people they are simply empty ejaculations, like your swear words. The Danic owes nothing to you. If he can be said to owe anything, then it is to me. I took him from his cold, gloomy land and gave him a home here in the sunlight. The Danics have always thought of the Nam hemisphere as a kind of paradise

from which they were eternally barred by accident of birth. I told George that if he would bring you, Magellan, to me, he would be the only Danic permitted to dwell in the sunlight for the rest of his life. I did not, incidentally, hazard any guess as to the length of the rest of his life."

"You mean you'll kill him when it suits you," I said. "Which will be any time now, since he's finished his task and become as redundant as all the other Danics."

"What I mean is my affair. You yourself have certainly become redundant. You've finished your task, which was to bring me Prospero's spaceship. Thank you for that. I knew you would try to learn how to operate it, and hoped you would succeed. If you had failed, then George would have brought you back in my ship."

"Your mistake—he wrecked it," I said.

"He's a fool. But it doesn't matter. With Prospero's ship, and others patterned upon it, I can become more than a leader of the Makkees; I can become *the* leader. And with these new ships I shall immeasurably speed up our conquest of this galaxy—and begin to look to other galaxies. I could have killed you out of hand, Magellan, but I wanted you to know before you die how the small setback you gave me has, in actual fact, started me on the path to the greatest victory in the history of the Makkees."

I said, with controlled calm, "Run along then, little man, up your path of destiny. By the way, you *do* know how to handle Prospero's ship? It's kind of complicated."

For the first time, his gaze wandered from mine—and I began to hope.

He said, "Another reason I did not kill you at once is that before you die you are going to tell my technicians how to operate the ship. Also, you will describe the principles behind it."

There was a silence. Then Gerry laughed. "You've picked the wrong man, Drahk, old boy. And I don't know any more than Charles does. The clever people who do know how the ship works were too darn clever to come with us."

Surreptitiously, with my elbow, I'd been feeling the shape of my coat pocket. The little notebook of directions was still

in it. The Makkees had taken our guns but apparently nothing else. My opinion of their intelligence fell.

I said, "That's true. We're not scientists. I suspect you Makkees aren't, either—not in any real sense. You steal the inventions of races your ancestors doctored long ago, but you've lost the art of invention yourselves. You've been getting something for nothing for too long now; your minds have become flabby from lack of having to make any effort, from a surfeit of comfort. You're a lot of lazy parasites. I doubt if you have a single creative scientist left among you."

That was a shot in the dark, but Drahk's long silence confirmed a hit.

Presently, he said sibilantly, "At least you know how the ship is navigated. That information is necessary to begin with. I do not expect you to offer it voluntarily. So I will offer to make a bargain. Regarding bargaining, you cannot rely on any promise I might make . . . except one. The Makkees have no equivalent to your word of honor, which is purely sentimental conception."

"You're telling us nothing new," I said. "What is the promise we're to believe you'll keep?"

"The promise to torture you all slowly, one by one, until you provide the information I ask. The torture will continue to the death for your friends, Magellan—unless you speak first. If you don't, your turn will follow. I advise you to speak before any torture is necessary. If you do that, you can have an easy, painless death, by drugs. Now, can I for once expect a sensible rather than a sentimental reaction?"

"No," I said. "Get lost."

"Completely," said Gerry.

"And never come back," said Pete.

Drahk went very still for a moment. Then he said, "So we shall have to do it the long, hard way."

He reached for the visaphone, but it anticipated him. A shrill Makkee voice spoke rapidly from it. Drahk answered briefly, and pressed a desk button.

"This could be good news for all of us," he said. "Despite your opinion, we have some reasonably able scientists.

A team has been at work on the ship for some hours now. They think they may have discovered enough to be able to operate it. I am going to check. If it is true, you will be spared torture—but not, of course, death."

The door opened and George came in. We glared at him and he regarded us without shame. Drahk addressed him by some other name, in the Makkee tongue, took a ray gun from a drawer and passed it to him.

