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—
Novelette
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SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURES

Vol. 2 No. 11

1959

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Only a generation after the penal battalion landed on Sumedin most of Earth's technology has been lost. The struggle against environment and themselves is long and bitter. (A Sequel to "Children of the Stars.")

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On Earth Kramer was a rogue, and as such due to die—but he was destined to become a Soldier of Mirfak and pit his wits against some of the greatest fighters in the galaxy.

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B. Lewis



Readers will readily remember Clifford Reed's earlier story "Children of the Stars," published in No. 9. Here he continues his colonial theme with the first-generation children in command, struggling against each other and their alien environment.

FORGOTTEN KNOWLEDGE

by CLIFFORD C. REED

Illustrated by LEWIS

Chapter I

The towering metal needle had been standing on the same spot for eighty years while Shiptoun grew up around it from a settlement to a town. Ever since the ship had crash landed on Sumedin. The last of the original band had died fifty years ago, accepting the hard fact that they themselves would never see their home worlds of Earth and Mars and Venus again. But, to their last breath, exhorting their descendants that they, or *their* children, must not cease from seeking the key that would unlock the doors of space.

If the men who had manned the ship had been technicians there would have been no lost knowledge to be rediscovered. But they had been fugitives, escaping criminals. The atomic engines had been shut down for safety's sake immediately after

the landing, and had remained so ever since. From lack of knowledge. From fear of what might happen if incautious hands had raised the shut-down rods. So—since this power was denied them, Shiptoun's people must work and think and discover, until they, in the fullness of time, arrived at the necessary level of science. But, that time was not unlimited.

"Before the Jonners across the pass learn the road to the stars," the dying ancients warned them, "you must learn it. It was the first Jonners who chained us to Sumedin," they reminded. "The Jonners don't ever change. For your lives you dare not let them take the lead. Be first to find again the power to climb to the stars from which we came."

When the breath failed in the last survivor only the rusting structure of the spaceship remained to spur them to rediscover lost principles. Old principles so far as Earth and Mars and Venus were concerned. New thought to the people of Shiptoun, who knew of these worlds only from hearsay, from the words of the first settlers.

The Jonner descendants of the faction which had been expelled across the hills within a year of the landing had resentment to remind them of their inheritance. Throughout their scattered villages, for four generations, this resentment smouldered continually, never entirely dead. Three times in that eighty years it had flared up, sweeping them back across the hills to fall upon the people of Shiptoun. Three times they had been beaten back, although hardly, and with great loss on both sides.

A fourth cycle was building again, and the Jonner leaders had come to Jonville because of this impulse. To hear the word of Jon, son of Jon, ruler of all Jonners, upon this matter.

Hard, scarred men, they looked respectfully at their leader, descended directly from the first leader of the Jonners. They studied the deep-set eyes above the down-curving nose, the bold lips, the heavy jaw; marked the smooth power of his shoulders, his firm, wide hands. They waited, tense and eager, for his word.

"Shiptoun," Jon told them, and the chiefs, who had been silent, were silent no longer. This was the word they had longed to hear, and they roared their approval for the word. "Kill!" they growled. "Burn! The houses of Shiptoun. The women. The good living. Ours. Ours." They lifted their rifles. "Jon," they shouted. "Jon, son of Jon!" They laughed. "Shiptoun!" they bellowed. And, together, "Kill!"

He let them have their heads, smiling grimly. Then, abruptly, stilled their clamour with a commanding hand.

"Remember why we war," he told them. "They drove our fathers out to live with the beasts, calculating that our fathers would become like beasts. Leaving them free for new thought that would give them the worlds in the skies. Keeping the machines and the tools our fathers had in common. It was my father Jon who first got how this could be unsayed. Who planned the wars which took back some of the machines they denied us. So that we did not sink, but began to climb also. Until now we are strong to take our full share, so that it is the Jonners who will find the new thought which will win the race to the stars."

They were still, listening to his vision, and his interpretation of his vision. "From the words our scouts speak Shiptoun has become rotten. Because of their Council. Which sends its messengers secretly to kill those who speak against its judgments."

He held out his hand, palm uppermost. Steadily his fingers curved inwards. His hand became a ball, a remorseless press. "Like that," he told the chiefs.

The light which blazed down on the gathering in Jonville beat with equal fierceness on Shiptoun, and on the slope of the long hill north of the town which was called the Sitting Place. Where custom laid it down that the younger people could pair off, without fear of interruption, to speak what was in their minds for each other to each other. But, at the same time, in plain sight, so that there should not be any temptation to an offence against morality.

The afternoon was advanced, and fifty couples were already spaced out, sitting with outward modesty, when Shiptoun's two senior scouts trod a further fifty paces beyond the last pair.

The slim figure in leather halted, and looked at her companion. The gaunt young man nodded, smiling.

"Will you sit?" he asked formally, and Alla Jonsey, Scout of Women laid her rifle on the turf, and slid down beside it. Where Haljon, Chief Scout, joined her, laying his own weapon beside hers.

He lifted a finger to the scene below them. "What do you see?" he asked.

"Shiptoun," she answered. "On market day. With all the people busy."

"Busy at what?" he asked swiftly. She turned, hearing the passion in his voice. He nodded. "It is eighty years," he said, "since the landing." He pointed at the tall, rusted structure looming up from the centre of the city. "They came in that. The First Council took the machines and the tools in that ship, and builded towards the future. Towards the time when their children would reach out for the stars from which their fathers had come."

"We will," she answered. "Or the ones after us."

"So *this* Council speaks." His face was hard. "Do you get that this is true?"

She looked back at him levelly. "It seems that you did not ask me to the Sitting Place for what the men on this hillside have asked the women with them. Though all who see us here will calculate you did, and will not interrupt us. So you can speak what you could not safely speak in another place." She shrugged. "If I am not to hear what I thought to hear I will hear what you wish to speak."

He nodded. "To you I calculate I can speak. That the Council will not hear from Alla Jonsey that Haljon is in need of discipline." He paused. When she said nothing he leaned nearer. "There are some who calculate that this Council is on the wrong line. That under it Shiptoun is not now a place for those who desire new thought."

Her eyes widened. But her voice remained calm. "The First Council fought the Jonners on that," she reminded him. "The Jonners were driven over the pass with their thoughts." She shook her head. "Five times since I was called to wear leather I have scouted over the pass. I have not seen that the Jonners are on their way to the stars. The bogs suit them better."

Haljon's hand went to the pouch at his belt. He brought out a metal cylinder, needle sharp at one end. "I had this across the pass," he said mildly.

"A shell," Alla commented. She took it, turning it in her fingers. "Not like ours."

"Better. It is my fortune his aim was not good." He frowned. "Jonwel, Captain of Levies, did not calculate this speaked danger to Shiptoun. That the Jonners should make a better shell. That it could be that they made other better things. To him this was not a first thing. He is like the others

of the Council. They do not hear of a new thought if it is not on their line. Which is why there is no new thought in Shiptoun."

"How should Haljon know there is no other new thought?" the girl asked. "You wear leather. Not white cloth." She pointed at one building in the town, four storeys high, with wings and bays extending from its central block. "What can you know of the new thoughts of those who wear white cloth in the Science House?"

Haljon shook his head. "Calculate," he challenged. "What new thought has been found since you were called from school?" When she did not answer he nodded again. "There is none. Why? Because this Council is afraid. So that it holds Shiptoun to what is known, and disciplines those who speak against its judgment. So that there are those who speak we should leave Shiptoun."

"In which direction?" she asked.

"There is only one direction. We cannot go through the hills. Nor over the pass to the Jonners. We must go across the Forbidden Way. Taking a fair part of the machines and the stores to build a new town."

"If the Council got what was in your thoughts—!"

"They will soon get this," he replied. He leaned nearer. "I have spoken to some in the Pastures that I will scout across the Forbidden Way for a place for a new town. Where our work will not be wasted, and men need not be afraid. Where we do not have to halt our work each year because the Jonners are moving up to the pass to make a war, and all men must wear leather and drive them back."

"We wear leather," Alla pointed out. "That is our work."

"Because that is where we fit." His expression altered, softening suddenly. "The suit you wear is new," he commented.

The girl started, then looked away swiftly.

"It fits," Haljon said. His smile deepened, as did her colour under her tan. "It fits well," he said with satisfaction.

Alla swallowed. "You should not speak that it fits well," she muttered. "You did not ask me here for that."

"Should I not?" His hand touched hers. "Because I have not asked you if you have a skirt." His fingers closed on her wrist. "If I do ask, will Alla Jonsey tell me I am not the one to ask?"

She kept her face turned from him. But—"I will not say that," she answered.

"Then I will ask," he declared. "Have you a skirt, Alla?"

Her eyes shone. "I have a skirt, Haljon."

"Will you wear your skirt, Alla? For me?"

"Yes!" She turned with the word, her lips quivering. "I did not calculate you would ask. Not when you spoke of the other. I was afraid you had no mind to ask." She gripped his hand. "But, because we are scouts, it may be the Council will not hear that I wear my skirt for you."

The man's face tautened. "If they speak that," he assured her, "then they will unsay that. For from now we are us."

"It may be that they will speak so," she warned. "In quarters, before I came, there was word that the Captain is ready to call the other three levies. For a plan of his own. The suit makers are already cutting leather against this." She paused. "I had it hard to get this suit to trap you with."

He stared. Alla, fiery but unrepentant, returned his look. Until his head tilted back, and his mouth opened. At that she moved swiftly before his flaunting of public decorum could be observed. She slammed her fist down on his fingers.

Haljon grimaced. Alla's eyes were raking the couples nearest to them. Only when she was sure that Haljon's breach of propriety had gone unobserved did she turn back to him. "If *that* is how wise you plan—!"

He grinned. "That is one thing," he retorted. "This, with us, is another. I am not made to have pleasure in behaving like a stone because the woman Birkla smells dirt otherwise." He shrugged. "Did not Mother Ella in her book speak that she and Burke Halwell would fondle in the open? And that Hengsey twice, before he married, went beyond that?"

"Is that what *you* want?" Alla asked.

"No," he denied. "I am not one who speaks that we should not have rules. But in this also, because of Birkla, the Council's judgment is harder than what is needed. Out of fear. There is nothing fresh in them. In all things they hold us back." He shook his head. "You can plant a twig in a pot. But when it grows, it will shatter the pot. It is like this with Shiptoun. If we wait, the shattering will be worse."

"So we do not wait," Alla agreed.

"We?"

She nodded. "If the pot must break, two will be safer than one. When do we go from Shiptoun?"

Again his hand moved to touch hers. He sat in silence, looking at her tenderly. Then, "When the gates close," he said. "Taking nothing to make the keepers calculate we do more than scout outside the fence."

She stood up, lifting her rifle. "The rest you will speak when we are outside," she said.

He stood watching her as she went. Only when she vanished among the buildings did his eyes shift. To take in the town and the people milling round the wagons and the booths.

He frowned. This was not how the First Council had dreamed for Shiptoun. This was not how they should be busy. This was death, a slow, empty withering away because the moisture of audacity and dreams was denied. This was a locking up of their powers even as the power in the engines of the ship were locked. Because of fear what might happen if they went beyond what they knew was safe.

So, they must throw away safety. Himself and those who saw what was needed. They must deliberately go against the judgment of the Council, offering those who chafed a place to grow. The plant was more value than the pot. To that end he and Alla would scout for a place for the plant.

Darkness closed the gates on the heels of the two scouts. Automatically, although the countryside was settled for twenty miles ahead, they took opposite sides of the road, Haljon leading. Until, two miles on, he halted, and whistled a stave. From a copse beside the road came an answer, and Alla, stalking forward, saw shadows moving, and heard hooves.

"We ride from here," Haljon told her. "As far as Pasture's End." He stepped forward to meet the dark figures. "Godal the Smith?" he asked.

"And his sons," a deep voice answered. "Who sends for these beasts?"

"Hengbur sends for them," Haljon answered.

"Take them, then," the smith said. "They are fresh."

"They will not be fresh when the light comes," Haljon replied, as he and Alla took the reins.

Godal the Smith grunted. "That is Hengbur's affair," he retorted.

The scouts were astride the beasts. Dimly they saw three forms merge away into the dark. Haljon chuckled grimly. "There is no need for us to wait either," he said.

There were still two hours before the light came when they reined in at Hengbur's gate. Haljon swung to the ground, and reached up for Alla. She slid down, clinging to him, and his hands tightened. Then he released her, and looped the reins over the nearest post.

In the glow from a window they followed the path to the house. The door opened, and they crossed the threshold. The one who had opened the door closed it behind them. "Hengbur," he said.

"Haljon, and Alla Jonsey, Scout of Women," Haljon returned.

There were three others at the table. Hengbur named them; Melvin, Overseer of Grain; Edlon, Controller of Beasts, and Edlon's deputy, Daymor. All three, the scouts appreciated, were men of substance. Together with Hengbur they represented the most stable element of the Pastures.

If such as these, Alla thought, were against the Council, then she was in good company. She took the seat Hengbur placed for her, accepting it as the company accepted her presence. Accepting also the fact that this was dangerous company if the Council learned of it. Her eyes moved from the hats at one end of the table, each with its distinctive badge of office, to the owners of the hats, each of whom sat with steady face and firm mouth, and she was more sure than before that she was in good company.

"If the Council messengers are not already coming this way," Hengbur must have been following her thoughts. He smiled in a kindly manner. "Alla Jonsey scouts outside Shiptoun's fence," he went on. "The messengers scout inside it. If you get that there is danger in being here, will you unsay your word and go?"

She shook her head. "I have seen what the Jonners do to those they take," she answered. "I have scouted three times over the pass after seeing that."

The four men nodded gravely, not arguing further.

Haljon leaned forward. "Before we go," he said, "there is one word. Jonwel, Captain of Levies, prepares to call the other three levies. He has a plan."

Hengbur coughed. "It is his dream," he said. "To take a full war to the Jonners, to destroy them."

"It is not a good plan," Haljon said. "The Jonners are spread. They will not be easy to destroy."

"As Shiptoun should be spread." Hengbur's tone was sharp. He struck the table with his fist, softly, once. Once was enough. His face was carved in deep lines. "If we are not to be spilled and broken," he warned, "we must do our work with speed." He stared at Haljon and Alla. "If you can find the land we need, and bring word of it, we who remain promise to have men to hear that word."

"What men?" Haljon challenged.

Edlon, Controller of Beasts, answered confidently. "Many. Men who wear white cloth as well as drab or leather. Who all want to live the promise of the First Council."

Haljon stood up. "It is enough," he accepted.

Hengbur also. "I am a bad host," he said. "But it is best if your feet are on the Forbidden Way before the light comes." He indicated two packs in the corner of the room. "Those are yours," he said.

The scouts hoisted the gear, lifted their hands to the four men, and passed out into the darkness. The door closed, softly, and the four looked at one another with satisfaction.

"We have taken our step," Hengbur declared.

"The step Shiptoun must take," Melvin, Overseer of Grain, seconded.

"That should have been taken sooner," Daymor growled.

Hengbur shrugged. "That it is taken in strength. From choice, that only is important. If we are in time, that is how it will be taken."

"Let us hope we are in time," Edlon finished dryly.

Had these leaders been in Shiptoun at that same moment they would have been well satisfied. Had they been at a meeting of certain men and women who wore white cloth. Who were not easy regarding the guidance of the Council. But who were as discreet as they were critical, since those present at the meeting were only those whom they believed felt equally as they did.

In only one case had the organisers of the meeting erred.

They should not have asked him to come, Drivo complained to himself. They should have got that his beefing was not calculated as serious. It was not their right to put others in danger by such meetings. What if the Council learned that some who wore white cloth were not firm on the Council line? That some were angered when the new thought they found was not heard as a first thing by the Council. That such met

secretly, and muttered against the Council's judgment. Met, so he had just been terrified to learn, with men who did not wear white cloth, and spoke with them of doing more than mutter.

