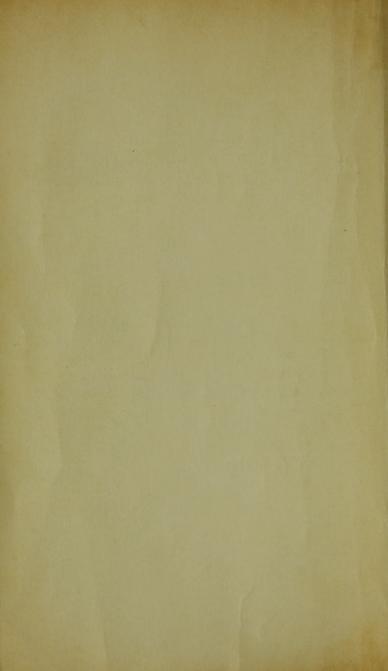
ANTHAR HOON'S MADNESS MOON'S MADNESS

Men vanished when the mutant maidens attacked but only Zanthar knew that the entire universe was in peril! ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS



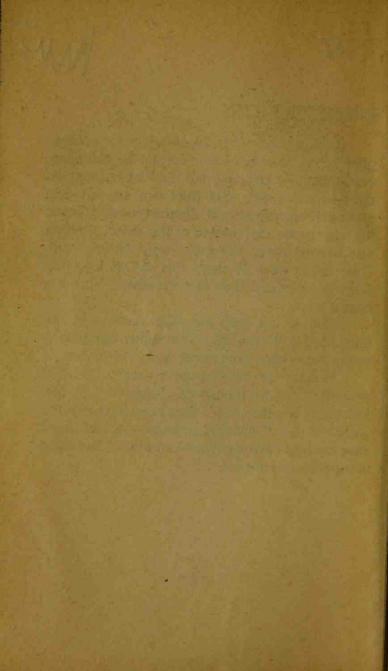
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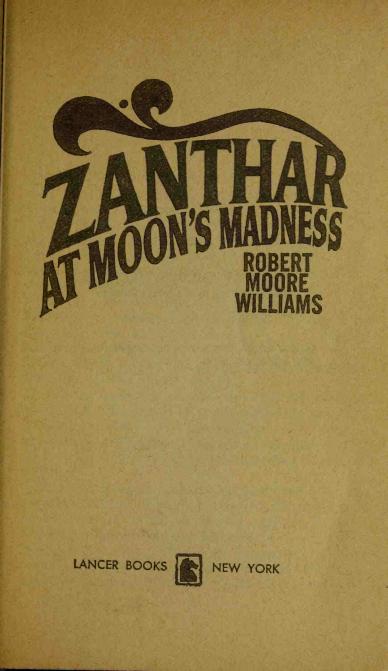
IMPOSSIBLE CITY

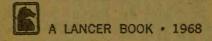
Looking back over his shoulder for another glimpse of the ship he was certain he had seen, simultaneously glancing into the vast bowl on his right where a man said existed a city of spun silver and burnished gold, Zanthar carefully made his way across the surface of the moon. Caution was needed here. The rocks were bitterly cold. Their edges were as sharp this day as they had been the moment they had separated from the parent mass.

Zanthar cut back his radio receiver to the band used by all the men. The soldier was talking again. Now rising excitement was in his voice.

"I never in my life saw so many beautiful women! There are thousands of them in this city! But where are the men?" Fear now crept into the voice. "A city of beautiful women—without men! How can you have a city without men?" The voice whispered into silence . . .







ZANTHAR AT MOON'S MADNESS

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Chapter One

IT BECAN spontaneously, unexpectedly, early in 1984. The craze came out of nowhere. And it was frightening, because its victims disappeared. Into nothing.

It happened in New York, in Peoria, in Shanghai, in villages in upper Brazil too small to have names and too poor to care, in crowded city streets and in shaded country lanes. One kid—or one adult—or even one dog would suddenly seem to hear the tune of an invisible piper, and begin to dance. As in the old legend of the Pied Piper of Hamelin, only the dancer seemed to hear the tune. Then, hearing it, dancing to it, he himself would begin to sing.

Once the dancing and the singing had begun, the glass doors were not far behind.

After the doors had opened—and had closed—there was nothing. Nothing at all. Just nothing. No song and no singer. No dance and no dancer. It was as if the person who had walked through the glass doors had stepped off the edge of Planet Earth and had vanished into Planet Nowhere.

On a spring day in 1984, in a neighborhood in Brooklyn where the kids played in the streets and a strong and fervid imagination was needed to convince doubters that the anti-poverty program had made life really worthwhile, an enterprising TV reporter had set up a hidden camera on the roof of a building to cover the street below. The cameraman had been tipped off that a rumble was coming between the Panthars and the Yellowjackets. If this fight took place, and if he got a good picture of it on tape, he could peddle the rumble to the *Life in America* program.

Down on the street, a group of small boys were playing baseball, dodging cars while they chased the balls. On the corner, a scout who was also the leader of the Panthars was loafing, a skinny kid with two missing front teeth and with a scarred ear, the latter a relic of a rumble when he was only seven. Now, at thirteen, he was a veteran already trained not only for jungle fighting but also for house-to-house battles. He would be ready when his turn came to be drafted into the armed forces-if the forces would take him, which was doubtful. The army wanted its men to look like soldiers, a feat this skinny kid would probably never manage to accomplish. The pictures the hidden cameraman took clearly showed him lounging stiff-legged on the corner. The stiff leg, the cameraman knew, came from a tire iron slipped down inside the pants.

The scout and leader, lookout for the Panthars, was nervous. Expecting the Yellowjackets to arrive at any minute, he was alert and wary. His gang, playing ball, watched him for a signal that the time had come to use their bats for another purpose.

The Yellowjackets did not arrive. Instead came something that looked like a small glass sphere. Like a brightly colored soap bubble, it came floating gently down from the sky. It hit the asphalt, bounced, rolled to the gutter, and lay there.

The lookout saw it fall. He moved quickly to pick it up, looked at it, held it up to the light of the smogmurked sun, then waved at his gang to come see what he had found. They came running to cluster around him. A small one, Timmie, who looked about five, jumped up and down and squealed, "Let me hold it too, Homer!" A fat one, Sqush, dangling a bat from his hand,

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reached for it, without success. "What is it, Homer? Where'd it come from? Will the junkman give us something for it? How much—" Their voices were a babble of sound. Homer, their leader-scout-king, held it out of their reach.

Later, TV screens around the world would show pictures of this little glass sphere floating from the sky, of this little ball of colored moonbeams, and of the Panthars jumping up and down around their leader as they tried to see what it was. Eventually, when the importance of these pictures was recognized, they would be hastily withdrawn from TV showing and would be seen instead only by security officers in all the major countries of Planet Earth. Eventually Professor John Zanthar, who spent very little of his valuable time watching television, would see them in a special screening run for his benefit by alarmed security officers of the United States.

benefit by alarmed security officers of the United States. The pictures were excellent, the sound pickup was good; the free-lance cameraman made a small fortune from the shots. But one trouble with them was that nobody understood them.

Perhaps nobody *wanted* to understand them! Perhaps no one was willing to face the possibility implicit in these pictures that they lived in a universe that had lost its boundaries, and on a planet where literally anything could happen—and always had happened!

The pictures would reveal a rusty-faced skinny kid who was obviously the victim of long-standing malnutrition in spite of all the poverty programs offered as votecatchers by succeeding Washington administrations, the kind of a kid who learned early that life was a battle and who never forgot this basic fact, such a kid as sometimes managed to find his way out of his poverty complex to go to work in a service station or in a garage or in a warehouse, this because he wanted to have things a little better for his kids than he had had and that the only way he could get them was to earn them. Kids like this existed by the millions in all the cities of America.

Millions of TV viewers would see this particular kid holding aloft a little glass sphere that looked as if it had been made of colored moonbeams. Then they would see an old-model car pull into the curb behind him, brake to a stop, and literally spill kids out of the back seat the hated Yellowjackets.

Taken by surprise, the Panthars had no choice except to run. Yipping and yelling, with tire irons and bicycle chains ready, the Yellowjackets chased them.

This was a routine performance. If one gang took another gang by surprise, the second gang would usually run. Custom decreed this. With shrill cries of victory, the first gang would give chase. Perhaps the chase might last a block or two, until those in flight lost themselves in the secret passages of their own country. If flight did not take place, then an angry rumble followed.

In this case, the Panthars fled in a body down the sidewalk. Armed with sharpened tire irons and bicycle chains, the Yellowjackets chased them. Then the Yellowjackets stopped. The group ahead of them had stopped. A glass door had opened. The Panthars were already beyond this glass door. A kind of misty light filled the area beyond the glass door. For a moment, while the now frightened Yellowjackets watched, the Panthars stood in this misty light. Something had happened to them, but from the lookout-leader-king, Homer, down to the smallest member of the gang, they seemed not to know what it was that had taken place. Then Homer began to dance. He began to shuffle his feet and to fling his arms in the air. As if moved simultaneously by some hidden inner impulse, all of the other Panthars began to dance too. They forgot the Yellowjackets, they forgot the tire tools and the bicycle chains of the enemy, they forgot they had been surprised, they forgot that their territory was being invaded, they even forgot that they were supposed to run. Instead of running, they began to

dance. Feet shuffled, bodies twisted, arms were flung in the air.

Pedestrians, startled by this sight, stopped to stare; then, fearful of being involved in a street fight, they began to back away. One woman pointed: "Lookit the glass doors right out here on the sidewalk!"

"What is it, an advertising stunt?" a man demanded. He moved toward the glass doors, but then seeing something there he did not like, he moved hastily away, muttering that there ought to be a law against such things.

From every direction, the glass doors were visible. They looked a little like ordinary glass doors used in thousands of stores—except that they seemed to open in all directions at the same time! They kept opening and closing, and the total effect was something like that of a kaleidoscope. The sight was unsettling to human nerves. Drivers stopped their cars on the street to stare at these strange glass doors. A cop, sighting them, came swinging his nightstick, then backed away and began rubbing his eyes. At the sight of the cop, the Yellowjackets hastily slipped their tire irons and bicycle chains out of sight.

Inside the glass doors, the Panthars continued to dance. And the song to which they were dancing was heard by all. There was no sound of drums, no wail of violins, no thump of a tuba, no clatter of a piano. None of the sounds of an orchestra were present. Instead the song was that of a massed female chorus. No bass voices. Nonel just sopranos! Women's voices, the voices of hundreds of women. Perhaps thousands of women were singing in this massive but totally invisible choir that sang in some lost land beyond the glass doors to which the glass doors were the entrance.

The sight of the glass doors, the sound of this magnificent chorus stopped all traffic on this street of Brooklyn on a spring day of 1984. At first, the words were in some strange language which was unknown but hauntingly familiar. Then, as the volume increased, as if at the command of some hidden conductor, the words became English—or almost English.

"We are the sons of Dionysus, We are the daughters of the goat god, Pan, We are the children of Aphrodite, We are the mutants of the moon—and manl"

Hauntingly familiar yet hauntingly strange, coming from an infinite distance away yet also near at hand, the mighty chorus of female voices rolled outward from some land beyond the glass doors. Inside the doors, the Panthars danced.

"What's Di-Dionysus?" a woman asked.

"Who's Pan?" a Yellowjacket muttered.

"What's Aphrodite?" another Yellowjacket whispered.

The startled, shaken, watching people simply did not know these words, yet they were names that had these words echoed through the history of the western world for thousands of years. Every listener knew all about sex, or thought he did, but of the Dionysiac Celebrations in ancient Greece he had heard little or nothing. Nor had the crowd heard of Pan, another god of lost Greece, usually portrayed as an ugly, merry man with horns, a beard, a short tail-and the feet of a goat. Nor did they know that Aphrodite was known in the worlds around the eastern Mediterranean in gone centuries as a daughter of the gods and was herself considered to be a goddess of love, of fertility, and of beauty. Aphrodite had been known by other names in other lands in those remote days, but in all of them she had had essentially the same function and had been connected with the immortality conveyed by the generative processes. Much of this ancient knowledge had been lost in the successive crumbling of great empires as they went down under barbarian invanders who in their turn went down before the legions of still other barbarians, and much of it had been deliberately hidden by various later groups and cults determined to establish at all costs that their way of life was the only way.

The true history of the planet called Earth was not a part of the knowledge of the people who saw the incredible glass doors opening and closing and who heard the majestic sweep of the mighty chorus of female voices claiming to be children of Aphrodite. So far as the Yellowjackets were concerned, so far as the startled men and women watching from the sidewalk were concerned, the planet called Earth-and for that matter the Universe itself-had begun with their entry into it. Most of them had found staying alive to be so difficult that just this commanded all of their time, interest, and attention, leaving them nothing to devote to such remote and esoteric subjects as ancient history. If ancient history came unsettlingly alive before their eyes, as it had now, they couldn't even recognize it. The past was dead, they thought. Let it stay dead. They had no future, or almost no future, and they knew it. To them, the future was as dead as the past.

Then the glass doors closed down and the song ceased. Where the Panthars had been dancing now was—nothing.

Gone was the song, gone were the unseen singers, gone were the dancers! A woman screamed. Swinging his nightstick as if to defend himself from invisible attackers, the cop backed even farther away. The Yellowjackets turned and ran.

Within a minute, the street was empty of all witnesses. Then others who had seen nothing appeared to walk uneventfully through the spot where the glass doors had opened. The people who had stopped their cars moved on, and traffic, trade, and commerce flowed on. The cop took off his cap, wiped sweat from a bald head, and moved along quietly. He made no report of what he had seen. If he reported what he thought he had seen, the desk sergeant would jerk his badge!

On the roof, the hidden camera caught the whole show; the falling from the sky of the little glass sphere that looked as if had been made of colored moonbeams, the opening of the glass doors, the dancing of the Panthars, the swell of the mighty chorus of female voices, the vanishing of the Panthars.

It also caught the fact that the leader-lookout-king of the Panthars had dropped the little glass sphere and that it had rolled into a sewer opening at the curb, where it would not be crushed by a careless foot or splintered by the tire of a passing car.

Huddling together in the safety of their own country, the Yellowjackets decided that they would never tell what they had seen. In fact, they were a badly shaken gang of kids who knew only that they had run into a world suddenly acting in unaccustomed ways. Obviously this was not something you discussed with adults. Like glue and pot and girls, this was a matter for discussion only within the group. The Yellowjackets were so badly shaken they did not talk about what they had seen and heard even to each other. Careful scouting revealed no sign of the Panthars: the enemy gang had simply disappeared and had not returned. What had happened to the Panthars, they asked each other. Nobody knew, not the parents, nor the cops, nor any of the other rival gangs. In truth, neither the parents nor the police nor even the rival gangs were much interested in the fate of the Panthars. If a few unruly, dirty-faced gang kids vanished, what difference did it make? Most people seemed to feel there were already too many kids, too many street gangs.

The camerman on the roof got a beautiful picture. It was complete with the falling of the little glass sphere,

with the opening of the glass doors, and with the dancing and disappearance of the Panthars. In addition, his audio picked up the mighty chorus singing in the background. The cameraman thought this song was coming from a radio or a tape recorder playing somewhere in the neighborhood, and he ignored it. He showed his film to the broadcasting company, and it was instantly snatched up for spot commercials instead of for the Life in America program. The shots were instantly successful and were shown on TV stations around the world. A famous bandleader heard the song, liked the rhythm and the words, called the broadcasting company to find out about it-and was eventually referred to the photographer who had taken the original pictures. The band leader got little information from the photog-simply because the photographer had little to give-but he did get a copy of the original film. From this he learned the words of the song. which he copyrighted in his own name. He put full orchestration around it, had a powerful basso sing the first line, female voices sing the second line, and brought in the whole orchestra on the line, "We are the mutants of the moon-and man!"

The song was an instant hit. Millions of tapes were sold and it was played at dance-ins, sit-ins, and love-ins. It was almost as if this song touched and revived momentarily ancient ancestral memories lost and almost forgotten in the minds of men. When a great mixed chorus roared out, "We are the mutants of the moon—and man!" lost memories stirred in the minds of men, stirred and tried to come to life. Men—and women too—remembered things they had chosen to forget, things that in forgotten times and in lost lands had been very dear to them.

Then, overnight, the song vanished from TV and from the radio. The tapes disappeared from the stores. Although never publicly admitted, in the United States the song disappeared at the urgent request of the U.S. Department of Health. In foreign countries the song vanished at the request of whoever had the power to order it out of sight.

The reason for this was quite simple. The governments of the world were being driven frantic by the fact that again the great invisible chorus of female voices was being heard, that again the gaily colored little glass spheres that looked like frozen moonlight were falling from the sky, that again the glass doors were opening, and that again people were dancing into them—and out of sight forever.

The song had returned—and people were singing and dancing through glass doors into oblivion.

Chapter Two

"WHAT THIS PLACE NEEDS is a blanket of air to act as a buffer zone and to create a borderland," Professor John Zanthar said to himself. "Here there are no borders. A rock is a rock right up to the point where it becomes something else. The horizon is not softened and pushed away from you by an air blanket, it's right in front of you pushing against your eyeballs!"

He was referring to the airless surface of the moon. Here space with its billions of glittering stars came right up to the surface of the broken rocks. Reflecting back the light of space and becoming visible because of this star-glow, the broken surface of the moon seemed to leap into existence. While air lingered in the deep depressions—and now and then a little ice—at the higher levels of the lunar ranges, there was no blanket of atmosphere to soften and spread either the light of the sun or the light from the stars.

On Earth, air was a great warm blanket surrounding the planet. Life based on oxygen thrived in this blanket. Water in the form of clouds moved through it. The atmosphere protected the planet from rocky intruders from space. In addition, the air changed the qualities of light and by softening harsh lines lent an aura of enchantment to the Home World.

Here on the moon there was no enchantment. Here was either too much sun, if you were on the sun side, or here was space with its millions of too-bright stars, if you were on the dark side. Here also was much too hard, much too brittle, much too cold rock. But in spite of the cold, John Zanthar always managed to find a kind of wonder here, an awe and reverence he always felt when his eyes looked outward into the infinite depths of Great Space. Looking outward, he felt he could see the literal meaning of infinity, of space that went on until the mind reeled away from trying to grasp the meaning of this immensity and like a drunken man lurched hastily toward the nearest available support in the form of a material object in an effort to keep from having to face the fact of infinite space. Looking outward, Zanthar tried to find some pathway between the stars, perhaps a lane that led beyond the Solar System and into the Galaxy and beyond that into infinity. He could not find such a lane. The stars seemed too close together to permit passage between them.

"A spaceship would have to travel a crooked route to dodge all of those blazing suns!" he muttered into the mike inside the helmet of his space suit. Even as he spoke, he knew that this appearance of closeness was only delusion, that in reality enormous gulfs of space existed between the stars. "They just *look* close," he continued. "They really aren't that close together." He forgot his suit radio was on.

"Yes, sirl" the shaky voice of the Space Marines lieutenant answered. The lieutenant with his detail of eight men were back at the base camp already established via matter transmitter from Earth. Leaving the lieutenant in command, Zanthar, wearing the eagles of a full colonel, had gone out from the base camp to explore the terrain.

"I was talking to myself," Zanthar said hastily.

"Yes, sir," the lieutenant said. It was against regulations, but if his commanding officer wished to talk to himself, there was nothing he could do about it. "Do you want us, sir?"

"Not at the moment," Zanthar said.

"Yes, sir."

"Out."

"Yes, sir. But my orders from you, sir, are to keep my radio continuously on so I can hear anything you say."

"I was only talking to myself," Zanthar explained again. "Out here where I am, you get a good look at Great Space."

"Yes, sir."

"And that's enough to start anyone talking to himself," Zanthar said.

"I agree, sirl" the lieutenant said emphatically. The tone of his voice said that anyone who took too many looks at that enormous immensity called Great Space would very soon take leave of his mind and that he hoped this had not already happened to his commanding officer.

"That is all, lieutenant," Zanthar said.

'Yes, sir." Zanthar waited for the soft click in his helmet speaker that would tell him the lieutenant had cut off his transmitter. When this did not come, he assumed the officer was still listening. Well, those were his or-

ders. The lieutenant was still shaken by his trip through the matter transmitter. On this point, Zanthar sympathized with him. The lieutenant looked like a nice boy straight from officers' training school for the Space Marines. He was cool, respectful, quick-witted-and at this moment still scared to death. Zanthar had no criticism of him for this. No human being, no matter how thoroughly he had been briefed in advance, could be expected to keep his cool on a trip through the matter transmitter. In going through this instrument, one second you were here facing a glow of white light that looked like a door, you stepped into this glow of light, and then the universe seemed to cave in around you, space changed, time jumped, and for a breath-taking moment the sun, the moon, and all the Solar System seemed to stand still like Joshua's moon in Ajalon. Pouf, you were wherever the transmitter had been tuned to drop you.

An observer outside the matter transmitter at the starting point had no way of knowing where a person went when he went though the door of light, when he arrived, or *if* he arrived. An observer at the arriving point had no way of knowing when the arriving person had departed. To a person at the transmitting point, the person went through the light door—and vanished. If the arrival point was above solid ground, the forces of the transmitter lowered the passenger gently to the surface. If the transmitter was incorrectly tuned and the arrival point was below the surface, the energies automatically adjusted to deliver the passenger at the surface level. No one had as yet been dropped into an ocean or a lake, a possibility that Zanthar privately feared. An analogical computer of a special kind was built into the transmitter itself, with the result that a spot similar to the transmitter was automatically selected as an arrival point.

Whatever else was true, a trip through the transmitter was unsettling to the mind, to the nerves, and to the soul of a man. The unit of Space Marines that had

jumped to the moon with Zanthar had gone through weeks of hard training in the use of the matter transmitter, on short hops. Each was a volunteer, each knew the risks he was taking, each knew he was to be aimed at the moon, and each could have backed out of the assignment at any time he chose prior to the actual departure. In case of a backout, the only requirement was absolute secrecy about the existence and the nature of the matter transmitter. The President of the United States knew it existed, a few high government officials knew about it, as did members of the Chiefs of Staff of the armed services. This secrecy was important. A device that could transmit matter-and armed men ready to fight-was a more important weapon than the hydrogen bomb. Foreign governments might suspect the existence of some new weapon but until they had specific information they could not develop it for themselves. The fact of the existence of the hydrogen bomb, which could not be hidden once it was used, was enough to set off frantic efforts to duplicate the weapon.

The matter transmitter had other possible applications that were more important than its use as a weapon, Zanthar felt. Given wide use, it could eliminate long-haul trucking, long-haul railroad, long-haul air freight, and long-haul ocean traffic. Perhaps a long time would have to pass before it would be accepted by the public for passenger traffic. The transit itself was so unnerving that wide public acceptance was probably impossible. Very few people were ever going to be brave enough to face the mind-emotion-soul-shattering effect of practically instantaneous transportation from anywhere to anywhere. Eventually the matter transmitter would also be used for space exploration, for adventure beyond the Solar System.

The lieutenant was still shaken by his trip through the matter transmitter, Zanthar decided. In the old army, this lieutenant would have been called a *shavetail*, meaning, among other things, that he had an ocean of courage but as yet lacked an island of sense, that he had not as yet been tested under fire from an enemy. The Space Marines might never test him under such fire. Space had few enemies who used rifles or cannons as weapons. Space had other ways to test a man, tougher ways, harder ways. Even the grizzled sergeant who looked as if he had already met the devil himself in hand-to-hand combat during his career in the armed forces had been visibly shaken when the matter transmitter had dropped him on the moon, dropping flat on his face and trying to grasp in a bear-hug the frozen surface of the moon.

Zanthar had jumped first. There had been arguments about this back at Space Marine Base in southern California. The general there had tried to talk Zanthar out of jumping at all, and when this effort had failed, he had tried to out-rank him, stating bluntly that he was a general and that Zanthar was only a colonel, and that colonels came to quick attention when generals spoke. Zanthar had replied that this might be very well in the regular army but that he was on special assignment and that he held his commission directly from the President and was responsible directly to the President.

"Also, this is my equipment, I made it, I understand it, and if anything goes wrong with it on the moon, I will be the man who repairs it," Zanthar had explained, politely, to the general.

"But you're the top man in electronics in the world, Dr. Zanthar!" the general had protested. "The country needs you."

"The country needs men, not me," Zanthar had answered.

"But you are the only person who understands how this matter transmitter works and if you—if you—"

"In the next century, teenage boys will be building them in their basements!" "You don't really mean that, Dr. Zantharl" the startled general had exclaimed.

"Well, maybe in the attic instead of in the basement. As for this taking a century, the smarter kids will probably be building them within twenty-five years. The matter transmitter is the best bridge to space the human race has ever found. Once they know the bridge exists, the kids will be building matter transmitters, from toy kits if in no other way. But all of them won't be kits. Some of them will be for real. This is the generation when the human race begins to learn about the wings that will take it to space!"

"But, space, I mean, of course, we're Space Marines. But I don't think that anybody even in the Space Marines really believes this talk about space—"

At this point, Zanthar had gestured with his mittened space suit glove toward the sky above California. "We're going that way, general, in time. Give a few years, take a few years, only laggards and sluggards and cowards will be left on the Home World."

"Oh, come, Dr. Zanthar-"

"I'm not coming, I'm going," Zanthar had answered. "Send the details right after me, one at a time, in a file, with the lieutenant coming last. When they arrive on the moon, I'll be there to catch them."

With these words, Zanthar had stopped all discussion of who would go first through the matter transmitter and of how long it would be before even the kids would be building matter transmitters by snapping shut the helmet on his space suit and by stepping into the white glow between the upright poles of the matter transmitter set up at the Space Marine Base in southern California.

At the receiving end of the matter transit, located on the moon but tuned from the Earth, Zanthar had steadied the detail as it had emerged. Coming out of the transmitter, appearing suddenly on or near the rocky surface of the moon, these men had needed nothing so much as the touch of a friendly hand, somebody to grab their spacesuit and help them to a solid surface. The length of time the jump sweats had lasted had varied with each man, ranging from three to eleven minutes. When the sweats were over, even though the men were still shaky inside, the conditioned training patterns of the Space Marines had gone into effect and these men had become soldiers in the finest meaning of the term. Zanthar had put them to work lugging away from the matter transmitter deposit point the supplies that now were coming through, food, water, arms and ammunition, a plastic tent big enough to hold the whole detail, oxygen containers to charge the tent and to recharge the space suits, radio for tight-band communication between the members of the group—and another, portable matter transmitter.

In something less than half an hour after they had jumped from California, these men had established an adequate camp under a rocky overhand on the moon. Moving from any point on Earth, it was possible to

Moving from any point on Earth, it was possible to establish such a camp anywhere else on Earth, or on the moon, or on the planets, with the aid of the matter transmitter. If a state of war existed—or even if it did not officially exist—it was possible to invade your enemy's country in this way and to pour in upon him troops, tanks, personnel carriers, plus whatever weapon strategy or tactics indicated. The enemy—who might not bother to declare war either—could also do the same thing to your land, if he possessed matter transmitters.

Professor Zanthar was trying to find a method to shield an area the size of a city, of a state, or of a nation, from intrusion via the route of the matter transmitter. He also had his two most advanced students, Lori Ponder and Red Cornish, working on the same idea but as yet neither he nor they had produced a workable shield. Such a shield would come in time, Zanthar was sure, if he ever had the time to devote to developing it. So far all he and his two aides had managed to develop was an electronic method of detecting when a matter transmitter was in operation within a circle about a mile in diameter. When a transmitter sent through space-time the end of the powerful vortex which acted as a carrier wave for the objects being transmitted, every radio set and every TV receiver in the vicinity of the receiving point went blotto with distortion.

However, all things considered, the matter transmitter had potential benefits of enormous value. When little glass spheres that looked like colored moonbeams had began to fall from the sky, when glass doors had begun to open and to close around the world, when a mighty chorus of female voices had been heard too many times, when the governments of the world had begun to be really alarmed, Professor John Zanthar had been called in as a consulting specialist. When study of the date had indicated at least the possibility that the source from which these strange events was proceeding lay on the moon, the matter transmitter had made easy the jump of Zanthar and the detail of Space Marines to the lunar satellite. Since they had brought with them a portable transmitter, it would also take them back when they had finished their exploration here. Or so they hoped.

"Are you all right, sir?" the lieutenant spoke suddenly via radio.

"I'm as near all right as any man can be in such a place as this," Zanthar answered.

"Is something wrong, sir? I mean—" Alarm was in the lieutenant's voice. If something happened to Zanthar, the lieutenant would have to operate the matter transmitter for the return trip to Earth!

"Physically, I'm all right," Zanthar said patiently. "It's just that this world here needs-" His voice slipped away into silence as he tried to decide what the surface of the moon needed most.

"Yes, sir," the lieutenant said. "It needs a lot, sir. Do you think that anybody has ever lived here, sir?"

"I think that life in some form or another exists everywhere," Zanthar answered. "Some of these forms may not be familiar to us. Some of them may even be invisible—" "Sir?"

"Don't worry about it, Lieutenant. Out."

"Yes, sir."

Zanthar felt a little sorry for the lieutenant, but then shrugged the feeling away. The lieutenant was just one more human who was learning the hard way the meaning back of Einstein's statement that physics had lost its walls. All Einstein had meant by this statement had been to call to the attention of the world what thinking men had always known to be true, that the boundaries between things and times had a large subjective element in them and that men either created these differences unconsciously for themselves and by their own power or that invisible creatures called "the gods" created these differences so that men might live by them.

The lieutenant and his detail were learning a little of this meaning by facing the rocky landscape of the moon at first hand.

To learn a little more of this same meaning for himself, Zanthar moved slowly forward. Ahead of him was a vast bowl-shaped depression that was almost a moon crater and could have been the bed of an ancient sea. Radar tracking stations on Earth had tracked the fall of the little glass spheres from somewhere near this huge bowl.

Inside his helmet, Zanthar could hear the thin whisper of oxygen under pressure feeding from the twin tanks on his back. Now and then the apparatus clearing out the toxic residues in the rebreathed air clicked softly. Also clicking softly but in a different tone was his own version of what had once been called a Geiger counter which was busy checking the impact of cosmic rays on the space suit. His head was free in a plastic helmet which had built-in shades which he could open or close to shield his eyes from too much sun or to admit more light as circumstances dictated. Hanging from hooks on his belt were various instruments, including a heavy copper hammer and a *xet* gun. The latter weapon, which discharged the equivalent of a very heavy lasar beam, Zanthar had developed from a weapon he had found on an ancient space ship on Planet Letar.*

As Zanthar moved cautiously closer to the great bowl that lay directly ahead of him, he glimpsed just above the horizon line of broken rock the outline of a ship!

The sight startled him. No ships from Earth were known to be on the moon, yet a ship was here! As he ducked back and down, the top of the hull slid out of sight beyond the horizon's edge—and the ship was gone from sight.

"Lieutenant?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Do we have any ships on the moon?"

"No, sir."

"Well, I just saw one!"

"What, sir? Maybe the Russians, maybe the Chinese-"

"And maybe someone worse than both the Russians and the Chinese put together."

"What, sir? Who, sir?" There was no mistaking the gasp in the officer's voice.

Zanthar was silent. The lieutenant's voice clamored in the speaker in his helmet. He ignored it. Oxygen hissed softly, the filter system clicked. There was no other sound, nor was there ever likely to be any other sound heard where no air existed to convey vibrations. He

^o ZANTHAR OF THE MANY WORLDS, by Robert Moore Williams, published by Lancer Books. watched the skyline where the top of the ship had disappeared. It did not reappear. He began to move forward, skirting the edge of the vast bowl, hoping for some point of vantage that would give him another view of the ship. The voice of the lieutenant yammered in his speaker but he did not understand what the officer had said. He moved forward. Here was a chasm that led almost straight down to the edge of the great bowl. He could go no farther in this direction. And the lieutenant was speaking again, urgently requesting his attention.

"Yes, lieutenant."

"One of my men, sir—" The lieutenant's voice trailed off and he seemed to be debating within himself what he would say. "Well, sir—he's seeing things. He's gone nuts, sir. If you would tell me what to do—" The officer's voice had a sudden gulp in it. "This is the first time I ever saw a man become insane, sir. The manual says I am to restrain him, by force if necessary, and that I can shoot him, if I have to, but—"

"What makes you think the man is insane?" Zanthar asked. His mind was still on the mysterious ship. "What is he doing?"