Then he stood up, and said, "Your old friend, my old servant, will take care of you while I'm away. Your legs will be useless for a long time yet, but do not even try to move—George will ray you if you do. He knows he will lose his home here if you escape. In any case, I shall still be keeping an eye on you."

He swung the visaphone round to cover us.

He went to the door, paused, and said, "George is a Danic. Danics, Nams, and Makkees do not have that aberration you call a conscience. Expect no repentance from George—it's simply not in his nature."

He shut the door behind him.

"Damn it," I said. "What a mess I've made of everything."

"We share the blame," said Pete, "but let's emulate George and waste no time on repentance. I predict Drahk will be back again soon, spitting fire. For I'm sure his scientists are talking out of the holes in their heads. Consider that with the help of Prospero, and Nunn—who's a brilliant old fool—and our team, not forgetting my good self, and Uvova, it took ten years of sweat to learn what Drahk's boys are claiming to have discovered in a matter of hours. I don't believe it."

"Neither do I," I said, watching George, who sat in Drahk's place, overflowing the chair, impassive as dough, twiddling the ray gun between multitudinous fingers. "Drahk will be back with the red-hot tongs." I nodded at George. "He's our only hope."

"I agree," said Pete. He stared at George, then said earnestly, "Listen, George, Drahk has told us that he has no further use for you, and will kill you soon. We're not trying to fool you—that is perfectly true."

Without returning his gaze, George said snuffingly to the desk top, "Drahk said I undead here till dead. Ic."

"Exactly," I said. "And once we're dead, you'll be dead within a week. That's all the lease of life he'll allow you."

"I am not weak," said George, shooting a red, indignant glance at me. "I am strongic."

"Confound all brainless electronic brains," I said loudly and distinctly. "Pete, I'm wasting time talking to him. Try him in Vathicanese or a reasonable facsimile. Tell him that if he helps us to escape, we'll take him back to Earth with us, for there's no future for him here—he's probably the last of the Danics. Tell him that we have a thing called a conscience which makes us keep our promises, whereas the Makkees do not have this conscience. Remind him that he heard Drahk say that himself."

"Okay," said Pete, and addressed George haltingly in the strange, clicking language of Vathic. George replied rapidly.

"Hm," was Pete's response, and he went into thoughtful silence.

"What did he say?" I asked impatiently.

Pete cleared his throat. "Well, it makes it a bit awkward. He said he feels safer with Drahk because Drahk is cleverer than you and knows what he's doing, and you're a fool and don't. He added that Gerry and I followed you, and look where it's got us."

Gerry laughed aloud.

"In short," said Pete, "he reckons Drahk is the mastermind around here, and we three are dead ducks and in no position to make any offers."

"Maybe he's right," I said gloomily. "All the same, he's a fool, too."

Pete shrugged. "It's merely that he thinks objectively. He understands things better than he understands people."

The visaphone glowed. Drahk's narrow, dirty, yellow face appeared on it and the black eyes scrutinized us. He said something in Makkee addressed to George. The Danic answered, probably confirming that everything was still under control. The screen went blank.

"Wonder where he's phoning from," said Gerry.

"Obviously a point somewhere near our ship," I said. "The house next door, maybe."

I spent the next few minutes trying to think of some new approach or argument to win George to our side. And then there began a heavy rumbling sound like a really big rocket starting to take off. It increased to a roar which shook the whole building.

George bounced to his feet and the inadequate chair fell back onto the quaking floor. He stood there uncertainly for a moment, then rushed from the room faster than I'd ever seen him move.

"He's scared out of his wits," shouted Pete above the noise.

I felt scared, too, and envied George for one thing—his ability to run.

The roaring sound suddenly subsided, leaving a legacy of minor vibrations still thrilling our nerves, the chairs we sat on, the air itself.

Gerry said shakily, "I'll bet that was Drahk's backroom boys blowing the *Revenge* apart—and Drahk with it, too, I hope."

"No," said Pete. "Look—through the window."

We all looked. Gerry whistled. He and Pete were taller than me, and could see something over the sill just below my line of vision.

"What is it? I can't see," I said sharply.