He had been mad to come to this meeting. His eyes, sliding sideways, brought him a worse shock. His two daughters ; Mona, the elder, tall and strong, and Wenda, dark and slight, both leaning forward, avid for every word. He shuddered, seeing their open acceptance, knowing himself unable to sway either once their minds were set. He could see their minds setting as he watched, fascinated, and afraid.

There was death in this meeting. For all who had been so crazed as to attend. Once the Council learned of it. As they would surely learn.

He wondered if he dared denounce the ones who were speaking, then sank back in his place. These mad ones would not hear one who stood to unsay what they muttered. They might do worse. Men who could speak as they spoke would not hold back from killing one who was not on their line. Even an old, inoffensive man who wanted only to live in quiet.

Afterwards, in the security of his own house, to which he had hurried his daughters so soon as he dared leave, he spoke his mind.

"We do not go again," he said. He stood, head bent, peering from one to the other under lowered brows. "If we are asked, we will speak that we did not get what was in the minds of those who muttered."

"We get it now," Wenda argued.

"We do *not* get it," her father barked. "If we are asked we will answer that we reckoned it as heat madness, and came away. Not staying to the end."

"We heard enough," the older girl told him.

"You heard nothing," Drivo insisted. "Nothing ! Except madness." He glared at her, his eyes wide and bulging. "Which you did not like to hear—"

"I liked." Wenda was angry. "And Mona also. For it was true speak. That the new thought we offer is not heard." She shook her head so that her hair danced with exasperation. "I will *not* be still. I am not feared. Now I have learned there are more who speak what I feel. Who wear white cloth as we do. Who look for new thought as we do. Who's work is

to find new thought. But who's new thought the Council will not hear as a first thing."

She flung her hand towards a bench under the window. "See!" she stormed. Automatically Drivo's eyes turned to the line of glass jars, each a different colour, each containing liquid. "Did the Council hear me when I brought this new thought? How the light passing through each colour made the water inside differ from every other taste and smell?"

"They did not hear," Mona's slow voice chimed. "As they did not hear when I spoke that light might be a tool."

Drivo waved his hands. "Because it is new thought," he snapped, "does that make it a first thing? It could be a toy only. Can you speak certain that it is of use? No. Only that it is new, and that *you* found it." He shook his finger. "That is what is under this. That the Council does not rush to make *you* big. As they have not made those others big who spoke that the Council choose ill."

He turned away. "If the Council makes everyone big for every new thought, even if it is not a help, is that what you want?" He snorted at their indignant expressions. "Ask yourselves how much is because the Council has not called you big in front of all Shiptoun that you speak this way," he finished, and went out with this final shot.

It was, he thought with satisfaction, a good argument with which to withdraw. It should sow doubts in their minds about their own motives. It should keep them still. And safe.

Fortunately for his satisfaction he did not see their faces as the door closed.

Chapter II

The Council was meeting, called in haste.

"At whose instance?" Jonwel, Captain of Levies, asked as he took his place.

"Mine," Hengsi, Chief Maintainer answered savagely.

Jonwel, observing Hengsi's anger, saw the same anger reflected in the face of Birkla, Counsellor of Women. Always, he thought resentfully, these two worked together, supporting each other. So that, in the Council, they made of him a mouth which none should hear. His face darkened. Why did not Birkla wear her skirt for Hengsi if that was how she felt? He stared at her, at her thin pointed nose and chin, at the mouth thinning downwards at the ends, at her thin, sandy hair

strained back on her skull, and he snorted. Such a woman would never wear her skirt for any man. Not that Hengsi was a man. He slumped back moodily. These two were ghosts, mouthing bitter, savage nothings, blighting Shiptoun with their futility.

Altogether, he reflected, this Council was not well chosen. Nor well liked.

His eyes narrowed. What must a man have behind him who thought to remove these two? How many men would hear him?

If he, Jonwel, were to call the levies for support, would the levies answer?

If they did answer—then there would be nothing to stop him from doing what this Council would not do. March on the Jonners. Destroy them. So that Shiptoun could live in peace, climbing the ladder the First Council had set for them.

That was the first thing to speak. That under *him* Shiptoun would climb. That new thoughts, *profitable* new thoughts, would not be set away because they were not on the Council line.

"What does Jonwel know of the liars who work to destroy this Council?" Hengsi's sudden question brought Jonwel up in his seat. He stared at the two thin faces wordlessly.

"It seems the Captain of Levies has not heard." The woman's voice was caustic. "If it was left to the Captain of Levies we could be killed while he slept in his bed. Or did not sleep. In some other bed."

Jonwel sat rigid, collecting his wits. If Birkla had not been so swift to add her spite he might have answered in the wrong words. Except that the venom she was so keen to use showed they had not counted him amongst their enemies. His mind seized on this. Saw how his attitude at this moment could set a seal on his innocence, as well as giving him satisfaction. Great satisfaction. He reached forward across the table.

Birkla shrieked. Jonwel had her arm, and was twisting it mercilessly. Her body was dragged towards him, over the table. She saw his heavy face, with its dark jowls, glaring down at her.

"You have a bad habit," Jonwel told her. "You calculate you may spill your poison where you will." He released her, shoving her away. "You will remember from this time that I do not like your poison."

He looked coldly then at Hengsi, dismissing the woman. "What is this word of liars?" he demanded.

"Hengbur," Hengsi faltered. His face quivered. Clearly this exhibition of violence had upset him. "And others. They speak against the Council's judgments."

"How?"

"They speak that we waste what is offered. That when a new thought is voiced, the Council judges it good only if it does not go beyond what is already practiced. That we permit only what will prop up, not on which to build." His eyes were hot. "They speak the Council is afraid of all that is new."

Jonwel shrugged.

"Is that all you answer?" Hengsi's lips turned down further. "Is that your mind? That you are on the Council, and against it in the same breath."

Jonwel sneered. "The Council judgments are those of Hengsi and Birkla. All Shiptoun gets this is true. That the voice of Jonwel is empty on the Council."

There were blotches on Hengsi's face. His voice, when it came, was thick. "If that is true, it is because Jonwel's judgment is not true." His thin fists were white. "It is your part to stand on the line of the Council."

"How?" Jonwel demanded.

"To command your levy to obey the word I give against the liars."

Jonwel was still, not trusting himself to speak. And Hengsi, staring at the face of the Captain of Levies, drew away, his own anger ebbing in fear of what he saw.

Abruptly the portly man laughed, pushing back in his chair, standing up. "I do not give that order," he told the Chief Maintainer. "That is not the work for them. That is for your messengers who make their war in the dark." He rolled towards the door, flung it open, and departed.

"For that—!" Hengsi whispered. "For that—!"

He whirled, seizing Birkla's shoulder. "Send the messengers after him," he commanded. "Send them. Now!"

Stoically she endured the pain where he gripped her hurt arm. "Is Jonwel a first thing?" she questioned.

Slowly the madness passed from Hengsi's eyes. "The liars are first," he conceded.

She nodded. "Then I will send them first to Hengbur," she said. She nodded. "But you may hear my word in this. When Jonwel comes next to the Council House I will give him to you."

Within three days Birkla's messengers struck at Pasture's End. Struck, and departed. And, after they left, others left also. To carry word of the Council's judgment. Returning home, not only shocked, but anxious also. Knowing they had cause to be anxious.

Godal the Smith looked at his two sons ominously. "That is not a good word to bring me," he commented.

The younger men shifted their feet nervously, and Godal's lips tightened. He went past them into the yard, stood looking down the dusty road. His sons trailed after him, stood at his side, not saying a word.

"You saw this yourselves?" he questioned.

The elder nodded.

"What was speaked?" Godal asked.

"The one who gave the orders was the only one to speak. That this was the judgment of the Council on liars miscalling old thought, such as the First Council punished, miscalling it new thought. Only the Council could speak what was truly new thought, hearing those who wear white cloth and work in the Science Block in Shiptoun itself. He speaked this before they killed them, and again afterwards."

Godal rubbed his chin. "After they killed them," he asked, "did they do more?"

"They mounted, and went," the younger son answered. He stared down at his feet. "Because of the night the beasts went back to Hengbur, we came away quickly. In case this was known."

"There is nothing to know," Godal corrected. "There was nothing in that. The ones Hengbur sent came with his word. They took the beasts. That is all. They were not remarkable men. You do not remember them. They wore drab, as do all in the pastures. Also, it was not light. You did not see their faces clearly." His voice was stern. "That is all you can tell. There is no cause for speaking in that. It is not a thing to keep in the front of your minds."

"If we are asked—?"

"You will remember. As something not important to you. I do not calculate you will be asked."

The elder son shifted. "I will do what you say," he said. "But—"

"But?" Godal the Smith waited.

"I do not like this thing the Council has done. If people are ignorant of what the Council does, is that not the blame of

the Council? Is it not better to show the people how they are ignorant? Not send messengers to kill them for speaking."

Godal turned. "And you?" he questioned his second son.

"That, also, is how I calculate," the young man answered.

The smith nodded. "There are others who will calculate so. Wrongly." His sons frowned, but he checked them. "Wait. Because they hear, without getting that they hear what the Council speaks. That these men were ignorant." He shook his head. "Hengbur and the others were not ignorant." He stared down the empty road, his eyes sombre. "The Council has not finished with this matter," he told them. "There are still others to speak what those who were killed spoke."

"Such as you?" his elder son probed.

Godal turned, laying a hand on each. "Such as me," he admitted. He looked at them gravely. "It could be that the same will come to me also," he said. "What is your minds on that?"

The younger son's eyes glinted. "They will not do this with comfort," he swore. He pointed to a rise beyond the fence. "With one of us taking his turn to watch, they could not come on this road without our knowing."

Godal the Smith smiled. "That is how we will do it," he agreed. "Until the time when we put this Council out."

It was not only the Pastures which was shocked. The Captain of Levies was disturbed also. If Hengsi and Birkla were not checked worse must follow. At the meeting following the judgment he eyed his fellow Councillors truculently. "I tell you again," he growled. "I do not know where the scouts have gone." His chin sank down on his chest. "I begin to ask if *you* know. But do not wish me to get that you know. Because Haljon and Alla Jonsey are the best of my scouts. Whom I would already have sent through the pass."

Hengsi's voice matched his expression. "I remind you that there are three Councillors," he answered. "That two must agree that your plan is well thought before you have leave to scout for it. That we two do not agree it is well thought."

Jonwel did not answer immediately. They had gone to the point at last, he thought. The point which he had known always they must come to eventually. When a man who dealt in facts must take over from dreamers who knew not how their fellows felt; a man who could lead, who could see what

Shiptoun needed, a man with courage who would lead Shiptoun on.

"I remind you," he said, "that I am Captain of Levies. That the fourth levy, in camp in the Pastures, hears me. Even if the Council does not."

But, if he had counted on dismaying them, he was dismayed himself at their calm. At the suggestion that this was what they had expected him to speak.

It was Birkla who replied, while Hengsi listened, nodding as though he heard words that had been said before; in private, in readiness for this moment, checking the words off to be sure that all the words were said.

"It comes to threats," the woman answered Jonwel. "I will threaten also." Her face shone, and her eyes glittered. "You have forgotten my messengers, Captain of Levies."

"I do not fear them," Jonwel told her stoutly.

She smiled. "You do not know them," she said. "Only we know them. Only the Chief Maintainer and I can point whether this man or that, standing next to you in the road, or in your camp, is one that you should fear." She bent towards him. "I have given a word already, Jonwel. That if Jonwel speaks alone of the Council the same comes to him as to Hengbur. If Jonwel seeks to go out from Shiptoun, while this word is on, he is to be disciplined as Hengbur was."

Jonwel rose. "You will unsay that," he stormed.

She shook her head. "I will not unsay it," she denied. "It is our medicine to keep us from your poison." Her chest rose and fell. "Once, you gripped my arm. Now—I grip you. But for longer. For all your life." He sat down, staring at her. "In your mind, remembering always the eyes that watch you, in the light and in the dark." She nodded with satisfaction. "Well, Jonwel, Captain of Levies?" she said.

But Jonwel did not answer, staring back at her with a stricken face.

"It is well done," Hengsi complimented Birkla. "That is how it should be." He smiled. "Now," he looked at Jonwel, "Will you still speak that you do not calculate where they scout?"

Jonwel shook his head. For the moment he could not think. The woman with her poison had uncovered him where he was weakest. What man could fight, not knowing at any moment whether death stood smiling at his side?

He rose up suddenly, flinging back his chair. "I do not feel well," he mumbled to the two thin faces, and lurched out.

Hengsi, lips tight, flung his pen down. "He should have stayed," he snapped. "There is the matter of the workers for the dam to be calculated."

Birkla's dry laugh rustled through the room. "After this," she said, "Jonwel will speak as you judge. After this, three will speak as two judge."

While Jonwel, confined within Shiptoun's fence, cut off from the Fourth Levy, brooded over his possible fate, Birkla's messengers struck again the next day. The report they brought sent her hurrying to where Hengsi sat before his plans, assessing the labours of those who wore white cloth, integrating their findings into the overall plan which was to take Shiptoun into space. In the light of what was known from the journals of the first settlers, from the plans and sketches which they had left.

He looked up in anger at Birkla's entry, heard her with rage. "Another!" he fumed. "Who?"

"Godal the Smith. And his two sons." Her pinched-in lips, her heaving bosom, all spoke of wrath held in with difficulty. "The younger son escaped," she finished.

"Escaped!" Hengsi stiffened. "How—escaped?"

"He was not in the house. He lay hid, and watched the road. If the messengers had come by the road all would have been warned. But they came through the woods on foot."

"Did Godal speak? Give names?"

She shook her head.

"They should have made him speak." The Chief Maintainer picked at the fingers of his left hand with the nails of the right. Until he drew blood. "In all other cases—!"

"There was another. The one who named the smith."

"Ah!" Hengsi smiled. "A good man."

Birkla shrugged. "He spoke *after* the messengers came to him. Hoping to avoid discipline. Which, after he finished, he did not avoid."

Hengsi grunted.

"He spoke of another thing," she continued. "Of two scouts."

"Go on," Hengsi commanded.

"They scout along the Forbidden Way."

"No!" Hengsi whispered. "That is a lie. He did not speak that. You lie to speak that. You lie, I say. You lie!"

"No." Birkla kept the chair between her and the raging Chief Maintainer. "He did speak this. And *more*." Hengsi paused. "That this was Hengbur's work. And those with him. That Godal aided them in this. There is more you must hear. That will be good to hear. The two who scout, who do not know that Hengbur has been disciplined, will return to Hengbur to bring him word."

"They—do—not—know," Hengsi echoed. "They do not know," he repeated. He stood, head bent, peering at the floor. Then, coming upright, he lifted a commanding finger. "Send the messengers now," he instructed. "To wait in Hengbur's house." He clutched Birkla's shoulder, his eyes bright. "The liars must not be hurt. They must be brought here. To me. Tell your men this."

Birkla nodded, turned, went out.

Left alone, Hengsi walked slowly across the room. "Liars," he muttered. "Liars !" He beat one fist against the other hand. "The same lie that plagued the First Council. Seeking to go from here. For an easy life. Not desiring their duty. Not coveting the stars the First Council planned for them."

He halted before a closet, opened it, brought out a sheaf of papers, laid them on the table. He was oblivious to all except his dream. Fondly he turned the papers one by one. "It is wrote plain enough. The things the First Council had in the places from which they came. And planned for us. Roads. We have made roads. Bridges. I have built a bridge by the rapids, at the end of the road. The hills stop the end, but that is not a first thing. The first thing is that I have built a bridge."