"He is just sitting here in the tent, sir, and staring down into the big depression. That's all he does, sir, just sit here and stare."

"Shock from the matter transmitter, perhaps," Zanthar hazarded. "Sometimes the world sort of caves in on a person just after he has gone through the transmitter."

"I can understand *that*, sir. But when I speak to him, he doesn't seem to hear me. He just sits here and stares and talks and—and I don't want to shoot him, sir, just because he is nuts."

"Of course not!" Zanthar said sharply. "What is he saying?"

"Here, I'll put the mike up close and you can hear him for yourself, sir."

Listening, Zanthar was aware of a voice muttering in

the background. In the tent, the men had opened their helmets to make breathing and talking easier. As the lieutenant moved the mike in his open helmet closer, the muttering grew louder and almost became articulate sound. Almost meaningful, but not quite. Zanthar felt his skin crawl inside the inner liner of the space suit as he listened.

"That city there in the bowl!" the voice whispered. "All spun silver and burnished gold! It looks like it is made of moonlight twisted into strands of wonder. All beauty is there—and all madness . . ."

The voice of the marine went into silence. Zanthar flicked his transmitter to the band that would reach every man of the detail.

"Where is this city?" he asked.

"There in that huge bowl," the soldier answered.

"I am standing beside the bowl-and I do not see it." "You can't see it!" Astonishment was strong in the

voice of the soldier in the tent. "Are you blind, sir? It's right there, sir, right there! It sparkles as if it was made of diamond dust . . ."

For a moment, Zanthar considered the many possible meanings for the words the soldier was using. The marine might be hallucinating, he might be seeing a city that existed only in his own mind; this might be a delayed-reaction result of the trip through the matter transmitter. On the other hand, the matter transmitter might have triggered certain psychic centers that normally were closed, with the result that he was seeing a city that had once existed in the remote past of the lunar body. A third possibility was that he was looking into the future in which such a city would exist on the moon.

Which was true, which was false? Looking into the vast depression, Zanthar knew only that he did not see the city. Quickly he cut his transmitter back to the frequency reserved for communication with the lieutenant. "Do you see any city, lieutenant?" "No, sir," the officer answered. "I-I haven't seen any ship, either."

"Damn it!" Zanthar muttered.

"I don't see anything in that big bowl but rocks and sand," the lieutenant said hastily.

"All right, all right," Zanthar said. "I'm returning to the tent."

"Yes, sir. Good, sir. I'll be on the lookout for you, sir." Relief sounded in the officer's voice.

"Out!" Zanthar said. Looking back over his shoulder for another glimpse of the ship he was certain he had seen, simultaneously glancing into the vast bowl on his right where a man said existed a city of spun silver and burnished gold, Zanthar carefully made his way across the surface of the moon. Caution was needed here. The rocks were bitterly cold. Their edges were as sharp this day as they had been the moment they had separated from the parent mass. On Earth, the attrition of rain and sleet and snow, the friction of moving wind and blowing sand, the effect of alternate heating and cooling, eventually dulled even the sharpest stone edge. Here on the moon no atmosphere had ever carried water vapor to condense as rain and snow which would eventually erode away mountains. Here sharp edges remained sharp forever. Did- Zanthar cut back his radio receiver to the band used by all the men. The soldier was talking again. Nor rising excitement was in his voice.

"I never in my life saw so many beautiful women" the man was whispering. "They're thousands of them in this city!" Wonder and awe were in the voice. "What wouldn't I give to spend a few weeks there!" Then, as another thought seemed to come into the mind of this man, the excitement faded. "But where are the men?" Fear now crept into the voice. "A city of beautiful women —without men!" The voice shifted through shades of feeling, expressing growing fear. "How can you have a city without men? How can a world continue to exist without men? How can-" The voice whispered itself into silence.

"Look closely and try to see men somewhere," Zanthar said.

"Yes, sir. I mean, I have already looked."

"Look again."

"Yes, sir." Silence followed. The voice came again. "There are no men, sir."

"Are you sure?"

"Well—" The soldier seemed to consider the meaning of the word. He seemed to doubt that anyone could ever be really sure about anything. "Well, as sure as I can be, when I'm looking through glass doors, sir."

"What?" Zanthar said. "What do you mean-glass doors?"

"That's what they look like, sir. Like huge glass doors that are always opening and closing at different angles. The whole bowl seems to be filled with these glass doors. Or covered with them. Or surrounded by them! When they open just a little I can see the city beyond them—"

"Can you see any men?"

"No, sirl" Apprehensions appeared in the voice of this marine who was looking out from a plastic tent over a huge depression on the moon that looked like a great bowl. "A world without men is only half a world! I—I don't like this, sir—" Horrors too painful to be verbalized seemed to walk through the mind of the marine. He was silent.

"Listen!" he whispered. "Do you hear that song?"

Waves of cold went up Zanthar's back at these words. He turned so he could clearly see everything that was in the bowl. Now, for the first time, he had the vague impression that he was seeing glass doors opening and closing. Then he caught a whisper of a song.

Somewhere, in some lost world, a great chorus was singing.

"We are the children of Aphrodite, We are the mutants of the moon—and man!"

The voices in this chorus were exclusively female. As he realized this fact, the feeling of cold climbing the spine of Professor John Zanthar grew stronger.

The last line of the song was repeated again, a booming volume of sound.

"We are the mutants of the moon-and man!"

The song faded into silence, then came again, stronger now. And somehow closer.

Staring into the vast bowl, Zanthar saw suddenly appearing there like cloud mists from some lost fairyland tall towers of shining silver and burnished gold! In this split second, he knew the soldier in the tent had not been hallucinating. No! The marine had been seeing a world that was as real on its level of existence as were the harsh, sharp, cold rocks of the moon were real to the human level of perception.

The song leaped up.

Zanthar had the vague impression that he was seeing a huge stadium filled with singing women. From them this song was coming.

As the song grew louder he realized that the glass doors were no longer in the distance. Somehow they had moved closer to him. They were now around him, enfolding him like the matter transmitter itself in a transit to another world, perhaps to another universe.

Class doors opening, glass doors closing—and a song that was as old as time.

Chapter Three

IN HER AIR-CONDITIONED APARTMENT in Los Angeles, in a building set apart for living quarters for graduate students, Laurel Ponder came quickly to wakefulness.

In her mind was the distinct impression that the door of her room had opened. The thought sent alarm reactions through her body: it increased her respiratory rate, it sent her heart pounding beneath the thin plastic pajamas that she wore as night garments.

She listened. And heard nothing.

"The door can't have opened!" she thought. "The night catch is on. I remember shooting the bolt!"

She did not turn on the light. If the door *had* opened, someone might be in the room and turning on the light would reveal more than she cared to have revealed at this moment. Better to be quiet. Better to tell one's self that the door was certainly locked.

The feeling persisted that the door to the room, or the door to *something*, had opened. Now she snapped on the light switch and sat up in bed prepared to defend herself.

The door to her room was closed. She stared accusingly at it and it looked firmly back at her.

"Who is here?" she called.

There was no answer.

"Red! Did you knock on my door?" Perhaps Red Cornish, her companion and fellow graduate student who lived in the building, had tapped lightly on her door. He would not have entered the room, she knew, without her permission.

There was no answer to the question. She looked around the room. The study desk piled with books, the little dressing room with her clothes on hangers, beyond it the shower and lavatory, all of this was familiar, all of it was quiet, all of it was serene. To the left of the bed was the tiny dining area with its hot plates and coffeemakers, its small refrigerator, and a small table with two chairs, just room enough for two people to share a quiet snack in the late hours of the night; all of this was undisturbed.

She knew she ought to lie back down and go to sleep again. Somehow she could not do this. A door had opened somewhere! So strong was her impression that she got out of bed. Disdaining the dressing gown, ignoring the mules under the bed, she moved to the door in her bare feet. It was locked. The bolt was in place. It had not been opened. Thinking that perhaps someone had rapped softly on the outside, she opened the door and looked out into the hall. In the still hours of the morning, the long hall was quiet. This building was reserved for the use of graduate students; presumably all of them were in bed. Her plastic pajamas, which she would wear once and would then discard, made soft rustling noises as she turned back into the room. The study table caught her eye. On it was a small plastic box which Professor Zanthar had given to her before he had left for the Space Marine Base. She knew the little box contained a small glass sphere which looked like a marble that children might use in playing games.

She knew that this little glass sphere was not a toy. Handling it always with instruments, she and Red Cornish had spent most of the time in the laboratory after Professor Zanthar had left, checking the little gaily colored sphere for such fields as might surround it. Such fields had included the ordinary magnetic field that surrounds magnets and wires through which current was flowing. Their tests had revealed that the little sphere had a very powerful magnetic field around it. Were other fields there too? Gravity was one such possibility; time itself might be another field. Perhaps even space could best described as a field of a very special kind!

Using the very extensive equipment in Professor Zanthar's big lab, they had found hints that fields other than magnetic did indeed exist around the little glass spherel Subtle but very powerful currents swirled in mad vortices around the tiny glass ball.

"Whoever charged this thing really put a charge into it!" Red Cornish had said, after checking.

"But what's it for?" Lori had asked.

"Professor didn't tell me much," Red said. "He just said to handle it with tongs. It has something to do with the people that are vanishing."

"What?"

"I don't know. Professor didn't say. He did say that only people with top security clearance know about it. This puts us in the clear. We have top security ratings."

"I know. But-"

"Don't worry, kitten," Red had told her. "When Professor returns he will tell us more—*if* he returns."

"What do you mean by that if?"

"Nothing, for sure, but I know he has been powwowing with a lot of generals. My guess is that he has set up a matter transmitter down at the Space Marine Base and that he is going through it!"

"Without us! Darn his hide! Wait until I catch him!"

Red had laughed at her comments and had repeated what he had often said before, that in his opinion Professor Zanthar was quite capable of taking care of himself without help. "He did say that we're to take this little sphere home with us tonight—home with one of us, that is—and that we are not to let it out of our sight and that we are not to talk about it to anyone else. Do you want to take the sphere with you tonight? I don't think there is any danger and I've got a date with a very lovely lady."

"Lovely lady? Pooh! I'll bet you have to bone up for a test!"

"How'd you guess?" Red had answered, grinning. "Will you take the sphere with you?"

"Of coursel"

Now, seeing the little plastic box lying on the study table, she picked it up. Inside the box was lined with foil which stopped both the inflow and outflow of radiation. The little sphere lay in a nest of cotton where she had placed it, with instruments, as she had finished with it at the lab. Looking at it she saw that it was truly a beautiful thing. Made of interlaced leaves of different colors, all imbedded in plastic so clear she had the impression she could look into it and see infinity, the little interlaced leaves ran through the color scale from the infrared to the ultraviolet. Lifting it in her fingers from its nest of cotton she could discern hints of other colors beyond the range normally visible. This did not surprise her. She knew, from tests, that her color vision went beyond what was normally regarded as the visible spectrum.

Studying the little glass sphere, she felt a touch of wonder at the beauty of it. This was the work of some competent artist! Whatever it was, it was not a toy for children, a piece of tinsel punched out by the millions for mass distribution. It was a work of art, and more than this, it was also the product of a vastly advanced science. Diamond-hard, this little sphere was. No test she and Red had run had even scratched it. Acids had not corroded it. The glass of which it was made—if it could be called by this name—was unlike any glass known to humans. All she and Red had been able to learn about it was that it was surrounded by intense fields and that some of them were probably generated by unknown energies.

At the same time, it looked like a marble, like a taw, like a shooter that any child would delight in having.

Holding it near the top of the desk, she spun it in her fingers then released it on the surface of the desk. Like a top, it spun there. She leaned over to watch it more closely.

The door opened again. Right in her own room, right where she was standing, the door opened. She knew it happened but it did not alarm her. When a door had opened before, she had been asleep. She had translated the first opening of the door into the opening of the door of her room. Now she understood that the door had really opened beside her bed but by the time she had awakened, it had closed. She also realized that it had opened again in response to the touch of her fingers on the little glass sphere.

She was not afraid. A vise seemed to have clamped down on her brain, so subtly that she was not really aware that it had happened at all. This vise had shut her off somehow from fear. With this emotion gone, her intelligence continued functioning. She was suddenly completely what she had trained herself to be, a scientist interested in the objective functioning of the world around her, without emotional bias of any kind. Thinking in this manner, she was interested in the fact that a door was now around her. She saw that it was glass and that it seemed to have a churning, twisting motion that was all its own. She stood very still, waiting for something—she knew not what—to happen. On the desk top, the little sphere spun slowly to a stop. Turning, she took a single tentative step toward the glass door.

It seemed to move away from her.

She took another step. Again the glass door seemed to retreat.

"How interesting!" she thought.

Moving around the end of her bed, she watched the performance of this amazing door. She saw now that no matter which way she turned, a door was open in that direction. She moved toward the door of her room and was out in the hall!

For a moment she wondered how she had gotten through the door of her room. She had not opened it and it had not opened in front of her. Instead the glass door had opened in front of her. She had stepped through it and in doing this had also stepped through the door of her room. She thought about this, wondering how it could have happened. Turning, she saw behind her the door of her room. It was a hard, physical fact. Trying to find out what had happened, she walked back into the door of her room. Again the glass door opened in front of her, again she stepped through the door of her room. Inside was the bed with the blanket thrown back, the study table piled high with books, the cleared space where now there rested a gaily colored little glass ball that looked as if it was made of the stuff of moonbeams. Her mind was concerned with one problem: how could she have walked through the door of her room without touching it? In an effort to solve this problem, she walked through the door again. Again she found herself back in the hall of the dormitory. Again she had not been able to see what had happened except that the glass door which was around her had seemed somehow to open a tunnel through the real door and, after permitting her passage, to close up the tunnel again.

Under other circumstances, this would have set off panic reactions in her emotions. Now these panic reactions did not arise. The vise was still around her mind. The vise permitted her to exhibit intellectual curiosity but it did not permit the rising of wild emotions. How could this happen? She had no answer, but she knew the vise was somehow a part of the functioning of the glass doors that opened in every direction around her. In her mind was the thought that careful testing of this phenomenon was very much in order. Professor Zanthar would want to know what had happened, how it had happened, when it had happened, at what hour it had happened, what she had been doing when it had happened, what she had been thinking, what had she been feeling, and so on. Professor Zanthar would also be certain to inquire what tests she had made while the phenomenon was in existence.

No stern and harsh taskmaster was Professor Zanthar ---but he was always hungry for facts.

In an effort to get more facts for him—and for herself —she walked slowly down the hall and pushed the button of the automatic elevator, noting as she did this that the indicator sign was glowing. The fact that the elevator was in use did not concern her. The elevator had an electronic memory and would eventually arrive at her floor. What concerned her was the fact that as she had walked down the hall, the glass doors had moved with her. As she waited for the elevator, they continued to enfold her in a continuously changing flow of some substance that she could just barely see and which looked like glass but which she did not for one moment think was really glass.

As she waited for the elevator, she considered seeing if she could step through the metal door of the cage, but then backed hastily away as she remembered that to step through the door would leave her in the elevator well with no floor beneath her feet. This was an experiment she did not wish to try just yet.

The door opened. From the elevator stepped a young woman, a graduate student living in the dormitory, and her escort for the evening.

"Hi, Lori," the young woman said, then giggled. The man looked sharply at Lori, pursed his lips, and nodded approvingly. "Nice," he said. "Nice indeed!" Neither seemed to be aware of the existence of the continuously changing glass doors.

Lori looked at them without expression.

"Your pajamas, Loril" the young woman said quickly. "Are you walking in your sleep? You're wearing your pajamas!"

Lori ignored them. Slipping into the elevator, she closed the door and pushed the *down* button. The arrow which marked the position of the elevator began its slow movement indicating descent.

The young woman looked at her escort. Shaking his head, he asked a question. "Is she on a trip?"

"I don't think so. So far as I know, she doesn't even touch psychedelic substances."

"Then what's wrong with her?"

"I don't know. She's a friend. We had lunch together today. Now she doesn't even recognize mel" Surprise and perhaps a little hurt was in the young woman's voice. "I mean, this isn't like Lori at all. She's usually the soul of consideration. Now she walks right past me and doesn't even see me!"

"And in her pajamas!" her escort answered, grinning. His grin got him a hot glance as the young woman turned toward the stairs.

"Where are you going?" he called out.

"If we hurry maybe we can beat this pokey old elevator to the first floor. Come with me, Tom!"

They went down the steps on the run. At the bottom, they turned toward the elevator well. They had moved too slowly; the elevator had already reached this floor. Lori, in her pajamas, was walking toward the front entrance of the building.

"Loril Waitl"

Lori kept walking. In front of her was a revolving glass door that was the front entrance and exit to the building. On both sides of the door short corridors led to apartments. The young woman got in front of the pajama-clad walker before they reached the revolving door.

Now Lori became aware of her existence. Quickly, Lori turned to the right and moved down the corridor in that direction.

"Catch her, Tom!" the young woman called out. Now she was really alarmed. "She's walking in her sleep!"

"She can't go anywhere," the young man answered. "This hall has no exit from it except into two apartments."

Calling, the two students followed Lori. She seemed not to be aware of them until she reached the end of the hall. Then she glanced back over her shoulder at them, shook her head, and turned back toward the solid wall.

In front of her glass doors spun almost invisibly. She walked through the wall and out of sight.

Behind her, a young man and a young woman clung to each other. "She walked—Tom!" The young woman was gibbering. "Tom! She walked right through that wall!"

"I saw it! But she can't do that!"

"We just saw her do it!"

Together, they moved to the wall and felt it. The wall was concrete, solid and firm. The young man ran his fingers through his hair. "I—I don't like this, Helen!"

"Should we call the police?"

"And get ourselves a psychiatric evaluation? No, thanks! But if she went through this wall, we should be able to find her on the other side." He moved to the door and pushed cautiously through it, the young woman reluctantly following him. "There she is!" he called out.

Lori, in her pajamas, was strolling along the sidewalk.

"She-she's walking in her sleep!" the young woman whispered.

"Did you ever see anybody walk through a solid wall in his sleep?"

"N-nol" She caught his arm as the young man

started to walk forward. "No, Tom! Don't try to catch her! I've got a better idea."

"Such as?"

"There's a man here who knows her very well. Cornish is his name. He—he lives on the second floor. Let's get him. He'll know what to do!"

A few minutes later a very sleepy young man was sticking a head of very tousled red hair out of the door of his room and was trying to discover what his two unexpected visitors wanted at this hour of the night. Both tried to tell him at the same time. He tried to listen.

"What's Lori done now? Gone for a walk? Well, what's wrong with that?" Red Cornish blinked sleepy eyes at his visitors. "She's got a right to go for a walk if she wants to. What? She went for a walk in her pajamas? Well, now, I'll bet that's a sight. A mighty nice shape she's got! Where did you say she was? Well, I'll just pull on my clothes and go sneak a peek at her walking around in her pajamas—"

"Red Cornish, wake up!" the young woman screamed at him.

"But I am awakel" Red protested.

"If you are awake, then listen to me. Lori walked right straight through a solid wall!"

"Well!" Red Cornish considered this idea. "She walked through a solid wall!" Even in his sleepy state this seemed a little hard to understand. "That's a neat trick, even for Loril" He nodded to himself, then found he had been grabbed by the shoulders and was being shaken. "She walked right through the wall of the building?" he repeated.

"Yesl" the young woman shouted at him.

"I saw it too!" the young man added.

Red blinked owlishly at them. "What have you two been drinking?" he asked. "Or smoking? Or sniffing? Or—"

"Wake up, Red!" the young woman screamed at him. This time she succeeded in shaking the sleepiness out of Cornish. Suddenly he was wide awake and listening intently to what the two students had to say. "What has happened to Lori now?" he wondered. "Well, no matter what it is, I have to find her." Quickly he was back into his apartment. When he returned, he was wearing street clothes and shoes. "Thanks, you two, for telling mel" he said. "I'll take over now." Not bothering with the elevator, he went up the stairs on the run. The door of Lori's apartment was open. Calling her name, he went inside. There was no answer to his call and a quick search revealed that the apartment was empty. He turned to the radio equipment built into the head of the bed. Since he had helped design and install this equipment, he knew how it worked and who it would reach by tight beam.

"Calling Professor Zantharl" he spoke into the tiny mike. He expected—or perhaps he hoped—to hear an answer in the form of a snore subsiding into a grunt as Professor Zanthar awakened. There was no snore, there was no grunt. Instead a tape recording came on requesting him to leave a message. He did this, then he found again the couple who had awakened him and made them take him back to the ground floor and show him the wall through which Lori had walked, then show him exactly where they had last seen her.

"She was walking along the sidewalk in that direction," he was told.

Red went down the street on the run. Night and the eternal smog were over Los Angeles. This was an old residential section near the university. Much of the housing in this area, whether old-time single dwellings or new, swank multiple units, was used for housings of some of the tens of thousands of students who attended the university. Where so many young people were concentrated in so small an area anything could be expected to happen and a young woman walking down the street in her pajamas would attract only amused comment. A husky, red-headed young man chasing her would cause much the same amused reaction.

"Lori!" Red yelled.

There was no answer. Hoping he would find the woman he sought, Red continued running down the street. The only attention he attracted was from a prowl car which pulled in to the curb and turned a spotlight on him.

"What are you doing here, buddy?" a voice demanded. "Look—" Red began.

"Now if you want to get stiff and hold out for your legal rights, you don't have to answer," the voice in the prowl car told him. "But we have some rights too, including the right to detain you for questioning. Do you want to talk here or do you want to talk at the station?"

"I'm not trying to get stiff with you," Red answered. He knew that the police, wary of riots, were sticking to the letter of the law. He had no wish to antagonize them. Instead, he wanted their help. "I'm looking for my girl," he explained. True, Laurel Ponder was not his girl. Instead, she was completely her own woman, but at this moment Red felt he could best explain her and his interest in finding her by saying she was his girl. "She's walking in her sleep."

"Ah!" the cop said.

"I'm afraid she will wake up and not know where she is and be badly frightened," Red continued. "I want you to help me find her."

"That's better," the voice said, from the prowl car. "But how do you know she is walking in her sleep? Maybe she had reasons of her own for taking a walk!"

"If she had reasons, I was no part of them," Red answered, his voice suddenly warm. "Friends saw her slip out of the dorm. They called me because they knew I knew her." "Are you a student?"

"Yes. A graduate student. We both live there." He pointed toward the outline of the dormitory building vaguely visible in the smoggy night.

"What's the name of this woman you are hunting?" Red answered him and gave his own name. "I want you to help me find her before she wakes up and scares herself half to death wondering what has happened to her --or before she gets hit by a car!"

"Does she use dope in any form?"

"No, sir!"

"Do you?"

"No. sir!"

"All right, buddy, get in the back and we'll try to help you find her," the voice said. The back door of the car swung open. Red climbed in. Two men were in the front seat. They were separated rom him by a metal grill that permitted free talking but did not permit rear seat passengers to attempt violence on the officers in the front seat. Not that Red Cornish had any thought of attempting such violence. However, this back seat from time to time would carry passengers who did have such thoughts.

"Which way did this woman go?" the officer beside the driver asked. Red now saw that this officer was a sergeant.

"All I know is what I was told. I was told she was walking along the sidewalk in the direction we're going now."

"How was she dressed?"

"In her pajamas."

"And barefooted?"

"I don't know about that. I wasn't told and I didn't think to ask."

"Hunh!" the sergeant grunted. "Another hippy who has decided to move out of her love nest."

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"She's no hippy and she doesn't have a love nest!" Red said, anger in his voice.

"All right, all right," the sergeant grumbled. "Was she sober?"

"I have never seen her when she wasn't sober."

"No offense, buddy. How'd she get out of the dorm?" "She walked out, her friends said," Red's mind was not fully on what he was saying. "Right through the wall of the building!" Red shook his head at his own statement. "What the hell is happening I don't begin to understand."

The front seat was silent. Red, wrestling with mental and emotional problems, twisted uncomfortably on the back seat. He was watching both sides of the street.

"How could she have walked through a solid wall?" he repeated. "How could she have done it?"

Now, for the first time, he noticed the silence in the front seat. The silence held much too long. Then the sergeant grunted.

"I didn't see her do this," Red said, hastily. "That's what Tom and Helen said. They saw it!"

The sergeant grunted again, a toneless sound, and asked who Tom and Helen were.

"Graduate students too," Red explained. "Look, I'm not saying she did this. I didn't see it. Tom and Helen said they saw her do it. They were shook—"

"I'm shook too," the sergeant drawled. "Do you mean to say that a human being could walk through a solid wall—"

"I_"

"What in the hell are they teaching at the university these days?" the sergeant grumbled.

"It's not the fault of the university," Red answered. "It's just that some of us at the university have learned, mostly on our own, that the universe is not what it seems to be to our conscious minds—" "Unh?" the sergeant grunted. "If it is not what it seems to be to our conscious minds, then what is it?"

"I can't answer that," Red said. "You can only describe it, really, in mathematical terms. The universe is what it seems to be—"

"One minute you say it isn't what it seems to be to our conscious minds, the next minute you say it isn't," the sergeant grumbled.

"It is what it seems to be but this is not *all* that it is," Red answered. He had the unhappy feeling that anything he said was not only going to be wrong but was going to be used against him.

"And in this universe where anything can happen, a woman walks through a brick wall and now you are out hunting for her?"

"I never said the wall was brick, I never said I saw her do this, I said two other people told me they saw her do it. I went to her room. She wasn't there——"

"Do you mean to tell me that they're teaching at the university these days that a human being can walk through a brick wall, or through a concrete block wall, or through a concrete wall with reinforcing steel inside it?" The sergeant's voice had grown gruff and hard.

"I didn't say they were teaching this at the university," Red tried to protest. "I said that some of us have figured out for ourselves that strange things can happen."

"You're not the only one who has figured that out—or who has seen it happen," the sergeant grunted. "I know walls exist. I also know women don't walk through them." He spoke sharply to the driver, who turned the car in the street.

"Where are we going?" Red demanded.

"To the station."

"Then let me out! I've got to find Lori."

"Just settle down, buddy," the sergeant said. "We'll find your girl for you, if your girl exists. And while we're doing it, you will have a nice quiet place to rest and some nice men in white jackets to talk to."

"Look, I'm not nuts-"

"I didn't say you were, buddy. The men in the white jackets will decide that. Meanwhile, you just relax-"

"Let me out of here."

Red reached for the inner handle of the room and found none.

"There is no inside handle, buddy," the sergeant said. "When you get into the back seat of one of these cars, you don't get out until we let you out."

"But I've got to get out. I've got to find Lori. She needs help-"

"Sure, buddy, sure. We're going to let you out just as soon as we reach the station---"

"Look!" Red shouted, pointing to the sidewalk. "We've driven past her without seeing her. There she is now!" He pointed toward the sidewalk.

There, visible under a streetlight, a young woman was taking a quiet stroll. Barefooted, she was wearing pajamas. As he looked at her, Red had the impression that he was seeing her through some kind of glass.

"Quick! Grab her before she gets away!" Red said to the sergeant. He rattled the back door of the prowl car and shouted at the top of his voice. "Lori!"

She either heard the car or she heard his voice, or both, for she turned toward the sound. She saw the squad car but not the occupant of the back seat. The car seemed to frighten her. She turned and ran.

"Help me catch herl" the sergeant said to the driver. Pulling the car to the curb, the two officers began to chase the fleeing woman. In the back seat, Red Cornish beat futile fists against the metal grill separating the two seats, then beat against the doors, then tried to smash the glass, only to discover that this car had been built to prevent escape from the rear seat. All he could do was watch. He saw the driver of the car run ahead of Lori, he saw her try to turn back from him only to find she was facing the sergeant. She turned away from the street and ran agan, this time finding she was facing the back wall of concrete handball courts that the university had built for student use.

"Hold it, lady!" the sergeant shouted.

Turning, she saw the two officers running toward her. Turning again, she faced the concrete wall—and walked through it.

Trapped in the back seat of the prowl car, Red Cornish had the dim impression of glass doors opening and closing around Lori as she walked through the concrete wall and out of sight. Lights from the street gave him a clear view of the concrete wall. He had often played hand ball on the courts on the far side of the wall and he knew from personal experience that it was made of concrete. He also knew he had seen Lori walk through it.

The two officers, suddenly shaken men, returned to the prowl car.

"I want you to take me to the station and book me on a charge of saying two people had seen a young woman walk through a solid wall," Red said.

"Look, buddy," the sergeant began.

"I don't know what charge you can book me on but whatever you charge me with, the fact is certain to come out in court—because I will bring it out—that one of the things I said was that I had been told by two people that they had seen a young woman walk through a solid wall," Red continued.

"Mister-" the sergeant began.

"Then I am going to put you and your partner on the witness stand and ask you to tell the court how both of you saw a young woman walk through a concrete wall—"

"Mister, we made a mistake," the sergeant said. All the bluster was gone from his voice. "There's no need to take this to court. There's no need to take you to the station. There's no need to book you."

"Good!" Red said. "Then open the door of this car and let me out."

Mutely, the sergeant obeyed. As Red ran toward the spot where he had seen Lori vanish, he heard tires squeal as the prowl car hastily departed. In it, Red thought, were two men who had suddenly and unexpectedly encountered some of the hidden forces of the universe and who had not liked what they had seen.

In this, they had Red's sympathy. He had not liked what he had seen, but instead of running away from it, he ran toward it. He knew there was no hidden door in the concrete wall but he examined it anyhow, to find nothing.

"Lori," he whispered, "Lori."

There was no answer. Nor had he expected one. Better than any police officer, he knew and understood that other worlds, other frequencies, other dimensions existed and on their levels of existence were as real as the physical world of man was real to him. Intellectually, he understood the existence of the many worlds. Emotionally, however, when he had to face the fact that a dear friend had somehow gone into one of them—or had been kidnapped or abducted into one—fear came up in him, fear for her safety, and with it came a lump of warm affection for this young woman.

"Loril" he whispered. Perhaps the universe would hear and would answer him.

There was no answer. None at all. Perhaps the universe was under no compulsion to answer the pleas or the prayers of humans. Perhaps the universe only answered those who knew how to ask the right question in the right way.

Whispering, "Lori," was not the right way.

Was there a right question and a right way to ask it?

He did not know. But he knew this backstop for handball courts was not the right place. Returning to the dormitory, Red went quickly to Lori's room, hoping against hope he would now find her there.

The door was open but she was not there. He went to the headboard and again used the radio equipment hidden there. No snore and no grunt came back as answer. Instead the tape recording invited him to leave a message. He did this, stating bluntly and briefly what he had seen happen, then cut off the radio transmitter.

The room was still fragrant with Lori's presence. Rising to his feet, Red saw, lying in the pool of light from the desk lamp on the study table, the little glass sphere which he had been studying with Lori in the afternoon. He saw now that she had taken it out of the container. Moving to the desk, he stood looking down at it. In his mind rose the thought amounting to a conviction that this little glass ball had something to do with Lori's disappearance.

He picked it up.

There was no feeling of electric shock from it. Instead, very dimly and very far away, he heard a great chorus singing very softly.

"We are the children of Aphrodite-"

Listening, Red Cornish was not even certain he was really hearing the song. Nor was he really aware that around him glass doors were opening on all sides—until they had begun to close.

Then it was too late to be aware of them.