"The building across the street has collapsed," said Pete. "I can see just a part of another street with an enormous crack across it. A fissure—with a car hanging over the edge of it . . . We've just had an earthquake."

"Fine," I said. "Hope the whole darn city comes down on the Makkees and buries them. If we've got to go, we've got to go. But it would be nice to know they're going, too."

"Don't be so morbid, Charles," said Pete, and then came another loud rumbling, the herald of another shock.

This time I thought my wish was about to be granted. Our building swayed like a sapling in a gale until I felt sick with

the motion. Networks of cracks sprang up the walls of the room like some madly climbing creeper.

To be caught by an earthquake was a frightening business at any time. But to be half-paralyzed, unable to rush out to open ground, made the situation even more nightmarish. I gripped the arms of my chair—there was nothing else to cling to.

Then the shock passed, and everything seemed unnaturally still and quiet.

"My gosh, another one like that and this building will fall apart," said Gerry, wiping his wet forehead.

We waited uneasily, and then the door, now out of plumb, was shoved open, grating on the floor. In shambled George. His face seemed somehow whiter than ever, and his ruby eyes burned in it certainly bigger than before.

He looked at us, and said indistinctly, "We go not-front to Earthic in your ship."

"We go back to Earth, George?" echoed Pete wonderingly.

The Danic didn't reply. He shoved his ray gun under his belt, lifted Pete clean out of his chair with one heave and slung him across his shoulders. For all his apparent flabbiness, it was clear that George was accustomed to lifting heavy weights. He began to carry Pete from the room.

"I don't know where I'm going, but here I go," said Pete.

They disappeared through the doorway.

"Well, you never know your luck," I said. "Maybe Drahk was wrong. Maybe George does have a conscience tucked away under all that blubber."

"I think he's just plain scared of earthquakes," said Gerry, cynically.

A few minutes later, George returned, lifted the massive Gerry as though he were a mere stripling, and made off again.

I presumed that George, by leaving me till last, was still rating me as the fool of the family and therefore the least important. It was hardly flattering and I began to wonder if, indeed, he would trouble to come back for me. Then I remembered the notebook still in my pocket. Not even Pete

could operate the *Revenge* without it. George would have to come back.

So instead I began to wonder what had been happening at the ship. Had Drahk been injured by the quakes? If he had, how could George have learned that?

Suddenly, the visaphone came to life. A grim and apparently quite uninjured Drahk stared at me. "So you're still there. The earthquake didn't—"

He broke off as he noticed the empty chairs flanking me. "*Where are the others?*" His shrill voice rose almost to the ultra-sonic. He began calling the Makkee name he'd given George, and as if in answer, George came back into the room. Drahk addressed him peremptorily. The Danic ignored him completely and came and lifted me. As he carried me out, I looked back at the mouthing yellow face on the screen, and called, "The account has yet to be settled, Drahk. And your time is running out."

The melodramatic touch again. Yet I believed what I had said, though reason wondered how, if Drahk was still alive and in control of the *Revenge*—and it seemed that he was—three helpless cripples could even reach him, let alone deal with him.

I saw the visaphone's glow dim out. Then I was bobbing on George's shoulders along an empty lobby. He began climbing stairs with no slackening of effort. It was a long staircase. We were almost at the top when the lobby below suddenly filled with agitated, hissing Makkees. It sounded like a snakepit.

They saw us and the whole mob started rushing for the stairs.

This mass pursuit couldn't have been spontaneous. I guessed that Drahk had switched his visaphone call and raised a general alarm. I reached around George's ungainly torso and snatched the ray gun from his belt. I'd not forgotten how to use the things, and expertly sprayed the long staircase and most of the lobby with the pale green rays.

The Makkees fell in sprawling heaps, stunned or unconscious, and all the hissing died to nothing.

George turned a corner and we emerged onto a flat and dazzlingly white roof in warm sunshine. Four flying saucers were parked there, and there was plenty of parking space for more. As George bore me to the nearest, I could see many broken towers in Murges and the debris piled high in the streets.