He turned another page. "This is the first thing now. The dam. This I will have. Where the First Council wrote on this drawing that it should be." He lifted his eyes from the paper. "It is a hard thing to follow the line of the First Council. Since all is not always wrote clear for us who have not seen with our eyes the things they saw. But I get that we must follow the line. That all new thought must follow the line. Not hearing anything else as a first thing if it does not tie with these writings of the First Council. Because this only must be the line of the First Council who came from the stars. Else why was it wrote ? They said that we must find the new thought to take us to the stars. They wished this for us. Their writings, then, can be only what it is good for us to learn to help us find the new thought.

"But the liars do not make it easy. Who speak that we should hear every new thought." He barked a contemptuous laugh. "How should we climb if we did that, making every new thought a first thing? Because the liars will not get this I must be strong to stamp them out. That way, when there are no more liars, we shall come sooner to the stars."

He sat on, wrapt in the rightness of his reasoning, unaware that fifteen days march away, two people who dreamed of a different base on which to build were approaching their goal.

The two figures emerged from the jungle, and halted. Below them, a mile on, the river they had crossed and recrossed several times on the journey, was now incredibly wide. The farther bank was half way to the horizon. They could not cross again. They looked at each other, nonplussed by something altogether out of their experience.

"In Mother Ella's journal—" the girl ventured. "Where she says, 'the one thing I miss is lying on a beach, where the sea stretches as far as the eye can reach, blue under a blue sky.' " She looked at the man. "Is this a 'sea'?" she asked.

Haljon shook his head. "It cannot be," he answered. "This water runs smoothly. Remember how she says, 'to lie and watch the waves roll in, and crash upon the sand. To dive into the waves when one is tired of basking'." He stared past Alla at the river. "That is the sad part for me. Where she says, 'I can never do these things again.' "

The girl caught his arm. "If we go on," she said, "perhaps we shall find a sea? That would be an answer in my mind to that sadness of hers. To give it back to her that way."

"I think," Haljon told her warmly, "that Mother Ella would have found you pleasant." He lifted his rifle, sparing her an answer. "We will go on," he said.

They moved in a corridor between the river and the jungle.

"This land is good," Alla observed.

"If it widens," Haljon qualified. He pointed ahead. "When we have climbed to that point," he said, "it may be we shall know if we have found what is required."

They tramped on steadily. Until, in the late afternoon, they topped the crest, and sank down upon the earth, awed at the picture stretched out before them.

The river, bending to the left, had widened further, so that the far bank was a shadow only. Below them, for forty miles or more the ground rolled gently. Towards a blue band that

stretched to cut the sky cleanly at the limit of their sight. Nearer, where it touched the land, it marked its boundaries in ragged, moving lines of white.

"Haljon," Alla whispered. "Haljon. We have found the sea."

He nodded, his eyes moving steadily from point to point, coming at the end to rest upon the soil a foot from where he lay. He drew his knife, and probed, examined with his fingers the spoil he dug. Satisfied, he lifted his head once more, and again his eyes travelled round the scene.

"Mother Ella's sea," Alla murmured.

"The land," Haljon answered softly. "Good land. Better than they asked that we find. Land for seed, and land for beasts."

She nodded also, smiling, stretching out to lay a finger on the fragments he had dug up. "There is metal in that stone," she said.

"Metal to work," Haljon exulted. He swung his arm. "Wood to work it. Land. What the new Shiptoun wants. The Council will not be able to unsay this."

"We shall take a good word back," Alla said happily.

Chapter III

It was the third day of Jonwel's discomforture, and now it was Birkla who was under fire.

"Daymor remains free," Hengsi accused. "And Godal's son. Your messengers have not brought them for discipline."

"They have brought others," the woman defended herself. "They will bring more yet. Until there are none left to bring."

Jonwel stared at his two fellow members of the Council. "How many have you disciplined?" he asked. "How many more? Until there are none left, you speak." In three days, his face, which had been plump before, now sagged. "None left for the levies. And then what will you do? When the Jonners came over the pass to Shiptoun, and we have no men to put on leather and drive them back."

"Jonners!" Hengsi flamed. "You speak only of them. But not of those who are worse. The Jonners burn houses in the Pastures, and rob us of beasts. Not worse than that. Not nearer than that. Since they fear the power of the engines."

"If there are no levies," Jonwel persisted with weak stubbornness, "they *will* come. What will you do if they come because you have destroyed the levies?"

Spittle flecked the Chief Maintainer's lips. "They will not come!" His voice shrilled and cracked. "Because if they come I will open the Shut Down Rods, and destroy them. Every one of them. Because they get that I, Hengsi, Chief Maintainer, will do this, they will not come."

Birkla looked coldly at the objector. "It would be wise if you did not speak that the discipline should stop. Or the liars, hearing this, will calculate that you, who are on the Council, would unsay the Council's judgments. And become stronger because of you."

Jonwel glared. "That is poison," he complained. "Because you do not wish me to speak in this Council."

Hengsi shook his head. "You are the Captain of Levies. Your place is in this Council. Although what you speak is not well calculated." His tone was severe. "Because you fear a shadow, not getting as I do what is a first thing to fear."

Jonwel sat in obstinate silence. If Hengsi could not see what was so plain—!

Hengsi's voice changed. A note of reason sounding in it. "It is my mind to speak a new word to you," he said.

Under lowered, sullen lids Jonwel saw Birkla's mouth open. Saw it close as Hengsi turned and glared at her. Waiting menacingly until he was sure that the women was not going to protest against what he was about to say. Jonwel held his breath. If there was disagreement between these two he might turn it to his gain. He also waited, painfully, for Hengsi to continue.

"It is not good for the Council to be on different lines," Hengsi said unctuously. "Now that you have learned that you shall not unsay our judgment you will work to our line more strongly. After you have proved that my line is the one this Council should take." He fingered his chin. "First, I will prove that there is no poison in me for you. Shiptoun is not closed around you." Jonwel came up eagerly, and Hengsi smiled thinly. "Is that a proof?" Hengsi asked.

"It is a proof," Jonwel agreed.

"Next you will take your fourth levy, and you will move it to the field Drome which is close to the pass." Jonwell nodded. "So that, if the Jonners should come, you have a levy against them."

"That is a wise speak," Jonwel applauded.

Hengsi purred. "This is more wise," he said. "You will send scouts over the pass. The scouts will see the Jonners, and calculate. Whether they are for war, or not. They will come back with speed." Jonwel, his body gathered under him, listened intently. "This, I calculate, will prove your fear is shadow. For I speak that the Jonners are not for a war. So that, when the scouts bring word that this is so, you will give the fourth levy to me to work on the dam."

Earnestly Jonwel prayed that his thoughts did not show in his face. That Hengsi, the madman, did not unsay as fast as he had speaked. That the poison bitch Birkla did not warn that it was not safe to let the Captain of Levies return to the armour of his men.

Fatuously Hengsi droned on. Until, satisfied with his own thoughts, he dismissed the Captain of Levies to his duty as the Chief Maintainer saw it.

Only when Jonwel was outside the Council House did he feel the clammy sweat prickling his body, notice how his plump hands shook as he took back his gun from the attendant maintainer.

Gradually, after he had passed through Shiptoun's gates, and had put more distance between him and his associates on the Council, confidence grew. Until he was riding faster, pounding along the road, to where his staff had waited for him for the past three days. "Now !" he exulted. "Now !"

Three hours later, surrounded by his officers, he finished his assessment of the situation. As one they gave an answer, endorsing his opinion. If Shiptoun was to be saved it was the levies who would do this. The Council must go. The liars must be destroyed. Only in this way could order be restored, without which they could not hope for the practical new thought which would give Shiptoun its destiny.

Confidently the junta began to sketch out the steps which must be taken. Soon, thereafter, those who could see the way things should go would be in control of Shiptoun's affairs.

Elsewhere, however, both in and out of Shiptoun, other persons with diametrically opposed views were also considering the steps they considered should be taken. There were three elements.

In Drivo's house the women stepped back to consider the fugitive wearing Mona's spare suit of white cloth ; decided

that this suit fitted Godal the Smith's surviving son well enough.

"It is good that Mona is a giant," Wenda laughed. "My suit would never be so large as you have need."

Sonjo smiled at the elder girl. "Say that is good that I am so small," he corrected. He looked down at himself, and nodded. "The messengers will not look for me dressed this way," he said.

"If they speak you they will soon calculate who you must be," Drivo nagged from his seat. "And if you show in the street how will you be sure that they do not speak you?"

"Is there need for Sonjo to show on the street?" Wenda asked.

But her elder sister put this evasion aside. "If Sonjo is to speak to those who must hear him, he must show," she said.

"To name us," Drivo snarled, "when they hold him."

The young man flushed. "I will not do that," he swore.

The older man overruled him. "Others will have calculated that way," he snorted. "And learned different. As your father learned. If the messengers hold you, you will speak as they made him speak who named your father."

"Then he must not be held," Wenda declared.

"If we calculate well," Mona put in swiftly before her father could burst out, "the messengers will not look for him in Shiptoun."

"Why did he come to Shiptoun?" Drivo rasped. "Why here! To this house? Crawling here. After the men in the Pastures ruined everything with their tongues. To ruin us also. To lead the messengers here."

"No!" Sonjo was furious. "I calculated that there were men in Shiptoun. Who would fight. As we in the Pastures will fight. Without you!" He spun round, his face twisted with shame.

Wenda shocked at her father, stared at Drivo in horror. But Mona moved, to set herself between Sonjo and the door. "I have a speak which is not my father's," she said.

Drivo came to his feet. "Stop!" he commanded.

But the elder girl ignored him. "Fear is not the answer," she said. "Only if the people in the Pastures and we in Shiptoun are as one will we come out of this. To work apart, in anger, means death for all of us."

Sonjo said nothing.

She spread out her hands. "So I speak that we must work here in Shiptoun, while you speak the pastures that they are not alone."

Wenda, nodding eagerly, came to join her sister.

"There are men, wearing white cloth," Mona continued, "who we will take you to see. Now. Who will give you the same speak as I give." She ignored her father's protest at this further tempting of disaster, looked levelly at Sonjo. "Will you hear this?" she asked.

"I will hear," Sonjo answered. "I will go with you."

"For this we shall all be disciplined," Drivo told them.

At this Mona went to him, speaking gently. "Can you not get that we are disciplined now?" she pleaded. "By fear. That this is what we must join together to fight."

"Words!" Drivo flung back. "From foolish girls, and spoiled children. I warn you. If this is done—!"

She shook her head sadly. "It must be done," she answered. "As you would if you did not have fear for us."

Her father turned his head away. She waited, hoping. But when he remained obstinate she lifted her hand, let it fall, and came back to the others. "We will go quickly," she said.

The door closed. Only then did Drivo turn, and take one step towards it. But only one. And halted, plucking at his mouth, his eyes hunted, listening. He heard the outer door close. He felt behind him for his chair, fell into it, and sat, staring before him, plaiting his fingers, and mumbling.

If, in Shiptoun, there was fear, and people braving their fear, across the hills in Jonville there was no such feeling. In Jonville there was the second element in Shiptoun's fate. Jonville, it seemed, was of one mind. Yet at this same moment, where the chiefs had come together in council, there was another mood. One of impatience, among the leaders, where they waited, shifting their feet, for their lord to drop the shield of concentration behind which he had withdrawn. What was there to consider, they asked themselves. If the report was true, the last one, the one which had come but one hour before, then they ought not to be wasting time. Not if Shiptoun was preparing war. As the report suggested, giving details of how Shiptoun's Fourth Levy had moved its quarters from the Pastures to a new camp near the pass. Of how the workers in leather were toiling through the dark as well as the day, cutting suits. For whom were the suits unless for another three

levies? For what other reason than for war would Shiptoun call all its levies? Lastly, that several of Shiptoun's scouts had already come through the pass. If these facts were true, why did Jon delay?

The leader's head lifted. "When light comes," he said, "we march." He summoned them to gather round the map before him. "We go this way," he told them, and his finger moved on the map, away from the pass, away from Jonville, leaving it open to the advance of an invader.

They stared at him, half-angered by the sardonic amusement on his bold lips.

"There is a plan in this." Jon's younger brother Rane spoke for them all. "But, by crash—" he shook his head, "I do not contain it." He looked round at the others, and grinned. "I calculate I am not the only thick head," he commented.

The chiefs chuckled, nodding, looked expectantly at Jon.

"In all the wars with Shiptoun," he explained, "it is we who have gone over the pass. With fewer numbers than the men they could call. It is my mind that Shiptoun should find the war in a different place. Where their numbers will not help them against our new thought." They began to see where his mind had led him, and nodded. "We have heard that Shiptoun has not found this new thought for a war. So, if their scouts return to them, speaking that we have moved away from here, that it would be easy for them to strike us here—!"

Rane laughed. "At what place do we turn?" he asked.

Jon's finger touched the map. "Here," he answered. "Turning towards the hills, skirting them, to wait for their levies to cross our front."

"One fault," Rane objected.

Jon smiled. Plainly he knew what his hotheaded brother was about to say.

"You have made it too easy," Rane complained.

Jon's arm went round his neck. "After we have stamped on their levies," he promised, "you will be first through the pass. What war Shiptoun has left to offer, you shall have."

"That is the right speak," Rane said happily.

That was the second element.

Meanwhile, on the Forbidden Way, the third element moved.

The light was fading as the two figures topped the ridge, and saw again the farms at Pasture's End. Sheltered in the trees they waited until the darkness spawned specks of light in the buildings they could no longer distinguish.

"Now," Haljon said.

"Now," Alla echoed. But as she stood up the man caught her fiercely. "After this," he said, "until we come away from Shiptoun, we cannot stand or sit together."

They were silent until, after a space, she stepped back. "The dark will finish," she said.

"We have it in our hands always," Haljon told her.

She touched his face with her fingers. "The more reason to go. Hengbur waits. The more we take for us, the less we have for others."

Haljon chuckled. "You have too strong a duty," he teased. "Now it is too late for me to unsay my choice I calculate I have selected bad."

Alla laughed. "A woman's duty lies always behind her skirt. The man sees only the skirt, since that is what he wants to see. Afterwards he learns he must take both."

Haljon sighed. "Now you tell me this," he mourned. "Now that I cannot escape your discipline."

They moved forward gaily in the cool air, began the descent to Hengbur's house. But, however their hearts felt, it did not make them careless; separately they drifted through the gloom, making no noise.

Two hours later they slid under the fence, covering each other, their eyes and ears searching the darkness. Finding nothing suspicious.

Judging from the sound of singing coming from one of the larger buildings Hengbur's men were happy.

They came together at Hengbur's door. Softly Haljon tapped. The light inside dimmed. The door opened. The burly figure they expected to see showed as a dark silhouette. "In," a deep voice whispered. They slid through the opening, and the door closed.

"Let us have light," the doorkeeper said.

From three sides unhooded beams of light lanced at the newcomers, blinding them. Hands wrenched away their rifles, plucked their other weapons from their belts.

"You have kept us waiting," the man they had taken for Hengbur told them. They were silent, their eyes, adjusting to the sudden brilliance, fixed on the weapons threatening them. The imposter grinned. "But, now that you have come, we must give you comfort."

They could not resist when their hands were pulled behind them, when their wrists were lashed together, and other cords were tightened about their arms.

"You do not ask how this happens," the one in charge taunted them.

"Bugs creep even into the best beds," Alla flung back. "And Jonners into Shiptoun."

Their captor smiled. "Brave," he applauded. "But—!" His hand went out, and a finger hooked in her shirt. "We are not Jonners. As you get well enough." His finger pulled, dragging her shirt open. "As you get," he repeated. He looked at Haljon, and grinned expectantly.