Chapter Four

IN A CITY that looked as if it was built of spun silver and pounded gold, in a city that looked out on such a sky as had never been seen by mortal men, John Zanthar waited-for what he did not know. His feet had a sound footing on a solid surface of what looked like a street but which also looked like the interior of a courtyard. The reason he could not decide whether he was on a street or in a courtyard lay in the visual distortion produced by the glass doors, which were still opening and closing around him. The effect of the glass doors was somewhat similar to the matter transmitter, a fact that startled him. Had someone else invented a matter transmitter? It seemed likely. The universe was always willing to answer any question asked in the right manner by anybody. Anybody who wanted to build a matter transmitter had only to ask the right question in the right way. Sometimes the question was asked by accident but the result was the same-the clue that led to the development of a matter transmitter appeared. Of course, the individual who saw the clue appear had to recognize it for what it was and to follow it up. Did all inventions follow this same process? Zanthar did not have the answer to this question and at the moment it was of little interest to him. There were differences between the way the glass doors operated and the way the matter transmitter operated. One difference lay in the jar he felt in his body every time the glass doors opened and closed,

a subtle jolt that extended clear down to the level of the atoms, it seemed. The jolt also had a mental effect, disturbing both mind and emotions, and forcing him to keep a tight grip on himself. Adding to the mental-emotional effect was the fact that he could not really see the glass doors opening and closing with his physical eyes. However, even without normal vision, he was well aware that something that could be best described as glass doors were opening and closing around him-and that through them, he could occasionally catch glimpses of a vast city that looked as if it had been made of spun silver and hammered gold. Going along with the effect of opening and closing doors was a soft puffing sound which indicated that somewhere air was moving under pressure. Looking down, he saw that the puffing sound was coming from inside his space suit and that this bulky garment was deflating. This indicated that the air pressure inside the suit was decreasing in relationship to the air pressure outside it. Since he had been wearing the suit on the surface of the moon, where there was no air, the pressure inside the suit had forced it to expand. Now it was contracting. Now he was also entering the world the Space Marine had seen in a vision. John Zanthar was not startled to discover that this was happening. As one of Earth's top men in the field of electronics, with all the theoretical and practical knowledge that implied, he had already learned of the existence of many worlds existing simultaneously with each other in time and space, the only difference being frequency. He had also accepted theoretically that movement between them was possible and with the matter transmitter had proved such transitions could take place. Indeed, it was his private opinion that such transitions took place fairly often, with the result that life forms, including men, vanished from Earth, to turn up on other worlds, and that creatures came to Earth from other worlds to startle the inhabitants of the Home World. Perhaps such transits

accounted in part for the flying saucers! He knew from experience that other worlds existed, and he had many times been through the matter transmitter he had discovered and had developed, but this was his first experience with a matter transmitter that operated via the mechanism of opening and closing glass doors. He was not shaken by the experience, but as the glass doors vanished and he saw before him in full view a city of spun silver and pounded gold, he reached automatically for the little weapon held in one of the hooks on the belt circling his space suit at the waist. This was a *xet* gun, a weapon he had found on an old star ship on Planet Letar. Also held on a hook of the belt was the heavy copper hammer he had used so effectively on that planet.

"Don't use itl" a woman's voice said behind him. He turned quickly, to face the most beautiful woman he had ever seen. He saw instantly two things about her: the first that she was pointing at him a little weapon that seemed to be made up mostly of strangely shaped coils of heavy wire, the second that she was truly beautiful. Not even Hollywood had a face and a form to match this woman.

"Hello!" Zanthar said. He smiled at her. "I don't know who you are but one thing I know, Hollywood has a place for you." His voice was carried to the outside of his space suit by the outside speaker located in front of his throat.

"Holly-wood? I never heard of this place," she answered. "But I thank you for what must have been intended as a compliment!"

"It certainly was intended that way! But, you have never heard of the celluloid capital of the world?"

She shook her head and smiled again, doing this without in the least letting the weapon she held waver from Zanthar's body. "What is your name, stranger?"

"Zanthar," he answered.

"Zan-thar," she repeated. "It has a nice sound but I have never heard it before."

"My father gave it to me and his father gave it to him and so on back across time," Zanthar answered.

"Your father?" An expression of distaste crossed her face.

"Yes. I come from what is called a patronymic society, meaning that children take the name of their father. Is it not that way here?"

"No, Zan-thar, it is not that way here," the woman said.

"Oh? Then I suppose the children are named after their mothers. We would call this a matronymic society."

"No. It is not that way either." Something akin to pain, something that mixed longing and heartache, crossed the beautiful face.

"Then—" Zanthar began, but she had moved toward him, very rapidly, and had snatched the *xet* gun from the hook holding it. "Careful of that!" the scientist said quickly.

"I will be careful, Zan-tharl" the woman spoke. Her language was English, but with a twist to the words and a roll to the tongue that produced a dialect like none he had ever heard before. He made no effort to retrieve the little weapon. Her eyes came back to him again. With her weapon, she gestured toward the helmet, ordering him to take it off. As he reached for the snaps that would allow him to release and swing aside the helmet, she took a quick step backward, then spoke again as she realized the purpose of the suit.

"You came across the surface of the moon!" Surprise was in her voice. "You did not come directly from Earth!"

"Yes, to the first question, no to the last one," Zanthar answered. The catches loosened, he opened his helmet, simultaneously turning off the oxygen supply from the tanks at the rear. A cautious sniff told him this air was breathable, a deep breath told him it was wine-rich and heavily charged with oxygen and negative ions.

"Men have reached the surface of the moon?" Her

voice was pounding questions at him. "What are they doing there? What do they want? Why do they disturb our peace."

"You can really ask questions! Yes, men are on the moon, though in small numbers as yet. As to what they are doing here, they are here in large part because the process of human evolution toward space has brought them here. As to disturbing your peace, they do not even know you exist, and in fact are not disturbing your peace a thousandth part as much as you are disturbing the peace of the whole Earth."

"How can you say we are disturbing your peace?"

"It is not exactly simple to explain, but either from this city, or from spot very near it, what look like little glass spheres are being launched to fall on Earth—"

"You have found them then?" Sudden eagerness was in her voice. "You touched one of them—and it brought you here?"

"We have found them all right!" A grim note sounded in Zanthar's voice. "In part I came here through what looked like opening and closing glass doors—"

"That was the work of one of the little spheres!"

"But I had no little sphere. The glass doors suddenly started opening and I heard a burst of faraway song right here on the moon."

"Then there must have been energy leaks, eddy currents." A frown came over the woman's face. "I—none of us—really understand the technical details very well. But—" Her eyes were focused on his face again. "How did you get on the moon?"

Zanthar tried to explain the matter transmitter. As he was speaking he knew he was failing. "Then somebody else knows how the glass doors work!" she gasped.

"I wouldn't say that."

"Then what would you say, Zan-thar?"

"I would say somebody—in fact, lots of people—are trying to discover how they work," Zanthar said. His voice was grim. He lifted a finger and wiggled it at the woman. "I do not know who you are-"

"My name is Selene. I am chief aide to our mistress. This much I will tell you." She stared doubtfully at the pointing finger.

"All right, Selene. This much I can tell you. You, or someone here, have been kidnapping people on Earth. You have been seizing them. You have been taking them from Earth against their wills."

"Against their wills!" Her eyes blazed fire at him. "What difference does their will make? If it is our will to take, we take. What we wish and what we desire, we take. It is our will that matters, man from Earth!"

"On Earth, men will not look at your actions in this way!"

"Who cares what any man wants or does not want?" Fury was mounting in her eyes. "Men are monsters! They are spawn of the dark side of creation, beasts that have come out of evil night!"

Zanthar shrugged. He was getting a little angry himself but, mindful of the weapon she was holding, he was carefully holding his temper. "Men are not really that bad," he protested mildly. "Really, they are nothing to be afraid of!"

As he spoke, he thought first she was going to use the weapon, then he thought she was going to spit at him. "No moon maiden is ever afraid of any man!" she shouted at him.

"Of course not! Most men are really sort of nice, once you get to know them." He spoke quickly but in his mind was a sinking feeling that right at this moment anything he said would be wrong.

"Who would ever want to get to know one of them?" she snapped back at him. "I want to warn you, Zan-thar, to hold your tongue. I have but to summon Mistress Harker to deal with you. She will not be gentle. Not at all!" A shiver crossed her face as she spoke. "Do you not know that for any man to come here unbidden is instant death?"

"No, I didn't know it," Zanthar answered. He considered the matter, then shrugged. "Well, you have the weapons. If any man who comes here is to be shot on sight, why don't you shoot?"

He was bluffing. For a second, as fire leaped into her eyes, he thought she was actually going to use the weapon with the strangely shaped coils. The impulse to destroy him certainly rose in her mind, but she caught it before it was acted out, to stare at him from smoldering eyes.

"Why don't I shoot, man from Earth?" Each word was a separate piece of heavily accented bitter sound. "Nefen brath! I do not shoot because I want to talk to you."

"Well, that's better!" Zanthar said. "Start talking, Moon Woman, if this is the moon."

"Here?" Scorn was in her voice. "Do you not realize that any instant someone may see you here? Of course, in that garb, they may not instantly recognize that you are an evil man—" Indecision showed on her face. "But where to talk to you in safety?"

"Men are not necessarily evil—" Zanthar began, then was silent. Out of the corner of his eyes he had caught a glimpse of movement in the sky. Turning, he saw a ship moving there. It was the same ship he had glimpsed above the horizon of the moon. Now it was moving through glass doors that were opening and closing around it!

Now that he saw the whole ship, Zanthar recognized it instantly. Only one man had ever designed such ships as this: Fu Cong, the devilish Asian with dreams of world conquest! So far as Zanthar knew, only one such ship had ever been built. This ship Zanthar had personally captured and had launched it for a voyage to the nearer stars, hoping thus to free Earth of it, and of its cargo of monsters, forever.*

Zanthar had also hoped that Fu Cong had perished in atomic explosions at his hideout in Central Asia. Here was proof that Fu Cong was not only still alive but that he had a second ship capable of traveling to the moon and perhaps to the planets as well.

The sight of the ship told Zanthar that his problems had doubled. Or perhaps they had tripled. He turned quickly back to Selene, to find that she had also seen the ship and was staring at it. Fear was on the face of the moon maiden.

"Do you know who is in that ship?" he asked.

"Yes. The devil himself. He calls himself King of the World!"

"If he has his way, that is what he will be, but in calling himself King of the World now, he is ahead of himself," Zanthar answered.

"Do you know him?"

"I certainly do."

"Is he a friend?"

"Not of mine or of any other decent human!"

"Good!" Relief showed on the face of the moon maiden. "Then perhaps you can help us—I mean help me—even if you are a man!"

As they watched, the ship dropped slowly from sight.

"Mistress will be wanting me soon!" Selene spoke quickly. "I must find a place to hide you. But where?"

"Why don't you take me to your quarters?" Zanthar asked.

"Sirl" Again her eyes shot flame and smoke at him. He laughed. "I assure you I am quite safe, really. Among other things, I have learned self-control."

"No man ever knew the slightest meaning of self-controll" she answered.

* ZANTHAR AT THE EDGE OF NEVER, by Robert Moore Williams, published by Lancer Books. "Then make the decision yourself," Zanthar said. "You have told me that if I am recognized as a man, I will be killed—"

"And so you will!" Swiftly she made up her mind. "Come with me, Zan-thar. I know a place to hide you."

Moving through corridors and up steps, following the moon maiden, Zanthar found himself shoved through a door and into an apartment that was painted with all the colors of spring. Somewhere in this place a hidden fountain tinkled softly. The fragrance in the air was that of flowers in bloom. On the far wall was a picture window.

Selene went quickly across the room and pulled a shade over the window, then turned to Zanthar. "These are my living quarters," she said quickly. "You are to stay here. If you are found anywhere in the city, you will be killed. If you are found here in my quarters, both of us will be killed."

"Do you mean what you are saying?" Zanthar questioned.

"Of course I mean my words!" the moon maiden answered.

"Then this must be a grim world in which you livel"

"It is a grim world, in many ways. There are those of us who are trying to change it! But—no matter now. You stay here and do not show yourself. Now I must report immediately to Mistress, or she will have me lashed for being late!"

The door closed behind her and she was gone. Zanthar was left alone in an apartment as beautifully decorated as any he had ever seen—in a city where men were apparently killed on sight!

Chapter Five

INSIDE THE SHIP, seated in the control chair, was a tall man who habitually wore a golden robe. As the ship settled down, he looked through the rounded bubble in the control room at the city of spun silver and pounded gold where he had landed. He knew, from previous visits here, that the spun silver was really a metal similar to aluminum and that the pounded gold was really brass. He looked around and saw that again the opening and closing glass doors had brought the ship down in what he knew the inhabitants of this city called a "catch-pen." At the thought of what would happen to him, or to any other man who appeared in this enclosure as a result of the normal operation of the glass doors, a slight shudder appeared on his usually impassive face. This was one place he would not want to be found without an invitation

Releasing his seat belts, he got slowly to his feet. This trip through the folding glass doors was very trying, even for him. Stretching to relieve some of the strain, he revealed how tall he really was. A product of a union between a German father and a Mongol mother, Fu Cong had inherited the bad qualities of both races and the virtues of neither. In addition to possessing a brain that worked with computer depth and accuracy, he also possessed an ego structure that was essentially megalomania, a belief in himself that said that of all the world and all the billions of its inhabitants, he was the most important. This was Fu Cong. In him was blended all the evil that has come down with men from ancient times when conquerors and emperors ruled their own domains by imperial decree—and wished to rule in the same way all the vast wide world.

Routed by Zanthar from his secret headquarters in central Asia, Fu Cong had used this second ship to take himself and a select group of followers to the moon. A secret base had already been established here and his followers had already uncovered clues which indicated the existence on the moon of an invisible, hidden city. Driven by greed and by necessity, the Mongol had lost no time in establishing contact with the inhabitants of this hidden city. As yet he knew very little about this secret world, but he knew enough to realize that a vast lost knowledge was hidden here, that in this place were secrets that were old when Babylon was new, that were ancient when Karnak had been built in Egypt, lore that had perhaps come originally from lost civilizations that had once existed in the Atlantic and in the Pacific Oceans.

Whatever was here in this hidden city that could help him regain the power he had recently lost in Asia, Fu Cong wanted it. Where knowledge was power, he wanted knowledge, for his own sakel

As he got to his feet, his two top chelas bowed. One or the other, or both, were usually with him. He had selected these two disciples with great care, selecting from the thousands of youths available to him only those with exceptionally high IQs, then giving them additional training of a special and most intensive kind. Although no disciple ever knew this, much of the training had involved at its beginning special brainwashing techniques and at the end had become very deep hypnosis which had been reinforced by the implantation inside the skull of miniaturized radio receivers designed to secure instant obedience not only to the usual voiced orders but also special thought broadcasts originating within the mind of Fu Cong himself. In a word, his inner circles of disciples would obey his very thoughts.

Fu Cong had dreams that at some future time he would have whole armies who had been brainwashed in the way these two disciples had been. He saw himself moving regiments, battalions, divisions, and even whole army groups by thought processes alone, inspiring in all who served him what all observers would think was fanatical devotion to him. Regarding himself as the reincarnation of Genghis Khan-perhaps the biggest killer the world has ever known-he saw himself using such methods to subjugate the world. Asia had the hungry millions out of which to form his armies! He had the will to form them-and the methods! Perhaps there would be temporary setbacks, but in his mind his destiny was certain. He would extend an empire beyond that of Genghis Khan, whose hordes had galloped from the Straits of Korea to the gates of Viennal

Bowing to him were his two disciples, Ath and Kef, who would already obey his thought commands—and who thought the mental processes arising in their minds rose from their devotion to their master and who did not know that it was his mind who ruled them at all times. Each wore the loose brown robe of the chela. Each had a shaven head. Ath was perfect in obedience. Kef had a perfect memory.

Looking at the two, Fu Cong decided that he would choose Ath for the service he had in mind.

"Yes, master!" Ath said, bowing again. "I will be delighted to go with the coolies who will take the hoses into the city to obtain water."

"Good," Fu Cong said. "And what will you do once you are inside the city?"

"I will hide and learn all I can about the inhabitants of this city. I will also learn its resources. I will learn how power is generated here and how it is distributed. I will learn if the people are happy under the ruler they call the Mistress. Then I will return to the ship and will report to you, my master."

Fu Cong frowned.

"I have forgotten something?" Ath quavered. "Yes!"

His hands clasped in a position of prayer, Ath sunk to his knees. "My life belongs to my master," he whispered. "If the master will only instruct me, will only tell me what I have forgotten."

Fu Cong turned to Kef. "What did he forget?"

Kef bowed: "Many things, master. First—" Kef held up one finger. "He forgot to remember to estimate the number of inhabitants who may be willing to rebel against the ruler. Second, he forgot to remember that he is to discover the real nature of this ruler who is forever enclosed within a purple shield. Third, he forgot to remember that above everything else, he is to find out where the men of this city are hidden. Fourth—"

"Excellent, Kef, but that is enough." Having had long experience with the perfect memory of this disciple, Fu Cong knew that Kef would go on almost forever, remembering smaller and smaller and less and less consequential details. He looked at Ath. Ath quivered.

"I will forgive you this time," Fu Cong said to Ath.

"I will not forget again, master. I promise!" Ath said. "See that you do not," Fu Cong said. "Remember, my

"See that you do not," Fu Cong said. "Remember, my cord men must not become too lazy through lack of work."

At the mention of the cord men, deadly stranglers who were Fu Cong's official executioners, both disciples shuddered. They had seen the black-robed cord men in action too often to doubt their efficiency.

"Go now and wait with the water men," Fu Cong said. Getting to his feet, Ath hastily departed.

Inside the ship, Fu Cong waited for a door to open in the walls of the catch-pen. They were, he thought with impatience, taking their time about welcoming him. As he waited, irritation rose in him. He calmed himself with the thought that soon this city, and its secrets, would be his. When he was ruler here, no one would keep him waiting.

Fu Cong wanted this city, and its secrets, for many reasons, not the last being that he saw in it a completely secure military base from which to launch attacks on Earth. The tall Mongol had long held the opinion that military control of the Earth was not on the planet itself but was on the moon, in the sense that whoever ruled the moon had a perfect missile launching platform in the sky. From the moon rockets and missiles could be launched against any city on Earth!

If such weapons were launched from this hidden city, men would not be able to strike back at the rocketlaunching source!

There were other things here that interested Fu Cong. The secret of the glass doors was one of them. The secrets of the city itself, its origin and its continued existence, were others. Also, the absence of men puzzled the Mongol. Was this city a true matriarchy, a world ruled by women, with the men kept hidden? Or were there no men here? If no men existed here, how was the population maintained? A world that consisted only of women was a violation of the laws of nature as men thought they knew these laws, and could not continue to exist. Fu Cong also suspected the existence here in this city of practices that were evil enough to produce feelings of horror even in him—and he could watch the agonies of a person being strangled to death by his cord men with no show of emotion whatsoever.

The queen of this city also puzzled Fu Cong. He had never seen her face. All he knew of her was a raspy voice emerging from the center of a purple cloud that was obviously an electronic screen of some kind. The voice was that of a woman. The raspy overtones gave the effect of incredible age but Fu Cong had never seen her face. Could she really be as old as her voice said she was? She had spoken to him in English. True, it was not good English, but Fu Cong did not speak good English either. English was the tongue of the races that he regarded as his mortal enemies and he hated to speak it at all, but the queen had refused to speak to him in any other tongue. Fu Cong had spoken to her in German, in Russian, in French, and in several dialects of central Asia, without response.

Yet even as she had spoken to him in the hated English language, Fu Cong had realized that this was not her mother tongue. Fu Cong had not liked to talk to a woman hidden inside a circular purple shield, for many reasons. One was that he regarded all women as inferior. He did not like to have to talk to a woman he could not see, to a queen surrounded by armed female guards who obviously considered him to be her and even their inferior. In fact, he hated it.

If questioned on this point—if anyone had been able to question Fu Cong on this or on any other point—Fu Cong would have denied the hatred, or would have found other words for it. He would have claimed that hate was not scientific and that he was a scientist and that therefore he could not hate. In his computer brain, this was acceptable reasoning. He would have claimed that the scientist must be absolutely dispassionate, without emotions of any kind. To him, his claims would have been true. He would not and did not suspect that under the surface of his intellect hatred big enough to set the world on fire smoldered continuously. Nor did he guess that his dreams of setting the world aright, aright, that is, according to his views, had their roots hidden deep in this smoldering hate.

In much of Asia people spoke of this man in whispers and called him the Scourge of God returned and believed him to be the reincarnation of Genghis Khanas he also believed. Others in Asia thought that perhaps he was the reincarnation of Tamerlane, or of some other monstrous conqueror who had piled skulls hill-high in ancient days. Fu Cong, however, was not as yet known to the general mass of Asians. His existence and his nature were matters for whispers of new ways in which death was coming, this in a vast continent where death has always been omnipresent.

Watching from the control room of this ship, Fu Cong felt that death was also omnipresent in this city of spun silver and hammered gold.

His skull-face was somber, his mind was quiet. His eyes had neither the slant nor the color of the Chinese but were the cold blue of the Germanic peoples, blue to which a faint dash of yellow had been added. This combination of colors had not blended very well with the result that when Fu Cong was very angry the eyes showed glints of pure yellow color that looked a little like flames seen flickering through thin blue ice.

His eyes lighted. In the wall of the catch-pen a door was opening. Out of the door came a file of young and shapely women who moved on the run to the lock of the ship. There they spread out a long roll of carpet which led from the lock of the ship through the door into the catch-pen. Moving out of the control room, Fu Cong crossed the big main cabin and descended to the lowest level of the ship, where men opened a lock and set out a flight of steps at his signal. He stepped outside and paused on the top of the stage. Before him, bowing in recognition of his presence but not prostrating herself before him, was a woman whom he remembered as being the official greeter for the queen of this strange city. The face she turned toward him was cold and filled with signs of anxiety.

"Selenel" he said.

"Yes, King of the World," she answered.

"My men will require water. Where do you wish them to get it? They 'ave hoses ready inside the ship."

"Water? You got water before, did you not?" "Yes."

"Then you may get more of it the same way this time," Selene answered. "Meanwhile, if the King of the World will be so kind as to descend, the Mistress waits beyond the door."

Fu Cong descended from the landing stage. Behind him came Kef. Behind Kef came the cord men. Fu Cong liked to have Kef with him always, for the quite good reason that the data stored as memory in the banks of the computer that he called a brain was not always instantly available. As he moved along the carpet following Selene, he asked Kef a question, using a dialect they both knew perfectly.

"Her name is Selene," Kef answered instantly. "She is the chief disciple of the moon queen. She has greeted us each time we visited this city. She has green eyes and perhaps some would think she is beautiful. The thumb nail on her right hand is painted red. On the left hand the thumb nail is painted gold. The first finger on her right hand......"

"Enough," Fu Cong said. "I sought but to test your memory."

Just inside the door of the catch-pen, Selene was bowing deeply. The women of the guard, with their weapons ready, surrounded the figure seated there. What Fu Cong saw was a purple shadow or a purple cloud or a purple mass that looked to be perhaps twice as big as the average man. Inside this purple mass, invisible but able to hear through it and also to talk freely, invisible to him and seemingly invisible to her own guard, was the queen of this strange city.

Fu Cong did not like the purple shield, he did not trust it. The fact that it existed meant something was being hidden from him. A glance at the guards circling the purple shield, and at their weapons, told him there was little he could do at this moment. True, the laser-beam weapons in the ship could probably knock down the walls of this catch-pen, and men from the ship could charge into the city, but he did not want to use force as yet for many reasons, one being that such force might destroy the very information he wanted, a second being that he did not know how the weapons of the guard operated, how effective they were, and at what range.

Weapons might exist in this city that could cripple his ship. Or—worse yet—the strange device that looked like opening and closing glass doors might be used to pick up the ship—and dump it at the end of nowhere.

Perhaps the opening and closing glass doors could be used to pick him up-and to dump him in airless spacel

All things considered—and the computer brain of Fu Cong considered all things—the proper move on his part at this moment was to parley. Fu Cong understood thoroughly the tactic of keeping the enemy quiet by talking to him while you were secretly planning to cut his throat.

Out of the corner of his eyes, Fu Cong saw movement near the ship. The water detail there was busy with hoses. Under the competent direction of a group of women, the workmen from the ship were busy stringing the hoses through another door in the catchpen.

With them, wearing the floppy gray garment of a workman, was Ath.

Bowing from the waist, Fu Cong spoke to the woman hidden within the purple shield—and began to parley.

Chapter Six

WHEN THE CLASS DOORS closed around Red Cornish, and he did not know what was going to happen next, he did not go into panic. He knew he could best help himself no matter what happened by keeping control of his emotions and by keeping his top mind at full function. Under the careful leadership of Professor Zanthar, who taught more than electronics to the two graduate students he fondly called his kids, Red Cornish and Laurel Ponder had been trained to handle the wild horses of the emotions. The technique for doing this involved, among other actions, a careful control of the breathing.

As the glass doors opened around Red, his conditioned responses went into action, putting into operation inside himself the mental-emotional-muscular patterns for controlling his emotions. The doors opened again. Outside, where Lori's room had been, was nothing. Gone was the study table with its books piled high, gone was the pool of light where the little glass sphere had lain, gone was the bed, gone was the fragrance of Lori's recent presence there, gone was everything dear and familiar.

Beyond the open glass door was a world that seemed to be made up exclusively of green flame, a world into which he had the impression he was falling.

His control of his emotions saved him from being precipitated into the green flame. By some process he did not understand, the fact that he had little fear in him set into operation again the glass doors. The green flame he saw as wildly distorted fires dancing in the interior of some world. Then, as the glass doors closed, the green flames slipped out of sight. Again the doors opened, to reveal a world of spinning gears, of vast wheels turning, of cogs rushing madly to keep appointments with other cogs. Whether this world of spinning wheels was a glimpse of the interior of some factory or was a symbolic representation of the way the average human lived and worked in 1984, Red did not know. He did not know whether the world of the green flames or the world of the spinning wheels was real or whether his own mind was creating them in an effort to rationalize his space-time movement through the glass doors. The mind was a very powerful and very subtle instrument, he knew. Under stress it was quite capable of creating hallucinations and of presenting as real its own panic-inspired constructions. On the other hand, the turning gears might have been a glimpse of the interior of some factory that had once really existed somewhere. Red was not certain how these glass doors were operating, but if they were similar to the matter transmitter, both time and space effects might be involved. He was now reasonably sure that he had been trapped inside some kind of a matter transmitter which had been triggered into operation when he had picked up the little glass sphere on Lori's study table. As he realized this, he also grasped that she had been trapped in a similar way, though in her case the reaction had been different. Perhaps the glass doors handled individuals in line with individual variations, treating each person differently. Red did not know whether or not she had heard a burst of faraway song. He had heard it but he was not hearing it now.

The doors opened again. Outside was a rain forest, a matted wilderness where great beasts fought each other in eternal battles. The doors closed and the wilderness vanished. They opened again to reveal a snow landscape that seemed to consist of nothing but snow that stretched away into infinity. In its turn, the snow scene slipped into oblivion, to reveal mountain slopes where great fields of crimson flowers swayed in an invisible wind. In the distance were other fields of flowers, yellow, white, and pink. Each flower seemed to be shining with its own internal light, its own unique living color. Again the doors closed The fields of flowers were wiped from sight. This time the doors did not open. Instead Red knew that he was moving across both space and frequency, at enormous speed. He could see nothing through the glass doors. There was no time for seeing as the eyes see. Such seeing had been temporarily left behind in another dimension, in another universe, in another frequency. He had the feeling that he was crossing gulfs of time and of space. Where these gulfs were located he did not know, but he had the impression that they existed in every direction around every human being-and around every focal point that could be called a life form. Did infinity exist in every direction around every man? Was man himself a way to limit infinity? Perhaps—but the doors were opening again. Firming into existence around him was a high wall made of carefully fitted stones. In the wall were many doors, and on top of the wall were watching women!

As he saw this enclosure, Red realized that the function of the glass doors was to deposit him inside this place, that the purpose of the trap was to deliver the victim here. He also realized that the women on the walls were a welcoming committee.

Around him the glass doors vanished—and he fell The fall was only a matter of a few feet, but it was unexpected. Hitting flat-footed, he went to his knees.

"Hey, come! We've caught a man!" an excited woman yelled from the top of the circling wall.

Red got to his feet. Air was around him and he gulped at its life-saving quality. Realizing now that his emotioncontrol techniques based on breathing had been jarred out of phase in his reactions to the bewildering variety of scenes revealed by the opening glass doors, he found he had been holding his breath. In consequence, his body was starved for oxygen. He gulped at it, panting like a healthy animal after sudden exertion.

The women, he saw, had clustered at one point on the wall and were beckoning to him to come toward them. He moved in that direction. One of them—he saw that she was dressed in tight blue slacks and an over-large orange blouse, yelled at him to come closer still. He saw that her hands were behind her body. As he obeyed her order to come closer, she suddenly took her right hand from behind her body. He saw now that it held a weapon made of strangely shaped coils of wire.

Pointing the weapon at him, she pulled the trigger. Pain leaped into his muscles, a jump of it. His feet seemed to slip out from under him and he fell heavily.

Getting slowly to his feet again, fighting a numbness in his muscles, Red heard the women laughing.

"What are you doing?" he shouted. "Look—I mean— I don't understand—" His voice was a stammer of words.

"Don't you understand what we're doing, man?" Blue Slacks asked.

"No," Red answered.

"How stupid can a man be?" a woman in yellow slacks yelled down at him.

"I don't know," Red tried to answer.

"How do you like this, man?" a woman in green slacks yelled. Out from behind Green Slacks' back came her hands, to hold a weapon. Pointing it at the helpless male in the pen, she fired again.

Again a surge of pain went through Red's muscles. Again he fell, this time heavily. While the women screamed with joy, he lay on the cobblestoned surface of this enclosure, panting to get oxygen into his lungs and into circulation in his body, fighting to get suddenly leathery muscles back into action.

"Stand up, man!" Blue Slacks yelled at him. Reaching down, she picked up something lying on the top of the wall. Red could not see what the object was until she swung it around her head. Then he saw that it was a whip with a short handle and a long lash, such a whip as might have been used by the rowing master of a Roman galley to reach the bare back of the farthest slave sweating at an oar.

The flick of the lash went into Red's back. It cut through his shirt and sent a flash of pain flooding through him. He struggled to get to his feet but the effect of the weapon with the strangely shaped coils was still upon him and he could not move. Again the lash hit him. On the wall the women screamed in joy, yelling to Blue Slacks, "Hit him again, Mistress Harker! Hit him! Hit him! Hit him!"

Jolted by the pain of the lash, Red Cornish fought off the paralysis produced by the weapon of the strangely shaped coils. He shook his fist at the woman on the walls, an involuntary gesture which further excited the women. "He's showing signs of fight!" they yelled. "The stupid man! He thinks he can fight us!"

Again the weapon of the coils knocked him from his feet. As he lay on the cobblestones, with sudden and very futile rage boiling in him, the lash reached down for his back, striking him repeatedly until he was forced to his feet. Again the paralyzing jolt from the weapon made with the strange coils knocked him off his feet. Gone completely was his mental-emotional control based on control of the breathing.

On the wall the women continued screaming.

"Don't you know that no man is allowed here in our perfect world?" Yellow Slacks yelled at him.

"Nol" he tried to answer.

"The man is trying to talk!" Blue Slacks shouted. "Be quiet, sisters, and listen to the man."

"I haven't done anything wrong!" he called out. "I didn't even know I was coming here."

The babble of voices broke out again on the wall.

"The man didn't know he was coming herel"

"He hasn't done anything wrong!"

"He's a nice man! He has never done anything wrong in his life!"

Red pulled himself to his feet again.

"Shut up, you muddy-minded witches!" he shouted. "I don't know who you are but you can't get away with this!" He shook his fist at them. "This is torture! Do you hear that? You're sadists! Every one of you!"

His order to them to shut up had the effect of shocking them into silence. How they would react he did not know and at this moment, he did not care. Pain was pounding at the roots of his brain. Blood was running down his back. The women stared at him.

"What do you think I am, an animal in a zoo?" he shouted at them. "I'm a human being!" Again he shook his fist at them. Again the babble broke out.

"Man says he's a human being!" Blue Slacks yelled. Wild laughter followed this comment. "Man says he is not an animal in a zool" More laughter.

"Who are you?" Red yelled upward.

"Man wants to know who we are?" Blue Slacks spoke. As if this was quite the funniest statement ever made, the other women burst into shrieks of laughter.

Blue Slacks looked at the other women. "Shall we chop him up, girls, or shall we save him?"

They debated this question in shrill voices. With blood running down his back, with pain writhing through his body, and with rage rising thundercloud high in his heart, Red Cornish watched them. There was a difference of opinion, he gathered. Some of the women were for "chopping him up," whatever this meant, others wanted to "save him," though he had no idea what they were saving him for. Finally, they made up their minds.