And then I was under the shallow dome of the saucer, amid shafts of sunlight striking in through the circular ports. On the thickly carpeted floor (for the Makkees, comfort was indispensable anywhere) Pete and Gerry were reclining.

"Good—a fourth for bridge," said Pete.

Gerry said, "What kept you, old man?"

I grinned as George laid me beside them. He closed the aperture, and went straight to the control console and began jabbing buttons and throwing switches. We felt an upward motion. TV screens assumed a pallid life in the bright cabin. On them I saw the roof falling slantingly away from us. Makkees were pouring out onto it, making for the three remaining saucers.

"Don't look now, but we're being followed," I said.

George, who hadn't said a word since his sudden *volte-face*, wasn't missing a thing. He juggled with an odd swiveling lever, and a white-hot dart shot away from our ship and speared the center saucer on the roof. The impact pushed it clear through the far parapet, where is disappeared throwing off incandescent flame.

"Plumb center," said Gerry. "That's real shooting."

There seemed to be utter confusion on the roof, but we could see no details, for already the white square had dwindled to the size of a pocket handkerchief. Then our ship leveled off, following the beeline of the glittering monorails.

And suddenly we were looking down at the *Revenge*, a black pill lying among the sugar cubes of the small detached houses.

I never did discover what George had intended to do at that time. Perhaps land alongside the *Revenge* and make a wild solo attack on the Makkees there with the ray gun. Perhaps merely concentrate on escaping and hiding up until we three were fit enough to take an active part.

Anyhow, at that moment Drahk slammed down his ace in the hole.

Chapter 12

FROM directly out of the sun, where it had been hovering and waiting for us like a hawk, a flying saucer dived at us.

George saw it just too late. He attempted evasive action, but the other saucer cracked us on the side, a glancing blow but with plenty of ergs in it. Both saucers shot apart like cannoning pool balls. The metallic sound of the crash echoed and re-echoed thunderously inside our cabin and we were thrown across the carpet like so many packages.

George, resilient as a rubber ball, seemed to take it as a matter of course and was promptly back at the console. He brought the ship back on an even keel.

Gerry had finished up lying across my dead legs—I couldn't even feel his considerable weight. He gasped and pointed. "Look at that!"

It was a really big inward bulge in the wall, and torn wires and broken things protruded from it. They were parts of the dart launching gear. The other saucer had disarmed us at a stroke.

"Thatic Drahk," said George, breaking his self-imposed vow of silence. He had piloted Drahk's saucer often, and doubtless had recognized it at sight.

I rubbed the sore area at the back of my head, and said, "You've got to hand it to that guy. He was thinking ahead of us. He must have taken off directly after he gave the alarm, then waited up there to get the drop on us."

Neither Pete nor Gerry answered. They were watching Drahk's saucer wheeling around for another stab at us.

But George handled the situation brilliantly. Instead of trying to dodge, he sent our ship hurtling straight towards Drahk's and at the last moment dropped about thirty feet and skimmed just beneath its keel. Before Drahk had quite grasped the maneuver, George was heading our ship like a bullet towards the horizon.

"That's the idea, George," I said. "Run for it—the hunt's up."

For the screens showed flying saucers rising from all over Murges like flocks of startled birds.

"Drahk's on our tail again," said Pete. "Coming fast, too."

Immediately, George, without slackening its speed, took our ship down to a height of scarcely more than a hundred feet. We chased our round shadow across the streaming miles of park land. When tall trees seemed to race towards us, I shrank inwardly, remembering how George had piled up a similar saucer in Windsor Great Park.

Drahk's saucer hung on close behind and above. I saw now that it, too, had been damaged by the collision and was leaving a thin trail of black smoke.

"George is not so dim," said Pete. "This hedge-hopping is good strategy. If Drahk tries to ram us again we'll both hit the ground. So he dare not try. But I can't understand why he's not shooting at us."

"Because he wants us alive," I said. "So his technicians can't have succeeded, He still wants to pick our brains about the *Revenge*. He's hoping to force us down."

"If he can catch us," said Gerry. "But it seems to me, old man, we're beginning to outpace him."