"We get this," Haljon capitulated without argument. He swallowed.

"Better," the man approved. His finger stayed where it was. "So—who are we?"

"From the Council." Haljon's answer was loud and quick. He strained against the cords, against the men holding him. Holding him easily.

The chief of the messengers regarded Haljon's efforts with tolerance. "And why does the Council give Haljon and Alla Jonsey such greeting?" he probed. He put more pressure on his finger.

"Because we scouted across the Forbidden Way," Alla cried.

Deiberately the big messenger pulled her back against his stomach, held here there. "For that you have earned discipline," he said. "For not hearing the Council's judgment on what is a first thing, and what is not. For your new thought the Council speaks is a lie. For hearing this lie from other liars. Whose names the Council will hear."

"We have no names," Alla gasped. She fought unavailingly against the man's hands moving over her.

"The Council calculates you have." He looked at Haljon where now three men held the scout. "If I take Alla Jonsey in to the other room," he suggested, "will you still have no names?"

The girl writhed, and twisted, and was held, and Haljon cried out in desperation. "Hengbur," he choked.

"One name. You have more names than that."

How many have they taken, Haljon asked himself? Hengbur, for sure, since they had laid their trap in Hengbur's house. But, did they have the others of the meeting? His eyes,

flickering about, fell on certain articles—hats, the badges on them proclaiming their owner's ranks—swept together in a pile upon the floor.

As if he dragged out the admission, he named the owners of those hats.

The fat man heard him. "Melvin. Daymor. Eldon." He nodded. "It is well for Alla Jonsey you have speaked," he said. "Now, until we come to Shiptoun, you will not speak again. So that those who sleep will not be waked as we pass."

He released Alla to others of his band, watched as the two captives were gagged, then led the way outside. Hard hands forced the scouts after him. Held them while a cart was brought, lifted them in.

For Haljon, perhaps, the drive through the night was greater torture than for the girl. Picturing scenes in which Alla suffered unmentionable things under the hands of beasts. Had it not been for the gag he must have pleaded with their guards for mercy for her. But all he could do was turn his head, and stare at her as she stared at him, dumbly and without hope, as the cavalcade swept along the empty road.

Until, as light came back into the sky, they came to Shiptoun ; through its still empty streets, to the Council House, and were hauled down from the cart.

The hour was early. But they were not the first arrivals. Armed men in leather preceded the captives through the great door, jostling the messengers of the Council aside, grinning in their outraged faces while holding their weapons in readiness. But the messengers, unsure, without orders covering such a development, did nothing. And Jonwel's men trod on behind him to the Council Chamber, sweeping the prisoners and the leader of the messengers with them.

Boldly Jonwel flung the door of the Council Chamber wide, stalked in, his bodyguard crowding at his heels. "Poison for your poison," the Captain of Levies boomed.

The man and the woman at the table sat in frozen incredulity. Their eyes moved from the arrogant Jonwel to the men behind him ; men who met their eyes and did not show respect. Who even grinned and nudged one another and were clearly amused by the dismay of the rulers of Shiptoun.

"You should always calculate that all men, if free to choose, will always take their own line," Jonwel educated the Chief Maintainer. "Which line may not be that of Hengsi and

Birkla." He grunted. "You should also calculate what discipline your messengers will find if you command them to discipline me. What discipline *you* will find," he finished.

He lowered himself into a chair. "What you did to me, in this Council, making me nothing, I will not do to you. But, when I go, after this meeting, certain of my guards will stay. Who will hear no commands but mine." He nodded at Birkla. "From now you will be wise to keep your poison for those who cannot answer you. Such as my scouts whom you have had brought here." They gasped, and Jonwel grinned. "Show them," he commanded.

Haljon and Alla were pushed forward from the ranks into Hengsi's view, and Jonwel beamed.

"Since I am present to hear their speak, which you calculated you only would hear, let their mouths be free," he said genially.

Then, when the gags were removed, he waved his escort out. "Hold the door," he ordered, and leaned forward in his seat. "Now we begin," he said.

They answered his questions as they had answered those of the one who had captured them, and who still stood by them now. Admitting no more than they had already conceded. Until, Jonwel, out of patience, flung himself back in his chair.

Birkla took up the inquisition, her eyes on Alla Jonsey. "You," she accused, "who have not only joined with liars, but have unsayed the judgment of the Council. You have gone with this man Haljon, not waiting for the Council to give you leave to wear your skirt for him." Her eyes shone like small stones. Her fingers bent, and twitched. "Will you speak that you have not bastardised with him?" she whispered.

Jonwel snorted. "Is that all your worry?" he threw at Birkla.

"Wait," the woman advised, her eyes moving from one prisoner to the other. Neither answered. Yet what Birkla saw satisfied her.

She nodded. "Morep," she said.

The gross messenger stepped forward, unctuous and eager.

Birkla smiled a hard smile at him. "You get what is needed?" she asked. "That you should take them, and bring them here again. And that when they come they will speak."

Morep's heavily fleshed face gleamed. His hand came out, and stroked Alla's arm. "They will speak," he promised.

Hengsi giggled.

Haljon, sick and shuddering, saw Alla's hands twisting against the cords that held her, opened his mouth to concede anything the woman across the table demanded.

But was forestalled.

By the Captain of Levies. "It must not be done," Jonwel vetoed. "One word of this outside, and all your messengers will not save you. Or me. The people will not wear this."

Birkla sneered. "There will be no word unless it is yours," she retorted, and Hengsi nodded.

Jonwel shook his head. "There are my men. They are not blind or deaf."

"Then take them with you," Birkla spat.

"They stay," Jonwel's voice was flat. "There will be no work for this Jonner thing of yours. You will hear me on this."

"You do not wish the bastardisers to speak," Birkla stormed. "Why? What is it you do not want us to get? That they may speak your name?"

Jonwel rose. "When I come again," he told her, "I will see these two. If they speak that hurt has been done them, you, Birkla, will learn what you will be glad not to learn."

He came round the table. Deliberately he walked into Morep, crowding him back. Observing the resentment on the gross man's face, he lifted his staff of office, and struck the messenger across the mouth, heavily, flinging him across the room.

Then he was gone. From the hall came a challenge, an answer, and they heard Jonwel tread heavily towards the entrance. There was silence in the Council Room. Until Birkla, rousing herself, dismissed the messengers with the prisoners.

Climbing the stairs back to their cell Haljon looked down. At the men in leather, Jonwel's armed guards, at other men and women, all staring up at the two with their fettered wrists. One man's face stood out. Taller than those about him, dark faced, clothed in white, Seyheng was the best known of Hengsi's favoured followers. The man whom Hengsi had chosen to build his dam. The one man who had no reason to complain that *his* new thoughts were not heard by the Council. Who, of all men, had least cause for sympathy with the offenders. Yet on whose face Haljon read, not enmity, but solicitude, friendship, encouragement.

Why, Haljon asked himself, as the guards thrust them on and up, why should Seyheng stare up with such an expression?

Chapter IV

He would have told himself that his eyes had deceived him had he been able to see into the Council Room when Seyheng was admitted. Had he seen the suspicious Birkla and the frustrated Hengsi both mellow at the coming of this man. He would have asked "why" even more strongly had he heard the tall man accepting Hengsi's bitter condemnation of those who had flaunted the Council with their journey, and defied it still with their silence. When Seyheng neither excused their impatience in love, nor protested the severity of the penalty which Birkla demanded.

Only listened. Until Hengsi and Birkla turned from the matter of their own accord.

"You came to hear when you will begin the work," Hengsi said.

Seyheng nodded. "You speaked that I would have the fourth levy to begin the work."

Hengsi fumbled for an answer. How should he admit that the Captain of Levies had refused to surrender his force?

It was Birkla who saved his face. "We must wait for the return of the scouts," she told Seyheng. "Who will bring word of the Jonners. Until we hear that they do not prepare war the Captain of Levies will not leave Shiptoun bare."

Seyheng pinched his chin. "How long?" he asked.

Birkla shrugged. "Five days—?"

Seyheng hesitated. "If I may speak—?" he asked.

Hengsi nodded.

The dark man's face was grave. "As I get what you have speaked," he reasoned, "this is a big time. Because not all the people are on the Council line."

"Because of the liars," Birkla snapped.

"Because of them," Seyheng echoed. He paused. "It is because of them," he ventured, "that I calculate it would be good if the Council took a new thought."

"What new thought?" Hengsi questioned. He sounded more interested than angry, though Birkla had stiffened at this hint of criticism.

"Those that have been disciplined," Seyheng answered. "Few of the people have seen this discipline. As I get this, the liars will speak that the Council fears to discipline openly. Speaking so, they are brave to take a different line to the Council."

Hengsi nodded. "It is your thought that the liars we take should be shown to the people. So that the people will get that the Council is strong."

"There are two to show now," Birkla said.

"If I may speak again," Seyheng suggested. "If the scouts speak that there is no war from the Jonners, the people will be glad. If, after the Council speaks this word, it shows the discipline on the liars to the people, the people will get that the line of the Council is strong, both against the Jonners, *and* against the liars. It is not one thing, but the people will get that it is one thing."

The two Councillors were still, weighing up this suggestion. Gradually a smile grew on Hengsi's lips, was reflected on the thin mouth of the woman.

"We shall do as you suggest," Hengsi told the dark man.

In their cell Haljon and Alla stood side by side, looking out through the bars at Shiptoun spread out below them.

"When the discipline comes," the girl whispered, "it will be hard. Did you scan her face? Her face spoke that it will last long." She shuddered.

Haljon swallowed. "It is I who brought this to you," he muttered.

Her head against his shoulder moved denying this. "Did you hold me so I could not unsay what you wanted?" she demanded. For one brief moment she smiled. Then shivered. "I am afraid," she whispered. "Remembering Birkla's face, I am afraid."

Seyheng, descending from the steam cars which he had boarded after being dismissed, wondered whether Birkla had sent a spy after him. For clearly she had not relished his comments, although she had agreed with Hengsi that they were wise. He shrugged. He must take this risk. There was no other way out. What he had seen, what he had heard, what he suspected; none of these gave him comfort. Not for Shiptoun.

Against that, what he was attempting, if he were wrong in his reasoning, could lead to disaster. Nevertheless, because he did reason as he did, he must go on.

He walked, steadily, towards Drivo's house.

Mona, opening the door, was plainly dismayed at his unexpected appearance. He saw this. Yet did not show that he had seen. Easily, almost gaily, he asked to see her father.

As if there had been no cooling off in their friendship. As though things had not changed since he had grown in Hengsi's favour, and Mona, from that same time, had drawn back from their relationship.

Coming into the main room he lifted his hand to Drivo and to Wenda. "I am from the Council Room," he said, and studied their reactions openly. Drivo was fearful, Wenda, like some wild young creature, was tense. Mona, under her calm, was concerned. He felt a glow of satisfaction. He had reasoned correctly. "There are two on whom the Council will make discipline," he told them.

"Two?" Drivo answered.

"Haljon, Chief of Scouts, and Alla Jonsey, Scout of Women. They were held for scouting across the Forbidden Way." He paused. "They did not do this without certain others getting what was in their minds before they went," he said.

Unless his listeners were mad they must perceive that he accused them. They did perceive this. Drivo's face flushed, then paled. He sat frozen, waiting for what he dreaded was coming.

"Why do you tell us this?" Mona asked.

"Because," Seyheng answered, "this is a word that must go to the Pastures. To find men there who will take these two out of the hands of the Council inside five days."

It was out. He waited for their reactions. It was Mona he watched, whom he faced, who must accept his claim to be on their side.

"If we speak your words to the Council," Wenda said, "what will it do?"

He turned, surprised that the counter should come from the youngest. He spread his hands. "If you have never liked Seyheng," he answered, "that is all you need to do."

"Why do you come to us to speak this?" Drivo flared. He shook in his chair. "Who have not ever spoken with those you name." He put out a finger. "It will be good if you go before I speak the Council what is in your mind."

The dark man shook his head. "If I go," he returned, "I will not come again. But must look in another place for one to take this word."

"It is a new Seyheng," Mona commented. "Seyheng, the friend of Hengsi, might speak to us as you do because Hengsi calculates we should be liars."

Seyheng shrugged. "If you are not," he said simply, "then I am for discipline. But I get that you are. From how I feel."

"A new feeling," was all that Mona said. But he understood the idea behind her words, and flushed.

His face was sombre. "It came when Godal the Smith died," he said. "He was my friend."

"If that is true," Drivo demanded, "why do you come here? An old man and two women. What do you expect from this house?"

Seyheng's eyes did not move from the older girl. "That if you are on this line, those who are also on it will hear you. Who will not hear Seyheng for their lives, calculating him to be the friend of Hengsi. But if you get that I speak true, then those who can reach the Pastures must know that my word is a first thing."

He waited urgently. Until Mona put out her hand to his arm. "I do get this," she said. There was a warmth in her which had been absent for a long time, and Wenda, hearing this note in her voice smiled also. "Godal's son, who is in Shiptoun, will take your word," Mona said.

"He must take it fast," Seyheng stressed.

"Speak fast then," Wenda came forward. "All he must hear. I will take your word. Now." She spun round as Drivo croaked. "I will!" she flashed at her father. "We are not all yellow and shaken." Impatiently cruel, she turned back to Seyheng, her young face scarlet. "Speak *fast*!" she cried.

He did not look at Drivo, hurt and shamed. Drivo was his own gaoler, imprisoning himself with his fear in his own mind. Seyheng felt sorrow for Drivo. But his duty was to those who were behind physical bars. He put Drivo and Drivo's shame out of his mind, and told Wenda what she must impress on her messenger.

Then the girl was gone, and Mona came with the dark man to the door. "It will take all the five days," she murmured.

"Four days," Seyheng insisted. "Five he cannot have. When the light comes on the fifth day the men of the Pastures must be in Shiptoun." He smiled at her. "I go now to the Captain," he told her.

"Go carefully," she advised.

Seyheng nodded. "I wish to return," he answered. "I will be very careful."

"As you were careful here," Mona commented dryly.

Seyheng returned her look with meaning. "With you here," he returned, "I could not take hurt. That also I have calculated a long time."

He turned, and went, leaving her looking after him, wondering to find herself excited at his words and his look. Slowly, thoughtfully, she stepped back inside, and went to try to ease Drivo's complaints. But not all her mind was on what that task demanded.

Seyheng, boarding the steam cars again, was in much the same state. She had not rebuked him for the meaning behind his words. As she would have done, he admitted, if he were still Hengsi's man. It was clear that in the years to come he would never be encouraged to avoid his duty. Or find an excuse for doing so. He smiled wryly. He would be yet another man who's wife took over the duty of his conscience. Still not every man was so fortunate as to have so attractive a lawgiver. He chuckled to himself, and lay back enjoying the luxury of dreaming. Until, when the steam cars halted at the large open field named Drome, he must descend.

Mention that he came direct from the Council got him through the outer sentries of the fourth levy. Carried him through the organised men in leather busy setting up their quarters as far as Jonwel's headquarters. Where Jonwel's second-in-command, demanding to know his business, raised his eyebrows at Seyheng's answer. "Did Hengsi send you here to speak this?" he snapped.

The officer sounded contemptuous as well as hostile. How far did this reflect his commander's attitude? What effect would this have on what the Chief Maintainer planned? Smoothly Seyheng set himself to find the answer.

"The Council, as all know, has judged there is need for a dam," he said mildly. "Has set me to do this work. For this I must have workers. Since this levy does not go to war—"

His insinuation had its effect. "This levy," the officer assured him, "does go to war. This levy, and the three not yet called."