Blue Slacks smiled sweetly down at him. "All right, man. We have decided to save you," she called out. Her voice was pure melting honey, but as she spoke, she again lifted the strange weapon, and aiming it at him, fired down. Red's feet went out from under him. This time the jolt of energy from the weapon was the heaviest that had as yet been used on him. He could hear and see but he could not use a muscle in his body. He saw the women climb down from the wall, saw them open a door and appear inside the big enclosure, saw them trip over to him, heard the sound of their pleased laughter. He felt them begin to tug at him and he knew they were pulling him along the rough stone surface. Helpless, unable to move, he was pulled through a door in the enclosure and along a corridor which had grilled doors on both sides and which sounded like a zoo full of hungry animals just before feeding time. He could hear howls that sounded as if they were coming from wolves, he could hear excited barking that made him think that wild dogs were penned here, he could hear screams that sounded as if they were coming from enraged tigers fighting equally enraged lions, he could hear hoarse grumbles that sounded as if they were being made by bears. In addition, he could hear men shouting at him in foreign tongues that he could not understand.

The women dragged him as carelessly as they might have dragged a sack of potatoes. At the end of the long corridor, Blue Slacks unlocked an iron grille. Red saw what looked like pygmies move hastily away from the door. The women picked him up, two on each side of his body, and flung him inside.

Clang, went the iron grill that was the door, crunch went the lock.

Laughing and joking with each other, the women tripped away. Red lay on his side on the floor. He was barely conscious. He was aware, eventually, of hands and of voices near him. The hands rolled him over and pulled off his now bloody shirt. "Those dirty broadsl" a voice said, near him. "Sqush, get some water! Elkin, go wash this shirt. Timmie, if you are going to sick at your stomach, go into the next room and be sick at the right place." Feet scurried in response to these orders.

"Sorry, Red, this may sting," the voice said again. Water splashed on Red's back. He had no time to wonder how the speaker had known his name. Long experience had taught him that people usually took one look at the color of his hair and instantly began to call him by his nickname. The sting of the water brought him to a sitting position, then to his feet. He yelled and tried to rub his back. Facing him was a tall, slender youth. Around him were others, a fat kid called Sqush, a slender stripling called Elkin, and the smallest, Timmie, who seemed to be perhaps five years old. Others were in the background. All were looking at him from worried faces. Red had the vaguest impression that he had seen this group before, but before he could recall where, words, a babble of them, were on his lips. "I'm looking for a woman-" Memories of trying to find Lori were still sharp in his mind. Other memories, sharper and harsher, were also in his mind. Clamoring for expression at the same time, the memories clogged his vocal apparatus. "Where am I? What kind of a place is this?" His mind went back to Lori. He tried to explain about her. The group around him was silent. The tall youth studied him.

"If you're looking for a broad, Red, you can have every one around here—and welcome to them!" the tall youth said. "As to where you are—in hell, we think. I suppose you got here the same way we got here, by picking up what looked to be a pretty shooter on the street."

"That I did. Only it was lying on the study table of this woman— Say, I remember where I saw you beforel In a film! You're the street gang that vanished from Brooklyn." He looked at the tall youth. "You're Homer."

"Yeah. But how'd you know?"

Red explained.

"You mean there was a TV cameraman on the roof and he took pictures of the whole thing?"

"Yes."

"And now the whole world is looking for us?"

"For you—and for some others, including me, now." Red said. "Look, Homer, I'm shaken—"

"So is most everybody who comes through the glass doors," Homer said. "A lot of people who land here in this catch-pen go stark, raving crazy, Red. You're doing better than most."

"What do they do with the ones who go crazy?"

"Some of them the broads drag in here and stick in a cell. Some they chop up—"

"What do you mean-chop up?" Red demanded.

Before answering, Homer looked down at Timmie. "If you're doing to be sick----"

"I can stand hearing it this time, Homer," Timmie said, stoutly.

"All right, Red——" Homer began. But before he went any farther, Timmie was clutching his stomach and heading for the next room. Homer shook his head sadly. "He just can't take a description of it, Red, Timmie can't. Some other time I'll tell you what I mean. Also, I don't want to talk too much. Some of my bunch have been acting as if they are about to start spinning their atoms too."

"What's spinning their atoms?"

Homer explained. "Sometimes they start screaming, sometimes they just sit in a corner and stare at nothing."

"I understand," Red said. "Yeah, I understand." Out of the corner of his eyes he saw that the fat kid, Sqush, had moved to the iron grille and had sat down there. Staring outward, the fat kid seemed to have forgotten everything except the world in the corridor.

"He wants to be back in Brooklyn," Homer said. "He needs help, Sqush does. And so does Timmie. Come to think of it, maybe I could use a little help myself."

"To help him, to help anybody, calls for trained people," Red said. "If I had Sqush back at the university, I could refer him to people who would know what to do."

"Where is this university, Red?" Homer asked, sudden interest showing on his thin face.

"Back at the other end of some glass doors," Red said.

"Only I don't know if they swing that way." "I don't, either," Homer said. "But do you mean you're a real college student, Red? Do you play football? How much did you get?"

"I don't and I never did play football," Red said. "I was a boxer, an amateur, and I got nothing for it. Very few people ever get anything for college athletics, beyond scholarships that cover room and board and books. I know about the stories you hear. They're mostly untrue. But college and football are not important to us right now. What I want to know is about this place."

They tried to talk all at once. Elkin returned, carrying Red's washed shirt. Red took it, grimaced, and said he would not put it on right this minute. Timmie, whitefaced, also returned.

"As best we've been able to figure it out, there's nothing but women here in this city," Homer explained. "If there are any men except in cages, we haven't seen them. They've got a whole cage full of wolves and a lot of hungry dogs and a tiger and I don't know what else. Off somewhere else they've got some other cages. What they've got in them I don't really know but they've got something that makes a bigger noise than an elephant in the zoo. Do we have monsters on Earth bigger than elephants?"

"Not in our time," Red answered.

"They've also got a boxer who used to be a heavyweight fighter, until his jet misfired. I don't guess he really ever went into the championship orbit but he had one fight with the champ. He still thinks he won."

"His atoms are spinning?"

"Yeah," Homer answered. "All he does is sit in a cage and howl. They've got him in a cage all by himself because he tries to fight anybody who comes near him. Thinks everybody he sees is the champion he fought in his last bout. We've also got a cowboy right off the Montana ranges, a couple of businessmen, a lawyer, and I don't know what else. Every man who is here is in a cage."

"Don't they ever catch women?"

"Yeah, but they don't bring 'em here."

"Then Lori may be here!"

Homer shrugged. "I don't know the answer to that, Red. We've found how to work the lock. Elkin is real good at picking locks. And we get out of here when it's dark—"

"Then you can get me out of here when night comes?" Red asked.

"Yeah. But it's not exactly safe."

"There's nothing anywhere in all the worlds that is safe!" Red answered. "You get me out of this cage, and I'll find Lori, if she's here—and still alive. She's got to be alive! She's just got to!"

"Does she mean so much to you as that?"

"Well, she's not my sweetheart. She's just a good friend." Red paused, trying to state the relationship between him and Laurel Ponder. "We're fellow students. We work together under Professor Zanthar. We perform experiments together. If I was in trouble, she would do her best to help me—"

"That's the kind of broad to have!" Homer said. "Does

she carry a gun for you? Or maybe a knife? Or maybe a piece of iron?"

"No no, nol" Red said. "Nothing like that. In the world in which we live people don't carry guns—"

"Do you really mean there is a world like that somewhere?" Homer's voice was suddenly filled with wistfulness. "A place to live where you don't have to be dodging cars and cops and Yellowjackets?"

"Of course there is! You don't carry guns in the university!" Red said. "In most of the world, nobody carries a gun." He broke off to study Homer. Now he saw how thin was the face of this gangling kid, how deep was the look of hunger in his eyes. Not just hunger for something to put in the stomach, hunger for other things, for a decent way of life and for a decent world in which to live. Red suddenly realized that Homer had never known any of these things. "Would you like to live in that kind of a world, if you had the chance?"

"Golly!" Hope was suddenly a living thing in the eyes of the tall kid. "Would II"

"Would you go to school, if you had the chance?"

"GOLLY!" Homer's voice grew strong, then faded. "But there's no use in even thinking about it. Even if we can get out of his place and can return to Earth, gold I ain't got. Gold my mom ain't got."

Around Red was a clamor of voices from the other members of this gang. "Can we go too, Red, if we can get out of herel" they asked, all together. Timmie was jumping up and down with excitement. "Can I go too, Red?"

"If we get out of here, and if we get back to Earth, I'll guarantee you get the chancel" Red said.

Homer's hand shot out to him. "I'm your man, Red!" the skinny kid said, gulping. "And the Panthars are your gang." Homer's handshake was strong and firm. Fires were burning in his eyes. Red found himself shaking hands with every member of this street gang out of Brooklyn, except for Sqush, who did not leave his squatting position at the grilled door.

Outside, coming from the cages along the long corridor down which the women had dragged Red, he was aware of howls, of the barking of what sounded like dogs, and somewhere in the distance some heavy creature was stamping so heavily that the ground was shaking. Red asked about the identity of the stamper.

"I don't know what it is," Homer said. "Except it's mighty big. Over that way is a big place that looks like a stadium. Actually, we're all under the stadium but the stamper is at the far end."

"What do they use a stadium for?" Red questioned. Homer shook his head. "They ain't used it for anything since we've been here. Maybe these broads make up teams and have a big gang fight in it."

"From the way my back feels, I would like to get in on one of their gang fights, if that's what they have in the stadium," Red said. "I wouldn't care which side I'm on."

"Me neither. All I want is a chance to get Hell-hole Harker under a tire iron! She's the one in the blue pants!"

"You have to take turns with me!" Red said.

At the grilled gate, Sqush had suddenly awakened. He looked over his shoulder and beckoned to Homer. "The rest of you get in the back room," Homer said. "Sqush has spotted something. Red and I will go see what it is."

"But, Homer-" Timmie protested, a wail starting.

"If you cry, the Purple Queen will eat you," Homer said.

On the run, Timmie headed for the back room.

"Who is the Purple Queen?" Red asked.

"She's the chief broad in this joint," Homer answered. From the front grille, Sqush was beckoning impatiently to them. As they moved toward him, Red realized that the howls and screams in the cages along the corridor were subsiding into silence. Homer looked around the corner

of the door, then ducked back. "Down on the floor, Red! Don't make a move! You too, Sqush."

The fat lookout was already on the floor. Homer dropped beside him. Red Cornish dropped beside Homer. Lying on his side, with his head turned toward the grilled door, he saw a strange cavalcade appear in the big corridor outside.

First, armed with the strange weapons that produced paralysis, were two women. Completely human in ap-pearance but with faces set in stiff masks that seemed to indicate that below the surface were violent emotions now frozen solid, they were as young, as beautiful, and as vital as any Hollywood starlet. Behind them came a bulky purple object that Red could not identify. Was this the Purple Queen Homer had mentioned? Red suspected that it was. Then, at the place of honor at the right hand of the Purple Queen, came a man that Red could identify—Fu Cong. With the tall, skull-faced Mon-gol in the golden robe were three black-robed cord men and a shaven-headed disciple whom Red had never seen before.

Smiling and bowing to the queen, Fu Cong seemed only to glance at the interior of each cage as they passed. The shaven-headed chela seemed to miss nothing.

The group walked past in silence. Inside the cage, Red heard Homer take a deep breath.

"Hell itself just walked past!" Homer whispered.

"I agree with you!" Red answered. "But you don't know anything about that Purple Queen!" Homer protested.

"But I know plenty about that tall man in the golden robel" Red answered. "He's the devil's own disciple let loose from hell to earth!"

As the other members of the gang came cautiously from the back room, Red tried to explain to Homer and to them what he knew of the tall, skull-faced man in the long golden robe. Again Sqush began to point. Looking out through the grill, Red saw that the procession was returning. Now the shaven-headed disciple was in the lead. He stopped in front of the cage, to point within, a gesture that sent everyone in the cage flat on his face on the floor, playing dead—too late!

"Ah, yes, Kef," Fu Cong said, looking through the grill. "You remembered him from just the picture you saw, didn't you! Excellent! Yes, you shall be vell rewarded for this!"

"Thank you, master." The voice of the shaven-headed disciple came to them. Then Fu Cong was speaking again, saying, "Now, Mr. Cornish, oo can stand up. I recognize the red hair now! Stand up, Mr. Cornish, and tell us vhat oo are doing here!"

Slowly and reluctantly Red got to his feet. He moved to the grill. "I might ask you the same question," he said. "What are you doing here?"

"Oo might ask the question," Fu Cong said. "But oo vill not get an answer."

Red looked at the purple shadow now watching quietly. Was there actually a human being inside that mass of flowing, spinning, shifting, twisting purple? He did not know. But if Homer and his gang was right, the real authority in this city rested inside that purple shield.

Red pointed at Fu Cong-and spoke to the Purple Queen.

"I don't know who or what you are But this much I know. This man——" the jabbing finger emphasized Fu Cong "—Is a criminal killer wanted by every civilized nation on Earth!"

While the skull-face of the Mongol grew tight with anger, Red waited for an answer. It came—in the form of laughter. "And what to me, man, are the wants of any or all the so-called civilized nations on Earth?"

"How do oo like that answer, Mr. Cornish?" the tall Mongol said. He turned to the purple shadow, and bowing, asked a quick question.

"But of course you may have the red-headed prisoner, King of the World," a woman's voice spoke, from inside the massed purple color.

"I am no slave to be given away!" Red shouted.

"No, you are not," the woman inside the purple mass conceded. "But you are a prisoner-and that's one strike against you. And you are a man-and that's two strikes against you. In addition, you are mine, to do with as I wish. And if I wish to give you to the man whom you call a killer and a criminal but who is known to us here as King of the World, this is my right. And if these are not enough reasons-" She spoke quickly in some foreign tongue to the women with her, sharp hard words that seemed to spurt hate as they emerged from the purple mass.

Lifting their weapons, two of the women moved forward toward the grilled door.

Inside the cage, Homer and his gang fled to the rear.

"Now vhat do oo say, Mr. Cornish?" Fu Cong asked. "I say you can go to hell!" Red answered. As he was speaking the weapons made of strangely shaped coils of wire were discharging their paralyzing energy at him.

He felt his muscles tremble from the impact of the energy, he felt his feet go out from under him, he felt his body hit the floor. Paralyzed but able to see and hear, he saw and heard the cord men of Fu Cong enter the cage to carry him out.

He both felt and saw them carry him away but where they were taking him he did not know. In his mind was the sure thought that wherever they took him, it would not be a place he would like.

Chapter Seven

MAKING A SLIGHT OPENING in the drapes at the window, Professor John Zanthar studied the world outside. In spun silver and hammered gold—or in bright aluminum and shining brass, he did not know which—the city rose up to a sky so clear he suspected it had never known the darkening effect of clouds and the cleansing sweep of rain. The sky caught his attention. It was blue, showing the coloring effect of an atmosphere, but it was not as blue as the sky of Earth. There was a sun redder and smaller than Sol and farther away—and definitely not the friendly sun that lighted the sky of the Home World. Or so Professor Zanthar decided. Even as he studied the city and its sky and its sun, he knew that he was really trying to find some clue that would tell him where this city was located and in what sky this small, reddish, faraway sun was shining.

This was an impossible task, he soon realized. Better by far to grasp the essential idea that this city and its sun existed in another of the many worlds. At the thought, amazement—and a kind of delight—rose in him, amazement because there were so many worlds, delight because this was true. Perhaps better than any other human, Professor Zanthar knew that the sun of Earth and of the planets of the Solar System, was only one sun, that the system was only one system existing in a universe which demonstrated the meaning of *infinity* in infinite ways. The universe, Professor Zanthar knew, was truly a continuum of many dimensions, of boundless structures, and of boundless possibilities of other structures coming into existence. The atom was one such structure. It was a spinning whirl of energies that continually tied themselves into a knot. From these whirls of energy the molecule was constructed. From the molecule the physical worlds were made. But there were other forms that energy could take, other frequencies that it could exhibit, and other worlds that it could be used to construct, worlds that were as real to the life forms inhabiting them as Earth was real to those who lived on it.

In the belief system of Professor Zanthar, infinity stretched in every direction from every human being! And from every life form!

Looking up at the sky over this city of spun silver and pounded gold, Zanthar wondered where the city was located in relation to the Home World. Up or down? To the right or to the left? North, south, east, or west? He knew that the direction to the Home World could not be described by any of these words. North and south, east and west, established reference points on a globe. multidimensional space was not a globe and could not be described by reference points set up as degrees of longitude and latitude on such a planet as Earth. The distance that separated this city from the world of Earth was not a distance in the sense of miles stretching away forever. It was not so many miles to Earth, nor was it so many light years. This place was so much frequency range away from Earth, so many dimensions. He suspected the opening and the closing of the glass doors marked the shifts through the frequency octaves. In these shifts, the word distance underwent enormous changes in meaning. On Earth, the word distance was intimately related to the length of a man's stride. But no man had ever strode through the frequency ranges of the many worlds. He could be taken through these octaves, via the matter transmitter or the glass doors, but walk there he could not.

The mind of the average human conditioned from infancy onward to see and think in terms of distance in space, simply had no mental mechanism to grasp the meaning of many worlds in one space, of many spaces in one world, or the multidimensionality of the real universe. As a result of prolonged study and work with higher mathematics, Professor Zanthar had acquired the ability to grasp this meaning. The equations he had studied and had himself developed had stretched his mind, or so it had seemed to him. In conjunction with his work with the equations of higher mathematics, he had performed mental and physical exercises akin to yoga. In this way he had developed the mental ability to grasp simultaneously the meaning of the many worlds. It was not that he had discovered more worlds than one existed; that fact was known to occultists and adepts across all human history. He had, however, developed himself to the point where he could grasp the meaning of this co-existence. He lived in only one world at a time, always the world of here and now, he knew that no one could really live in more than one world at a time, but as he lived in whatever world he was in at any moment, he was able to remember that other worlds existed. How many other worlds existed? This was a question that had no answer. The number of other worlds was infinite. Traffic between them had always existed, in a limited way; some of the unidentified flying objects sighted from Earth, were mechanisms developed to traverse the vast gulfs of frequency. Across all history stories have been told of people vanishing as mysteriously as they would if they had dropped through a hole in space. Did this really happen, now and then? John Zanthar had no answer to this question, but he suspected there were regions in all the worlds where the veil between them had grown thin from natural causes. Did people sometimes wander through these thin places, sometimes to return many years later with such tales as Sinbad told? Zanthar suspected that sometimes this happened.

From the infinite sky that was not quite the color of Earth's sky Zanthar's gaze came down to the buildings of this strange city. What struck him at once was the fact that no building had a rooftop landing space for aircraft. Indeed, he saw no aircraft in the sky. Nor were automobiles or other wheeled vehicles visible on the streets. Had the wheel never been invented here? On Earth, the wheel was one of man's basic inventions. Remembering the little weapon that Selene had displayed, with its curiously curved coils of heavy wire, Zanthar knew that some scientific knowledge and certain skill must exist here. The opening and closing glass doors, the little glass spheres were proof of this! Erecting the buildings he saw in the city had been no mean engineering feat. If the people of this city could erect such buildings as these, could devise such weapons as the little device Selene had used, and could invent and learn how to use the folding glass doors, why hadn't they also invented the wheeland aircraft? Considering these problems, Zanthar realized that the answer must be that development here had been too great in some directions, too little in others. In the human world some men were saying that science had run far ahead of the development of the skills men needed to learn how to live together in reasonable peace and that this lopsided development, with too much emphasis on hard science and too little emphasis on human science, was responsible for many human ills. Had the same kind of lopsided development taken place here in this strange city of polished silver and pounded gold?

The fact that he had seen only women concerned Zanthar even more. A world which contained only women would be certain to be lopsided! Yet such groups had once existed on Earth, if history was to be trusted. There were legends of matriarchies, where women had ruled, and even tales of tribes of Amazons consisting of warrior women who had made themselves even more lopsided by having their left breast removed, this so that the breast might not interfere with the proper holding of a shield. Had nations that consisted of nothing but women ever really existed? Hints out of the hidden depths of the race memory indicated that this was a possibility. However, the matriarchies, the rule by women, had passed from the stage of Planet Earth, to be replaced by patriarchies, where the family, and the tribe, city, or nation were ruled by men—at least in theory. There were those who considered the United States to be well on its way to becoming a matriarchy, basing this opinion on the clear fact that most of the wealth of the nation was in the hands of women. Also on Earth, while tribes and possibly nations had been ruled by women and while they certainly controlled most of the world's wealth, always the men had been an accepted part of the life pattern.

men had been an accepted part of the life pattern. Was this untrue here? Did men simply not exist in this city of spun silver and pounded gold? Zanthar shook his head at this question. It raised such puzzles. These sky-high towers had not been built in an afternoon. Certainly decades and perhaps centuries of labor had gone into them. Who had done this work? Even more important, how could a city that consisted of only one sex keep itself in existence long enough to get these towers erected? Through the process of reproduction nature had build a bridge for itself into tomorrow. Nature had tried a thousand different experiments with methods of reproduction but had finally settled on two sexes as being the best method of building a bridge into the future. When the human level of growth was reached, this process of two parents had been continued. The development of the infant of the human species required the love field provided by a father and mother who were themselves deeply in love with each other. Somehow, nature seemed to think that the intangible emotion called *love* was of the greatest importance in building a bridge to the future, once the human stage had been reached in the evolutionary process. The rule seemed to be that without love there was no future!

Turning from the window, he began to examine the gaily colored quarters in which he found himself. The table and walls held objects of art that were worth a fortune, the shelves held manuscripts in many languages including English. Leafing through them, Zanthar found French and German scripts, plus languages that he did not understand and could not even recognize. One script was even in ancient Sanskrit! Each of the books was bound in thick leather covers. He could not determine what process of reproduction had been used on these books but it was nothing with which he was familiar. The number of different languages surprised him. Did Selene spend all of her spare time studying the different languages of Earth? Why would people living in this strange city have an interest in human tongues? Of course, they were human but few humans had little interest in languages other than their own. In the absence of men, did they find spare time hanging heavily on their hands, with the result that they developed many hobbies including languages? Zanthar wondered if his guess was close to the truth.

The rooms were certainly beautifully decorated and luxuriously furnished, but there were no cooking facilities, no kitchen, no refrigerator for cold storage, and no dishes. Did the residents of this city eat in community dining rooms with the food prepared in community kitchens? But it was the walls, and the colors on them, that held his attention the longest. The walls were done in pastel shades, all of the colors perfectly blended and all of them changing all of the time, but changing so slowly that only the closest scrutiny would reveal any change at all. Touching the wall, to test the surface, Zanthar discovered again what he already knew, that the gloves of a space suit were much too thick and much too chumsy to allow him to feel with his fingers the texture of any surface. The gloves were part of the space suit. To remove them would require removing the space suit itself. Shrugging Zanthar stripped to stand erect in the special close-fitting suit of special plastic that looked much like an old-time suit of heavy gray winter underwear worn in cold regions of the Earth. With the weight of the space suit gone, with the weight of the heavy belt and the instruments hooked to it gone also, Zanthar sighed with relief-and instantly felt an enormous urge for elimination. He had trained himself to withhold eating and drinking for hours before donning a space suit, doing this to slow the need of the body to eliminate its wastes, and then he had trained himself to go at least twenty-four hours without elimination except through the skin as sweat. Within twenty-four hours anybody ought to be out of any space suit, he had felt. Correlating with this training had been training in elimination just as soon as the suit was removed.

When he slipped out of his space suit, this conditioning hit him—hard. Momentarily, he had forgotten this conditioning. But his body and his nervous system—and his bladderl—had not forgotten. Once the need had arisen it could not be easily checked. The question was, where? In the quarters of a strange woman in a city culture of which he as yet knew nothing, he had to find a bathroom that he was not sure existed.

The miniature dinosaurs of Planet Letar he had faced, the Neth of that planet he had also faced, he had faced the Pit beasts of Earth, without panic, but the sudden knowledge that he had to find a strange woman's bathroom where he did not know how to use the plumbing hit him hard. "Well, when the devil drives—" he thought. The adjoining room was obviously intended for the disposal of wastes. It had a hole in the center—and nothing else. He used the hole. The wastes remained there as mute accusing evidence against him. On the wall was a red button. He pushed it. There was no surge of water as would have happened in a human lavatory, but instead white light flicked from the edges of the hole. The wastes vanished. Not even a faint smell remained.

"This—this I must learn more about!" he thought, with vast relief. "This we could use on Earth. With this gadget—" he scratched his head in thought. On Earth, he knew, elimination of human wastes for the sprawling cities was becoming a major problem. Contamination of streams, lakes, and even oceans was growing worse each year. But with his flashing white light and—pouf! —no more wastes, the situation on Earth could be changed for the better, immediately. Here in this bathroom was one of the most important inventions ever madel This city might not have the wheel, these women might have no method of travel except on foot, but they had something all the Earth needed!

Zanthar knew that some sociologist had claimed that one of the greatest of human inventions had been the water closet. This method of disposing of human waste had eliminated some of the plagues that had once devastated cities and even whole nations in the past, including the black death.

"This is what we really need on Earth!" Zanthar thought. "More than we need space ships, or matter transmitters, or anything else, we need this light which disintegrates sewage."

Dropping to his knees, poking into the hole in the floor, he began a careful examination of the source of the white light.

"Well!" Selene spoke behind him. "So, Zan-thar, you have taken the liberty of exploring my private disposal system."

For a moment, Zanthar felt like a very small boy de-

tected in mischief. Getting to his feet, he mumbled that he was sorry, then tried to explain, "You know how it is, when . . . well . . ."

"Yes, Zan-thar, I know how it is," Selene answered. Amusement glinted in her eyes, but then was gone from sight as it fled from emotional pressures rising within her. She stared at Zanthar. "And what has happened to your garments, man?" Her voice was icy.

"If you mean my space suit, I took it off," Zanthar answered. "It was hot and heavy. Also, the gloves were very clumsy—"

"Too clumsy to allow you to take apart my waste disposal, perhaps?" Selene said. The amusement was gone from her eyes and from her voice.

"They would have been but that wasn't the reason I took them off." His embarrassment gone by now, he was suddenly aware that he was much too much at her mercy. "Really, madam, I intended no offense and I am sure I have done no damage. Tell me, please—" he gestured toward the toilet unit. "Are these devices in common use here?"

"They are universal," Selene answered. "Without them, this wonderful city could not exist. Now if you are finished with my eliminating room, I would like very much to use it myself."

"Certainly," Zanthar said, apologetically. Again he felt like a small boy caught in some sinful act that he had not known was wrong. "When you are—ah—finished—I would like to talk."

A slam of the door was his answer. Zanthar trusted his weight to one of the fragile chairs in the room and waited with trepidation for her return. When she emerged, her ill humor seemed to have switched from him to another object. "Mistress was abominable today. She sent me home early! When that horrible beast who calls himself King of the World comes here, Mistress and her attendants go into an absolute dither. You would think she has not seen enough men to know how horrible they really arel"

"Are they?" Zanthar said, placatingly.

"Of course they are!" Sudden anger lit her eyes again. She bit her lips and seemed to turn off the anger in considering some other problem. Zanthar had the impression that he was that problem, a thought that was con-firmed when she spoke again. "Now be quiet while I de-cide what to do with you." A frown came over her face, then was gone in the glow of a sudden solution to her problem. "I have it. Men from the crew of the ship of that creature who calls himself King of the World have extended long hoses to an outlet outside the walls where the ship is held and are getting water. You can join them. Then when the ship leaves, you can go with it. Yes! That is a solution. But how to get you across the city to the water crew from the ship?" The glow went from her face as she asked this question, then came back again as she thought of an answer. Rising, she went to a clothes closet. Emerging from this, she had a shapeless, one-piece garment in her hands. "Here! Put this on!" she said, imperiously. "It is one of my work garments." When he made no move to accept the garment, she looked at him again. "Put it on, I said. Do men consider themselves to be too good to wear the clothes of a woman?" Rage was kindling in her eyes and in her voice.

"Even if I were willing, I'm afraid the garment would not really fit me," Zanthar said, smiling. He rose to his feet.

Consternation rising on her face, she stared at him. "You are big, aren't you. And my poor little worksuit would not do more than go over your head. But what am I going to do with you? You cannot stay here. I must do *something* with you! But what?" She sank to a chair. "Before you decide what to do with me, why don't you just talk to me for a while?" Zanthar suggested.

"Talk? What good is talk. Something must be done with you. If someone should find you here!" A shiver crossed her face.

"What would happen then?" Zanthar asked.

"A man in my rooms and I have not reported him!" She glanced toward what she had called her elimination room. The shiver turned into a shudder. "Mistress would order me lashed, then flayed alive, then dissolved!"

"Dissolved as in there?" Zanthar nodded toward the elimination room.

"Yesl" The shudder came again. Doubt visible on his face, Zanthar stared at her. "Oh, it is very well for you to doubt what I am saying!" she raged at him. "But I have spoken true, every word of it!"

"Then what kind of a city do you have here?"

"What kind of a city?" Exasperation was on her face. "The most beautiful, the most cultured, the most wonderful, the most perfect city this side of the heavens!"

"And in this wonderful city, your queen has the authority to order destroyed any subject she sees fit?" Zanthar questioned.

"Yes."

"Then your beautiful city—and it is beautiful—has its roots in hell!"

"Yes, yes, yes!" she spoke again. "This we all know, secretly. Perhaps even Mistress knows this, secretly! But how to change our customs, our laws, our world, without destroying it?"

"You ask a question hard to answer," Zanthar said musingly. "I find it hard to believe that so lovely a lady as you would be destroyed for no offense greater than being near a man. On Earth, lovely ladies like to have men near them, and the men, I have heard, like to have them near." "Is that true, is that really true, Zan-thar?" Sudden longing was in her eyes.

"Of course it's true," Zanthar answered.

"Do you really mean that on Earth it is not a serious crime to be near a man?" The longing deepened.

"That is what I mean."

"But this is not Earth, this is not the old world whose memories you have stirred to life in me with your stupid talk!" Anger was flaring in her voice. "Tell me, Zan-thar, why did you come here to torture me with this kind of talk?"

"I did not come here of my own choice!"

"Yes. Yes. I had forgotten. If you come from a world where the men and the women meet, then you must think me crazy for talking like this. You do not understand. You think of me as being an ordinary woman! Perhaps you think of all of us as being ordinary women. We are not." Her eyes snapped at him

"If you are not an ordinary woman, then what are you?"

She started to answer, then changed her mind. Her gaze went to the window, then returned to her prisoner. When she had entered the door, she had had her own weapon in its holster at her hip. His xet gun she had in her hands, turning and twisting it as if she had half a mind to use it on its owner. Starting to speak, she changed her mind, then suddenly was angry again. "By what right do you question me, man from a forgotten world?"

"I intended no offense," Zanthar said, his voice calm and mild. "There is much here that I do not understand. Much—"

"Lucky you are not to understand it! Luckier still not to know anything at all about it! If you knew the half of what is here—" The anger slipped into grimness which settled over her face. "I want to know what you are doing here, Zan-thar. I want to know how you got here. I want to know if others are with you. If so, I want to know how many. I also want to know if you are trustworthy—"

"One question at a time. Am I trustworthy? You will have to answer that question for yourself. Making the answer difficult is the thought that the man who is trustworthy today may not be worthy of trust tomorrow—"

"Then they are fickle beastsl"

"They are not nearly as fickle as the average woman!"

"Sirl Women are steadfast, loyal, true—" Fire was rising again in the eyes of the moon woman.

"They are—until they change their minds!" Zanthar said, smiling.

"I want my questions answered!" There was no mistaking the anger in her voice now. Suddenly she shifted Zanthar's weapon to her left hand. With her right hand she drew the weapon from the holster. With it, she covered Zanthar. He spread his hands in a helpless gesture.

"Beautiful lady, you have me in your power. I don't know what that weapon does to a man but—"

"It distorts the electric field of the human body and causes a man struck by its invisible beam to lose control of his muscles," she explained. "Don't force me to use it!"

"It distorts what?"

"The electric field of the human body," Selene answered, impatience in her voice. "Don't tell me that you don't know that such fields exist! How stupid can a man be?"

"Of course I know these fields exist! What surprises me is that you should know it. Do you also recognize the existence of body fields made up of more subtle energies?"