Gradually, Drahk's ship was falling back.

"You're right," I said. "The smoke's pouring from his ship now. He must have damaged the works when he side-swiped us. There's a whole pack of saucers behind him, though."

That was true, but they were only dots in the far distance. We'd had a long start on them, and they hadn't made up any ground. The sun was moving down the sky behind them to its setting, and we were causing its descent by our swift passage. When it set, we would be entering the twilight zone which lay between Nam and Danic country. We debated whether we should drive on into the cover of night or try to play the fox, skirt the zone for a fair distance, turn, and outflank our pursuers back to the *Revenge*. Possibly we could make it before Drahk in his crippled ship returned there.

I said, "Both courses are a gamble. Darkness is doubtful

cover since the Makkees can see in the dark. Anyhow, there's radar."

I indicated the screen with the scattering of blips which were the distant, pursuing saucers.

Pete said, "We can detect them by radar because they're still traveling high, specks in the sky. I doubt if they can detect us as easily—we're hugging the ground. George knows what he's doing. If we landed in a valley or a forest, the odds are that they'd lose us altogether."

"True," I admitted. "Whereas if we tried to double back now, they might pick us up again. I'm for going on into the Danic hemisphere and taking cover. Say, does anybody feel anything—bodily, I mean?"

"I feel tired and sort of . . . heavy," said Pete. "That what you mean?"

"I feel heavy, too," said Gerry. "And damned hungry."

"Heavy, that's it—me, too," I said. "Also, I'm beginning to feel my toes again. They're tingling. I can wriggle them. The drug's wearing off."

"I can't feel a thing," said Pete, staring at his feet.

But soon he did. So did Gerry. But there was a paradox; as our muscles grew stronger, our legs became more difficult to move.

Pete frowned. "Another Makkee trick? Are they reaching us with some ray?"

"Ask George."

Pete tried George in Vathicanese.

George chose to answer in English, as the sun sank from sight and we flew on into thickening dusk. He pointed to the dark horizon, and said, "Is the heavy side."

For the moment I thought stupidly he was referring to something akin to the Heaviside Layer, but Pete said, "The heavy side. That's what he calls the dark side sometimes. Of course, that's not a semantic mix-up at all! Everything *is* heavier on the dark side of Vathic. Gravity is more intense there—I can't think why."

I rubbed my chin, and even that was an effort. "I think you're right, Pete. But I can't think why, either. Gravity is related to mass. Therefore, the mass must be greater on the

shadowed side than on the sunlit side. That would put this planet in a state of imbalance. It would revolve eccentrically on its axis and eventually disrupt. Yet Vathic doesn't revolve. It's come to rest with one face turned towards its sun . . . the *wrong* face, as I see it. Surely the heavier side should be turned innermost, mass attracting mass?"

"No comment," said Gerry. "Not my line of country."

Pete said, "You're assuming a couple of things, one of which is certainly wrong. First, that Vathic has come to rest. Maybe it has, but only in a temporary misleading sense. 'Temporary,' astronomically speaking, is a relative term; it can mean ages. Superficially, Vathic may appear at rest, but its inner forces—centrifugal, centripetal—must be in a state of imbalance. The earthquakes point to that. Without knowledge of cosmic history in these parts we can't say what caused the imbalance in the first place. Perhaps some wandering heavenly body, an asteroid on the loose. Maybe just the stresses of the Alpha and Proxima system."

"Um. What was my other false assumption?"

"That Vathic is a globe. Remember?—it's an ovoid."

"Eggic," said George suddenly, without relaxing his attention on the dimming, scudding landscape. "The yolkic is unchased."

Anyhow, that's what it sounded like.

We stared at him. "The yolk of the egg is not chased," I said, attempting translation. "It still makes no sense."

"Not chased, unchased," Pete muttered. He pondered. Then, "I get it. He said 'unchaste'—in the sense of 'loose.' The yolk of the egg is loose. He means the heavy core of Vathic has become detached, it's loose inside the outer shell, on the rampage. It has distorted the shape of the planet."