Seyheng blinked. "I do not get this," he complained. "The Chief Maintainer speaks that when the scouts return with word that the Jonners do not prepare war—"

Again he left his sentence hanging. Again the bait was taken. He gathered that, whatever Hengsi might have led Seyheng to believe, it was the Captain of Levies who would

decide on war or not war. Whatever word the scouts might bring. Seyheng could return to Hengsi, and make this plain. But Seyheng, in the role of a man who had no intention of entangling himself in an argument between his superiors, excused himself from bearing such a report. Was permitted to leave, outwardly too dismayed by what he had heard to perceive the sorry civilian figure he displayed to the sardonic man of war.

This was not altogether acting. He cared nothing for what Jonwel's aide thought of him. He did care for what lay behind the man's words.

The nation was being carried forward into a double war. War against the Jonners, deliberate war, and war inside Shiptoun itself.

It appeared that Seyheng, the saviour of Shiptoun, must face up to one thing. That his dream that the rule by fear of Hengsi and Birkla could be checked by moderate means was only a dream. He had expected that when the captives were taken out of the hands of the Council, that when the Council was shown that the people would not be quiet under tyranny, that a new Council could be chosen. To lead Shiptoun on in harmony. With no need then for men to uproot themselves, and begin again elsewhere. He had had a savage correction.

He sat in carved immobility as the steam cars lurched back to the city.

It was not a matter of returning to the line of the First Council. That line was dead. As Haljon and Alla and Hengbur and Godal had seen clearly. They were the ones who had seen what line was right. It was, therefore, more important than before that those who had calculated right should not be lost now.

He had fought against this idea. Now he must fight for it.

How many would go when the time came? How many did he know who wore white cloth who would join with the people of the Pastures? Perhaps it would be wiser not to stir too strongly until the Pastures came to Shiptoun? That would be the time to challenge. When neither the messengers of the Council, nor the levy under Jonwel, were together strong enough to hold the people. When they could go as a nation, and those who feared to go could stay, but could not stay those who went.

"That is the first wise speak I have heard," Drivo declared when a returning Seyheng told of his reasoning. "*Now you speak with your years.*"

But the older man's approval disappeared when the talk turned to the lists the younger people were preparing. Of things that would be needed when the exodus began. Of the many wagons that would be needed, the beasts to draw the wagons, the food to feed the beasts and the people. Which machines could be moved, and which of the machines were more valuable than others. when it was clear that this man and his two daughters were in earnest. Were not drawing back from the danger of discovery. Were determined on revolt.

Of necessity they did not argue with him. There was too much to do, too much to be decided in too short a time. All Shiptoun might rest on this night's work. Against that, the fears of one man must be left to him to endure. Gently, but firmly, they let him perceive this, and, as he did perceive it, he withdrew into himself again.

They sat on until late, suggesting, approving, rejecting. All the while Seyheng's mind was concerned with another matter. But he kept this to himself until Wenda rose to bring them food. Then, before his courage could die, he put down his pen.

"There is a speak which is in me," he told Mona.

She waited.

His voice dropped. "What was in my mind when I went to Jonwel," he said, "is more in my mind now. And may stand well if I take it to the Council."

"What word is this?" Mona asked.

"That I have asked you to wear your skirt for me." He went on swiftly before she could comment. "If Hengsi still calls me friend, he will call all this house so," he urged. "For my sake, he will not hear if word comes against this house."

"Seyheng the wise," she answered after a while.

"Seyheng the foolish," he corrected. "Seyheng who wants, but must hide his want with reasons. Seyheng who has forgotten the courage of youth, and wants to remember it through you."

"Young-old Seyheng," she smiled. "Which one shall I hear?"

He looked at her with grave appeal. "From me, hear the one you want to hear. But, if you speak what *I* want to hear,

then let your father calculate you hear what will make it safe for all in this house."

She nodded at this warning. The man waited. Until she lifted her eyes, and he saw them, and his own blazed with sudden fierceness. "You hear!" he exclaimed.

"I hear what *I* want to hear," she told him as Wenda came back into the room. "I will wear my skirt for you."

She did not take his hand when she rose and went to Drivo. "Seyheng will ask the Council that I should wear my skirt for him," she told her father. Wenda gasped, and Drivo hunched his shoulders looking at her under his eyebrows. "That way, Seyheng being calculated as Hengsi's man, the messengers will not come to this house."

"For *that* cause!" Wenda was shocked. "You will do this because—!"

Mona shook her head. "If I am pleased with that, let me be pleased." She touched her sister's hair gently. "Seyheng and I are on the same line," she assured the younger girl.

Before the outraged girl could speak Drivo caught her wrist. "When you are asked," he said sternly, "then you may hear or not hear. Now it is your elder sister who speaks that she hears Seyheng." His chin sank to his chest. "It is a wise speak," he told them. "For which I thank Seyheng. If you say again that you are on the same line I will speak my pleasure also."

"Speak it," Mona assured him. Now she took Seyheng's hand. "See," she said.

Wenda came forward once more, peering at her. Then, impetuously, held out both hands to them. "Although it is not as I have calculated for me," she said, naively.

Even Drivo smiled at this, and Mona took her sister in her arms. Seyheng, to his astonishment, found himself blinking foolishly.

He carried this recollection with him next day. When he came to the Council House. He had to get word to the prisoners that help was on its way. If he could trick Hengsi into permitting him to speak to them—?

"If I may speak of what is the work of the Council," he moved, "does the Chief Maintainer calculate the liars above might speak if another liar were put with them?"

"Who?" Hengsi asked.

Seyheng touched his shirt. "If the Council learned that Seyheng was a liar, and held him." He frowned thoughtfully. "If he were driven into the prison with anger and blows, the liars there might calculate they could speak safely to him."

Hengsi's eyes shone. "Then, when the dark came—?"

"—he was dragged out. And speaked the Chief Maintainer what they have held back to the Council."

Birkla sneered. "Seyheng has been calculating that the Council cannot stand without his help."

But she found no support. "Will you poison even those who are on your line?" Hengsi snapped.

He went to the door, lifted the catch, calling in the guards. Seyheng leaped past him, was promptly seized, half won free, was dragged down, still struggling. Another guard came to help. Between three of them he was hauled from the room, heaved up the stairs. He was held, still struggling furiously, while the cell was opened. Then he was pitched in, and the door clanged behind him.

He rolled over under the startled eyes of Haljon and Alla, and grunted. The guards had not been gentle. Gingerly he felt his ankle where a shod foot had landed. "Any woman who wears her skirt for one of them," he offered acidly, "must be cousin to a Jonner."

The prisoners smiled, then, immediately, the care was back in their faces. Seyheng, under cover of examining his injuries, studied them, understanding only at this moment, the task he had undertaken. His own specious captivity would end with the day. They could look forward to death alone for their release. Staring at the barred window, and the enclosing walls, he felt something of the spirit of the trap, and knew how they must feel.

He had until the dark to change their minds. So that they could endure the remaining days without breaking. In the comfort that rescue was on its way. He must make them sure of this.

He looked over his shoulder at the door. There was no one at the grille. He nodded. That was how it should be. As Hengsi had appreciated.

He looked back at the two scouts, and grinned. "Seyheng," he announced himself. "With a message."

Their eyes widened. He explained how he had gained entry to them, making light of the risk he ran. Painting the eager

gullibility of the Chief Maintainer extravagantly so as to draw smiles that were not forced. Going on to tell them what was planned. Stressing a factor which he saw was needed, that they were not alone.

"A story I will need to have," he finished. "One without new names."

Haljon nodded. "For you," he said, "there is more. To pass on if we do not come out of here. So that the others can get what they can have if they will go across the Forbidden Way."

"Let me hear," Seyheng answered, and listened while first Haljon, then Alla, took up the story of their march. And as he listened he noted the feeling in their voices, beyond the mere words, which spoke of their conviction that the future of the people, more, the existence of the people, depended on the new line which only a new life could develop.

"I will take your word," he promised when they finished, and were silent. "Although it will not be needed. Since you both will lead the march of the people." Inwardly, he swore that his assurance would not be empty. Whatever came to any of them, even himself or Mona, these two must not die. For these two were Shiptoun, and Shiptoun's future.

With the dark the guards returned, the gross man foremost. He crooked a finger at Seyheng. "You," he said.

Haljon and Alla, sitting cross-legged, looked on with well assumed dismay as Birkla's creature put his hand on the nape of Seyheng's neck, and pushed him out.

Inside the Council Room, however, Morep was not permitted to linger. Brusquely Hengsi dismissed him. Then, while Birkla sat with motionless eyes, Seyheng related what he had rehearsed.

"There was more," Birkla stated when he ceased.

Seyheng shrugged. "What is known," he replied. "The names of the ones who have been disciplined. Their speak was of them only." He rubbed his chin. "Hengbur was the chief one. The others followed."

"Not more?" Hengsi was disappointed.

"Except of what they scouted," Seyheng told him, frowning as though downcast that his plan had not been more productive.

Birkla sniffed, provoking Hengsi's annoyance. Until he realised that already Seyheng had seen too much of the

in harmony in the Council, and stopped. To Seyheng, sending him away, he spoke sweetly, praising his effort.

Gratefully the plotter left. He had done all that he had set himself. Now there was no more he could do. Until the fifth day. After which things would be resolved. There would be a gathering, with all men free to speak without fear. And those who heard would march, surely the greater part of the people, and put this trouble behind them.

To build the new thought that would carry Shiptoun back to the stars.

Chapter V

He woke late next morning, rose hurriedly, and left for his room in the Science House. To hear word that shocked him. Daymor had been taken.

"He was brought to the Council at first light," Seyheng's assistant reported. "I myself saw him among the messengers." He looked at Seyheng with a troubled expression. "There is word that the messengers look for other liars," he said.

Seyheng cut him short, leaving him staring after his senior's retreating back. The dark man's plans had collapsed. If Daymor implicated Drivo ! If that happened all could be lost. For Drivo would surely break.

He broke into a run. The steam cars would bring him fastest near Drivo's house. If there was time he might get the old man away, hide him somewhere.

But he was thwarted in this. He was still a block from the track when the cars rattled past. Panting, he dropped to a walk. Another string of cars would pass soon, and he must wait for those. He was almost at the stage when he saw Mona coming towards him, her cap pulled down over her face.

But, not enough to hide her face from him, and, seeing it, he caught his breath.

He halted, let her pass, then turned casually, and came up with her. "I was on my road to you," he said. "Daymor is held, and may speak."

He talked, knowing his words wasteful, but hoping that the impossible might be true. That he had read her face wrongly.

"The messengers have come," she said.

Seyheng swallowed. "And—?"

"Drivo, my father, is dead. And Wenda with him."

He took her arm, supporting her as they walked.

"I was away. At the block I looked back, and saw the messengers at our door. They did not see me among those who watched. Where we stood we heard my father's gun. Twice."

"Himself?"

"Himself," she answered. "Getting that this was what he must do. To Wenda also. The messengers went in. I waited with the others where I stood. Until the messengers dragged them out the door to lie in the road."

"They will be wanting you also," Seyheng muttered.

She was calm; without emotion, without hope: without life. "That is why I came to you. For your gun. I will do as my father Drivo did before they find me."

His grip tightened on her arm. "We will not speak that yet," he denied.

She did not argue. Only walked. Waiting for the inevitable. There was no place to hide, by day, inside Shiptoun, with the messengers already searching for her. There was no place. Not inside Shiptoun. But—if they could get out . . .

"Come," Seyheng told her.

They passed round the corner of the Science House.

"This way," he said sharply, and was encouraged when she did not hang behind. "In here," he said. He closed the door behind them. He snatched down two suits of labourer's cloth, gave one to her. "Hurry," he compelled her.

He turned his back, stripped off his suit of white cloth, and pulled on the garments he had taken down. When he turned he was heartened to see Mona's fingers on the last fastenings of her suit.

He led the way through another door, down some stairs. They came out in a courtyard around which were stables. He dived into the stalls, untethered two beasts, and led them out. "Take one," he commanded. Holding the lead ropes they moved out of the yard, turned left, and halted where a dozen labourers loaded other animals with gear.

On the platform Seyheng's assistant stood supervising the loading. Seyheng went forward until he stood below the younger man. Deliberately, then, he lifted his head so his assistant could see his face. "It will be good to give us a paper," he said aloud in a complaining voice. "To prove we are the proper ones to take these loads to the place of the dam. So that the messengers who look for certain liars will let us pass."

The young man was quick. He chuckled. "Shall I write on the paper that you are the most dangerous liar in Shiptoun?"

Seyheng spat with credit. "Do that," he countered, "and the men from the Pastures will not hear they should hurry to Shiptoun to save Haljon and Alla Jonsey from discipline."

The young man nodded. "You had best come in with me, and watch what I write," he suggested.

Obediently Seyheng lumbered up the steps. Inside, out of sight, he clapped his assistant on the shoulder. "When the messengers come," he advised, "speak that I went to Drivo."

He plunged through the work room to his own quarters, snatched up his belt gun, shoved it in his pants, and ran back.

Taking the paper Seyheng remembered the notes they had made at Drivo's house. He brought them from inside his shirt, handed them over. "These are the machines we calculated must go when we cross the Forbidden Way," he said. "Also other things. It could be you may find time to prepare for this work."

Outside again, he took the lead rope he had dropped, and fell in with the party. The laden beasts moved off.

The shortest route followed the city fence, passed out by the North Gate, and took the road towards the pass, beyond the point where the pipe line bent south to the Pastures, on until it reached Second River. There the route left the road, and followed the river into the basin in the hills where the dam was to be built. From the camp in the basin it would not be hard to gain the Pastures, Seyheng thought cheerfully. Provided they waited until dark.

Provided, also, they were not held before then.

The men around the fugitives must be wondering what this masquerade meant. Not that there was any mystery about it. Clearly their director had joined with the liars. That they had not made any protest could mean only one thing. Their sympathies were not with the Council.

"It would be a good thing," a gruff voice broke into his thoughts, "if it was me that held Philstep's paper." Seyheng turned his head. "The ones at the gate will not look at faces while they read the paper," the grizzled overseer said.

Seyheng nodded. He handed the chit over as the small caravan entered the straight approach to the gate.

Under cover of his cap brim Seyheng peered ahead. There did not seem to be any extra guards. That was a good point,

he felt. Then corrected himself. The guards were not the ones they had to fear. It was the secret ones. His eyes moved to scan the loungers, men recovering from illness, excused work ; boys ; women spinning out a moment of gossip. Three, no—four men who stood more sharply as the pack train approached. Seyheng's free hand slid under his jacket.

Another beast, stepping out faster than Seyheng's charge, pulled across his vision. He swung his head, saw Mona and her animal flanked on the other side. He felt a warmth in his heart. This labour gang was making sure that the messengers were going to be cheated. His hand came away from his gun, and he stood patiently in the centre of the group while the overseer went forward.

The examination seemed to go on for ever. Eventually the foreman turned, and lifted his arm, and they lumbered forward through the gate, and plodded off along the road.

When they were out of earshot, "They speaked that I should not lose Philstep's paper," the overseer grunted. "Which speaks there are other watchers. It would not be wise if a man and a woman were to step off the road. Until the dark came."

Seyheng nodded. "I did not get that there were so many not on the Council line," he hinted.

There was a ripple of laughter. "The Council does not get this either," the overseer answered. "It will not get this until Sonjo bring the Pastures to Shiptoun."

Seyheng checked in his stride. "Now how is it you have word of that ?" he asked.

A hand pushed him from behind. "Walk *and* speak," a voice advised.

The overseer winked. "Does Seyheng calculate that he is the only one who has reason to be a liar ?" he demanded. "Though it was good wit to have word with the scouts as Seyheng had word."

Seyheng gaped, and again the labourers laughed.

"Above the room with bars," the overseer explained, "is the roof. Under the roof, out of sight, is a new thought. A thing that listens. Put there when the bars were set in place." He looked innocently at the sky. "It was not calculated that the Council should hear of this new thing."