In sudden dismay, she stared at him. "If you know that much, then perhaps you are the answer to my—to our—well to our prayers here!" Her voice was a sudden whisper and the longing was back in her eyes. "I have never regarded myself as the answer to any maiden's prayer," Zanthar said, chuckling. "As to what I know and how much I know, compared to what is to be known, it is really very little—but I am always trying to learn."

"Your modesty does you credit." The longing was stronger in her eyes now. Gone was the anger.

"Your mood changes proves you are a woman," he said, nodding toward the window. "The world out there is very beautiful. The world in here is equally beautiful. Only great artists could have created such beauty. But if I understand you correctly, you are telling me that not all of this world is equally beautiful. How can this be true?"

"It is true!" She seemed disinclined to explain. Watching, he saw that she was no longer holding either weapon in quite so tight a grip.

"I gather that you know nothing of the basic facts of the man-woman relationship," he ventured.

"Of course I know! I remember how it was!" she flared at him. Then the flare faded. "But that was long ago."

"It cannot have been too long. Besides being avery beautiful woman, you are obviously quite young. So your memories of men, whether you acquired them here or elsewhere, cannot be too far in the past."

"But they are! You just don't know what is true here! And I acquired my memories of men on Earth."

"Were you also kidnapped from Earth via what I call the opening and closing glass doors?"

"Yes!" Her voice had anger in it again.

"Well, whatever is the truth about you, if you were living on Earth today, dozens of men would come knocking on your door. These, dear lady, are facts of life." "What means *facts of life?*" she questioned. "These

"What means facts of life?" she questioned. "These words I do not really understand. Explain to me, pleasel"

"Well-" Zanthar said, then coughed his way into silence. Confusion threatened to rise in him, and he stared at Selene. A beautiful woman she certainly was, but either there was a language barrier between them or she was teasing him by pretending an ignorance and an innocence she did not truly possess. Certainly she seemed strangely ignorant of matters that most inhabitants of Earth thought very important. Yet she claimed to have come from the Home World! She also claimed that no men existed here in this city of spun silver and pounded gold. At the moment, he did not think it wise to mention that just as a battery with only one pole could not exist, neither could a world with only one sex. Enigma was here with mystery piled on top of it.

Her foot tapped on the floor. "Explain, please, about these facts of life. Perhaps something new has appeared on Earth while—while I have been gone."

"Well-" Zanthar began.

"Explain, please! And no lying, no evasion!" Her words were little bursts of hard sound. "I know, of course, that every cell in my body has a positive and a negative end, that the right side of my body is positive and the left side is negative..."

"Do you also know that in relation to the male, the female is negative and the male is positive?"

She stared at him from hot eyes. Suddenly her face turned white, then it turned pink, then the pink became scarlet. Instantly she was on her feet, the twisted coils weapon covering him. "You—you dare to make such suggestions to Selenel"

Zanthar blinked startled eyes at her. "There is a communications problem here. Words do not mean the same to you as they do to me. I intended to make no suggestions..."

"Beast! Monster!" She seemed not to hear his explanation. "Thing out of the past!" With each word, her emotions were growing stronger. "Thing that has no future! Man thing! Male thing!" "But without male things there would be no future," Zanthar protested mildly.

"What?" In her anger had reached the point of fury. "Here in this city we have proved this is not true. Men are not needed here. Not at all. Never have been! Never will be! This the sisters of this city have proved through thousands of years!"

"How did you prove it?" Zanthar said, real curiosity in his voice.

"I'll teach you a lesson, man thing!"

She pulled the trigger on her weapon.

Flipl Zanthar had gotten to his feet. As she pressed the trigger, he found himself on the floor. His brain was intact, he could think and see and hear, but he simply no longer had control of his voluntary muscles, even to cry out in surprise.

Consternation on her face, Selene stared down at him. "Oh! I meant but to frighten!"

On the floor, Zanthar shook his head. The effect of the weapon had completely surprised him. He waited for the paralysis to pass. It passed quickly, perhaps quicker than Selene had anticipated. She did not know he was back in control of his muscles until he reached out a hand, grabbed her by the ankle, and yanked. Yipping, his *xet* gun flying from one hand, her weapon from the other, she discovered the feeling of losing control of the voluntary muscles. Her bottom hit the floor with a thump. The sound of this thump pleased and satisfied John Zanthar. The next second he was doing something that pleased and satisfied him even more. Getting to his feet, he picked up the startled moon woman. Seating himself on the chair, he laid her across his lap, bottom up.

Smack, went the flat of his hand on her bottom. Smack! Smack! Smack! "Don't you ever do that to me again!" Zanthar said. Smack!

She started to scream, in rage rather than in pain, then

choked the sound. Holding her with one hand, Zanthar rose and moved across the room to gather up the *xet* gun and her weapon. Then he released her.

His first thought was that she was going to attack him with woman's oldest weapon, teeth and fingernails.

"Monsterl" she hissed at him.

He jerked his thumb toward the door. "If I am such a monster, run outside and scream for help!"

She glared at him. "I will kill you myself!" she hissed. "That's nice to know. How will you do it?"

"I'll find a way!"

"You'll use this thing, this toy, perhaps?" His nod indicated the weapon he had taken from her.

"If I can get it into my hands, I will use it."

Zanthar grunted, a sound heavy with disdain. Lifting his xet gun, he pointed it at the little table across the room, and pressed the trigger. Twin beams of intense radiation leaped from the weapon. The table smoked, burst into flame, and was consumed. The wall beyond it began to smoke. Hastily Zanthar turned off the weapon.

Startled and shocked, the moon woman stared at the smoking wall. The table had left fragments of white ash on the floor. She stared at them.

"This is a gun!" Zanthar said.

She stared at the *xet* gun, then lifted shaken eyes to him.

With his left hand, he extended her weapon to her. She stared at it, then again looked up at him. Fear was rising in her eyes.

"It's your gun," he said. "Go on and take it!"

She did not move. Her face seemed frozen. She stood staring at him.

In his mind was one thought, that he must out-face this woman, that he must master her. If he could master her, she might fear and hate him—but she would also respect him. Respect was what he wanted. From a viewpoint of mutual respect, a working agreement might be made that would be workable.

"If I take it—" she began. Fear was strong in her eyes.

"If you take it, and try to use it on me—" Zanthar lifted the xet gun. He nodded toward the white ash on the floor. "Those ashes are all that is left of a table." His voice was polite, cool, and detached.

"Ashes are all that will be left of me?" she questioned, studying him.

He shrugged. "It's your choice," he told her. "I'll let you shoot first. But this weapon of yours—" he nodded toward her gun "—cannot act quickly enough to keep me from pulling the trigger of my gun. Even if you paralyze me completely, I will still pull the trigger as I fall."

"You will do this-to a woman?"

"To a woman with a gun, yesl" he said.

She studied him.

"There is a difference, an enormous difference between a woman with a gun in her hand and a woman with a baby in her hands."

At his words a startled expression appeared on her face. "Do-do women still have babies, back on Earth?" she asked. A gasp was in her voice.

"Of course! Don't they here?"

"No. I mean-no. Here we have no men." Sudden sadness was in her voice.

"I thought perhaps frozen sperm were available here." "No. No-"

Outside, from another world it seemed, came the sound of shouting. He cocked an ear toward it. Out there women were yelling. Selene glanced toward the window, then looked back at Zanthar. Resolution was on her face. She took the gun, held it toward him.

"I think you are bluffing, man from Earth!"

"Then pull the trigger, paralyze me, and find out!" Zanthar said. "Then you really will shoot a woman!"

"Certainly-when she shoots me first!"

"But I have a right to shoot youl" Anger was again in her eyes.

"When you claim a right to shoot me—or to shoot anybody—you are giving the other person the right to shoot back at you!" Zanthar said. "This is one of the oldest laws on Earth. Sometimes we call it self-defense."

"Is that true?" she questioned doubtfully. "Here only the will of the Mistress is law."

"It's different on Earth. Here you have a warped civilization, a lopsided, out-of-balance monstrosity that cannot survive."

"Sir-"

For a moment, he thought she was going to use the gun. But she shook her head. Again the sound of shouting came from outside. Without asking his permission, she moved toward the window.

"Don't do that again!" his voice was sharp. "I almost killed you when you moved!"

"Ohl" Comprehension came into her eyes, then faded. "But I have a right to move when I wish!"

"You also have a right to get killed if you move at the wrong time!" With his free hand, Zanthar wiped sudden spurting sweat from his face. "That was close. Don't do it again, please!"

"Why are you sweating, Zan-thar?"

"Because I almost killed you!" he replied.

She opened the shades a trifle, looked out, then gestured for him to look. "And if you had killed me—" she gestured again out the window.

Out there the shrill screams had grown louder. Making certain that he always had the moon woman within his range of vision, Zanthar peered quickly outside. A street was out there. Down it a shaven-headed man wearing a long robe was running. Shouting at him and at each other, they were trying to get a clear shot at him with the weapons of the women of this city.

"That's a man!" Zanthar said. "I thought you said men are not allowed in this city."

"So I did."

"Then where did that man come from?"

"He came with the men getting water for the ship. When he thought he was not being watched, he slipped into the city."

"A spy?"

"What else?" She had made another opening in the drapes. "Ahl He goes down!"

The man with the shaven head had been hit with the radiation from one of the little weapons used by the women of this city. His right leg was suddenly useless and he sprawled on the street. As he tried to get to his feet, another jolt of the paralyzing energy hit him. He went down on his face. However, he was not out. Instead he was fumbling under his robe, reaching for some weapon hidden there. A woman ran up to him. A quick close shot stopped that fumbling.

"See!" The voice of the moon woman was hot. "He tried to use a weapon on a woman!"

"I see," Zanthar said.

On the street the man writhed, his movements now being similar to those of a crippled animal that can barely move. The woman who had fired the last shot screamed in triumph. From all directions women came running. They formed a ring around the man lying on the street, some on their knees, some standing, uttering wild cries that resembled the howls of wolves. Then, with knives, they began to dismember the helpless man. Quickly they cut off his arms and legs, then his head, then they began to cut these bloody parts into still bloodier but smaller bits.

Zanthar turned to the door, then stopped as he was aware that Selene had seized his moment of horror to cover him with her weapon. He stared at her, she at him. "If you shoot—" he said.

"And if you shoot quicker than I—if you can—and rush out there to try to help that man, so will they dismember you!" the moon wooman said. "If I shoot you here, it will be to save your life."

"Those women out there-" Zanthar choked. "They are beasts!"

"That is what women become when there are no men to balance and guide them," Selene said. Her voice was suddenly calm. "In the hope that we might get men here, to balance us, or to help some of us topple the Mistress, is the reason I released hundreds of extra glass spheres on Earth—"

"What?" Zanthar gasped, startled.

"It is also the reason I will release hundreds more of the little glass spheres in the near future. Some will trap menl Somel And perhaps with men here—" Her eyes went back to the window, then returned quickly to Zanthar.

"You are not in favor of—" he gestured toward the window "—of such beastly acts?"

"From the bottom of my heart I hate them!" the moon woman answered. "For more years than I can remember I have hated them! But how to stop them? I and those with me are so trapped in custom that we simply do not have the strength to change this city." Her eyes looked up and fixed themselves on his face. Now the longing in them was the greatest he had ever seen, longing for something she did not even dare hope would come true, but longing just the same.

"Are you the one sent up from Earth below to help us change our rotten city here?" she whispered.

"Am I—" Zanthar was suddenly aware of the possibility that he had misjudged this woman. He did not blame himself for this. In a world of enigmas, who could be expected to find the right answer to a conundrum? "If you are—" she turned the little weapon in her hands.

Looking down, Zanthar saw she had reversed the weapon and was holding it toward him, butt foremost.

"If you are on my side, then this is yours," she said.

"And if I am on your side, and if we fail, what?" he. questioned.

Her answer was to nod toward the window. "That for you-and that for me."

Now he understood at least in part why she had been so nervous, so doubtful, so filled with shifting moods. She had been trying to make up her mind about the quality of man in him—and had been doing this knowing she was betting her life on her own judgment.

"The people of this city may never have learned how to use the wheel," he said. "But some of them have an even more important quality—courage. Heart and mind and soul, woman of the moon, I am on your side."

He paused for a moment, then continued. "Now tell me what else is here in this fantastic city on the moon?"

He listened, in utter amazement, to what she told him. If the city itself was fantastic—and it was—her story of its building and of its purpose was even more so.

Chapter Eight

BY THE TIME the cord men had carried him out of the cage, Red Cornish's muscles had come back under his control. Pain was still in them, and a feeling of heavy weight, but he was able to stand. The cord men took no chances with him. One looped a cord around his neck, the second looped a cord around his right arm at the wrist, the third looped a cord around his left arm, the second and the third stepped in opposite directions, pulling his arms apart until he yelled from the pain. Behind him, the other cord man was ready to strangle him.

Standing nearby, and watching with alert interest, were the women who had knocked his legs out from under him in the cage. With them, obviously their director, was the mass of boiling purple smoke that obviously hid and shielded the queen of this place.

It was the man directly in front of Red who held his attention. Red knew this skull-face, these cold blue-gray eyes that never seemed to blink and that always gave the impression that behind them was a computer brain. This was Fu Cong. The bald-headed individual who kept carefully out of the way Red did not recognize, but he assumed this was a disciple of the Asian.

"Yis!" Fu Cong smiled. "Yis! I recognize oo myself! Oo are the disciple of Professor Zanthar! Yis! There is no need to deny it!"

"I have no intention of denying it!" Red said. "I am proud to have the privilege of being a student working under Professor Zanthar!"

"Well!" Fu Cong said. He glanced sideways at the women and particularly at the boiling purple smoke that surrounded and shielded the queen. Indecision was in him. He had expected this trapped man to cringe before him, perhaps to beg for his life. Millions in Asia were willing to beg. Why wasn't this man on his knees, thus showing the queen how everyone from Earth regarded the King of the World? Fu Cong frowned. The women waited. Whatever was inside the boiling purple smoke, it revealed nothing of itself.

Fu Cong did not know—and never would understand —that this man, and uncounted millions of others on the continents of the Americas, were simply not the cringing sort. In Asia, men were sensible. When they were licked, they stopped fighting. When the conqueror came before them, they cringed before him—and begged for continued life.

This man seemed to have no intention of begging for his life, or for anything else. Or if he did beg for anything, it would be for the chance to fight again.

Fu Cong did not clearly understand what happened next. Nor did Red Cornish. All Red knew was that the cord man who had the end of the length of tough cord looped around his wrist changed his position a little, just enough to leave a little slack in the loop. Instantly, without really thinking, Red had slipped his left hand free. Again without thinking, he turned to the cord man on his right. Here the loop was not free but before the cord man could jerk, Red was on him.

In college, during his undergraduate days, Cornish had been national intercollegiate boxing champion. If he had so chosen, he could have had a career as professional in the middleweight class. But he had chosen to do graduate work instead. However, he kept himself in excellent shape, he worked out daily at a gym, his muscles were firm, and his reflexes fast. He hit the cord man on his right one blow with his crossing left fist, the deadly blow at the edge of the chin that all boxers try to evade. This cord man was a killer, not a boxer. He did not know how to evade a driving fist.

Thumpl

The sound was that of fist meeting flesh. The cord man on the right went over backward—knocked cold. Red Cornish did not hesitate. Already he could feel the cord man at the rear jerking at his throat. He went toward the cord man, at full speed. Now he had both hands free.

The cord man did his best. He tried to jerk tight the cord and strangle this madman but he had never encountered a man willing and able to run up his cord to him. Nor had he ever seen a man who could hit so hard and so fast with both fists.

Thump-thump!

The third cord man sprawled backward. Jerking the cord from around his neck, Red turned toward Fu Cong. "You're next!" he said.

As he spoke, he was aware that the right hand of the skull-faced Asian was diving inside his golden robe. Red knew that a weapon was hidden there, probably several weapons, and he knew he had to move fast.

Before he could reach Fu Cong, the two women with the paralyzing weapons, at a sharp word from inside the mass of purple smoke, had shot him

Every muscle going out of action, Red sagged down, down, down-and into unconsciousness.

Now the queen spoke. "What kind of a man is this, King of the World, who can singlehandedly, and without weapons, overcome three of your killers at the same time?" she asked.

At the question, Fu Cong's face went rock-hard. "He's crazy!" he muttered.

"Tell me-do you have many such crazy men in the world of Earth these days?" the voice of the queen continued.

"I do not know," the Asian answered. His face was grim.

"If they do—then Earth would be an interesting place to visit," the queen said. A mocking note was in her voice. She looked at the women with her. "Put him back into his cage," she ordered. "Meanwhile, as soon as the killers of the King of the World are able to get to their feet, we will continue our walk."

Red Cornish, knocked out completely, had no memory of being dumped back into the cage. Eventually he was aware that from an enormous distance some kid was calling to him. "Wake up, Red! Wake up!" the kid kept calling. The fact that he was being called irritated Red Cornish. He didn't want to be called, he didn't want to talk to anybody, he didn't want to do anything except lie as still as possible and wait for some of the pain to go out of his muscles. Pain in red flares was running through his whole body. If he lay still, perhaps it would go away. This was not like any pain he had ever felt before,

This was not like any pain he had ever felt before, the stab of hurt that comes from a cut or from a bruise or from sore muscles that are trying to enforce inactivity. This was another kind of pain. It seemed to start in an electric field completely outside his body. From this point of vantage it seemed to leap headlong into his muscles, where it began to play leapfrog through the tissues. Hurting even worse than the pain itself was the knowledge that he could do nothing to escape it. He could not move, he could not twist, he could not writhe, he could not turn. He was trapped.

He did not like this feeling of being trapped. It made him want to give up. Why continue fighting when every muscle in your body was jumping with pain and you were trapped in such a way that you could never escape no matter how hard you tried?

Red did not like this kind of thinking or this kind of feeling-tone. It was a vague thing, not clearly defined, and it belonged to the world of the emotions where there are no clear boundaries.

His thinking equipment, his conscious mind, was out of circuit. Somewhere in some faraway world this conscious mind was screaming to be connected again to his muscles and to his emotions, to take charge of them. Behind this feeling of wanting to give up, both his conscious mind and his emotions wanted to keep on fighting. This urge was part of the history of the race of men. To have survived on Planet Earth for the length of time the evolving human body had spent in development on the Home World meant that hundreds of battles thought to be lost had been won by a final despairing effort in the last second. This history, in Red Cornish, meant that he would fight on until he was dead. It was because he was helpless that he wanted to give up. And some kid kept yelling, "Red! Red!" and continued to poke him in those very sore muscles which did not really want to move.

"Rub his muscles, Elkin, Sqush, Timmiel Everybody help. Get with itl If rubbing don't help, then begin to pound on him. He feels as stiff as a board!"

Red felt hands working with his muscles. This hurt, this caused pain. The pain became so great that he writhed to one side in an effort to escape it.

"He moved!" the kid's voice came again. "Pound harder!"

Hands beat harder on his body, causing agony. In a frantic effort to escape from this agony, he managed to roll over. As he did this, the paralysis slipped away from his muscles, and his conscious mind and his emotions hooked themselves again into their proper circuits. Kids were all around him. His first thought was that these kids had been beating him. Pulling himself to his feet, he drew back a fist. "No, Red!" a tall, skinny kid yelled at him. "We were trying to help you!"

"Hunh?" he whispered. Fog was in his mind. Also in his mind were recent memories of intense pain. Fist ready, he looked around.

"I know how you feel, Red!" the skinny kid said. "They knocked me out a couple of times with those guns—"

"What?"

"They knocked me out. It hurt like a blast from a jet tube in the bottom of hell."

"I-" Red questioned.

"The only way to get anybody out of it is to rub and pound them. This hurts but it brings you back. We're not mad at you. Honest, Red—"

Vaguely, Red recognized this skinny kid as Homer. As

this happened, his memory returned. Around him were others of the gang. The grilled gate was closed and Sqush squatted there, alert now.

"I know how you feel," Homer said, sympathetically. "If I ever get a chance to get a tire iron on one of those broads! Or on that witch who hides inside that purple smoke!"

"Yes, Homer," Red said. "Yes! I'm with you on that. I would also like to get a tire iron on that chap in the golden robe. Only I don't have a tire iron!"

"That tall man in the yellow robe recognized you, Red. Where'd you know him?"

"I-uh-I knew him-several places. He wasn't any good in any place I knew him! But, about this mass of purple smoke? I don't understand that."

"We don't understand it very well, either," Homer explained. "All we know is that it is a protective screen of some kind."

"Hunh? An electronic curtain?"

"An electronic—" Homer began, then shook his head. "I don't know what an electronic curtain is. But there's a broad inside that purple screen. She can look out and hear out—and smell out too, for all I know, but we can't look in and see her."

"I seem to recall her telling Fu Cong that he could have me."

"That seemed to be the general idea," Homer reluctantly admitted.

"She seemed to think I was her property, to be given away as she saw fit!"

"That's what she does think!" Homer answered. "She thinks she owns us." His thumb jerked at the very intent —and very dirty—faces surrounding them. "Ain't that what she thinks?"

"That's what she thinks, Homer!" Piping voices answered.

"What do we think?" Homer continued.

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"We don't think she owns us," the voices piped back at him.

"What happened after I was knocked out?" Red asked.

Homer jerked a thumb down the corridor. "They went that way," he said. "She was laughing at him because you had knocked out three of his gang. He wasn't liking it any."

"How'd I get back in here?"

"The broads knocked you out with their guns and threw you in," Homer explained.

"Uhl" Red said. Outside the howls had begun again. In the far distance, the stamper was busy. Somewhere hungry dogs were yelping. A wolf howled. Its mate answered. At the grilled door, Sqush beckoned. Outside could be heard rumbles and squeaks. Moving to the door, Red saw women pushing gigantic carts. Watching, he saw chunks of bloody meat tossed from one of the carts into some of the cages.

"Are they going to feed us that?"

"No," Homer said. "What they will give us will be different-not as good as cheeseburgers with fries but it will keep us alive. Better get back in the other room. Those broads on the carts will knock your feet out from under you just to see you fall."

From the other room, they heard the grill open. Thumping sounds followed, then the grill closed again. When Red went out he saw on the floor long loaves of bread plus a yellow substance that looked like cheese. The kids grabbed ravenously for the loaves of bread and for the cheese, fighting each other possession.

"Better get your share, Red," Homer advised. "But—" Red was appalled. "I am supposed to fight just for something to eat, to fight kids who are my friends?"

"Your friends will eat up everything if you don't get with it. Here!" Homer snatched a loaf of bread and a piece of cheese from Squish, who had two loaves and two pieces of cheese and was trying to hid them behind his

ample body. "Here, Red, take these. And next time do your own scuffling."

"You'll get used to it, Red," Homer said, seeing the expression on the face of the man. "It's better than starving —but not much better."

Tasting it, Red discovered that the loaf was apparently made of several different kinds of grain. He wondered aloud where the people in this city got the grains. "They grow 'em somewhere," Homer said, indifferently. All of his short life he had lived in a great city where bread and groceries were commodities that miraculously appeared in never-ending supply in supermarkets. Homer knew these commodities were brought to the stores in trucks because now and then his gang had managed to pilfer a few items from a truck when the driver was not watching closely, but he had not wondered where the trucks got the goods. Presumably some miraculous process of manufacturing produced bread in loaves sealed in plastifilm bags, produced beans in cans, and cold cuts and cheese in packages covered with synthetic wrappers. That these products originated on farms and ranches had never occurred to Homer. He had never seen a ranch or a farm.

Water bubbled from a drinking fountain on the wall. Red drank. Outside a sort of semidarkness was gradually falling. Howls were beginning again. Having eaten and drank, the kids were settling down against the wall and on the floor to sleep. Sqush was again at the grill, nodding there. Red settled down against the wall and tried to talk to Homer but the skinny kid was drowsy and would not answer questions. Red was silent, listening to the night noises in this strange city.

Inside the stadium, the queen and her escorts were finishing showing the city to Fu Cong.

"This looks like a place where the game called football

might be played," the Asian muttered. He was grumpy. The queen was taking advantage of this fact.

"Yes, we hold our games here," she said to the Mongol. "Perhaps the man who beat your killers will be seen here someday."

"Unh!" Fu Cong grunted.

"He will probably conduct himself in an interesting manner," the woman hidden behind the boiling cloud of purple continued.

"Ah!" Fu Cong said.

"A very brave man!" the Mistress continued. "But with little respect for the King of the World."

"Ah-uĥ!" Fu Cong said. "I vill teach him to show respect, if oo vill give him back to me!"

"Ah?" the Mistress said. Her voice was cool and detached. And full of doubt.

"I vill teach him to obey me," Fu Cong continued. "Vill oo give him back to me?"

The mistress considered the matter.

"Vill you?" Sudden eagerness was in Fu Cong's voice. "I vill teach him!"

"Yes," the Mistress said. "You can have him back." She spoke quickly to the women with her. They departed hurriedly.

"Hey, Red!" Sqush whispered, from the grilled door. "A couple of broads are coming!"

"So what?" Red muttered. His back was still sore from the lashing he had received upon arrival. The knockdown from the paralysis-inducing weapons had left its effects. All he wanted to do was to sit with his side against a wall and rest—and perhaps sleep. "I don't want to see them," he muttered. As he was speaking he was aware that Sqush was scuttering on all fours away from the grill. Now a light came through the bars.

"Come out, Red-head," a woman said. "Or do you want another jolt from our ion guns. "Tll come out!" he answered hastily.

"Just walk ahead of us," one of the two women said. With the weapon made of strangely shaped coils of wire, she indicated a direction. Red obeyed. They took him to Fu Cong and the Mistress.

"Here he is!" a woman's voice spoke from behind the boiling purple cloud mass. "You may have him, King of the World. At some future time I will ask you to demonstrate him to me. Now—" the sound of a yawn came from inside the smoky cloud"—this audience is at an end."

Red found himself instantly grabbed by the cord men. This time they took no chances with him. Tying his hands behind his back, they looped a cord around his neck, then forced him to walk ahead of them. They took him to what he recognized in the dim light as a large catch-pen. Inside it was a ship.

"So you had two ships!" he said, to Fu Cong.

"Yis! And more than two!" the Asian answered.

Guards on duty at the landing stage went to attention at the sight of Fu Cong. Up above, the lock was already opening. Very politely, Fu Cong invited Red to precede him into the ship. When he was allowed to stop and the cores were removed from his hands and from his neck, he was in the main cabin of the ship. Fu Cong went directly to his private cabin. Eventually he summoned his guest. Accompanied by the cord men, Red was escorted into the smaller cabin. Seated behind a big desk, Fu Cong waved Cornish to a seat on cushions piled on the floor.

"Tea?" the Mongol asked.

"If you are going to kill me, why give me tea?" Red demanded "Kill me and get it over with."

"But I am not going to kill oo, Mr. Cornish. Or not now."

Tea was brought. With three cord men watching every move he made, Red sat on a cushion on the floor. From a table all of eighteen inches high, he lifted a tiny tea cup so fragile it looked as if air could blow through it. "I hope oo has recovered from the effects of the ion gun," the Asian said. "How did it affect oo?"

"It seemed to paralyze the voluntary muscles and to disconnect them from my brain."

"Ahl" Lights glinted in the pale blue-gray eyes of the Mongol. "Have they really discovered a way to distort the electric field of the human body? 'Ave they, Mr. Cornish?"

"It seems that way to me," Red answered.

"I suspected it! They 'ave many inventions here, old to them but new to us. Has not Professor Zanthar found this to be true?"

"I can't answer that question. I do not know what he may have found to be true. I do not even know where he is." Red got to his feet. Instantly the cord men had him, to wrestle him back to his position on the floor.

"When oo have a cushion under you, it is better to stay where oo are," the Asian said. He lifted a long finger and waggled it at his guest. "Oo are trying to deceive me, Mr. Cornish. Oo are trying to give me the impression you do not know the whereabouts of Professor Zanthar!"

"But I don't know where he is!"

"Lies do not deceive me, Mr. Cornish!" The long finger was still wiggling.

Around Red, the cord men looked hopeful. Fu Cong shook his head at them. "Not yet," he said. His eyes came back to his prisoner. "I 'ave just lost a very valuable disciple, Mr. Cornish," he said.

"What did he do-get smart and run away?" Red asked.

"No," Fu Cong said. "He died." He shook his head. "It was not an easy death. There are many ways to die, but these women here—" A trace of a shudder crossed the skull face. "They are not gentle, these women. But most thorough. We think of women as being kind and gentle, or nursing and nurturing the young, and of taking care of babies. But these women here!" Again the shudder crossed the skull face. "They are not women, not really. They have become something else."

"I agree with you on that!" Red answered. "But why are you telling me about this lost follower?"

"Because I vish you to take his place, Mr. Cornish. I want your services. I am prepared to pay well for them." Something akin to a smile broke the bleak features of the skull-face. "Back on earth, I have plenty money."

"Good God!" Red said.

The smile slipped away from the bleak face. "Money is good to have, Mr. Cornish."

"Not your money!" Red answered. "If I took it, I would never live to spent it!"

"Mr. Cornishl"

"Just be truthful, for once," Red answered. "If I took your money, would I live to spend it?"

Slowly the skull face shook in negation. "I guess oo are right. I guess oo would not live to enjoy it."

"So you seel" Red said.

"But you vill serve me just the same," Fu Cong said. He lifted his gaze to his cord men, spoke two quick words.

Red did not understand the meaning of these words. But the cord men did! As he tried to get to his feet, hands came down around his arms, a loop came around his neck, and again his hands were quickly tied behind his back.

"Carry him into the treatment room," Fu Cong said.

Again Red Cornish found himself lifted. This time he was taken into another cabin of the ship. In front of him was an operating table, around him gleamed what looked to be surgical instruments. Powerful lights were so arranged that they could be brought down close to the table. Red was stripped of all clothing, then strapped to the table face up. He felt a needle bite into his hip. What was being injected into his body he did not know, but very quickly a gentle, pleasant warmth spread through his system. The second step involved fitting electrodes to the forehead. Lights were brought down in front of his eyes. Quickly the lights began to turn on and off in a strange rhythm that he soon realized was keyed to the electrodes taped to his skull. In other words, the lights were operating in rhythm with the alpha pulses originating within his own brain. As this was going on, Fu Cong was watching a bank of meters.

"Ah! Ve 'ave the rhythm! Turn him over!"

Untied but given no chance to escape, Red found himself turned face down on the table, his face fitting into an opening so that he could breathe easily. A liquid was painted on the back of his head. He tried to pull away from the liquid, but could not, then stopped fighting when he felt a pleasant warmth from the liquid.

"Oo vill hear my voice," Fu Cong said. Quickly, the voice of the Mongol became a chant. "Oo vill hear my voice. Oo vill obey my voice. Oo vill hear my voice. Oo vill obey my voice. Hear and obey—hear and obey hear and obey—" The voice picked up a soothing rhythm.

This was hypnosis, Red Cornish knew. Or attempted hypnosis. He set himself to resist it mentally. The lights were brought down again, this time over the base of his skull where the warming liquid had been applied. Suddenly he realized the warmth was now penetrating the back of his head. It went in—and in—and in—until it had reached the old brain which has come down with the human race from pre-human days. This old brain, or midbrain, or brain stem, Red knew to be vital to life. The emotions were centered here. Vital life pulses including the control of breathing and the beating of the heart had a major control point in this region.

Reaching the old brain, the warmth became heat, then pain! The pain increased. Red Cornish fought the impulse to scream—and lost the battle. Dimly he realized that Fu Cong was still talking but he had lost the ability to understand the words the Asian was using.

The pain slipped away. Now he could hear Fu Cong talking again. Or so he thought. Then he realized that the words had changed.

"Oo vill hear my thinking," Fu Cong was saying. "Oo vill obey my thinking. If oo try to disobey my thinking that oo vill always hear, the pain will come again. Like this the pain will come!"

In the middle of his brain, pain leaped into existence. Writhing on the table, Red tried to scream. The pain slipped away. Fu Cong's voice came again.

"Oo vill hear my thinking. Oo vill obey my thinking. The mental orders I give oo vill be carried out. Oo vill hear my thinking. Oo vill obey my thinking. If oo try to disobey, the pain vill come again. Like this!"

Again the pain leaped into existence in Red's midbrain. Again he screamed. Again Fu Cong's voice came. "Oo vill hear my thinking."