George made a gesture of assent. "Soonic hatch."

Gerry said uneasily, "Think he means it'll soon break out of its shell? Please, tell me I'm wrong."

"Yes," said George, answering for himself. "Nams warnic longic time. We go to Earthic—quick."

I looked at Pete interrogatively. He questioned George in his own language, and was answered at some length.

Pete absorbed it, then told us, "Sure, George is no fool

about material matters. When the earthquakes started, he guessed it was the beginning of the final crack-up and was plenty scared. The Nams had warned the Danics that it would probably happen in the indeterminate future, and that when it came earthquakes would be the first sign of it. Hence George's sudden change of heart, if you could call it that. Drahk was right; George is all for himself."

"It beats me that the Makkees didn't realize the state of things," I commented.

"Does it? It shouldn't. You were right when you said their scientists were dopes. Besides, remember it wasn't the Makkees' original intention to settle here—we forced it on them unexpectedly. One presumes they'd made no thorough survey of the planet lately."

"Isn't that a shame?" I said. "And now they're stuck with it. So are we unless we can get back to the *Revenge.*"

I was beginning to feel a little depressed. The increasing darkness and gravitational drag added their psychological quota here.

George was quite unaffected, however. This was his home ground, even if he did prefer Nam-land. I understood now his easy handling of heavy weights, his bouncing walk in a weaker gravitational field. And his flexible bodily construction was nature's way of coping with this bone-crushing hug of gravitation, which was flattening us against the carpet. Strength was returning to our legs but we could scarcely stir.

Drahk's ship was so far behind now that we couldn't distinguish it from the other blips.

Our saucer began to decelerate. George had seen a likely refuge. After some bumpy maneuvering, the ship came to rest. Through the ports I could see black branches and leaves silhouetted against a moonless, starry sky. George opened the door and went out there. A faint breeze came through the aperture. It was very quiet outside.

We lay helpless, pinned down, waiting and wondering.

George returned with an armful of plumlike fruit and distributed it. It was sweet and gave one a noticeable lift. Munching, Pete questioned George, then reported to us.

"Seems we're hidden among a bunch of trees near the

bottom of a valley. George says we've got to wait here for four and a half Earth hours. If the Makkees can't locate us soon, they'll have to abandon the chase, because their frail bodies can't stand this Danic gravity even as well as ours. If we can outlast them, George says, our chances are good. He has a plan for getting us all back to the *Revenge.*"

"What plan?" I asked.

"He won't say. He fears if he tells you, you may steal the plan and abandon him here. He wants to make sure of coming with us."

"Doesn't trust a soul, does he? Why the precise figure of four and a half hours? We can leave directly the Makkees have gone."

Pete shrugged. "I don't know."

Gerry said, "What possible plan could there be? We've got to fly back—we can't walk two steps under this gravity, quite apart from the impossible distance. And if we fly, the Makkee radar will detect us sooner or later. We'll be chased back here again."

"True. But what can we do but wait?" I said.

We waited. Our vision adjusted itself to the starlight to some extent but we could still see little.

Presently, the silence was disturbed by a distant rumbling, which rolled nearer. The ground trembled.

Gerry coughed nervously. "Hell, another quake?"

I thought, with more irritation than fear, Did these things always have to happen when we were quite unable to move?

George said, "No, notic quake."

He turned the TV cameras this way and that, searching, finally focussing them on the valley floor a hundred feet below us—so I judged. A bright, uncertain light was approaching along it. It seemed to be the source of the disturbance.

"Thinkic Nam war machine," said George.

"Then the war isn't over yet?" I asked, surprised.

There was no answer. Now we could discern the outline of the thing itself. It was like a great headless tortoise, crawling deviously among the trees, avoiding the bigger, bull-

dozing the smaller. A searchlight beam quested restlessly from its forepart.

George said something quietly to Pete, who passed it to us.

"It's a kind of tank, thickly armored and carrying armaments. The Nams are affected by this gravitation much as we are—they can only move around in these things, at ground level, anyhow. If it detects us, it'll probably attack us."