"How does it work ?" Seyheng asked humbly.

"An electric," the overseer grinned. He and his men were delighted at the wonder in the faces of the new recruits. "It is not only those who wear white cloth who look for new things," he triumphed mildly.

His voice changed, becoming taut. "There is more need for speed," he said. "With this thing, at first light, Birkla was heard to speak to Haljon and Alla Jonsey that this is their last day. To speak this herself she climbed the stairs. That their discipline will come when the darkness ends."

"Hengsi's word was five days," Mona's head jerked up. She looked at Seyheng, saw that he was not surprised at this news.

"When Daymor was taken," the dark man said, "things changed for the Council. I read Hengsi's mind on this."

The overseer scowled. "I calculate Daymor has speaked that many are not on the Council line. To fear those, the Council will show them a hard discipline on the scouts."

"Can we do nothing more?" Mona asked from her misery.

The overseer shook his head. "The Council House is full with Hengsi's men. We must walk as we walk now. Not giving suspicion. Until the dark comes. Then, if we are swift, and the Pastures are swifter, enough men may come to Shiptoun to make the Council unsay its judgment. But, until the dark comes, we must not step aside from this road."

The small group plodded on in the dry heat. Occasionally a troop of riders swung by. When that happened, the group closed up, gave all its attention to the beasts. None except the overseer lifted his face to the messengers. Mile by slow mile they trod nearer to the camp. The day wore on, eating up the hours which they could not use. As the night would fly, in which each must ride like a fiend. The night, perhaps, would not be long enough.

Was there nothing else they could do Seyheng asked himself? And answered that there was not. Only determined men, prepared to use their arms, could halt this hag-ridden, fearful Council. How many people had it murdered? How many more must still die? Because the bigot minds of Hengsi and Birkla would not accept that there could be any other road except the one they indicated.

How much effort and thought had they stultified because it was beyond them? What was there in their make-up that made them refuse to admit that they had failed? That made them react so viciously, ruthlessly destroying those who challenged their rulings? Was it that they knew themselves to be insufficient, but could not bear to have it proved? So that,

to cover up their lack, they would go to any lengths. That was more than obstinacy, that was madness.

If it were only a matter of delaying progress until this Council fell, the nation could endure that. Not easily. Never easily. But, if there were no other solution, then it could be done. But not with the other threat added, the danger from across the pass. The nation could not endure both. To be at odds within at a time when it needed to be whole because of the enemy without.

"Will Jonwel watch while the scouts are disciplined?" one of the labourers asked.

"I calculate he will," the dark man answered. "It suits him so. After, he will claim that the scouts should have answered to him, but that Hengsi outspoke him. He will bring Hengsi down on that."

"Jonwel works his own line," the overseer confirmed. "He, also, is against the liars. For he will fall also if the people pull down the Council. He calculated the Council must fall at *his* speak that Hengsi disciplines too freely. He will call all the levies to put down Hengsi, then have them under his hand to war on the Jonners."

"Under Hengsi, it is war on the people," Mona said bitterly. "Under Jonwel, the war is on the Jonners."

"That is why it is the people who must speak," the overseer finished.

Ahead of them dust moved, drawing nearer, background to a mounted figure that grew rapidly larger.

"One wearing leather," Seyheng reported. "Coming from the pass."

"Spread," the overseer commanded. "So that he must stop."

In a moment the road was blocked, and kept so as they moved forward, so that the rider must draw rein or take a fall.

"One side!" he roared at them.

"Are the Jonners so close," the overseer bawled back. "Have they chased you over the hills?" He grinned, holding up a flask. "Wet your tongue," he invited. "Then you can curse us better."

The rider reached down, lifted the flask, and swigged.

Then, "No Jonners," he reported. "They hunt, moving away from the pass. They will not bring war this season." He reached back the flask.

"Good speak," the overseer applauded. "Worth that jar. If you have left a swallow in it."

"Two," the scout laughed. He hung the flask on the saddle. "I will remember you when I take them." He urged his mount through the gap they opened for him, and thundered on his way once more.

"The speak the Council wants to hear," the overseer commented. "The Council will make sure that Jonwel gets that the Jonners do not prepare war. Which Jonwel will want them to unsay. But—how will he move to make that come? How will the Council move to make Jonwel hear its judgment. These are things we do not get."

"Is it Hengsi who calculates how to strike?" Seyheng asked. "Or is it Birkla?"

The overseer shrugged. "The messengers hear Birkla. And she hears Hengsi." He rubbed his chin irritably. "Our speak is talk only. Not getting who hears who as we walk."

It was the same for the Council, Seyheng reasoned. Not knowing just what forces might be gathering against it. And, for that very reason, more fearful, more vicious. Yet, in that, there was an advantage for the rebels. Since the Council was unsure, a bold stroke might succeed. Particularly if there were men in Shiptoun, like these labourers, who would rally to a rescue. In fact, that was their best hope. Perhaps their only hope. Since the numbers they could raise during the night would not be enough to overcome the messengers by themselves.

They would have to overcome them, one way or another. For if they failed they were all dead. There would be no mercy for any one of them. People with minds that did not allow them to calculate that there could ever be more than one line were not people who could understand mercy.

The three prisoners, lying in the cell above the Council Room, had reason to know that the Council did not practice mercy. Slowly, his breath hissing, on trembling hands and knees, Haljon crossed the floor to where Alla lay. Past Daymor, lying still. He could not help Daymor. The flogging designed to open the older man's lips had closed them permanently. Fortunately for the other two. Whose own punishment was halted lest they, too, should pass too soon out of the Council's power.

As would certainly have happened, Haljon thought, if it had gone on for much longer. He halted at Alla's side, staring down at her bare back, as torn and bloody as his was. Or almost so. But it was the hurt in her mind that would be the more grievous. For it was the gross Morep who had elected himself to be her persecutor. Who had wielded his scourge less times than his fellows dealing with the men. And with less force. Yet had inflicted a greater hurt. Pausing, in between the blows, to talk.

There was little Haljon could do to ease her. There was water, and some of this he used. Gently. Until she stirred, and, moving, cried out in pain.

Later—"Is it time?" she asked.

He bent his head, searching her face. Her wide eyes looked back at him without recognition. She was hot under his hand, and restless.

"It would be kinder," he thought, "if she died. So that she will not suffer when the light comes again."

His hands moved almost of themselves. If he took her throat, and held it, would that not be more merciful? But, even as the impulse came, he put it aside. He could not take her chance from her. The hope that Seyheng had staked his life to bring to them. The chance that men were daring the messengers to make.

Only—his hands lifted again—Seyheng had speaked five days, and the Council had unsayed this. Would Seyheng know that the Council had stolen three days? And, if he did know, could he bring help so early?

Surely Seyheng knew. His hands drifted down once more. Slowly the day ended.

In that dark Shiptoun did not sleep, waiting for the light. Hengsi and Birkla waited. But Jonwel, in his headquarters, would outwait them. The Council runners could not pass the guards to come to him, to deliver the Council's summons to the judgment. "The Captain is busy," the sentries answered. "He cannot hear you now."

"He calculates to wreck the Council," Birkla stormed when this failure was reported. "He will speak that this judgment was not his. That the discipline was for the Captain of Levies to judge. He will speak that to the people against us."

"To speak to the people," Hengsi whispered, "he must come inside the gates. When he does that, he will not return

outside them." He smiled brightly. "I have prepared the gates for when he comes. After that there will be no one who will calculate that a Captain of Levies may take a different line from the others of the Council."

He leaned back in his chair. "When the liars are all done," he said, "when Jonwel is disciplined, we shall get that these things were needed. To spill out all the poison. After this, when all the people are truly on the right line, Shiptoun will be stronger. It will not be a long climb to the stars then." He smiled at the woman standing beside him, her hands twisted. "Do you also calculate how it must be to drive among the stars?" he questioned. "How we will see, and, perhaps, change in ourselves with seeing?"

"I do not calculate so far," she denied. "Always I see to-day's work only."

There was wonder in Hengsi's face at this. "How is it that you are on the right line if you do not?" he asked. "When some who calculate choose wrong."

She shrugged, and Hengsi, smiling, turned back happily to the charts and other treasures the First Council had left, and forgot her.

After a while she went out, and climbed the stairs. To check that the captives were secure. To make sure that both they and their guards knew what the Chief Maintainer had commanded for the coming day.

With Morep beside her she stood looking down at the fevered Alla. "It will be wrong if she does not wake in time," she said.

Haljon, crouching over the fevered girl, cursed her, and she listened. Morep moved, and she put her hand across his way. "No," she told the messenger. "His tongue does no more wrong. Not here. Not to us. Who do not hear him because we are on the right line."

She turned with the guard, and the door clanged behind them, and Haljon was left to his vigil.

Then, eventually, the light began coming, faster and faster, and the door of the cell opened. But the messengers had no key to unlock Alla's fever, and, grumbling, they must carry her down the stairs, and into the open. Must carry her through the gathering people, thrusting them aside, driving Haljon along in their ranks, to where the Chief Maintainer and Birkla waited beside the Ship. To the two posts set in the baked ground beside the platform on which the Council stood, robed and

attended. Where they fastened them, Alla not knowing what they did.

"The judgment of the Council on these liars." Hengsi's thin voice stilled the crowd's growing note. "Who would break down the work the first Council began, Who would escape the duty we have to restore all that was as it was. To die by the weapon of Burke Halwell as did others he disciplined for the same offence."

A messenger came from the Ship carrying a case of gleaming, polished wood. Brought it to the Chief Maintainer. Birkla's hands lifted the lid. There was silence in the square. But there was movement also as Hengsi took the gun from its case, turned it, and gave it to the one who stood at his left hand. Haljon, upright against the post, free to turn his head alone, strained his eyes to see across the throng. If it were help, it drove too slowly through the press. For already the executioner had turned, and was coming down the platform steps.

Haljon moved his head, twisting to look up at the judges. At Hengsi. At Birkla. Unforgiving. Righteous. Expectant. With their avid adherents around them.

"First—the woman."

"No!" Haljon strained against the post. "Me!" he cried. If delay could still save either of them, even a moment's delay, let that one be Alla.

The executioner paid no heed to Haljon's call, halted before Alla. Slid his feet, and poised himself. His hand came up.

The front rank of the people split. Men sprang through the gap. Too late. Burke Halwell's gun roared.

Far off, someone screamed. Not far off. Close by. An outraged stricken, insane sound. Then the executioner was falling, his face pouring blood, the shattered stock of the too long unused weapon, too seldom tended, falling from his fingers. The light beat down on the crowd, for one instant held amazed, in craning, stooped, unbalanced attitudes; dumb, shocked as the Council on the platform. On the two figures tethered to the two posts, on the dead messenger on the hard, bare ground, on the rescuers, grim and angry, their guns in their hands.

Then the dam of people was breached a dozen times, and more men erupted to face the messengers. With more behind them. Resolute, not to be overawed, trembling for one sign to unleash their rage on those who killed in secret.

But Birkla, plucking Hengsi's sleeve, drew him back from the edge of the platform. Behind the screen of messengers, standing like threatened beasts, heads down, teeth showing, snarling at the rebels.

"Down and away." Seyheng's voice, Seyheng's dark face, anxious. "How much hurt?"

"My back. Alla also."

The dark face darkened more. But his voice stayed low. "Carry them with care," he commanded.

Chapter VI

The invaders drew back. Off the square, among the buildings. Posting squads at the beginning of the roads where they commanded the open space.

"In here." Mona's voice. The door of a house was flung open. Alla was carried in, laid down. Then Haljon. Gently their shirts were cut away, so that all saw what had been done.

"For this—!" a gruff voice snarled, and there was a surge towards the door.

"Wait!" Haljon forced himself up. "Hear me first."

They checked, unwilling, looking back.

"Hengsi is mad." Haljon's tongue stumbled around the words. "Press him, and he will not stop to calculate what comes after."

"The engines?" Seyheng came back to where Haljon lay. "He would do that?"

"If you hear me," Haljon muttered, "Shiptoun is no place for us."

The men around waited.

"If Hengsi gets what we do," Haljon said, "he will take the sure way to unsay this. If he kills all Shiptoun. So I speak we go, all who are on the same line."

"It will take time," Seyheng answered doubtfully. "To load all that it will be good for us to have."

"Time is a weapon for Hengsi," Haljon said.

"And for Jonwel," the overseer added. "Jonwel will want to unsay this also." He turned to the men behind him. "A cart and beasts," he ordered. "To carry these." He looked at Seyheng, and chuckled. "The machines were marked before this," he said. "And," he paused for effect, "are already being lifted."

Haljon let himself slide back. "It seems you have made time," he whispered. "But—be sure the messengers do not break your lines, and get what you do." His eyes closed. "If—you can hold Hengsi—until—until—" His voice died away.

Systematically the rebels organised the stripping of the city, while Hengsi and Birkla and their forces held back, waiting to repulse the onset they were sure was coming. Towards dusk the exodus began. With men strung out on either flank, and a mounted body under Seyheng covering the rear. Alongside the wagons the women marched with the elder children. Only the elder people and the infants were permitted to ride. Haljon, conscious once more, but confined to his cart by command of his fellows, had been adamant on this point.

"This march is for those who will walk a hard road," he told them. "Who will not put many in danger because of their own softness. So, if any will not hear this, let them stay."

It would be in his mind always, Haljon thought. The faces of those who were not coming. The men and the women watching as the carts rolled out through the gates of Shiptown. The silence. The uneasiness of those who would not dare the move, yet could not disguise their discomfort over what the Council might do to those who had not tried to halt the liars as they left.

He put this out of his mind when Mona, kneeling beside the prostrate Alla, touched his shoulder. The road ahead was throwing up dust, thickly, indicating the coming of a large body. The caravan, straggling and unsure, milled and halted. On the wings the flanks drew in. Seyheng's rearguard, pounding forward at top speed, reached the tangled core, and could get no farther.

"Hengsi?" Mona asked. "Or Jonwel?"

Haljon did not answer. He was watching the left flank, nearest to the coming riders. If they opened fire—

But their own men were throwing up their arms, waving madly. Their voices carried to the carts, jubilant and boisterous.

"Sonjo!" Mona exclaimed "He has brought the Pastures."

Haljon, taut, staring at the newcomers, estimating their numbers quivered with relief. Now they were secure. Now, if Jonwel moved his levy, he would fail. Even with the Council messengers beside him as well.

He looked up at the overseer, riding next to the cart. "We will halt on that ridge," he said. "Facing Shiptoun. The new men have come fast. Let them stay behind us to rest unless they are needed. I do not calculate Jonwel will move. But let Seyheng and his men watch the road back to Shiptoun. So we are covered on both sides."

Obediently the overseer wheeled his beast, and Haljon lay back once more. When the light came again he must be on his feet. Until then, the wisest thing was to rest.

"Haljon."

His head came round, his eyes wide. Alla was awake, alive ! He flung himself towards her.

"Softly," Mona warned.

"You are back," Haljon whispered. He touched her cheek with his fingers.

Her lips quivered. "They have hurt you, Haljon." Her eyes, enormous and dark were on his face that was gaunt, the skin tight over the high bones. "I read it in you."

He moved his head, denying this. "My worst hurt was you," he said. He smiled, slowly, but with light growing behind the smile. "Now—I am no longer hurt. Now you are back."

She gave the slightest nod, then her eyes closed.

"She will sleep," Mona assured him. "That is best for her."

Haljon swallowed. "I was feared—"

"No more," Mona answered. "Now, let Hengsi fear." She raised herself, looking out over the encampment. Her eyes were hard. "With the men from the Pastures we can have our judgment," she said harshly.