Suddenly Red realized that he actually was hearing the thinking of Fu Congl He also realized that the purpose of this whole hypnotic procedure had been to make changes in his brain to enable him to hear Fu Cong's mental orders and to force him to obey them.

Horror rose in him like a tidal wave. Would he always hear the mental orders of this Asian? Would he always obey them?

"If oo disobey—like *this!*" Pain that reached the point of agony. "Oo vill hear my thinking." Sickness in the heart and mind. "If oo disobey—*this!*" Pain screamed in the middle of his brain.

"Oo vill take the place of my chela, Ath. You will report back to me what you discover!"

"Yes," Red gasped.

"Good. Very good. And if oo do not obey—this!" Red hot pain in the middle of the brain. "The pain vill stop vhen oo obey me!"

The pain stopped.

"Release him," Fu Cong said.

The cords were stripped from Red's hands and feet. He was helped from the table and to his feet. He stared wonderingly around the room.

"Oo vill not remember this place," Fu Cong said.

"No," Red said.

Leaning back, the Asian lit a long cigarette. "You will obey me," he said.

"Yes," Red answered.

Reaching behind him, Fu Cong picked up a small screwdriver from a workbench. He dropped it on the floor.

"Pick it up," he said.

Red picked up the screwdriver.

"Hand it to me."

Red obeved.

"Hold out your hand with the palm up."

Red held out his hand.

"This vill not hurt," Fu Cong said.

Firmly, he pressed the glowing tip of the cigarette into the open palm. Red stared at his hand. He did not flinch, he did not try to pull his hand away.

"Now oo vill feel the pain," Fu Cong said.

"Oooooow!" Red screamed.

"Now the pain is gone!"

Red stopped screaming.

"In your world these things are true: oo vill hear my thinking, oo vill obey my thinking, and oo vill not remember vhat has happened here."

"Yes," Red said.

Fu Cong looked at his cord men. "Take him back to his cage," he said. Satisfaction with his work was on his face and in his voice. Helped by the women guards, the cord men returned Red to his cage.

"Convinced, Mr. Cornish?" Fu Cong's voice asked in his mind.

"Yes," Red answered.

"What things are true, Mr. Cornish?"

"I will hear your thinking, I will obey your thinking, and I will not remember what happened to me."

"Cood," Fu Cong said.

"Red, who are you talking to?" an alarmed Homer asked.

Red did not answer. In fact, he was so intent on listening to the voice speaking in his mind that he did not hear the voice speaking to him in the dim light of the cage.

"Lie down, Mr. Cornish," Fu Cong said, in his mind. Red lay down.

"Go to sleep, Mr. Cornish," Fu Cong said.

Obediently, Red went to sleep. Homer pulled at his arms, trying to attract his attention, without response. From the cages along the corridor, the cries of wild beasts —and of wilder humans—began again. Muted now, these cries were. It was as if something more horrible than anything they had ever seen had passed along the corridor and the sight of it, the smell of it, the feel of it, had left them too frightened to scream aloud.

Chapter Nine

ON THE SURFACE of the moon, a Space Marine patrol moved from rock to crevasse and from crack to opening and from opening to a patch of sand at the edge of a huge bowl. They had come down the wall of the bowl by stringing tough nylon cables from peg to peg, then dropping them dangling down toward the next point that was to be made secure. Always the first man down such a dangling nylon cord had been an intrepid lieutenant who was being utterly stubborn with himself to cover up how badly scared he really was. When they had all reached the bottom of the slope and were safe on the sand, the lieutenant had gone off by himself, so he could shake without any of his men seeing him. The marines under him were glad of this—so he could not see them shaking inside their bulky space suits.

There was something about the rough, rocky terrain of the moon that got through to a man. There was something about the glare of Great Space that hit deep into a man. There was something about the nearness of the literal meaning of infinity—or as near to the literal meaning as a man could come—that reached deep centers in a human being, be he commissioned officer or private in the rear rank. There was something about the sight of Great Space that made a man realize he was kin to infinity, and being kin to infinity, was also kin to everything that lived in all of this vastness.

When the lieutenant had gotten himself under control, he examined the rocky wall above him and the sandy slope under his feet. He did not like the look of those walls. The rocks there had edges that were razor-sharp and which would slice through the tough fabric of a space suit. Eventually the lieutenant decided he would interpret a little more freely the meaning of his orders and would risk using his radio.

"Dog detail calling Green Mission," he spoke into the transmitter in his helmet. "Dog detail calling Green Mission. Come in, Green Mission."

The lieutenant and his men were the dog detail. Green Mission was Professor Zanthar.

There was no answer.

Looking toward his men, he saw that they had found something on the sand and were gesturing for him to return to them. Going back, he found his men were pointing to holes in the sand, holes such as might have been made by the landing gear of a great ship that had the power to land straight down.

"See here, sir. See here. And here. A landing gear of some kind made these marks. Look how far apart the marks are, sir! And how deep they sink into the sand! How big must have been the ship that landed here?"

"Unh," the lieutenant said. He shifted the wave-length of his transmitter. "Dog detail calling Green Mission. Come in, Green Mission."

The lieutenant listened for an answer. He ordered his men to listen for an answer. When nothing came, he checked the gauges on his oxygen supply, then ordered his men to report on their oxygen left in their back tanks.

"Be ready to switch to reserve tanks," he ordered. "But right now—" The lieutenant hesitated. Taking three deep breaths of the precious oxygen, he made up his mind.

"We will set up camp right here," he said.

His men busied themselves setting up another tent, in a place the lieutenant chose because it was out of sight from the sky. When the tent was securely set up and was complete with its own air lock, the matter transmitter was set up inside it.

They had brought this transmitter to the moon with them, and then they had brought it on from their first camp.

"Dog detail calling Green Mission," the lieutenant said again. There was no answer. By now the lieutenant had begun to doubt that there would be an answer—ever.

He changed the settings on his radio, then used it to contact Space Marine headquarters on Earth. To those who answered him there he explained exactly where he was, what he was doing, and what he wanted. He had to explain that he did not know the whereabouts of Professor Zanthar, that the professor had gone off on an exploring mission and had not returned. Nor had he contacted this group.

"You find Professor Zanthar!" orders rasped at him from across space.

"Yes, sirl" he answered. "This is what we need, sir." In response to his request, supplies began to come through the matter transmitter from Space Marine headquarters on the Home World. Back on Earth the brass was watching this operation for many reasons, one being that the generals wanted to see for themselves how well a fighting unit could be supplied on the moon.

Food came through the transmitter intact, water, oxygen, ammo, weapons, space suits, extra tents, another portable matter transmitter, everything that a fighting man could use came through undamaged and untainted.

The brass was very pleased about all of this. Everything pleased them about all of this—except one thing. They explained again to the lieutenant what this thing was.

"I'll do my best to find him," the lieutenant said.

When the connection with Earth was cut, the lieutenant explained to his men what had to be done.

"We have orders to find Professor Zanthar no matter what!" he said. "My idea is that he is near here somewhere. We'll start working from this spot and we'll keep working until we are successful. We will find Professor Zanthar—" he looked at the marks in the sand"—if whatever it is that has been roosting here doesn't find us first!"

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Chapter Ten

IN THIS CITY of polished aluminum and burnished brass —or of spun silver and pounded gold—the young woman clad only in now-tattered pajamas remained in hiding during the hours when the sun was gone and the gray half-light was on the city. For days, she had hid here, slipping out for water when the half-light came, finding food where she could, always staying out of sight, always hungry and always scared. But also always grimly determined. As yet she knew very little about this place, except that it was a city inhabited by women—and a place where horror dwelt.

When the glass doors had ceased opening and closing around her, she had found herself in a courtyard that had once been used as a catch-pen, though she did not know this. Coming through space, a quirk of the flowing energy currents had deposited her in a catch-pen that was no longer in use. The consequence, no guards had been on the walls.

Coming through the glass doors had not shaken her too badly. Experiences with the matter transmitter had prepared her for such flights. When she had landed, she had not known where she was, but she had wasted neither time nor energy on screams for help. Instead, she had scampered swiftly out of sight. She had remained out of sight.

When she had been caught in the swirling energies that acted like opening and closing glass doors, she had been wearing pajamas that were of a synthetic material that she would wear once, then discard. Before she had spent one night in this strange city, these pajamas had been in shreds.

Watching by day, she had seen the women of this city dressed in many kinds of clothing, dresses, slacks, micromini skirts, flowing robes, and in shapeless gray onepiece suits that looked like work garments. Her own clothes would make her conspicuous. Hence, she must have garments from one of the women of this city. How to get them? Steal them! This was not a matter of ethics, this was a matter of survival. She did not doubt that from this city had come little glass spheres that had been bait for traps on Earth, traps that had caught men, women, children, and possibly animals. The women of this city had stolen living humans! From them she would steal clothing—and anything else she needed to stay alive.

If she was caught-I She shrugged the thought away. She was a graduate student in electronics, one of the very few women ever to attempt to earn advanced degrees in this difficult field. As a student of Professor Zanthar, she had come to accept risk as part of her way of life, taking chances so that others might find the ground beneath their feet a little more secure. This was idealism! She gloried in this fact! If death came for her because of the risks she took, she had trained herself to regard death as a part of the challenge of existence, a fact that every man and every woman must face eventually. She would accept it without fear if it came as a result of her individual efforts to make the world in which she lived-and its future-a better place. She knew that uncounted millions of humans had lived and had died in the hope that they could somehow make the future a little better for their descendants. This was part of the great dream of the American pioneers. Long ago, they had crossed the continent, on foot, on horseback, and in covered wagons -even by walking-so that she and others of her generation might have a better break from life. Those who knew Laurel Ponder knew she would never be false to the dreams of those who had gone before her.

But she had to have clothes. How to get them? All around her were structures that on Earth would have been called apartment buildings. Each had windows looking outward. Usually in the dark hours these windows would be lighted for a time. Occasionally out from them would float tantalizing music, exotic drum rhythms as primitive as sin, and the wailing throb of strange instruments she had never heard before. The music was varied. Now and then she would hear what seemed to be the surge of a mighty symphony, now the rhythmic beat of drums. Once or twice she was sure she heard symphonies that she recognized, Beethoven and Brahms. Now and again she heard concertos that she was certain had been composed by Mozart. All of this convinced her that the women of this city had access to music from Earth. But all of the music she heard had not come from the Home World. In the time of the dim light it poured out of the open windows as a vast symphony of varied sounds, all rhythmical, all harmonious-and all sad and lonely. Or so it seemed to Lori, as she climbed to a ledge that would give her access to a number of windows.

The gray time was on this city.

She hoped to climb through some darkened window and inside to find garments.

Climbing was easy here. She made her way along the ledge. The first window was closed and was locked on the inside. Listening, she could hear nothing. She made her way to the second window, which was dark and open.

"But my dear lady—" the voice of Professor Zanthar rumbled inside the room.

The sound of this familiar voice so surprised her that she forgot her precarious position on the narrow ledge. One foot slipped, she went to one knee, the knee slipped, her body went over the edge, she heard the remaining shreds of her pajamas rip and tear but she managed to catch the edge of the ledge with the tips of her fingers.

The ledge was on the second-floor level. Below her was a drop, how far she did not know, but when she felt her fingers slip she knew she was going to find out. Down she went dropping straight and true to the street below, hitting on the balls of her feet and instantly throwing her body forward and catching herself with her hands in such a way that she went instantly into a roll. Coming to her feet, she found herself facing a group of women who stared at her in utter surprise. Above her windows opened.

"A naked woman!" one woman said.

"What happened to your clothes?" a second asked.

"What were you doing in that building?"

"Did you get thrown out on your bottom?"

She stood facing the women.

"Are those pajamas the newest style?" a woman asked. "You must tell us how to make them!"

"They hang so beautifully!"

"You—" Lori began, then was silent. There was nothing she could say.

"They fit so well!"

"And skin tight tool"

"What's going on here?" a voice spoke from behind the group of women. Instantly, the women scattered. Into sight came three women whose manner and bearing indicated that they were part of the police force.

At the sight of them, Lori turned and ran.

"Halt!" a voice shouted.

Turning a corner, she kept running.

Feet padded after her, voices called to her. Around her, in the buildings, windows opened. Voices from these windows called out to the police, saying which way she was going.

Something hit her from behind, something she knew

not what. Her feet went out from under her. She fell, tried to get to her feet, and found her muscles would work no longer.

The policewomen came up to her. They tried to question her but she refused to answer.

"Call Selene," one of the policewomen said. "She will know what to do about this!"

Chapter Eleven

IN THIS CITY of polished silver and of hammered gold, in this city where women were both the ruled and the rulers, in this city where ancient rites long gone from the Home World still existed and were practiced, a great yearly festival was held. To secure the raw material for it, the little glass spheres were launched on Earth.

Incredibly ancient in its origin, this festival was called Death's Perfect Day. There was a good reason for this name for this event.

When this day came, the great stadium was filled early by women whose excited shricks filled the air. Partly this was due to natural excitement, partly it was due to the fact that for the first time in all of its history, men would be seated in the stadium as witnesses of the excitement. And not only in the stadium but in the special area reserved for the queen and her attendants.

Men in the company of the queen!

And such a man as this, tall, slender, wearing a long golden robe. This man was the special guest of the queen. With him were three men dressed in black robes who continuously, nervously fingered short lengths of silk cord. Also with him was one disciple with a shaven head.

In this city where anything even remotely masculine was the object of instant attention, Fu Cong and those with him were the subjects of clattering tongues, of whispering voices, and of endless conjecture as to exactly what would happen to him this day. The watchers were certain that something would happen! Exactly what it would be they did not know.

The tall Mongol seemed not to be aware that he was being watched. At ease, seated on the right of the cloud of boiling purple smoke that made up the protective screen around the queen, he spoke to her, to those with her, and to his own men, laughing and chatting. When the first group took the field down below, a group of graceful dancers moving to the rhythm of an ancient song, he gave them polite attention. Nobody else in the huge stadium watched the dancers. They were women. Instead they watched Fu Cong and those with him. They were men.

When the dancers had given way to a group of female acrobats, nobody in the stands watched them either. When men were present to be watched—and hated! there were few here who would watch women.

"Yis!" Fu Cong said, when the acrobats had gone. "Very interesting." Delicately he stifled a yawn.

"It will be more exciting later," the queen spoke, from inside the boiling purple smoke.

"Ah, yis, no doubt." Fu Cong, without interest. Turning to his disciple with the shaven head, he spoke quickly to him in an unintelligible tongue and from Kef received a quick answer. "Tomorrow—" he said to the queen. "It would be a good time for me to leave."

"Certainly, if you wish it!" the queen answered, her voice cold. "But we had hoped that the King of the World would choose to remain longer with us. After all, there is still the demonstration of obedience from the red-headed one!" A touch of derisive laughter was in her voice.

"Oo vill yet see that demonstration!" Fu Cong said. As he was speaking, trumpets were blowing. Across the stadium in the opposite wall a door was opening. People moved there, both men and women, cripples, old people. One walked with the aid of a crutch. When he saw the throng around him, he shook the crutch at them. Screams of rage answered him.

"Oo have both men and women there!" Fu Cong said. "Yes," the queen answered. "Some are our own people who have been rebellious. Others are women we caught by accident who were too old to be of any further use to us. And men, of course."

"Ah," Fu Cong said. Across the stadium the doors were closing. Some of those who had entered the arena had turned and were trying to escape through the closing door. In the narrowing opening women with whips drove them back. The man with the crutch glared at the crowd. They screamed at him.

"What—" Fu Cong began, then was silent. He thought he knew what was going to happen here. However, there were other things he did not understand. "Some were caught by accident—?" His voice rose in question.

"That is Selene's department," the queen answered. At her signal, Selene drew near. The moon woman was pale this morning, her face was thin, and her eyes looked as if she had had little sleep for many nights.

"We send the little glass spheres through the translater that acts and looks like glass doors opening," Selene explained. "No, we are not really sure where the spheres will land."

"That is very wasteful!"

"Yes, but the little spheres are not difficult to make. We try to drop them over cities, but often we miss our target. One shot landed in the Upper Amazon some years ago. We got two tapirs, a bushmaster snake, and a black leopard." Selene's voice was brittle. She started to withdraw but the queen told her she had not been given permission to leave.

"How did it happen you caught these animals?"

"Perhaps they touched one of the spheres by accident," Selene explained. "Sometimes a touch is all that is necessary. At other times, the little sphere can be picked up and nothing will happen."

"Why is this?"

"We do not know," Selene answered. "Perhaps in part it depends on the mental strength of the individual. People with strong wills do not move into resonance with the little spheres. For them, the glass doors do not open. Of course, they can open by accident too."

Fu Cong looked appraisingly at Selene. He nodded to himself, then spoke to the queen.

"But I cannot give you Selene," the queen answered. "She understands best of all how to distribute the little spheres. We would be helpless without her."

"But the making of these little spheres-"

"I know little about that," Selene answered quickly. "That is not in my department."

Fu Cong stared at her. "Oo speak English very well."

"It is my native tongue," Selene answered.

"You come recently from Earth?"

"Well, not too recently."

"Oo picked up a little glass sphere?"

"Yes. It was such a pretty little thing!" Selene's face darkened. "And here I was."

"Do you like it here?"

"Of coursel This is heaven." Selene looked quickly at the boiling smoke that hid her queen. "Everyone who comes here wants to stay here forever."

"There is a rumor I 'ave heard-" Fu Cong seemed to

choose his words with extra care "—that the people in this city live forever, that they are immortal."

"I—" Selene gasped. Again she looked at the mass of smoke where her mistress was hidden.

"One hears so many things," the queen spoke. "Ahl If only half of them were true!"

"But is this one true?" Fu Cong persisted. "Are you immortal?"

"Yesl" the Mistress said.

Fu Cong gulped, hungry lights glinted in his eyes, he started to speak, then was silent. These women were immortal! Here was a secret worth having!

"It is only for women, not for men," the mistress said.

"Vhat?" the Asian gasped. "This is silly talk! Oo are lying to mel"

"If I am, what can you do about it?" The voice of the queen came from the boiling smoke that marked her presence. Fu Cong gulped again. What could he do about it? As he was thinking of possible answers to this question, a shout from the stadium pulled his attention to events down below. A group of perhaps twenty people had been forced into the arena. Now another gate was opening. From it were lunging shaggy beasts.

"Dogs?" Fu Cong questioned.

"Wolves, I think," Kef answered.

The beasts were thin and hungry. Seeing the humans, they charged. Some of the humans tried to hold their ground, some tried to run. The beasts, dogs or wolves, had been without food for days. They pulled down the cripples first, slashing at those who were too weak to run, pulling down those with the strength to flee.

The man with the single crutch fought furiously, using his crutch as a weapon, and held the beasts at bay until a wolf leaped on his back. He went down under a pack of snarling wolves.

The whole vast stadium howled like wolves themselves.

Near him, Fu Cong could see Selene's face. The moon maiden looked sick. Fu Cong glanced at Kef, asking a question. "Such spectacles were often seen in ancient Rome," the chela answered. "Men often fought beasts in that time. Men also fought men."

"Uh," Fu Cong said. The expression on his face said he was wondering if he had missed something else as he had missed even the thought of living forever.

When the last of the victims were dead, women with ion guns and whips invaded the stadium and drove the wolves from it.

"Vhat is the purpose of this—ah—performance?" Fu Cong asked the queen.

"It has many purposes," the Mistress answered. "First, it relieves us of the presence of unwanted men, of overage women who have failed to respond to treatment, of rebels, and of undesirables who have picked up one of our little spheres on Earth. Also—" the voice was bland now and without emotion—"it gives the girls a chance to relieve themselves of their pent-up emotions. Living here in idleness, in boredom, with much too little to do, many of our girls develop neurotic, perhaps even psychotic traits."

"I see," Fu Cong said. "Oo vould not regard this whole performance as a psychotic, a crazy trait?"

"Not at all!" the queen answered.

Looking around the stadium, the Asian could see that the women here were indeed quieter now.

"It was really a poor performance—" the voice of the queen came from behind the boiling purple cloud. "I can remember when I was a girl—"

"Did oo perhaps live in Rome vhere such performances were common, as my disciple tells me?" Fu Cong asked.

"No such luck!" The voice of the queen was suddenly very bitter. "I lived in Ephesus. How I longed to see the great coliseum at the Eternal City, but I was never able to get there!"

"Um," Fu Cong said. He looked at Kef requesting information—and got it. "My disciple tells me that the coliseum at Rome has been in ruins for many centuries. Have oo lived since the days vhen it vas being used?"

"Yes. Did I not tell you that we live a very long time, if not forever?"

"Yis!" Fu Cong answered. "Yis. Oo told mel But—I had forgotten."

"What you mean is you did not believe me!" the Mistress said.

"No, no, no," the Asian hastily answered. The blowing of the trumpets saved him from attempting further explanation. Now the dark door across the stadium was open. From it was emerging a lumbering beast.

"Is that a bear?" Fu Cong asked. He looked up at Kef for an answer.

"That beast is called a great brown bear," his disciple told him.

"Perhaps the bear and the wolves vould have made an interesting fight," Fu Cong suggested.

"When the wolves are well fed, they will not fight, but will run away," the queen explained. "The hungry bear would drive them from their food and would settle down and eat it himself. When he was full, he would sleep—" Inside the purple screen, the Mistress gave the impression of a shrug. "And nothing would happen."

"Then who would fight the bear?" the Asian asked.

"Would the King of the World like to challenge him?" the queen asked.

"I? It vould be no contest against my weapons," Fu Cong answered.

The Mistress laughed. "I see you decline. But I do not know who the girls have chosen to fight the bear this time."

"The same beast fights more than once?"

"If he wins," the queen told him.

Again the trumpets sounded, again the door opened in the far end of the arena. From it came a man in a space suit. With the helmet open, with various tools dangling from the belt at his waist, he had in his hands what looked to be a heavy copper hammer.

"I know that man!" Fu Cong gasped. "He is deadly! You must make him give up his weapons!"

The mistress consulted by radio with helpers across the arena, then spoke to the Asian. "Calm yourself. They tell me he will fight with the copper hammer, that the objects dangling from his belt are tools."

"One of those tools is mighty enough to kill everyone in this stadium!" Fu Cong refuted. "His name is John Zanthar! I suspected he vas here but I did not know he vas a prisoner. How can he be a prisoner with that *xet* gun at his belt?"

"Calm yourself, King of the World," the queen advised him.

Below her, the man in the space suit was bowing. His voice came up as a throb of sound. "We who are about to die salute youl"

"If it were spoken in Latin, that would be the ancient salute of the Rome gladiators to the emperor of the Roman world!" the Mistress gasped. "Where would he have learned such talk as that? Is he also from the old time? I must talk to this man." She looked around at Selene.

"He—he is one of the prisoners," the moon maiden answered quickly. "He came from Earth. Beyond this I know nothing."

Fu Cong was still trying to warn the queen that this man in the space suit was very dangerous when the bear reared to its full height, sniffed the air, then dropped down again and came toward John Zanthar.

Like the wolves, the bear had been starved for days and was very hungry.

Zanthar closed the helmet of his suit, then gripped the

heavy hammer with both hands and turned to face the charging bear. He waited until it was almost upon him, then stepped quickly to one side and brought down the heavy hammer on its head.

Thwuck!

The sound had in it a crunching note that told of a skull being crushed.

The bear dropped flat. The great beast lay trembling. Slowly the muscle tremors went into the quietness that is death.

A might roar shook the stadium.

For many years these spectators had watched this huge beast kill its victims here. Men, women, horses, wolves, had all gone down before it. The legend had grown up that it was invincible.

Now they saw it dead.

"My girls told me true when they said he would use only the hammer!" the queen gasped. "Bring that man to me. Make room for him here beside me!"

"But he is only a crude gladiator," Fu Cong protested. "Oo do not want him here to profane your presence!"

"Perhaps I need that kind of profanation which comes from nearness to a mighty gladiator!" the queen snapped at him. "Move, you lazy girls! Bring him to me! At once!" As the women around her scurried to do her bidding, she turned to Fu Cong, demanding to know why he objected to this man coming to sit beside her.

"I vas thinking only of oo!" Fu Cong protested.

"Please let me do my own thinking!" the queen answered. She looked again at the arena and gasped at what she saw there.

Down below the man in the space suit had lifted the body of the dead bear to his shoulder.

"The gravity is low here," Fu Cong said.

"Could you lift that monster even where the gravity is low?" the mistress demanded. Before the Asian could find an answer, the women had rushed on the field of the stadium and were directing the man in the space suit to follow them. Minutes later, escorted by breathless women, watched in utter silence by an awed throng who had never seen such a sight before, he dropped the body of the bear at the feet of the queen. Opening his helmet, he spoke to her.

"A trophy for you, lady!"

"Oh, thank you!" Perhaps the queen hidden in the mass of purple smoke cared nothing for the bloody trophy dropped at her feet but she did care for the attention thus given her. In the eyes of all of her subjects, this man in a space suit had made her important! Could any woman ask more? "Thank you! What shall we call you?"

"My name is John Zanthar."

She turned to Fu Cong, to introduce the two men, then was silent as she saw the expressions on the faces of the two men.

"I have already met this man," Zanthar said: He nodded toward the Asian. "Tell me, King of the World, do you think that either of us will ever get out of this city alive?"

"Out of here alive?" Fu Cong's mouth hung open. Of all the questions he could have been asked, this was the one he was least expecting. "I—I—" the Mongol sputtered. Momentarily the computer that he used as a brain was out of circuit. "I do not know vhat oo mean, John Zanthar! I did not know I vas in any danger here!"

"You know it now," Zanghar said.

"Perhaps it is oo who are in danger!" Fu Cong said.

Zanthar gestured toward the carcass at the feet of the queen. "I killed the champion. According to the rules of these people, I am safe until next year's Day comes. Is not this correct, Mistress?"

"It is correct," the queen spoke from the boiling purple smoke.

Fu Cong glanced at his cord men, a gesture that was

intended to convey the idea that Zanthar was not safe from them.

"Those!" Disdain was in Zanthar's voice. He made a gesture with his hammer. Involuntarily the cord men backed a step away. Zanthar looked at Fu Cong. The face of the Mongol showed worry. He looked at Selene. The moon maiden looked as if she was about to faint.

"Do you wish to have the skin as a trophy?" Zanthar asked the queen.

"Yes," the queen answered. She spoke swiftly to her attendants. Ten of them clustered around the great beast and began to drag it away.

"Tell me, Zan-thar, how did you grow so strong?" the queen asked.

"It is not that I am so very strong, it is that I used my strength to its best advantage. Like this." Motioning to the women to get away from the bear, he reached over and caught the skin in a tight grip. Lifting it, he slipped under the weight and caught it on his shoulders. "See!" He gestured for the women to come close again. Carefully he transferred the weight of the bear to them. They staggered as they bore away their burden.

"Sit here beside me, Zan-thar," the queen said. Her face could not be seen but there was no question of the smile in her voice. "And do be careful of that heavy hammer. If you dropped it—"

"I only drop it on the heads of my enemies," Zanthar answered. He seated himself beside the queen. On the other side, Fu Cong looked very uncomfortable.

Trumpets sounded again. Again a door opened in the wall across the way. In this opening women could be seen wielding whips, pushing and shoving men out into the arena. Men in brown robes, men in black robes, men in gray robes.

At the sight of these men, Fu Cong sat up very straight. "Those men are the crew of my ship!" he gasped.

The men in robes who had been forced into the arena

caught sight of Fu Cong. They ran across the stadium and stood looking up at him. "Save us, master! Save us," they wailed.

"That was the crew of your ship!" the queen said softly. "Oo-oo-"

"Yes, we have kidnapped them," the queen said. Her voice was very sweet.

"Vhat of my ship?"

"My girls have it too," the queen answered.

"Vhat are oo going to do with my men?"

"I thought perhaps our new champion would volunteer to fight them," the queen answered. "Of course, he does not have to fight again for another year, unless he volunteers, but I thought perhaps-"

"I would rather fight their master!" Zanthar said.

"My ship!" A howl like that of one of the wolves in the arena came from Fu Cong. He had finally realized what had happened to him, "Vhat are they going to do with my ship?"

"My girls thought they would like to use it to make trips to and from our old world of Earth," the Mistress said.

"But they do not know how to operate it! They will crash it! And I will be marooned here forever!" The Asian was screaming now.

"You will be marooned here but it will not be forever," the queen told him.

"But they do not know how to handle the controls!" "You should have told us this sooner," the Mistress chided him. "I am in touch with them by radio. They have sent the ship through the glass doors and are on Earth now. They say your vessel controls beautifully."

"But how vill I return to Earth?"

"It may be that you won't return," Zanthar said.

"But I am the man who is destined to rule Earth!" Fu Cong was on his feet.

"The way things stand right now, I would say you

are one of the men selected by destiny to die on the moon," Zanthar told the excited Asian. He looked around the purple cloud that hid the Mistress. "Sit down!" he said.

Fu Cong remained standing. With his cord men close behind him, with the trembling Kef trying to get out of sight behind the cord men, Fu Cong turned to the cloud of purple smoke that held the queen of this city. "Oo oo can't do this to mel" he gulped hoarsely.

The queen laughed. "This, Ruler of the World, you should also have told me sooner!"

Lifting the copper hammer, Zanthar rose to his feet. "I told you once—" he began.

Fu Cong sat down. His eyes on the copper hammer, he did not move after he had seated himself. Zanthar moved to stand in front of him. Holding the copper hammer ready, he pulled aside the golden robe. From pockets in it, he began to take weapons. The robe yielded a *xet* gun, two knives, a bulldog pistol made in Britain, a Luger that had come from Germany.

"Here! Catch!" As he pulled the weapons free, he tossed them to Selene. With little squeals of dismay she caught each one. The purple cloud that was the queen turned to watch what was happening here.

"You were a regular walking arsenal, weren't you?" Zanthar said to Fu Cong. "Now tell your cord men to turn over their cords—and all weapons they possess."

Out of the corner of his eyes, Fu Cong looked at the copper hammer. The blood from the bear was beginning to dry on the heavy weapon. Fu Cong spoke quickly to his guards. The cord men yielded weapons too, cords, knives, and small automatic pistols. Zanthar looked at Kef.

"He is vowed to eternal peace," Fu Cong said, of his chela.

"He can be just as peaceful after I have searched him as he wishes," Zanthar said. "But anybody who is associated with you, gets searched first. Then I know he is going to be at least a little more inclined to peace afterwards."

Kef squirmed forward. From the lining of his robe, he yielded two short-bladed knives.

"Yes, I see how peace-loving this Kef is," Zanthar said. "No doubt he needed the knives to cut his food!"

Again Selene took charge of the weapons, slipping them into pockets in the floor-length gown she was wearing this day. Turning, Zanthar bowed to the mass of boiling purple smoke that hid the queen of this city. With his hammer, he gestured toward the discomfited Fu Cong, who now was sitting very still.

"You see, Mistress, the risks you ran in having near you so treacherous a man!"

"I seel" the queen answered. Now alarm was rising in her voice. "And Zan-thar, what risks do I run in having you near me? What arms, what weapons do you possess?"

"That is a good question," Zanthar said. "Of course, you know that this is a weapon." He lifted the copper hammer in one hand, shoook it lightly in the air. "You have seen what damage this can do."

"Yes," the queen answered. "But that is not what I had in my mind when I asked you what weapons you possess."

"How right you are in thinking a simple hammer is not a really dangerous weapon. But—" his voice took on measured tones "—the question is not properly put. It is not what weapons that I possess, Mistress. It is what weapons you possess!"

A gasp came from inside the boiling purple ion shield that looked like smoke.

Zanthar shook the hammer again, lightly and easily in the air.

"I doubt if that purple ion shield will really stop this simple weapon," he said. "But it lies with you to find out. Either yield your weapons—or discover how devastating such a simple weapon can be at such close quarters!"

The gasp from inside the boiling purple mass became a wail.

As the watching women saw what was happening, the gasp went over the entire stadium.

Chapter Twelve

FOR COMFORT, the Space Marine patrol huddled together. Each man tried to tell his nearest companion what he had seen happen.

"I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes!"

"It was the biggest ship I ever sawl"

"Glass doors opened-and there it was!"

"It just came out of nowherel Right out of nowhere. One second it wasn't there. The next second the glass doors had opened and there it was!"

"It seemed to move and to stand still at the same time!"