"Thanks a lot," I whispered, and found my lips were dry.

Suddenly, the cumbersome thing stopped right below us. The roaring cut off abruptly, the searchlight snapped out.

There was a nasty silence, inside and out.

"If it's going to park here, we're sunk," said Gerry, *sotto voce.*

"It seenic something," said George.

It wasn't easy to cross my fingers, but I managed it. It didn't reassure me. I cringed, waiting for a thunderbolt.

"Look up—overhead, through the ports," Pete muttered.

We looked. A dark shape, familiar merely in silhouette, was circling and recrossing the patches of sky that we could see. A Makkee saucer, only a few hundred feet up, apparently scenting our presence.

But that we never knew for sure. Something arose with a terrific buzz from the Nam war machine and sped towards the saucer. Something like a flying torpedo.

There was a bright explosion in the sky, and the saucer—now just a ragged shape—came dropping like a stone. The ground shook again as it landed near the lip of the valley.

"That was a guided missile," Pete informed us unnecessarily.

"I only wish it was Drahk on the receiving end," I said. "That would be poetic justice; he started the war."

"Justice is seldom poetic," said Pete.

With a roar, the war machine started up and lumbered on, the searchlight playing on trees ahead of it. George waited until the sound of it had died in the distance, then went outside. He was away some time. When he came back, he said, "Makkee saucer. All deadic. Notic Drahk, his saucer. Another."

"Too bad," I said.

Presently, a weak sort of moonlight came filtering through the tree-branches. The artificial moon was rising.

The hours dragged on. We talked little. It was tiring to keep moving one's jaws here. At length the tiny moon became visible overhead. It looked like a nova among the dimmer stars.

George said, "We go."

He backed the saucer from its hiding place, and then smoothly took off. Our ascent became swifter. The effect of this upward acceleration was murderous on us. The blood drained from our eyes, from our frontal lobes, and we passed into unconsciousness.

I came to at last to discover myself floating like a balloon in the air inside the saucer. From too much weight, our condition had changed to no weight; we were in free fall. To one side of us was blackness tinctured with millions of untwinkling stars. To the other side—just blackness. I felt sick, dizzy, confused.

Pete, by courtesy of George, presently explained the situation. We were stationed behind the great mirror of the artificial moon, within its back shadow. And together with it we were falling in orbit around Vathic.

This satellite had not been manned since Drahk captured its crew. So no one knew we were there. We could fly across the sky of Nam-land, unseen, undetectable. Naturally, the satellite itself showed on Makkee radar screens—to be treated with the contempt of familiarity.

From long experience in the station, George knew our position precisely from hour to hour. Directly we reached a calculated point on the orbit, he intended to plummet the saucer almost vertically down on Murges, like a dropped bomb. We had to gamble on reaching the *Revenge* before the Makkees had time to do much about it.

This was George's plan, and it was a good one, and it was a pity that it was entirely wasted effort.

The moment came. We plunged down to Murges—or what had been Murges. For another earthquake had struck, and Murges was only one of many towns boiling smoke and flame from their ruins.

The Makkees had more to concern themselves with than sitting around watching for us on radar screens.

In our turn, we had small concern for the Makkees. We were solely concerned about the *Revenge*. Had the further quakes damaged it? Anxiously, we surveyed the ravaged area of Murges, seeking it. An unusually bright spot some miles from the city drew our attention. We identified it, with surprise, as a Makee saucer embedded sidewise in the earth, reflecting the sunlight like a mirror.

"That was a nasty crash," I observed. And we were struck by a possibility.

Gerry voiced it. "Drahk? His runabout was badly damaged."

"Could be," I said.

Then Pete pointed eagerly to a distant black pill. "The *Revenge*."

As we approached it, it looked reassuringly solid among the smashed little white houses. Yet the ground had risen in waves around it and they were split by great fissures.

We could see no living creatures in the vicinity.

We landed on the mutilated lawn near the *Revenge*. I was out first, unsteady on my feet, making a new adjustment to gravity. I had George's ray gun in my fist. The others followed slowly.