He did not reply. Instead, he waited for the leaders to come as they would surely come, bringing the same mind to the meeting.

Seyheng came first, sitting his beast, saying nothing. Then the overseer. Another rider, impatient, standing in his stirrups, searching among the throng, saw Mona, and swung his mount towards the cart.

"You go the wrong road," Sonjo called in greeting.

They would all be on that line, Haljon thought. He was weary. Very weary. But he could not let his weariness be a first thing. Afterwards he could think of how weary he was. Now he must bring them to a new line.

"We have enough men to clean Shiptoun," Sonjo challenged.

"It will clean itself," Haljon said.

"Without us," Mona was fierce, "it will not be cleaned. For those who have been disciplined it must be cleaned. By us who are strong enough to do this."

Haljon's hands took the side of the cart, lifted him until he stood. "You will hear me on this," he told them, "if you will come the way we have scouted. Clean or not clean, Shiptoun serves us. Because of the Jonners over the hills. Who must pass Shiptoun to come to us." He stared at them out of sunken eyes. "If we judge the Council, and discipline it, Shiptoun becomes too weak to be our fence."

"And our dead ones?" Mona grated.

"They will have more dead for company if we go back." He spoke, not to the leaders only, but to those who gathered round the cart, listening. "Those who go back," he told them, "stay. With those who feared to come away."

"We are not feared," Sonjo snapped.

Painfully the scout kept himself from falling, made himself answer. "Are you so strong you can stop from judging?" he questioned. "Collecting only what was done bad so that you do only good for the people. Are you so strong for that?" He wrestled with the words which did not wish to come off his tongue. "Which is not a quick thing, but a hard thing, lasting as long as you last." He could hold this position a little more, he told himself. A little more. "Do not speak now," he told them. "But, when the light comes, those who calculate they are strong for this, we will go on."

He turned his head towards Mona. "If you will help me to sit?" he said.

She took his weight without a word.

Then, when he was down, before he remembered how weary he was :

"You will wish to speak with the others on this," he said to her.

Mona, her eyes on Seyheng where he sat his beast in silence, did not answer quickly. But the dark man gave her no sign, and she understood that he waited for her to speak what was her mind. Slowly she spoke. "I have work to do here," she said slowly. She turned her head at that to look down at Alla, and lifted her eyes again afterwards to Seyheng.

To see his face clear, to be glad, that, over-riding her loss, she had spoken as he had hoped she would speak.

"That will be for my answer also," the dark man addressed Haljon, and smiled at Mona, and wheeled his beast, and rode away.

The overseer grunted. "One left," he said. He stared at the young Sonjo. "And you," he said. "Will you come work fire for us in your father's place, or do you go spill it in Shiptoun?"

"No," Haljon muttered. "Do not calculate for him with his father's mind. Let him speak what is his when the light comes. Not now, with you judging for him."

The overseer frowned. But Sonjo, turning his mount, looked back at Haljon with a new interest as he went.

"You will have him also," Mona commented. She, too, looked at Haljon as though she saw him for the first time. "It could be that you will win many with your line."

"It is my road to win them," Haljon answered, before his head went down.

To sleep, oblivious of everything, while those whom he would lead to a new home stood guard through the night. Against Hengsi's counterstroke, or Jonwel's, delivered in cold rage on rebels who turned their faces from what was ordained for them. On gullible peasants, and disgruntled labourers, and, most venial of all, those wearers of white cloth, who, from vanity, had given their support to the traitors Haljon and Alla Jonsey, liars and bastardisers, by their own admission liars and bastardisers, and judged to be disciplined for those crimes.

So, all that dark, the fugitives stood to arms. Against the wrath and the vengeance of the Council. The Council which was split, as irrevocably as Shiptoun had been split.

As Jonwel, Captain of Levies, had sent word to the Chief Maintainer. Bitterly. Speaking that what had happened was the blame of Hengsi and of Birkla, and of them only. On whom, when the Fourth Levy returned, judgment would be done. Meanwhile, before the Jonners learned how Shiptoun had been weakened, this levy marched. To do the Jonners such hurt that they would be in no case to cross the hills themselves.

Grimly, knowing the odds, the Fourth Levy drove through the pass.

Exultant, grinning scouts brought the news to Jon, standing with Rane a little apart from the other chiefs.

Jon smiled. "It is as we calculated," he said. "They aim at Jonville, straight across our path." He looked at his brother. "Before the light goes, Jonwel will be finished," he promised.

He turned towards the chiefs. "Baro," he called, and a grey bearded man came forward. "You do not fight in this war, Baro," Jon told him.

The older man stiffened with resentment.

"Not *this* war," the leader repeated. "This war is won already." His voice deepened. "But, the war after this, and the next war, my son must fight." He lifted his hand, and let it fall. "It can happen I will not be here to grow him. So—I have chosen you to do this in my place."

Baro tugged at his beard. "After this war—?" he suggested.

"For my satisfaction—" Jon insisted, "—now."

Rane laughed. "The boy is like his father. I warn you. To grow him, Baro, will be worse than three wars."

The chief snorted. "I will grow him," he said. "But, if he is another Rane, the Jonners will not thank me for that."

Jon clapped him on the shoulder. "Go with my thanks," he said.

The other chiefs had edged closer, and Jon, turning from the departing Baro, smiled at their eagerness. "We will go as we calculated," he told them, and they went without waiting for further instruction.

The day advanced. Jonwel's levy topped a smooth ridge, crossed the road running along the crest, and started down towards the river. The Captain drew his mount to one side.

"Jonville before the light goes," he said.

But his lieutenant's attention was elsewhere. Jonwel's eye followed the pointing finger. The flanking scouts were coming back, flogging their beasts. Behind them came steam trucks, smooth fronted, sweeping along the road at high speed. The second in command spurred his beast, bawling the order to halt, to face the rear. But the trucks were on them before the order could take effect. From openings in the front and the sides gun muzzles slanted out. On the open slope, without cover, the fourth levy was meticulously torn to shreds. Jonwel, blasted to the ground in the first volley did not see the end of his dream, the last vicious or cowering remnants of his force hunted down by mounted men until not one invader was left alive.

"Now we shall see how Shiptoun likes the war she wanted," Rane said thickly, and fell in at Jon's side as the leader turned his mount towards the frontier.

By evening the main body lay before the pass, and Jon called his last council.

"One half will hold the pass," he told his listeners. "One half I take to follow my brother Rane. When we return we shall leave Shiptoun only without which they could not live." His lower lip thrust forward. "As they did to our fathers." He stood up. "Until light, sleep," he commanded, and rode to join the advance guard.

As dawn came Rane's men fanned out into the open country. In support, moving inexorably along the road to Shiptoun, Jon sent the trucks. The rest of his force he swung in an arc, to take Shiptoun from the rear. But, by his command, wide of the city.

"When do we fight?" the chiefs with him complained.

He stared back grimly. "Did you not hear my word to Rane my brother?" he demanded. "That he should take whatever war Shiptoun can still find." He shook his head. "We do not close except word comes from Rane," he said.

The day wore on.

Until, riding furiously, a messenger came. "Rane," he choked.

"What does he need?" Jon asked.

"Nothing," the rider answered bitterly. "Now."

"Speak," Jon said.

"Between here and Shiptoun the land is empty. We came to the gate, and Rane went forward, calling for them to open. Or have us do this for them. They speaked him small, swearing no hurt. The gates opened for Rane, and ten with him, and in he went."

"Then?"

"They came back. Over the fence. Lying where Shiptoun's men threw them."

As one all heads turned to Jon.

He nodded. "Now I unsay," he told them. "For this we leave them nothing. We stamp them flat." His voice was bleak. "March," he ordered.

The column wheeled, driving for the town. On the road the trucks and footmen would still be moving slowly. A galloper went to bring them the change of plan. On the last slopes

Jon's cavalry halted. Until a flare burned red, reporting the readiness of the army on the road. An answering flare, leaping skywards at Jon's word, signalled them to the assault.

The trucks surged forward, sweeping at the gate. The leading vehicles, striking at full speed, spilling over, crumpling, blossomed flame. The sagging barrier caught. The dried timber, showered with burning debris, leaped into destructive life, opening the way. The second wave, coughing, lurching, spitting shells, rolled through the gap. The mounted men followed. The footmen stormed the houses one by one.

In the minds of the Jonners, driving remorselessly towards where the red needle of the ship towered above the sound and flame and thickening smoke, the war was won. In the minds of the inhabitants, scurrying vainly for shelter from the ruthless hunters, the war was lost before it had begun.

In one mind only was there another thought. In the Ship was the weapon against which the barbarians could not stand, and Morep, at his post within the Ship, barred the lock against any invader, waiting the word from the Chief Maintainer should that be needed. As, Hengsi admitted, it was now needed. The other defences of Shiptoun had given before the Jonners. Now it was the Jonners who would give.

The enemy gained the edge of the square, gathering themselves for the drive across the open space.

Birkla, calm faced, stretched out her arm to point as the last defenders of the fence fell under the triumphant riders. "It is time," she said.

"It is time," Hengsi agreed, and the bodyguard of the Council closed its ranks, and broke from the Council House.

"The smoke hides us," Birkla said.

The messengers, guns forward, took heart. "The engines will turn them," they told themselves. They ran, behind and around the Chief Maintainer, steadily closer to the Ship.

But a wind, blowing strongly, drifted the smoke aside, and the mounted Jonners, seeing the robes of the Chief Maintainer, yelled aloud, and drove for their prey.

At the Ship the messengers turned to meet the charge. While Hengsi and Birkla climbed the stairs. Below them, one by one, the messengers fell. Now they were dead, and the exultant Jonners swarmed over their bodies. Up the ladder to the platform. To where Hengsi and Birkla, pounding at the lock, could not make Morep hear. Gleefully the Jonners gathered them, wrenched them back, dragged them down, hauled them,

twisting and struggling and frenzied, to where a stone-faced Jon sat his beast while Shiptoun burned.

"One inside who would not open for them," they announced. "Whom we shall have when we can break the door. The rest—dead."

"The engines," Hengsi slavered. "I will start the engines. I will destroy this filth."

The Jonners shrieked with laughter. "Let us have them," they begged.

"Take them," Jon permitted.

He did not watch as his followers pulled Hengsi and Birkla to the ground, staked them out, and tore away their robes. When they brought wood, and laid it around the two, cunningly, placing it with practiced hands. When Birkla, understanding what they did, screamed and wept. When Hengsi, understanding nothing, except that he was prevented from his purpose, strained scrawny arms and legs against the stakes.

When the first small flames explored their food, tasting it; here and there, and Birkla's screams mounted uncontrollably higher. When Hengsi, provoked by his body's hurt, howled and squirmed.

Still Jon sat, unmoved, not looking down, looking only at the red ship where men, drunk with excitement, pounded at the lock.

The end of a dream, the mounted man reflected. The dream of many men, all long dead. After this day, tradition ended. Under his will, the people of this world destroyed the link with their kin on worlds so distant they could not be identified among all the worlds that filled the sky. After to-day, this world was on its own. To build its own life in its own strength.

His eyes dropped for one moment in response to a more intense scream of agony from the woman. That, he thought in a detached fashion, was Birkla. And the madman was Hengsi. Who between them, not willing it, had destroyed their own people. His lips twisted. What would this madman have done if he had succeeded in getting to the engines? What *were* the engines, of which they had heard so often, and of which they knew so little? His head lifted once more, and he nodded. The men hammering at the lock would have the door down soon, and they would see these engines. They would see inside the Ship which had brought their fathers to this world.

The Ship, though, that must remain. Shiptoun they would raze, but not the Ship. The Ship belonged to all, whether Jonner or man from the Pastures. The Ship would remain always to remind them of their common heritage. It would be the symbol he would use to hold the two nations together. Make one people of them—a new people—one with understanding and vision and mutual trust. A people strong enough to win their way back to the stars.

The door was yielding. In a few moments it would break, and they would set foot inside the Ship.

Inside the steel needle the gross man cowered before his god. Hearing the last rasping surrender of the steel which stood between him and death from those who had destroyed his town and his people and his prophet Hengsi.

Hengsi, the false prophet, who had deserted the engines ; had not dared to call them to life when the Jonners came. As he had always sworn he would do. Who had failed the engines. Which needed the word of the Chief Maintainer to set them free to turn their power against the defilers. Hengsi, who had spat upon the engines, scorning their invincible power because he was jealous of their power. Who had not come himself, as was his duty, but had sent a lesser man to stand watch.

“But—I am a Maintainer also,” Morep cried. He swung his head from one side to the other. “If there is no other, am I not the Chief Maintainer if that one does not come? If he is dead, perhaps, because he followed the wrong line? If all Shiptoun is dead beyond me?”

He began to walk forward, towards the engines, bulking on their mighty bed, silent, impassive, cold. But—latent with power. Power to destroy the enemy, all the enemy, wiping them away as nothing.

“As only Chief Maintainer,” Morep mouthed, “I speak, unsaying what the Jonners do.”

His hands touched the engines, moving to the points the Manual named.

“Because Hengsi has failed, not coming in good time, there is not time left to build-up as the Manual speaks. The engines must speak, and speak with speed.”

The door gave. The tribesman leaped through into the chamber. And the gross figure in white cloth turned his head and smiled at them as he laid his hand upon the lever.

“Speak now,” he said aloud, and leaned with all his weight upon the release.

The engines spoke.

On the Forbidden Way the march halted.

There was a light leaping into the sky behind them. Then a sound. Brightness beyond imagination. Sound more awful than the greatest storm. As they cowered, the cloud of which they had been told, the cloud they had thought never to see, of which they had been told by their fathers who had never seen it, rose up from behind the hills they had crossed.

"What was it we must not do?" they murmured. "If the light, and the sound, and the cloud should happen, we must not return to Shiptoun. Not us nor our children nor theirs. Because of the radiation which kills without being seen, or smelt, or sensed."

"We turn our backs," Haljon called. "Speak that along the march. We turn our backs, and go on. To build our ladder to the stars."

—Clifford C. Reed

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THE SAVAGE ONE

by ROBERT PRESSLIE

Illustrated by LEWIS

He was conceived in abandon, born in the gutter and raised in an alley. Yet he climbed out of his environment, stood on it and built a kingdom of crime and corruption which he ruled like a tyrant. He lived without fear and died with a defiant curse on his lips. In the death cell he laughed at the padre. In the lethal chamber he spat in the face of his executioner.

"Repent?" he asked the padre. "What the hell for? Whatever I did was done because I wanted it that way. Go back to your tea-parties and leave me to my supper!"

He told the executioner about the padre and in the telling he made the incident sound like an obscene joke.

"You didn't intend this," jeered the executioner when the warders had gone and Kramer lay strapped to the pallet of the disintegrator.

"A miscalculation," Kramer said cheerfully. "They got me for the only mistake I ever made. So what? I'm here now

and there's nothing I can do about it. Do your stuff, man. Don't keep the angels waiting !"

The executioner checked the power meters and the vibration readings. He peered over his glasses at the banks of glowing tubes and appeared satisfied with what he saw. Over his shoulder, he said :

"Still maintaining your reputation for toughness, eh ? I wonder how much you're bluffing, how much of your act is bravado—"

"I never bluff," said Kramer flatly.

"Never ? Do you know what will happen when I press this button ? You'll be taken apart, instantaneously and completely. Not just limb from limb, or even cell from cell. Every atom of your body will be riven from its neighbour and then the atoms will be disrupted and reduced to pure energy. One jab with my finger and you'll be feeding the city's power lines, doing the first useful thing in your life."

Kramer smiled with one side of his mouth. "The street lights will burn bright tonight," he boasted. "Watch out I don't blow the fuses !"