Although no one was going to admit this, they were a group of badly frightened men.

The lieutenant was gone. He had gone back through the matter transmitter to headquarters on the Pacific Coast for additional briefing. The patrol had been left here at the edge of the great moon bowl. A ship had come out of nowhere.

"I thought that trip through the matter transmitter shook me so bad that nothing else would ever shake me again," one marine said. "But this ship coming out of nowhere shook me almost that badly."

"And fastl The way that ship took off I'll bet it's clear to Earth by now!"

"Do you suppose it might meet the lieutenant coming back?"

This question produced silence. To them, the thought of the ship meeting the lieutenant moving through the matter transmitter was a real possibility. They did not know this could not happen.

"If it has reached Earth, I wish I was on it."

"Me too, old buddy-buddy."

"Where do you suppose it came from?"

"Who in hell knows? Where did the Earth come from? Where did the moon come from? Where did you come from?"

These questions produced more silence. "Do you really think we live in a universe where *anything* can happen?" a timid voice asked.

"It sure looks like we do. It used to be there were walls around us. Now the walls are gone!"

"Where does that leave us?"

"Right out in the open where anybody can shoot at usl"

"That ship skinned the edge of the cliff as it went up. I thought it was going to crash."

"Inexperienced pilot, maybe?"

"They don't let inexperienced pilots fly ships like that. You've got to be cleared and then cleared again, then double-cleared before they trust you in the air with that kind of a ship."

"That's in the marines, old buddy buddy. I have a feeling that our kind of people weren't flying that ship."

"Me too."

"How long has it been since the ship jumped itself right out of this place?"

This question produced much inspection and checking

of watches to make certain they were running. Finally all agreed that the time elapsed was not as much as four hours but was over three.

"What are we going to do?" an uneasy voice asked.

"We're going to sit right here in this tent and wait for Professor Zanthar or the lieutenant to show up."

"What if they don't show?"

"Buddy, you don't want to ask questions like that. If they don't show, I'll get on the radio and ask somebody back at headquarters on Earth to tell us what to do."

"What if they tell us to jump back to Earth?"

"We're going to have to jump back sooner or later and we might as well make up our minds to do it. There's not any other way home!"

"What if that ship comes back? Shall we start shooting?"

"Better to start praying, maybe."

"Maybe we had better start that right now."

"Better we should have started it yesterday!"

A bell clanged. To a man the patrol jumped. The clang of the bell announced the return of the lieutenant. Coming out of the transmitter, he very quickly sat down.

"That thing is never going to be a success, for people, anyway," he said. "It cooks me right down to the seat of my pants. Sergeant!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Is everything here all right."

"Yes, sir. I mean, no, sir."

"Make up your mind! If anything went wrong, I want to know about it. Back at headquarters they really chewed me out. They said if this patrol let anything happen to Professor Zanthar they would just naturally skin us all alive. How in the hell we can keep things from happening to him is beyond me! They know it as well as I know it but they still try to hold me responsible." At this point, the lieutenant ran out of breath. "What went wrong here?" he asked when he was able.

The sergeant told him what had happened.

"There were marks here where some kind of a landing gear had rested once." He got to his feet and went out through the flap air lock of the tent. Without waiting for orders, the whole detail went with him. The lieutenant inspected the holes they had found in the sand.

"They're deeper now," he muttered.

Down the canyon a short distance a piece of rock was seen to be falling slowly. Looking up, they saw that the ship was back. Inexpertly navigated, it had touched the side of the wall and had jarred loose the piece of rock.

As they watched the ship lifted up again. Momentarily it was out of sight beyond the rim of the canyon wall.

"Get down there to where that piece of rock is lying!" the lieutenant said. "We'll hide and let the ship land. When whoever is in it comes outside, we'll grab 'em. Don't shoot unless I give the order."

Moving rapidly, the patrol took up positions near the chunk of rock that had fallen from the side of the wall above them.

"Maybe I should have said when *whatever* is in it come out, we'll grab them and try to take over the ship. When the lock opens, I want us inside that ship, fast?"

"What if the lock don't open, sir?"

"Shut up!" the lieutenant said.

Above them, the ship came into sight again. Piloted much more cautiously now, it seemed to feel its way along the wall toward the sand in the bottom of the huge moon bowl. Nearing the bottom, it extruded legs.

"That's the gear that made those holes in the sand!" the lieutenant said, over the radio to his patrol. "I want us under that ship, right now! Movel"

The patrol moved. Coming from the rear, they seemed to be unobserved by whoever or whatever was in the ship. With weapons ready, they crouched under the ship, waiting for whatever was going to happen. Reaching up, the lieutenant pressed the top of his spacesuit helmet against the metal hull of the ship. "Be on the alert!" he said. "I can hear something moving around inside."

Very much alert, the patrol waited.

Around the ship, and around them, glass doors opened. And closed. And opened and closed.

The ship, the lieutenant, and the patrol all vanished.

Chapter Thirteen

ZANTHAR HELD the hammer ready.

"Would—would you dare strike me?" the queen whispered.

"Not by choice but by necessity," Zanthar answered. His voice was firm, his manner resolute. If doubts existed anywhere in his mind, he kept them from his face. Behind the queen, Selene looked pale. Fu Cong's face had lost its yellow tinge and had turned a vague white. The queen's attendants were irresolute.

"If any of you ladies think you can use an ion gun on me, forget it," Zanthar said. "If you knock me down, I'll knock out your queen's brains as I fall." To emphasize his meaning, he shook the heavy hammer.

The women around the queen resolved not to move a muscle. Zanthar transferred his attention back to the woman hidden inside the boiling purple smoke. Definitely, he wanted her to believe he was capable of knocking out her brains and that he had the will to do it. He did not know what weapons were hidden behind that boiling purple mist and he did not want to find out.

"You saw what happened to the bear?" he demanded of the queen.

"Y-es!"

The quaver in her voice was encouragement.

"Do you want it to happen to you?"

"N-o."

"Then tell your girls to come down one at a time and to pile their weapons here in front of me."

"But-"

"Tell them!"

The voice from inside the purple smoke rasped an order in an unknown tongue.

"Tell them in English!"

"Ladies! Do as this man says!" the queen whispered.

One by one the queen's guards deposited their weapons in front of Zanthar. Selene alone did not obey. "Selene, do as I say!" the queen ordered. "Do you want this brute to kill me?"

"Shall I also lay down the weapons taken from the King of the World?" Selene asked.

"Idiot! Of course! Do you want this monster to crush my skull with this heavy hammer?"

Selene hastily did as she was told to do.

Zanthar looked down at the pile of weapons at his feet. "You inside the screen, if you have weapons there—"

"I have none."

"All right. But if you should happen to have a little knife that you have forgotten, or some other little weapon that you are overlooking, and if you attempt to use it, I will throw this hammer straight into that mass of boiling ions that serves you as a shield, the energy flows will short-circuit through the copper and—" Zanthar's shrug was elaborate. "Well, don't do it," he said. "I-I won't," the queen answered.

Over the great stadium was an awed silence. The fact that a man was with their queen was enough to hold every eye in the place. Now this man had conquered the Mistress, had forced her to do his will, had disarmed her guard! Here was a sight that would be talked about for ages! The only sound was the clamor of Fu Cong's crew pleading with their master to use his influence to save their lives.

In point of fact, Fu Cong was wondering what influence he could use to save his own!

Zanthar kept his hammer high and ready. From inside the screen he knew that sharp eyes were watching him. If those eyes detected a weakness, or even if they grew bored, what would happen? What was he to say to a woman he could not see, how was he going to say it? If bluff failed, he was one man against thousands of women. He remembered what had happened to the shaven-headed disciple the women had caught intruding in the streets of their city. If he angered them too much, would they remember that he was champion and was immune to harm for a whole year? Or would they simply swarm over him and cut him into bits of flesh?

"Mistress," he began, "I have a great curiosity about you—and about this." He nodded toward the arena below him.

"Thus we did in Ephesus," the queen answered.

"You were actually there?" Zanthar questioned. "Yes."

"You actually lived in that ancient city?"

"I was born there."

"And you have lived here ever since?"

"Yes. This city was old even then. In the beginning and that beginning is remote indeed—it was built as a place of sanctuary for virgins vowed to the service of—" The voice faltered.

"Aphrodite?"

"No. This goddess was far older than Aphrodite. But the idea was the same. Once the city was built, only women were brought here or were allowed here."

"Are all of these women so old?"

"No. Many, like Selene, are fairly new here."

"What happens to the old ones?"

"They grow tired—and choose to die," the queen answered. Suddenly her voice was weary. "In this way I worked myself up to being queen."

"But who built the city originally?"

"Priests of the old time. Magicians you might have called them."

"We would call them scientists in the world today."

"Scientists?" She seemed to feel the word for possible hidden meanings. "Well, it does not matter what a thing is called. Mostly all that men can do is to find new words for old things, then applaud themselves for making great discoveries." Bitterness crept into the voice speaking from inside the boiling purple smoke. "People coming from the world today tell me of new things. I could tell them that much that they think new is only the old discovered again."

"I agree with you on that," Zanthar said.

"And the oldest of all—and still the newest—are the ways of a man and a woman," the queen continued. "Only here we do not have these ways. Here, instead, we have immortality. Or something very near it."

"About this immortality—" Fu Cong interrupted.

"Shut up," Zanthar said.

Rage made a mask over the face of the Mongol. Never in his life had anybody dared speak to him in this manner. He started to get to his feet. Ever so slightly Zanthar shifted the hammer. At the sight of his weapon, Fu Cong slipped quickly back into his seat. "Immortality is vhat oo want, tool" he shouted. Turning to the boiling purple smoke that hid the queen, "He is trying to trick you, to win from you the secret of living forever. He will steal it from you, he will take it by force, he will do anything to get it!"

"Everything you have said about me is true of you," Zanthar answered.

Fu Cong was silent. The queen was quiet. The women watched. "I am not looking for immortality," Zanthar continued. "I know something of its price—"

"Price?" Fu Cong fumed. "I will pay any price demanded."

"I am not talking of price in terms of money," Zanthar said. "I am talking about it in terms of other things. One of these other prices that must be paid is sterility." How far his voice carried he did not know. All around him he could hear women breathing heavily. He knew then that he had uncovered part of the hidden mystery of this city. Here was a city of women. Here also was a city of sterility. Here also was horror.

"Whatever it is that lives forever, whether it be a man, a woman, or a god, cannot reproduce itself. This is a law of nature," Zanthar continued. "If it could reproduce itself but could not die, then it would eventually fill all of the worlds with its offspring."

The whole stadium was quiet now.

"If I become immortal, then I can have no children?" Fu Cong asked.

"Right. Who would then inherit the empire you are trying to build?"

"There vould be no need for anyone to inherit it. I vould still be living. I vould keep it for myself!" Triumph was in the voice of the Asian.

"Ah," Zanthar said.

"Vhat do you mean by this ah?" Fu Cong demanded.

"I mean what good would an empire do you when you were too old to enjoy it? When your eyes failed, you could not even see your empire. When you lost your hearing, how could you hear the flattering words of men who were trying to steal your empire from you?"

"Men vould tell me about it."

"Not if you had lost your hearing."

"But my ears would not fail. Medicine, I know, the new and the old. I could keep my ears and my eyes working for many centuries!"

"Your heart would fail, your liver would stop working, your kidneys—"

"I could have new organs transplanted!"

"But that is very risky. Most heart transplants fail, you know."

"And even if the physical body could be kept functioning—and it can be done—" the voice of the queen came from behind the swirling purple smoke. "That is not the difficult part of living forever. New hearts can be transplanted if you know how to select the right ones. New kidneys, new livers, new blood, all of these can be provided. This was all known long ago. But one thing cannot be provided." Rasping, the voice of the queen went into silence.

"And what is this that cannot be provided?" Fu Cong asked.

"New thoughts, new ideas, and new dreams to set the heart throbbing, these cannot be provided," the queen answered. "No matter what happens, the time comes when you have seen it all before, seen it many times perhaps, in the old days. Because there is nothing new under your sun, and you know it, life becomes a dreadful boredom, a deep and bitter fatigue. You lose your ability to laugh. You even forget that laughter exists! Then you who would live forever begin to wish you were dead!"

The queen's voice had taken on raspy tones. Listening, Zanthar was almost sorry for her. Somewhere inside that purple smoke was a woman who had lived with pain —forever.

"The eagerness for life, the love of life, the hope of

life itself, is in something new! And the time comes when there is nothing new! Then you are dead. Then you would willingly give up your immortality for just a new thought!"

Listening to the voice coming from inside the smoke, Zanthar had difficulty in imagining the woman hidden, whether she was beautiful or ugly, or fair or dark. One thing was certainly true of her—she was tired!

"Death is the way nature renews herself," the voice continued. "To die is to live again, eventually, in a new body, we believe. And in a new body to have a heart that jumps again with each new day, with a mind that finds beauty in the quietness of the evening, with eyes that ever eagerly look for—and always find—the face of the beloved."

Listening, Zanthar felt new thoughts moving in his mind. Suddenly he realized that no matter what this queen was, she had one redeeming quality in that she had the soul of a poet. Perhaps it was a frustrated poet but it was a poet just the same. Then she was speaking again.

"No, my enemies-for neither of you are really my friends-you do not want the long life that I have hadand which I still possess. The price of immortality, of living forever in one body, no matter if you could renew it daily at full-blown tide of youth, is worse than sterility! It is stagnation! It is being caught forever in the web of old thoughts and old emotions that have grown sickening through endless repetition! Finally you reach the point that I have reached, where I envy each person, each animal, that I see die in the arena. No, Zan-thar, I am not the sadist you think me. I find no joy in the sufferings of others. Instead what I feel for them is pure envy, that they can die and that I cannot. For neither man nor woman live in their body. They live in their dreams! And when their dreams are failing, life itself is not worth having."

The voice slipped away into a silence that was sud-

denly haunted. Listening, Zanthar had the impression that not only was this woman haunted but so also was every other woman in this vast throng, haunted by the fact that they had set themselves aside from the stream of life and were without a dream for the future!

"If you feel that way, why do you not walk into the arena and learn again the meaning of death?" Zanthar asked.

"Because I am a coward!" the queen answered. Now something that was very close to a sob was in her voice. "Will you help me to die, Zan-thar the mighty? Will you strike with your great copper hammer and break through the purple shield around me and crush my skull as you crushed the skull of the great bear and thus free me from my cowardice?"

"I—" Zanthar said. "I—nol Of course not! I—"

"Suddenly you who were so very confident a moment ago are sounding like a very confused man," the queen said.

"I am confused. But I am not God to take life unless it is in self-defense!" Zanthar answered. "You raise deep questions in morals and in philosophy, questions to which no man—and so far as I know no woman—has found answers. I did not expect to have to answer such questions here."

"Where would such questions be asked except among those who can live forever?" the queen asked.

"I do not know," Zanthar answered.

"Did you expect me to flee from death?"

"Most people do flee from it. Why should you be an exception?"

"I have given you the reasons why I am an exception. I am queen of this city. It is life from which I wish to flee, only I am too cowardly to destroy myself. Nor will my girls, no matter how hard I drive them, do the job for me!" Behind the queen, Selene's face had gone completely white as she listened.

"This is crazy talk!" Fu Cong was on his feet again and was shouting. "I vill take this long life oo 'avel Tell me the secret! Give it to me—"

"It is not told except to women, it is not given to any man!" The voice from behind the screen was as cold as any wind that ever blew through outer space. "If I could, and would, give you the secret, this would not relieve me of my burden."

"This talk of life being a burden, this is crazy talk," Fu Cong insisted.

Hidden by the purple cloud a woman sighed. "How can I convince this man who would be ruler of the world that I am speaking the truth, Zan-thar?"

"Probably you cannot convince him," Zanthar answered. "He hungers after immortality in the same way that he hungers after great power. Only life and time can teach him that greater values lie elsewhere—"

"Lie where?" Fu Cong shouted.

"In the love of one's friends, in the respect of one's fellow men, in the chance to work creatively and freely at a chosen task. In life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—"

"That is crazy talk to be told to coolies! Tell me, Professor Zanthar, do oo not hunger for immortality too?"

"Not in this body," Zanthar answered. "Éventually even the best body ages, the strong become weak, the beautiful become ugly. The physical body is a chemical and electronic machine. It wears out. Corrosion eats away at it, decay nibbles at it in spite of all organ transplants and in spite of all new marvels of creative chemistry."

"You do not believe the body is everything?"

"No. I believe there is a dweller within the body. I believe this dweller constructed the body within the womb and within the limits of the genes and chromosomes supplied by the parents, within the limits of nutrient materials supplied by the mother. I believe this invisible dweller lives within the body as long as it is functioning as a machine, then at death slips out of it to live in worlds of higher frequencies. I admit I cannot prove this in my laboratory as yet, but some day somebody will prove it—"

"I was taught this same doctrine in Ephesus, when I was young!" The queen spoke. "The Ophites taught it, the priests of the Alexandrian gods taught it, as did the priests of the gods of ancient Egypt!"

"I know the idea is old," Zanthar said.

"But you have just admitted you cannot prove it!" Fu Cong shouted.

"This may be the real reason I have to live by it," Zanthar said. "It may be that my life is the only possible proof of it!"

- For a moment the Mongol was silent. Then he was talking again, demanding scientific proof.

"Would you care to put your record of scientific discoveries in the balance against my record?" Zanthar asked. "Would you measure your published papers against my published papers?"

"N-o. I admit—"

"Would you deny that I may know the meaning of scientific proof?"

"No. I know your reputation. But even a great scientist can be wrong—"

"Granted. And he will also be the first to admit the factl I think what you are saying in your heart is that you hope I can prove the existence of this dweller within the body, of the soul of man, so that you can find reason to accept it yourself. If I cannot do this, I would still remind you that my belief in a soul within a body has eased many of life's burdens and has helped me through many a difficult place. If this belief is false, this would not be the first instance where men have been nourished by false ideas!" Zanthar's voice was ringing now through the whole stadium. Everywhere women were listening. Even in the arena below Fu Cong's men listened and were quiet.

"You speak bravely, Zan-thar!" the queen murmured.

"I come from a brave land," he answered. "I was nourished on the belief that there are truths to be held self-evident which cannot be proved scientifically. These truths have helped create the greatest nation Earth has ever known."

"I thought, from those who have come from there recently, that patriotism had gone from Earth," the queen murmured.

"Not at all," Zanthar answered. "The only problem is that those who deny it have used its blessings to shout the loudest that it does not exist."

"This great land of which oo speak, I vill take it for my own, vhen the time comes," Fu Cong said.

"You and who else?" Zanthar said, then was sorry he had spoken.

"Me and the masses of Asia!" Fu Cong said. If he had had a desk in front of him, he would have been pounding on it. "Me and a hundred million coolies."

"When you try that, you will get to bury a hundred million bodies," Zanthar answered. However, inside of him, he was aware of a shudder rising, a shudder which came into existence every time he thought of the endless population of vast Asia, organized and exploited by the evil genius of Fu Cong, beating with relentless waves of manpower on the shores of America, coming across the Pacific, coming under the Pacific, coming through the air. In his mind was the fear that this conflict was truly coming. For generations, first at Pearl Harbor as Japanese planes had swept in from the sea to destroy a sleeping fleet, the guns of the coming war had been booming. After the guns had gone silent at Hiroshima and the world

thought that peace had come, it had been only to hear the booming of the guns in Korea, then in Vietnam, then in Laos. Now that vast conflagration smouldered just under the surface of the whole Asian-European-American world as a hidden volcano threatening to erupt into wild lava flows that would engulf the whole Earth. Fu Cong was not the originator of this conflict. However, he was one of many attempting to fan the flames into open wildfire, into conflict certain to involve the use of hydrogen weapons and germ warfare from which the population of the planet might never recover.

Most discerning people had sensed the coming of this conflict. Perhaps the most astute had wondered if it was really limited to Earth alone, asking if it also spread to other worlds. Was all creation in conflict on all levels? John Zanthar did not know the answer to this question, but he did know that here in a hidden city on the moon, he was taking part in it. Wherever Fu Cong was, there this war was being fought!

"Perhaps I should knock your brains out now, when I have the chance-and save the lives of a hundred million Chinese coolies," Zanthar said. This was a threat which he did not intend to carry out but Fu Cong did not know this. The Asian pushed his cord men out of the way as he moved backwards.

Down below trumpets blared again. Across the arena a door opened. Out from them, fleeing from the whips, came a ragged band. Zanthar looked. "Children!" he gasped. "You're not going to have them slaughtered!" "They are male children!" the queen answered, from

inside her purple shield. "But—"

Before Zanthar could speak, the queen had interrupted him. "How many times have girl children been sacrificed on Planet Earth? Did not the Spartans expose them at birth if too many were born? Did not other cities do the same? If they were permitted to grow up at all, it was only to become the slaves of their fathers, who either sold them into real slavery or into that fake slavery called *marriage*, where their only function was to bear both endless children and endless burdens. Across all human history women have been treated as inferiors! Perhaps it is time, here in this city, to balance the scales a little!"

"I know that women were mistreated in the past-"

"And still are being mistreated! Yes, I know that in your land of America there is much fine talk of the emancipation of women but most of it is just talk with few facts to back it up!"

"We are doing our best to make it a better world—or some of us are. The injustices women have received in the past and are still receiving today in backward lands are not balanced by slaughtering helpless boys here! Nor by—"

Looking down, Zanthar saw someone emerge from the door across the arena that shocked him into instant silence. What he saw was a man with a familiar thatch of very red hair.

"Red!" he roared. "Red Cornish!"

The red-headed man looked up toward the voice that had called his name, and, locating Zanthar in the stands, yelled an enthusiastic response. Then, waving at the youngsters to follow him, he came running across the arena to stand looking up at the big private box which held the queen and her guests.

Now there were two groups in the area, the men from Fu Cong's ship, who shouted to their master to save them, and Red Cornish and a group of ragged kids, who looked silently up.

Instantly Zanthar turned to the queen. Again he lifted the hammer.

"That red-head is one of my own men. Release him, and the children with him, or I will kill you."

From inside the boiling purple smoke a rasping voice defied him.

"Strike, champion!" the queen said. "Strike and release me from life into death!"

Chapter Fourteen

ZANTHAR STOOD with uplifted hammer but did not strike. Around him, among the attendants of the queen, was paralyzed silence. In the great stadium the only sound was coming from the arena. On the other side of the queen, Fu Cong and his men stared at him. From inside the purple screen a voice rasped at him, defied him, dared him to strike.

"Strike, champion, as you struck the great bear!" the queen told him. "Strike and what you regard as an evil regime collapses here! Strike and your people down below will go free!"

Zanthar wiped suddenly spurting sweat from his face. "I cannot strike," he said. His voice was suddenly a whisper without strength.

"Why not?" the queen challenged bitterly. "If you cannot strike because you hate me, then strike because you love some woman somewhere. Strike me and do her a favor."

"You are a woman," Zanthar whispered.

"Are you not a champion of equal rights for women?" "Y-es."

"Then do we not have an equal right to die?"-

"You do not strike women, is this what you are trying to say?"

"Spank you, I might, but kill you except under extreme provocation I could not!"

"Spank me?" Rage was in the voice.

"It happens now and then to a woman," Zanthar said, his voice mild.

"Would you strike me to save your own life?"

"I do not believe I would let any squabble with a woman reach that point."

"But if you could not prevent a squabble from reaching this point?"

"I do not believe that such a situation could arise."

"What you mean is you hope it is not now arising," the queen snapped at him. "Would you strike a woman to save the lives of others?"

"Strike her, yes, kill her, no."

"I will test you, Zan-thar!" Acid was in the voice of the queen. "Remember, I control the gates of the arenal"

"I thought that others-"

"Others do the work. I give the orders, by what you call radio, from here." She spoke swiftly in a tongue that Zanthar did not understand. Then she spoke to him again, in English. "Watch, champion! Listen, Zan-tharl Tremble, man!"

In the silence of the stadium, Zanthar realized that he could hear grunts and thumps coming from the far end. These sounds were muffled as if they were coming from behind a wall. A huge door opened there. Out of it came a beast.

Standing about nine feet tall, with a long tail and powerful hind legs on which it rested, with short forelegs and a long neck which ended in a mouth gaping with fangs, the creature was obviously one of the killer dinosaurs.

"That thing-" Zanthar began.

"We never had such beasts as this in the pits of Ephesus," the queen said. "I know you didn't. That's a killer dinosaur. The last of its species perished on Earth eons ago."

"But did not perish here, Zan-tharl One of these beasts has always been here—and has always been the champion of the arena. You are champion for a year, Zan-thar, but this beast, or one like it, has been champion here for more years than can be remembered."

"I—" Zanthar said. Horror was rising in him again, from a different source this time. "You don't mean that you are going to let that killer beast destroy Red and those kids!"

"If you don't like what you will hear, then strike me!" the queen said.

"I'll kill the beast," Zanthar said. Shifting the heavy hammer to his left hand, he reached with his right for the *xet* gun held in the hook on the belt circling his space suit.

The hand and the arm that came out of the mass of boiling purple smoke moved with the speed of lightning. Before Zanthar could reach the gun at his belt, the hand had snatched it away and gun and hand had vanished again with the screen.

To one side, Zanthar heard Fu Cong gasp. Glancing up at Selene, he saw her eyes were wide with apprehension. The women around the queen were frozen.

From the arena came a rumble, then a stamping sound. Down there the killer dinosaur was sensing the existence of prey nearby. Like the other beasts, it had been starved for weeks. Zanthar's gaze came back to the boiling purple smoke around the queen.

"Strike!" the queen said.

"You seized my gun to save yourself!" he said. "So it was a bluff that you seek death, a lie from the lips of a lying woman. I listened to it—and sympathized with you!"

"It was no lie!" the queen answered. "Nor do I wish to deal with liars but only with those who are willing to prove themselves. If you are truly a champion, there is your antagonist. Go again to the floor of the arena with your great hammer—and prove that your killing of the bear was more than luck!"

Zanthar did not move.

The hand reappeared again. The *xet* gun was gone from it. Instead it held one of the ion guns.

"Either go or I will paralyze you and have my women throw you from the edge of the wall!"

"All of the time you had a weapon hidden inside that cloud of smokel" Zanthar said.

"Yes. And you had a mighty weapon hanging from your belt but you thought I was too stupid to recognize it!" the taunting voice answered. "You were in no danger from the bear. If your hammer had failed, you would have used the gun I have taken from you. Now use your hammer alone against the beast in the arenal"

"I will do just that," Zanthar said. "But first, if Selene will take these weapons at my feet before Fu Cong grabs them and shoots me in the back—"

"Selene, do as he wishes," the queen spoke. Quickly the moon woman scooped up the weapons. Then Zanthar turned and began to make his way down the steps toward the door that had opened to admit him to the stands. Before he had descended three tiers, he heard hasty footsteps coming behind him. Thinking this might be Selene, or Fu Cong, or one of the cord men, he turned quickly.

The queen stopped there. She had in her hand one of the ion guns.

"Where are you going?" he challenged.

"Into the arena with you!" she answered. "I cannot let you go alone. To do that would be to prove that I am really a coward. My girls would forever remember me as lacking courage. No queen can be known as a coward!"

"Perhaps this is true," Zanthar said. "But you cannot go into the arena with just that little gunl I have examined one of them. There is enough power to block the voluntary muscles of a human being. But that beast down there—" he waved his hammer toward the killer dinosaur smelling his way across the arena "—has tons of muscles. They will not be blocked by such a small weapon as that!"

"You are trying to distract me, so you can grab my ion gun," the queen answered.

"I am not. I am simply trying to save your life."

"Why should you wish to save my life when I wish to give it away?"

"Because you are a woman!"

"The knight in shining armor who protects women!" Her voice had a cutting edge on it.

"I'm no knight in shining armor, I'm a man in a space suit," Zanthar answered. "All I ever do to such women as you is point out their own stupidity."

Turning again, he moved down toward the door that opened into the arena. Again the steps sounded behind him. All over the stadium he heard a gasp. He did not look back. If the queen was following him, she would turn back when she saw what she faced in the arena.

Below him, women hastily unbarred and opened the door. Zanthar stepped through and was on the sands of the arena. Shouting, Red Cornish was running toward him. Behind him he heard a gasp. Turning, he saw that the mass of boiling purple smoke had entered the arena. Now for the first time the queen hidden there was seeing the dinosaur from close range.

"I respect your courage," Zanthar said.

"Thank you."

"But not your intelligence!"

Running toward him, Red Cornish was shouting, "Sir, there's a beast that looks like a killer dinosaur."

"I know," Zanthar answered. "I'm waiting for him." "But you have nothing but that hammer!"

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"Then that is all I will use," Zanthar answered. "Move to one side, Red, please, and take your gang of kids with you."

"Yes, sir." Red shouted at his charges to get out of the way. Fu Cong's men had already drawn away from the path of the lumbering beast. The killer dinosaur stopped in front of Zanthar and reached down toward him with a mouth of many fangs. He hit it on the nose with the hammer, a quick hard blow. The fanged mouth jerked upward and away. The startled beast took a few steps backward.

From the watching throng a cheer went up.

"Have you seen enough?" Zanthar said to the queen. "I have seen nothing," this surprising woman answered. "You tapped him a little on the nose. Now he is running but when he has run off his hurt, he will remember how hungry he is and he will be back looking for you."

"I believe that," Zanthar said. "But what I meant was have you seen enough to send you running back through the door that leads to safety in the stands?"

He thought now she was going to use the ion gun on him.

"Do you believe that I will run?" Her words lashed at him.

"Sometimes running is good sense," Zanthar answered. "Perhaps this is one of those times. You have proved your bravery in front of your people. Now run." He reached toward the flowing purple ions, intending to shove her toward the door. The weapon ready, she quickly drew back from him. Through the flowing screen he could hear the hiss of her indrawn breath. "Would you dare touch me-"

Thump, thump, thump! The stamp of heavy feet moving a ponderous body was loud behind Zanthar. Also Red Cornish was shouting a warning. Turning, Zanthar saw that the dinosaur was upon him. Slipping to one side, he struck at the mouth that reached toward him. He

hit his target, the beast lurched to one side—and stumbled toward the queen.

She fired the ion gun, then fired again and again and again. While the whole stadium was breathless, she kept firing. The mountainous mass of muscles that made up most of the bulk of the dinosaur did not even flinch. The fanged mouth reached for the boiling purple smoke that was the ion screen, reached and caught the mass in a many-fanged mouth. Shorted in the mouth of the beast, the screen collapsed, revealing for the first time that what had been inside the screen was really a woman—and a very beautiful one. Caught by one leg in the mouth of the killer beast, she was lifted high in the air.

Leaping to the back of the beast, Zanthar went up the long neck, to strike heavily at the head with the copper hammer, bringing it down with both hands, a mighty blow. Under the impact of this weapon, the beast shivered—and dropped its prey. Now clearly revealed, the woman was crawling on the sands, not in flight, but to give herself a chance to draw a broad-bladed knife that was very like the short sword the Roman legions had used. She got the blade drawn and pulled herself to her feet, balancing on one leg. While the whole vast stadium seemed unable to breathe, the beast reached again for her.

On its neck, Zanthar struck again, as heavy a blow as he could land while standing on a moving platform that bristled with bony spines.

Again the beast shuddered.

The blow turned its attention from the woman standing on the sand to the man standing on its back. Twisting its neck, it reached for Zanthar. He struck again, with all of his strength, aiming at the opening between the vertebrae revealed by the twisting neck.

The hammer hit, bit deep, the beast shuddered, and instantly collapsed.

From the stadium came a great roar of applause.

Sliding from the side of the beast now in the death shivers Zanthar ran to the queen, to catch her as she fell. "Are you badly hurt?"

She smiled at him. "I will live to fight another day," she said. "But you were magnificent! That great beast---"

"If you had not distracted it and given me a chance to reach its back, it would have killed me," he answered. "You are really a very brave woman instead of the coward you have been calling yourself."

"Thank you, Zan'thar and champion!" Her eyes glowed at him. Around her on the sand were weapons, including his *xet* gun, and electronic switching equipment that she had been wearing and which had been torn loose when the dinosaur had mouthed her.

"Red!"

"Yes, sir."

"Get my xet gun from the sand and come with mel"

"Yes, sirl" Red's face was all grin. "Can my kids come too?"

"Your kids?"