The ramp of the ship was down, just as we had left it. I mounted it cautiously, crouching, and peeped in. One solitary Makkee was in there, turning the dials.

My nerves and muscles hardened, and I became ice-cold.

"Never mind it, Drahk. You won't get anywhere. And you're not going anywhere."

He went still, then turned slowly. He was unarmed, and his clothing was spattered with amber fluid. There was a gash on his cheek bone, and that was amber too. I realized that for the first time I was seeing Makee blood.

He said, "That is a reasonable prediction, but experience is teaching me that it is absurd for anyone to predict anything."

The reedy voice held no more emotion than artificial speech concocted from electronic wave patterns.

"I'm here to settle the account, Drahk. Come on out."

I backed down the ramp, keeping him covered as he followed.

He said, "The matter was almost settled for you only a little while ago. My damaged ship crashed when I was on my way back here. I escaped death by the merest chance. I had to make my way here on foot. The earthquakes have destroyed transport and communications. Very soon they will destroy this planet."

"I know that."

A roll of thunder seemed to run the length of the horizon. Drahk listened. As it faded, he said, "More of my people are being killed over there."

"They have the ships they came in," I said shortly. "They can leave."

"Those that could leave, have left—including my useless technicians. Many ships were destroyed. Many Makkees have not been able to escape."

"The universe will be enriched by their loss."

Drahk looked at me inscrutably. "With Prospero's ship and its like your people can win the universe from the Makkees. But not without certain essential knowledge—which planets my people occupy, where the key points are, what strategy will succeed against them. I can give you this knowledge—in exchange for my life."

I heard Pete gasp. Gerry muttered, "Stinking little traitor!"

I said, "You rayed Sarah Masters to death because she betrayed the Makkees. It is fitting, therefore, that you receive the same punishment for the same crime."

My finger began to tighten on the trigger button.

Drahk said quickly, "That is what you call justice. Makkees do not understand justice. Any Makkee in my place would say what I have said. Did any of them delay to search for me when I crashed? No! Self-preservation is our law. I killed Sarah simply because she had chosen to work against us. But I am willing to work with you. So what reason can there be for killing me? It is against your own interests."

I realized finally that it was impossible for me to try to

see through a Makkee's eyes. And Drahk could not be made to see through ours. Historically, philosophically, even biologically our races were literally worlds apart.

By what right, except that of conquest, could I judge him by the ethics of the human race? He was born without kindness, sympathy or mercy.

Pete stepped beside me. He put a hand on the ray gun, and said, "He's a swine—granted. And I know just how badly you feel about Sarah. But don't use this thing. Make it quick—and have done. Use this."

He eased the ray gun from my hand, replaced it with a needle-pistol. I stared down at it, then at Drahk, who waited silently.

Then I whispered to Pete. He nodded. "Good."

He went back and spoke to George, who climbed back into the flying saucer. A few seconds later, the saucer began slowly to rise. From a height of maybe fifteen feet, George jumped from the open door, landing with a characteristic bounce.

The saucer sailed steadily up into the blue, the last one operating on Vathic, and now leaving it forever.

Drahk watched it go.

I motioned the other three. They filed past Drahk into the *Revenge.*

I said, "Drahk, back there in Murges you condemned yourself. Regarding bargaining, you told me, I could not rely on any promise you might make. You chose to seize this planet. I shall not take it from you. You may remain in possession."

He made no answer. I entered the ship. As the ramp rose, I looked back at the lone, small figure and the wide background of wreckage. I felt almost a pang of pity—knowing at the same time how he would have gibed again at my sentimentalism.

The ramp door closed, cutting short another deep death-cry from doomed Vathic.

I turned my attention to the dials.

We returned to solid, placid Earth.

And now I sit here and wonder whether I should be

right to impose my own restlessness on my fellow men and lead the big crusade against the Makkee empire. Or whether to leave them in peace, to nourish their souls in their new cultures.

The Napoleons, and would-be Napoleons, are born with this problem as much a part of them as their hearts and lungs. Only, some have more conscience than others.