Scooping the *xet* gun from the sand, Red nodded toward the group that had followed him and now were close behind him. Wild eyes looked at John Zanthar from frightened, tear-stained, and very dirty faces.

"They're yours?"

"Well, sort of. Can they come too?"

"Yes, of course." Now for the first time Zanthar became aware that each one of these kids had his hands out of sight. He realized that these hidden hands held weapons, tire irons and bicycle chains. He did not understand how they could have secreted these weapons in such ways that the guards had not detected them but secrete them they had. Lifting the queen in his arms, he turned toward the heavy door that led from the arena to the stands. She protested that she could walk. He did not listen. "You are losing too much blood," he told her. "You must have medical attention quickly." He pounded on the heavy door. It did not open.

From the stadium came a roar. Behind him, Zanthar heard the barking of many dogs. Turning he saw that another door was open in the far end of the stadium. Dogs—and his guess was that they were very hungry animals—were leaping from it.

"They are our scavengers," the queen explained. "We use them to dispose of the bodies of the losers."

"Open this door!" Zanthar shouted. With his now bloody hammer he pounded again on the thick door.

It did not open.

"They won't open it," the queen said. In her voice was resignation, perhaps even a touch of happiness.

"What do you mean?"

"We have a law here in this city—the queen who enters the arena never comes out again."

"Eh?" Looking over Red, Zanthar saw that Fu Cong's men were crowding close. He shouted at Cornish to force them to stand back, then turned his attention to the enigma that was the queen of this city. She explained what she meant.

"Then when you followed me into the arena—"

"It was with the knowledge that I would never leave again," the queen answered.

"We'll see about that! Red!"

"Yes, sir!"

"Use my *xet* gun and burn that door from its hinges!" "Yes, sir."

Struck by the fierce radiation from the *xet*, the door smoked, then flamed, then went down. Beyond it guards fled screaming up the steps. "Make a rear guard to keep those dogs off of us," Zanthar shouted.

"Yes, sir!"

In the arena, the dogs began tearing at the carcass of the huge dinosaur. Dogs who came toward Red Cornish died promptly. He forced Fu Cong's men to keep their distance. Zanthar went up the steps behind outraged guards who were screaming to the descending Selene that this horrible man had forced them to violate the laws of their city.

"It is high time somebody began to violate them!" Selene said.

"Here," Zanthar said, handing to her the body of the queen. "She needs a doctor fast."

"I already have one coming," the moon maiden answered. She nodded upward to a woman running down the steps. While the woman doctor worked with the queen, closing the wounds and stopping the flow of blood, Selene spoke to Zanthar. "I did not know that life was such a weary affair to our queen," she said. "I thought of her as harsh, cruel, a vicious ruler not knowing that inside she hated doing what our laws say she had to do."

"If she dies, will you be the new queen?"

"Yes."

"Then why did you bring a doctor to help her? All you had to do was to let her bleed to death. Since you had not inflicted the wound, no one could have blamed you."

"I would never do that," Selene answered. "In fact, now, I am even sorry that I—" She looked upward, and changed the subject. "I just want to remind you that the King of the World is up above—and unguarded."

"He won't be unguarded long," Zanthar said. "Red, take your group and go find Fu Cong and make him a prisoner."

Nodding, Cornish went up the steps. He was followed by kids armed with tire irons and bicycle chains.

"Perhaps I should tell you—" Selene's voice went into silence. The stadium was a clamor of many wondering voices. "That man, that red-headed one, you trust him?"

"Of course! He is my best student. We are the closest of friends. I would trust him with my life." "I think you have just done that," Selene answered. "What do you mean?"

"Call it the intuition of a woman, call it a hunch. Perhaps it is nothing."

Sitting up, her wounds temporarily bandaged, the queen beckoned to Selene. "Go down to the arena and get my belt which holds the electronic gear that creates the purple smoke around me. The beast tore it from me."

"But-"

"You wanted to be queen. Go get the instruments that will give you the power in the eyes of all!"

"But my purpose was not to be queen. My purpose was to give these women trapped here a chance to return to Earth-and to a normal life," Selene protested.

"I accept that," the queen said. "You will be queen and you will arrange the return of these women to Earth. I will be just one of your subjects. I will go with them back to a world that I have hungered to see again."

Zanthar moved back to the arena, got the instruments, and returned with them. Returning, he handed them to Selene. "If this is what both of you want, I will accept them," Selene said.

As she was speaking, Zanthar, looking up, was aware that Red Cornish was returning. His face wooden, the xet gun held rigidly, Cornish was walking like a robot trying to obey inaudible orders.

"Watch himl" Selene whispered. "Something is wrong-"

Zanthar saw Red Cornish lift the xet gun. There was no question in his mind that Red intended to use this weapon.

Zanthar dropped flat.

The blast of burning light went through the space he had occupied, lanced down the aisle that led to the arena, went through the still open door, and burned itself into the sand.

"Red!" Zanthar shouted.

Cornish did not answer. With the stiff movements of a mechanical man, he lifted the *xet* gun to fire again.

As if he was making a diving tackle and had to go under a stiff arm, Zanthar went under the flare from the *xet* gun. His momentum knocked Cornish backward. The *xet* gun went to the steps. With Zanthar on top of him, Red Cornish went down. With stiff wooden movements, he tried to continue the fight.

"Red! Don't you know me? I'm John Zanthar-"

The shout went unheeded, Cornish still tried to strike at the man he knew was his best friend. Above him, on the steps, frightened kids clustered. Zanthar shouted at them, wanting to know what had happened to Cornish.

"He told us you were his best friend," Homer answered.

"I know he thinks that. But why is he trying to kill me?"

Homer stared at Zanthar from frightened eyes. "That tall kook in the yellow robe told Red to do it." In his description, Zanthar recognized Fu Cong.

"What did Fu Cong tell Red to do?"

"To come down here and use the *xet* gun on you, to kill you!" Homer's face was twisted with doubt. "But how could Red do such a thing! You were his best friend —I don't see why he would suddenly want to kill you?"

"Just after he had talked to Fu Cong—I see a reasonl Because somehow Fu Cong has hypnotized him. That killer knows more about hypnosis than most people think is possible."

"Hypnosisl" Homer's eyes grew wide. "Red was taken to Fu Cong's ship. When he was returned to our cage, he wasn't right—here." The skinny kid pointed a tire iron at his head to indicate where Red was not right.

"Then Fu Cong made some kind of an implant in him!" Zanthar said. "If I ever get my hands on that skull-faced monster, I'll kill him."

On the steps, Red Cornish slowly ceased struggling.

His eyes were rolled back into his head and his breathing was labored. Zanthar gestured toward Homer. "You and your gang take care of Red," he said.

From the stadium came a roar of sound. Selene was moving toward Zanthar. Now she was covered with boiling purple smoke, the ion field in operation. Around her women were dropping to one knee in recognition of a new queen.

"Where's Fu Cong?" Zanthar asked Homer.

Homer and his group now were clustered around Red Cornish. "Gee, Mr. Zanthar, I don't know. He was up above us in a big box when we went up with Red. He told Red to come down here and shoot you. When Red came down, we followed him. I guess that tall kook in the golden robe is still up there."

"Then that's where I'm going!" Zanthar said. He started up, but before he had climbed two tiers, he was halted by alarmed women running down from up above. And Selene was calling to him.

"Zan-tharl Look! A ship!"

Turning toward the arena, Zanthar saw that out there in the air-glass doors were opening and were closing. These were big doors, big enough to enclose a ship. And they had a ship within them! As Zanthar watched, wondering, the ship came to rest on the sand of the arena. The glass doors opened, and vanished. A ship rested there.

Zanthar instantly recognized the design and shape as belonging to Fu Cong.

The main lock of the ship opened. Though it was well above the sand, out of it leaping and falling came women. They had taken this ship by force. They had been to Earth and back in it. Now all they wanted was to get off of it. Ignoring the dogs now loose there, ignoring the huge carcass of the dinosaur, the women fled from the ship toward the still open door that led into the stands.

Fu Cong and his cord men were running down an

aisle that led to the wall separating those in the stadium from those in the arena. Without hesitation, the tall Asian lowered himself over the wall, held on by his hands, then dropped to the sand there, rolling as he hit and getting instantly to his feet. His men followed him.

Watching, Zanthar knew that Fu Cong had seen in the arrival of this ship an opportunity to escape. As he hit the sand, his men who were already in the arena ran toward him. Quickly, they formed a protective group around him, and ran toward the ship.

Thump! went an automatic rifle. Thump, thump, thump,

Zanthar now saw that under the ship was a group of Space Marines. His first dazed thought was that they had come through space clinging to the outside hull and to the ports where the landing gear was extruded. He realized, however, that this was not possible, that what had actually happened was that this group of men had come through the glass doors under the ship.

The shots had come from this group as one marine, under directions from the lieutenant, had fired over the head of Fu Cong. The lieutenant stepped forward. Fu Cong and his crew had stopped. Cupping his hands, the lieutenant shouted at them, "Get your hands up, you, or the next shots won't go over your heads."

Fu Cong lifted startled hands into the air. His men did the same.

The lieutenant looked up at the lock of the ship, then gestured to three of his men. Under his direction, the three men formed a triangle. Climbing on their shoulders, a third man reached the edge of the lock into the ship. Pulling himself up, he slipped a leg over the edge of the lock, then slid upward into it. Reaching down, he gave a quick hand to another marine who had mounted to the shoulders of the first three. The two marines vanished inside the ship.

Zanthar walked down the steps and out on the sands of

the arena. For his pains, he almost got himself shot before he was recognized. Then the lieutenant was shouting at him and was beckoning him forward.

"Sir, they're looking for you all over hell!" the startled lieutenant began. "Sir, if I had let anything happen to you, they were going to court-martial me. Sir, if you will only assume command here! Sir, that matter transmitter and these glass doors just scare the hell right out of mel Sir, if you will only tell me where in hell we are—"

"I'll take charge and I'll tell you where we are—just as soon as I find out myself," Zanthar said. He gestured toward Fu Cong and his men. "Hold them as prisoners, lieutenant."

"Yes, sir!"

Zanthar was aware that Selene had followed him into the arena and was trying to attract his attention. Around the vast stadium they were the focus of all eyes. Then one woman leaped to her feet and pointed upward. Immediately all of the women were looking up. Zanthar followed the line of their eyes.

A cloud of tiny objects that looked like gaudy soap bubbles were in the sky. Unlike soap bubbles, these small objects were falling slowly down.

As he stared at them, wondering what they were and what their presence meant, he was aware that near him Selene was talking again.

"This is what I planned with Laur-el," Selene was saying. "We decided to flood this stadium with thousands of glass spheres."

"But why-"

"So that every woman who wanted one could have it!" the moon woman answered. "So that every woman who wanted to escape from the slave life here could have a door opened for her!" Selene's voice changed, became harsh and bitter, then lost it brittle hardness and became soft. "This was to be our gesture of defiance to the queen!" Her voice faltered. "We were going to leave her to rule a city that had no inhabitants. But I did not have time to tell Laur-el that the queen had actually hated the life here as much as all the rest of us and that she did not need to release the little spheres."

In all that she had said, Zanthar had heard only one word. "Laur-el?" he questioned. "Do you mean Laurel Ponder?"

"Yes. The guards caught her one night and summoned me. We worked together after that. She says she knows you."

"So she does! She and Red Cornish are my two best students! But would you tell me how she got here in the first place?"

"One of the little spheres was activated while she was working with it. She was curious—and unafraid—"

"That's Loril"

"The sphere brought her here through the glass doors."

All over the vast stadium the spheres were falling now. In the stands women were grabbing for them. Some struck the sand of the arena. The lieutenant started toward one that had fallen near.

"Don't touch it!" Zanthar said. "Don't let any of your men touch it. It's now a trap set to take people back to Earth through the glass doors."

"Yes, sir," the lieutenant said. He backed hastily away from the gaudy little globe that looked as if it had been made of spun and twisted moonbeams and that had hidden in it all the glowing colors of Earth's warm sun.

Chapter Fifteen

To JOHN ZANTHAR the scene that followed would linger in his mind forever—a great ship resting on the sand of an arena beside the carcass of a dead dinosaur, a ship with Space Marines standing with ready rifles in the lock, a puzzled lieutenant in a space suit looking up, a tall man wearing a golden robe surrounded by Asiatics in black and brown and gray robes, a vast throng of women in the tiers of a huge stadium, also looking toward the sky, while from that sky there floated slowly downward what looked like thousands of brightly colored soap bubbles.

Zanthar did not know whether all of the women who lived in this distorted city were present in the stadium. His guess was that all were either here or almost all. Perhaps some were needed elsewhere to maintain essential services. Near him with her attendants was Selene, queen now and covered in the electronic robes of the queen of this place. In the distance, running now, were frightened dogs.

In the stadium seats women grabbed for the little glass spheres, scrambled for them, fought each other for them the way baseball fans scramble and fight for foul balls, and screamed in triumph when they managed to catch one.

The singing began as a single voice.

"We are the sons of Dionysus We are the daughters of the goat god, Pan, We are the children of Aphrodite, We are the mutants of the moon—and man!"

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Another voice took up the song, then another and another and another, until the whole vast stadium was a single chorus. As he heard the song ring out, Zanthar realized that here still in semi-existence was the survival of an ancient cult that had once existed somewhere on Earth, perhaps in Asia Minor, perhaps on some island of the Mediterranean, perhaps in ancient Persia or in even more ancient Egypt, perhaps in all of these places, perhaps also in lands older still. Once this cult had included men. The phrase "sons of Dionysus" proved this. But at some lost time men had been excluded from it. The result had been utter distortion.

Perhaps the song had once been part of a miracle play depicting the cosmic drama, perhaps similar to plays enacted at Eleusis and elsewhere in Greece, for the instruction of men in the ways of the gods. Men who had made important discoveries in ancient days had often used these cults to reveal to the initiated their secrets, at the time hiding their meaning from the masses, contriving plays to educate those who were incapable of receiving direct instruction. Perhaps in this way monumental discoveries had been given to the world, discoveries such as a matter transmitter that worked by creating an effect similar to opening and closing glass doors, but the world had not understood them.

The song lifted up again.

"We are the sons of Dionysus-"

The chorus became a mighty volume of sound.

The glass doors began to open, women leaped into them, literally throwing themselves into an opening that would lead to another world.

"Do they know where they are going?" Zanthar asked. "They certainly dol" Selene answered. "The little spheres are tuned to take them back to their Home World." Her voice slipped away into silence. "And are they eager to gol"

"But here they are immortal. On Earth, little by little, they will lose this."

"Yes. And there is not one among them who will not be eager to trade it for the right to be a mother again," Selene answered. "Laur-el told us what we were missing. She fired us all with eagerness to return."

"That sounds like Loril She was always battling for the right of women to be women."

"We already had tentative plans which were little more than wishes, before she came," Selene answered. "She gave them direction."

Over the whole vast stadium the very air seemed to be fluttering as with heat waves as woman after woman after woman found a little glass sphere and used it.

The lieutenant came to Zanthar, to ask questions.

"These women are escaping. Do you want me to stop them?"

"You are very brave, lieutenant, even to think such thoughts," Zanthar answered. "No, don't try to stop them."

"Yes, sir. But if you will pardon me, sir—there is much here that I do not understand."

"I sympathize with you on that. Times come in the life of a military man when he has to follow orders he does not understand. But if you will ask specific questions, I will try to answer them, if I can!"

"That song, sir."

"I think the women here have modernized an ancient ritual," Zanthar explained. "In some other language, in some other age, I think it was an affirmation of identity with the gods that were worshipped then—and a statement of membership in a group or a cult."

"Who was Dionysus, sir?"

"He was one of the gods worshipped in ancient Phrygia. More explicitly, he was one of the personifications of a life principle. He was also worshipped in Greece, where his rituals were connected with orgies. What they are singing is their rendering of what may be one of the oldest sacred songs known to man. In other days, you know, men saw the world differently than we do now. And who knows that their sight was not clearer than ours?"

"Thank you, sir. You know a lot, sir. But you seem a little sad?"

"Sometimes, when I think of the old times of Earth, this sadness rises in me," Zanthar said. "But what I know is not a thousandth part of what I would like to know."

Lifting up, the song swept in waves across the stadium. Now gaps were appearing in the groups of women. Watching, Zanthar could see the women going. They were going singing. Spheres were also falling on the sand of the arena. Zanthar saw a dog trying to run back to the door from which it had been freed snap at one of the falling glass globes. It vanished through a glass door that opened for it.

"But when they get back to Earth, these women won't know anybody," the lieutenant protested.

"As pretty as they are, how long will they take to get well acquainted?"

"Well—" the lieutenant said. Something akin to a grin crossed his grim face. "Yes, sir!"

The song faded away, then came again. Now the rhythmic beat was slowing and the volume was dropping, simply because the singers were fewer. In his mind's eyes Zanthar could readily imagine some of the history that he felt must lie back of this song. Back in the past of Planet Earth worshipers must have danced themselves to exhaustion to its rhythm, perhaps hoping, like the whirling dervishes, to reach by this means the transcendental state, to penetrate beyond the conscious mind into the region of the invisible gods, and beyond this region, to the level where the gods and men were blended into one unity.

All of this was in the songl And more than thisl Zanthar could catch fleeting whispers of the hopes and fears of the human race, the prayers of men, in this song, the fears that each individual must face when he realizes he is an individual, and alone, the hope that somewhere, somehow, this long exile and this long loneliness might end. Men and women each knew this fear of being alone. Perhaps women tried to assuage it by having children, hoping in their families to find some child they might call friend.

This song was old. It had been old when Babylon had been building, when the building of Karnak had been a new enthusiasm in the valley of the Nile. Old, old, old was the song. Old, old, old also was the feeling of separation and of loneliness. Old, old, old were the attempts to relieve both pains that lived eternally in the human heart.

Back of the flight of the women from this city of torture was this search for companionship. For the sake of it, each was leaping into the glass doors, and beyond them to she knew not what but which she hoped would be a new life in a new day on an old world. Somewhere she might find again what her sould needed, companionship with a man, a love to share with him. As he needed this with her!

Fu Cong was stirring and was making motions to Zanthar. Up above in the lock of the great ship marines with rifles ready covered the Mongol. They called a question to the lieutenant and he in turned looked at Zanthar.

"Let him approach-alone," Zanthar said.

As Fu Cong moved away from his group, the former queen came from the stadium into the arena. She was a little unsteady in her walk and she was leaning on the arm of Red Cornish. Behind and around the two was the street gang from Brooklyn. "This tall man in the golden robe is not to be trusted," Selene said.

"How well I know that! But I personally disarmed him," Zanthar answered.

Fu Cong stood in front of Zanthar—and bowed. "Professor Zanthar, oo have von this round," he said.

"I won nothing," Zanthar said. "However, the women of this city have won a victory, for themselves and over themselves."

"Ah, yisl I understand." Fu Cong's smile said he agreed. The tone of his voice said he did not understand this kind of talk. A victory over one's self? What kind of a victory was this? In his world, women worked, and served the sexual desires of men, and bore children endlessly. Was there any other kind of world?

"Yes," Zanthar said. "The women of yesterday fled from that kind of world to this—and found this to be unbalanced. Now they are fleeing back to our world. I hope in some tomorrow they can find the better world we all seek."

"But the great discoveries they have made herel" Fu Cong said. The former queen had arrived. He looked at her and bowed. "Tell me if it is true that you have lived forever."

"It is not true," the former queen answered. "However, I am well over two thousand years old."

"And still beautifull" Zanthar said. His words got him a smile.

"Two thousand years!" Fu Cong whispered. Dreams were gathering in his eyes again. "Vhat could I not do, if I could live that long?"

"In that time you could truly become the King of the World—if nobody stood in your way," Zanthar said. "But somebody will always stand in your way. Always there will be free men to fight depotism."

Fu Cong seemed not to have heard him. He was speak-

ing again to the former queen. "And do oo really intend to give up the other thousands of years that you could have, if oo stayed here?"

"Yes." The voice of the former queen was firm and sure. "And will you take back with you the secrets here? The

weapon that stops the muscles from working, no doubt."

"I will take nothing but me!" the former queen answered. "You do not know what it means to live as long as I have. Both women and men really live in their dreams. There comes a time when the body will no longer keep up with these dreams. That is a sad time."

"But I hope you will take back some of the discoveries made here," Zanthar said. "That method of disposing of wastes—"

"I will take nothing but me," this amazing woman answered. "You may take what you wish. I am sure you know enough to duplicate anything you have seen here."

"That may be true," Zanthar admitted. "But I am concerned about you. What—well, when you get back—"

"I will find myself a cart driver," the former queen answered. "When I was a girl in Ephesus, I loved a cart driver. Perhaps—"

"I am afraid you will find few carts in the world of today," Zanthar said. "And if you find one, he will grow old and you will remain young."

She shook her head. "Once I go through the glass doors I will shed my so-called immortality. As will all of the women here. Immortality is *here*. But life is there! I will grow old right along with my cart driver for this is the way life is."

"But how—" Fu Cong began.

She lifted a hand that had been held down by her side; she drew away from Red Cornish. Standing unsteadily, he opened the hand. In it was a little glass sphere. "Stand back!" she called. As those near her hastily moved away, the glass doors began to open. She went into them, singing.

"We are the daughters of Aphrodite-"

The tune said that this was the song she sang as the glass doors began to close but the words were in a foreign tongue, in an ancient language that was old when the world was new.

From the vast stadium echoes came back.

"We are the mutants of the moon-and man!"

The doors closed. The last Zanthar saw of this most beautiful woman, she was smiling and singing. The sight made him choke somewhere inside.

"Watch it!" Selene screamed. Turning quickly, he saw that Fu Cong's face now had a look of intense concentration. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Red Cornish walking toward him. Red was walking stiff legged. His eyes were vacant. In his hand he had a tire tool which he had snatched from Homer.

"Red!" Zanthar shouted.

Not seeming to hear him, Cornish struck at him with the tire tool. Zanthar flung up his left hand and caught the blow there. With his right hand, he lifted the hammer—and threw it straight into Fu Cong's face!

Blood spurting from a broken nose, Fu Cong stumbled backward. His look of concentration was gone. Zanthar shoved Red Cornish toward the marine lieutenant. "Hold him but don't harm him!" he shouted. He dived for his hammer and for Fu Cong. Again the hammer went into the air, this time over Fu Cong's head as the Mongol sprawled on the ground.

"What did you do to Red?" Zanthar demanded. "I hypnotized him." "What is the receiver that makes your control of him work at a distance?"

"It is the paint on the back of his head."

"If you are lying—"

"I am not lying. In my ship, I do it. There you can see my operating room."

"Can I find there a way to remove this paint?"

Fu Cong looked up at the hammer. "Yes," he said. He described exactly what was needed to neutralize the paint clear into the midbrain.

"Will Red be harmed after the paint is neutralized?"

Zanthar turned to the lieutenant. "Have your men take Red into the ship. An operating table of some kind is there. Have them find it. Have them strap Red to it until I can get there!"

"Yes, sir."

As two bulky marines lifted Red to carry him to the ship, Zanthar turned back to Fu Cong.

On his feet, the Mongol was running to his own men. As Zanthar shouted at him to halt, as bullets began to whip past him, glass doors opened around him—and around his men. Then closed. Fu Cong and his group were gone.

Zanthar turned to Selene. Now the purple smoke was gone from around her. Now she was again a very beautiful woman and willing to be seen just this way.

"You and your women get into the ship," Zanthar said.

The moon maiden smiled a denial. "No," she said. "We are going with our sisters back to your world." She held up an open hand. In it was a little glass sphere.

Smiling, the glass doors opened around her. From the stadium the chorus rang out again.

"We are the daughters of Aphrodite—" 183 The moon maiden and her guard were gone.

Zanthar shook his hammer at Homer, who dodged. "Get into that ship!" he said. Homer and his bunch needed no further orders.

"Get all of your men into the ship too—but leave the lock open for me," Zanthar said.

"Yes, sir."

Standing on the sand in front of the open lock, Zanthar swept his eyes over the stadium. Most of the women were gone now. The song was fading into ragged solos. Putting both hands to his lips, Zanthar shouted, a bull roar that echoed through the vast stadium.

"Loril"

He waited for an answer. When it did not come, he swore at himself for having failed to take steps to locate Miss Laurel Ponder. "I should have learned from Selene where she is!" he muttered. "Or she would have remembered to tell me before she left!" Lifting his voice, his roar went out again.

From the far distance, a voice answered. "I'm coming!" Then Lori herself was seen coming down the steps from the top of the stadium. Her skirt up to her hips, and she was running as if devils were after her. Reaching the ship, she flung herself into Zanthar's arms.

"I never was so glad to see anyone in my life as I am to see you!" she gasped. "I tried to get here sooner but I couldn't leave until all of the spheres were released. Then when I did get free, those poor women—" Her voice took on an appealing note.

"Into the ship," Zanthar said. "Later you can tell me all about it."

He swung her upward into the arms of two marines, who caught her up easily.

Looking over the sand, Zanthar located a single glass sphere. Picking it up carefully, he moved to the ship. Marines reached down and lifted him up. The lock closed. He went quickly to the control room, then squeezed the little glass sphere.

Around the ship huge glass doors began to open. And to close.

Standing in the control room, he watched the city of spun silver and pounded gold slip out of sight. Gone was the city, gone from his vision was another of the many worlds.

Then he went to the operating room and set about freeing Red Cornish.

Chapter Sixteen

IN THE EARLY MORNING, Professor John Zanthar sat alone in his private office inside his own laboratory in Los Angeles. This huge lab was equipped with living quarters which meant a bed and a bath—so that he might stay continuously with any baby that needed constant watching, "baby" meaning an experiment in electronics that lasted all night and might last all the next day—and perhaps would last into next week before it was finished— Zanthar napping while the experiment cooked. Or perhaps he might turn the baby-sitting task over to one or to both of his trusted graduate students, Red Cornish and Laurel Ponder.

The silence in the vast lab was broken now and then by soft electronic sounds as instruments continuously in operation there metered events as far apart as the shifting of an electron in its orbit and the birth of a star in the form of a nova in another galazy.

Inside the office a buzzer sounded softly. Zanthar flicked on the wired TV. "Red Cornish, sir," the guard at the outer door said.

"Admit him."

Coming into the private office, Red spoke to Professor Zanthar, then glanced at the coffee-making equipment, then looked again at his chief. Zanthar laughed and shook his head. "Lori is not here yet. No coffee until she gets here."

Cornish grinned. "She'll be along soon, with the bunch. She promised them that if they were good, and got good marks in school, they could come in and talk to you."

"I know. She checked with me on it. How are the kids doing?"

"Fine!" Red said. "I promised them a chance to go to school and they're taking advantage of the opportunity. Of course, I don't think all of them will make Rhodes Scholars, but they're doing fine. Even Sqush is learning. And the way they stick together—and teach each other —is a lesson some rich kids ought to learn."

"I agree with you on that," Zanthar said. For a moment, he was silent. Lines of strain were still visible on Red's face. He studied these, then spoke. "Dr. Hanson called. He said he was satisfied that all of the so-called paint that Fu Cong put on the back of your head is gone from your system."

"I think he's right," Red said. As old memories revived, pain appeared deep in his eyes. He looked apologetically at Zanthar. "I didn't really want to kill you, sir, but Fu Cong's voice appeared in my mind and took control of my body. I wouldn't have tried to kill you, if I had had any choice in the matter."

"I know," Zanthar said. "Nothing is being held against you. Does Fu Cong's voice still appear in your mind?" "No, sir."

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"Not even in dreams?"

"No, sir. As you instructed, every time I wake up I write down my dreams before I forget them. Fu Cong simply is not in them any longer."

"Good," Zanthar said.

"Do you think he's dead, sir?"

"No such luck," Zanthar grumbled. "That man is not going to be easy to kill. Millions of people are going to wish he was dead, though. Maybe billions would be nearer the right number."

"That many, sirl" Horror was on Red's face.

"Of course, I'm only guessing. I may be wrong. But a lot of people for a lot of years have feared the coming of a war between the east and the west. We had tastes of it in Japan, in Korea, and in Viet Nam. And elsewhere. My private horror is that Fu Cong actually is the destined leader of these massed millions of people."

"But we have his last ship-"

"We have his second ship but we don't know if it is his last one. And if it is his last one, and if he is still alive, you can bet that somewhere on Earth or on the moon, he is building a third one. Perhaps a fleet of them! But his ships, as dangerous as they may be for the future of the world, are not the most dangerous weapon he has."

"Sir?" Red questioned.

"You demonstrated his worst and most dangerous weapon," Zanthar said. "He has some method of remote hypnotic control by means of thought alone which involves the use of radioactive paint which penetrates to the midbrain. Can you think of the consequences if he uses this method on millions of Chinese, all as controlled as you were, then launches them against the Americas, each soldier being willing to fight to death?" Horror rose in Zanthar's voice. "Of course I don't know that we are facing this sort of conflict but we may be facing it, a war to decide whether our way of life will continue to exist at all." "Can it be that bad?"

"Not if we can stop it now!" Zanthar answered. He was silent for a moment, musing, his thoughts as dark as fate and the future. Then he pushed the dour mood aside and grinned. "Selene called," he said.

"Good. What kind of an adjustment is she making to life on Earth?"

"Excellent, it seems to me. Of course, I haven't seen her. All she ever does is call and talk. From what she says it looks as if thousands of very attractive women made it back through the glass doors and are now on the loose looking for a husband and a home."

"Has she found a husband yet?"

"No. But she will! She said she saw the queen recently, riding in a truck in North Hollywood."

"Ah! What she liked were cart drivers in her day."

"So now she likes truck drivers instead. Selene said the queen saw her but looked right straight through her as if she didn't exist. That queen doesn't want anybody to know she was ever a queen." Grinning, he nodded to himself.

"This Selene struck me as being a very lovely lady—" Red said. He looked straight at Zanthar. "I was wondering if—"

"She might do for me?" Zanthar shouted. "Not for me, Red. I would never be able to forget how old she was!"

Again the buzzer sounded. Zanthar flicked open the TV circuit and spoke to the guard there. "Let them all in," he said, resignation in his voice. "Yes, all of them."

Minutes later, Laurel Ponder, accompanied by her brood, came into the inner lab. She called greetings to Zanthar and to Red, then turned to the table that held the coffee-making equipment. "Men! When will they ever learn to get the coffee started?" Trim and neat in slacks, she had a big paper bag under each arm. "Cookies and donuts and milk for the younger set!" Behind her, wide-eyed with wonder, came Homer and his gang.

"Cosh, sir," Homer said to Zanthar. "Do you mean you really let a broad in here?"

Lori was instantly shaking an admonitory finger under Homer's nose. "I've taught you better than this. If you ever call me a broad again, I'm going to have Professor Zanthar wash out your mouth with soap."

"Aw, he wouldn't do it," Homer protested.

"I will tool" Zanthar roared, at the top of his voice. Reaching behind him, he picked up the heavy copper hammer. "And if we find any tough kids around here—" He shook the hammer in the air.

At the sight of the hammer, Homer and his gang instantly took refuge behind Lori. Like baby chickens peering out around a mother hen, they looked out around Lori on all sides.

"Yes, sir," Homer squeaked. "Yes, sir. I'll remember, sir."

"See that you do," Zanthar said. Suddenly he was grinning and he and Red and Lori were laughing. Then the kids joined in and the whole laboratory rang with the sound of happy laughter. ALSO FROM LANCER, the book the science-fiction world is talking about and raving over:

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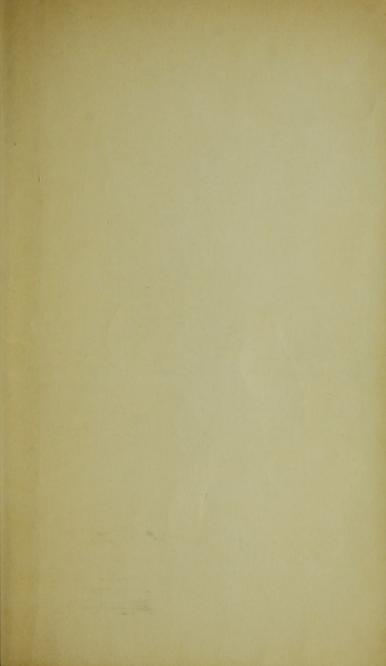
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