The executioner gave Kramer a calculating look. "You're tough," he acknowledged. "Let's see just how tough you are—"

Slowly, deliberately, he raised his hand and poised it over the button. Kramer watched without blinking. There was silence. Quite suddenly, and with the speed of a striking snake, the executioner stabbed his thumb at the button.

At the last split second he twisted his hand aside to miss the button and slapped the switchboard with a loud clap that went resounding round the bare stone walls of the lethal chamber and shattered the brief silence into a thousand sobbing echoes.

Kramer's lean cheeks were sucked into dark trenches. His eyes burned with the acid of undiluted hate. He unleashed the acid in a mouthful of obscenities.

When he had said all he had to say, he fouled the executioner's face with spittle. Strangely, the other was smiling as he wiped himself with a handkerchief.

"You'll do," he said cryptically and moved his hand again. This time he did not miss.

Kramer was sure of one thing. The place was not Hell.

The walls of the room were white. They had the whiteness of alabaster, the same appearance of being able to turn translucent if they so wished.

It was a big room. It could have been a room in a hospital. It could have been the embalming room of a mortuary. Except that there was no furniture. No beds. No formalin jars.

And as Kramer came out of the mists of unconsciousness, he thought he heard the last babbling of suppressed laughter. He wondered if the room was part of a college for the crazy.

Then he remembered that he was supposed to be dead. It was insane to think he was alive, so maybe his last guess was right.

He shook his head, tried to make sense of the facts. If he was alive, he must be mad ; if he was sane, he must be dead. He stretched out on the white floor, laid his head against the cool surface and waited for his head to clear.

One wall was still in his line of vision. In the centre of the wall, a space appeared, just as if the opaque alabaster had become glass. Through the space, a man stepped. Kramer sized him up as he approached.

He was a dapper little man. In full possession of his faculties, Kramer could have killed him with one blow. In his present state, he decided to play a passive line until he knew the score. He also decided he was not going to like the little man.

"Glad to see you made the trip successfully, Kramer—"

"Why?"

Kramer asked the question in a flat, noncommittal tone. It put the little man off his stride.

"What d'you mean, why? Most of them are glad to be alive."

Kramer's expression did not change. He gave no sign that he had learned he was not the first to cheat the lethal chamber.

"I asked why you were glad—what's it to you?"

The little man frowned. He lifted one hand in a vague signal. In response to this, the walls changed further. The featureless white darkened into shapes until the room was fully furnished.

"A clever trick," Kramer commented. "You should be on the stage." He took a long slow look around him. "Nice laboratory you've got."

The view shimmered once more and the laboratory was peopled by about a dozen men. One of them was the man who had taunted Kramer in the death chamber.

He said, "The trick is ours, not Crispin's." He sounded peeved that the little man had been given the credit.

"You should all be on the stage!" was Kramer's reply.

"I see the journey has not altered your character. That's good."

Kramer felt strong enough to stand up. He did it slowly, used the time to think. He had an idea he was being deliberately teased; they wanted him to ask questions, then they would answer if they felt like it. He looked at them impassively, determined not to oblige.

His lack of curiosity displeased the executioner. He barked a word which Kramer did not catch. And apart from Crispin, the others ceased to look like men. Maintaining his deadpan expression, Kramer had to admit it was an effective trick, one that would have shaken most people into babbling terror.

He gave them a slow handclap.

"Not bad," he said. "But I remember a man who used to fill a stage with wild horses. He used mirrors too."

It was the late executioner who yielded first.

"Fool!" he ranted. "Conceited Earth-animal! Don't you realise we have complete control of your mind? First you saw nothing. Then we allowed Crispin to become visible. And when we appeared as men, that too was only because we wished it. Now you see us as we are, a mighty race of—"

Kramer cut in. "You don't have to apologise," he said. "We can't all be handsome."

"—Conquerors!" the other screamed. "Mighty enough to rule the universe and mighty enough to steal the cream of Earth's fighters to help us do it!"

"And so almighty conceited you think you've got a monopoly on brains!"

Kramer walked over to the beetle-black thing that was shaped like a man. He looked it up and down, noting the differences. The head was longer than it was high, so that it was like the head of a fly. The lips were shredded to a flutter of cilia. The torso was wrong way up, so that it widened from narrow shoulders to fat belly. The arms and legs were so thin they looked like metal rods, and the fingers and toes were so long that the hands were without palms, the feet without soles.

Kramer smiled again. "Maybe you don't realise it, but in less than ten minutes you've told me more about yourself than you know about me."

"We know all about you," the other said. "As a product of war, you are an ideal subject. Until your war, you were

nothing. And when your war was over, you were nothing again. The only trade you knew was death. You were a fighter pilot with a high number of kills. But the time came when there was no demand for such abilities. So you became a dealer in surplus arms. A very successful dealer. Until your government, which could not trap you legitimately, caught you on a morals charge."

"It was a frame-up!"

"Certainly, as you learned too late. The girl who was supposed to be an agent for a prospective buyer looked older than she was. And when you found she had tricked you, you killed her—"

"That was the only mistake I ever made."

"And it brought you to the death chamber—from which I rescued you."

Kramer grunted. "Rescued? I'm beginning to wonder."

"You should be grateful."

"If I was dumb, maybe I would be. But now let me tell you what I know. You've got a war on your hands—"

"We always have!"

Kramer acknowledged this with a tilt of his head. He went on, "Okay, so you like making war. But you don't like the personal risk involved. So you import fighters from elsewhere."

Crispin interrupted with an aside. "I told you he was good."

Kramer ignored the remark. "You have an outfit on Earth—maybe on other worlds too—and this outfit tips you off whenever somebody like me is due to be fried. You inveigle your way in so that you rig the disruptor into a transmitter. Instead of being executed, I was sent here. Here being the home planet of a race of spineless rats."

"That's enough," the alien spokesman said.

"It is for me," said Kramer. "If you've got any fighting to be done, do it yourself. I'm not soldiering for you."

Crispin intervened. "I shouldn't argue. You're wasting your time. The set-up is pretty much as you imagine. Most of the immigrants make the same protest. But all of them become soldiers in the end."

"Not me!"

"You will. They've recruited men from Earth and from other planets, even from other times. Some of them have been as tough as you. But none of them were tough enough to face

the alternative. Having died once, they weren't prepared to die again."

"They couldn't have been so tough," Kramer grated.

Crispin shrugged. "You'll see. Actually you have no alternative but to become a soldier. There's nothing these people don't know about controlling the mind."

"I've had a demonstration—"

The alien said, "You have another coming !"

Kramer gave them full marks for their hypnotic powers. He felt nothing, yet in an instant the scene had changed. Whether they had put him to sleep and transferred him under coma, or whether the view was merely a mentally induced picture, he did not know. But he was indubitably being presented with a vision of the outside world.

It was night. He judged that it was early night, because one long wisp of white cloud still trailed across the sky. He stood with the aliens and Crispin at one corner of a vast field.

The field was occupied by an army of machines, stiff and immobile in neat ranks. As Kramer watched, they began to drill.

Each machine was about ten feet high. Their form was roughly cylindrical if the many protuberances were discounted. They moved sometimes on tiny rollers, sometimes on treads, sometimes on stumpy metallic legs—changing their mode of traction accordingly as they moved across differing types of terrain.

At an unheard command, they broke from drilled precision to a random scattering. At the far end of the field, floodlights picked out a group of orange-coloured targets.

None of the orange shapes was the same. They were tall, short, wide, narrow, and they moved erratically and without any predictable change of direction.

The monstrous cylinders began to attack them, closing in with a speed which, for their size, was incredible. The orange shapes seemed alive, they dodged and ducked with such frenzy.

Suddenly the floodlights were put to shame as the cylinders gushed flame from vents about midway up their length.

When Kramer's eyes had accomodated to the brightness, he saw that the mock battle was over. The shapes were gone. Only wisps of smoke curling into the night indicated their last position.

And the machines were scrambling back to take up their former array.

The night was now dark and still. Low in the sky a bright star had appeared. Rather than satisfy the aliens by commenting on the mock battle, Kramer discussed the star.

"I suppose that's where I came from," he said.

"That," said the alien, "is not Sol. Your star is too far to be seen by the naked eye, and it does not lie in that direction. The bright star in the south is Algol. We of Mirfak regard it as our enemy."

"What have they done to you?"

"Done? Nothing. Except that the fourth planet will not yield to us. In a few minutes the sky will be full of stars. And when you look at them, you will be looking at a picture of our empire. We have conquered the planets of ever visible star."

"Except the fourth planet of Algol," Kramer said.

"Precisely. And that is why you have been included in our latest recruiting campaign. To help us win that planet. To become a Soldier of Mirfak."

Kramer detected the capital letter to the word Soldier.

He said, "You make it sound like a profession. But I don't see how you need soldiers when you've got them—" He pointed to the motionless machines in the field.

"Those," the alien purred, "are some of our Soldiers."

"You mean you've got a man inside each of those things?"

"Some of them are men, some are equally intelligent but don't look like men since they come from other planets."

Kramer's face was rocky as he said, "You can count me out, mister."

The alien seemed unconcerned, even secretly pleased. "There is an alternative. Those who refuse to become Soldiers become targets."

Kramer's face got harder still. "So the orange things had men in them too—?"

"Not *in* them. They *were* them. Suitably altered biologically to represent the various creatures we are likely to encounter in our campaigns."

"You don't change my mind," Kramer grated. "You can make a target of me before I'll lift a finger to help you."

"We don't think so. You're the type that makes a good Soldier. You'd be surprised at the ones who didn't. That Hitler person now, the one that your people believed to have committed suicide. He was hopeless. He didn't even make a good target."

Kramer's only comment was, "You've been operating longer than I thought."

"A lot longer. If we wished, we could take the whole planet."

"Why don't you?"

"Economic reasons. It is too far away for us to maintain an adequate army of occupation. Besides—can you tell me anything on Earth that is worth having?"

"Guts!" Kramer said. "The guts to fight our own battles instead of using others to do the fighting for us."

The alien purred again. "You *are* intelligent. You've named the very reason for our preference for Terran Soldiers. You did a good job on this one, Crispin."

"Crispin?" asked Kramer.

"But of course," the alien said. "We need someone on each of our recruiting planets, someone who knows the customs intimately, we need a finger to point out suitable recruits. Crispin is our Terran finger."

Kramer moved like lightning. He lunged at Crispin, bowling two aliens aside in the process. He wrapped his hands around the thin neck and squeezed.

Then the newly born stars disappeared and he was in a darkness that was blacker than any night.

Time became an uncharted continuity of horror. There were moments when he was sure he was conscious, that no coma could have withheld the terrible onslaughts of pain. There were intervals when he knew he was unconscious—yet wondered how he could know; unless it was the certainty that things were being done to him, atrocities which his protesting body somehow managed to convey to his sleeping brain.

There was a long space when he felt he was being allowed to rest, to heal perhaps. During this period he possessed none of his physical senses. He saw nothing. He was floating in an amorphous limbo.

All he could do was think.

Most of his thinking ran in a channel of hatred against the Mirfakians. He fostered and nourished a determination to get even with them for whatever they had been doing to him.

A lot of his hatred stemmed from the fact that for once his life was not running on the lines he had planned of his own free will. He had always dictated his life. Now it was being dictated for him.

He had not asked for a reprieve from the death sentence. He had not asked to be transported to Mirfak. He had not . . .

There was another blank period then. When it was over, he discovered that two of his senses had returned. He could see Crispin standing before him. He could hear the little man talking. In a moment he was to learn that a third sense had been restored, that he could also feel.

"How d'you like your uniform?" Crispin was asking. After a pause, he added, significantly, "—Soldier!"

While Kramer always struck fast when the right time came, he was never a one for precipitate action. He bided his time, suppressed his hatred for Crispin, and said, "So they got me? I thought the victim was given a choice—"

"Not in your case, boy. You're what I would call officer material. But they don't have ranks in this army. However, they do need Soldiers of exceptional abilities to lead other Soldiers. You might have been stubborn enough to opt to be a target—so they took away the option."

Kramer was noting differences in his restored senses. His eyesight had always been perfect, yet he seemed now to see with a new clarity. And above the sound of Crispin's voice he could hear minute background noises which had never registered on his hearing centre before; he could detect every rustle of Crispin's clothing; when he listened directionally, he could even hear the little man's heartbeats.

"Putting me in a suit of armour doesn't necessarily put me on the Mirfak payroll," he said. "And one of the first things I'm going to do when I get myself out of this can is to kill you, friend."

Crispin simulated admiration. "My," he jibed. "You *are* exceptional. I don't think anyone else has ever come through the Treatment and still managed to retain so much of his own personality."

"Nothing will put me off killing you."

Crispin sighed. "I understand your annoyance, boy. But they had to keep one of their captives in his original shape if he was to be a finger. Don't blame me for that. It could just as easily have been you. I happened to be here first."

"You could have refused."

"But why? I like living, Kramer boy. Much more than I liked dying on the gallows. Can you imagine that sort of death? They rigged the gallows, but for the sake of appearances they had to let me die a little. For ten minutes I hung there, black in the face, only a trickle of air keeping me alive. I don't think

even you would have been tough enough to resist the Mirfakian offer after that."

Kramer said insistently, "I'm going to kill you."

"No, you're not." Crispin's confidence was disturbing. "I have another job here on Mirfak. If you want an equivalent, you could call me a rehabilitation officer. That is the capacity I'm in right now. I'm here to put you wise to your new status, to tell you what you can and cannot do, what you may or may not do."

"You can't tell me not to kill you."

"I don't have to. If you tried it—or tried any action against Mirfak, its people, or its interests—you would die first. That is the first lesson you must learn. Accept it and things will be easy. Fight it and you'll—"

Kramer swung a hand at Crispin, experimentally. He had a brief instant in which to realise that no hand moved in response to the message from his brain. Then he was screaming in agony, an involuntary scream which he could not stifle.

"This," said Crispin coolly, "is the moment of truth. This is the moment when many of our Soldiers crack and become useless—except as targets."

He moved a hand close to Kramer's face.

"Blink!" he said.

Kramer tried to. His vision remained steady and without interruption.

"Lesson two," said Crispin. "You are no longer seeing with your eyes. Your uniform possesses far better optical instruments than your natural ones. They are connected directly to the vision centres of your brain."

"Same with my ears?" Kramer asked tensely.

"The same indeed. Also—as you will learn in time—you will be able to understand more languages than you could believe existed. The Treatment covers ever conceivable contingency, including the fact that it may be necessary for you to converse—for the purpose of extracting information—with any of the peoples who are the enemies of Mirfak."

Kramer was learning something else. He was learning what fear was. Yet he fought it and forced himself to say, "I'll kill you, Crispin."

"Impossible, boy. You can't fight a psycho-block. Try it and you will either suffer extreme agony or die, depending on how hard you try. Somewhere in your right temple is a wire which leads directly to the power unit of your uniform."

"Crispin, if I was out of this mechanised can you wouldn't have the guts to say half of what you've just said."

The little man's laugh was mocking. "If you were winkled out of your uniform this instant, you couldn't do a thing. You see, boy, a lot of alterations have been made to your body, the big tough body you were so proud of."

"What sort of alterations?"

"Well—this machine contains a mass of equipment besides you. Someday, the Mirfakians hope to be able to dispense with the Soldier's body and use only his brain. Meanwhile, they compromise."

Kramer felt another twinge of fear. But he did not betray it as he asked, "Don't stop now. I know your sadistic little mind is just itching to tell me the worst."

"So be it," Crispin giggled. "Without your uniform you are helpless. Since you have no legs, you could not move. Since you have only one hand left, you could not fight. And since most of your motor nerve endings are intimately attached to the servo-mechanism that comprises your uniform, you would die instantly. Do you still want to be a man again?"

Kramer took time out to consider the enormity of his condition. When he saw and heard, it was with the eyes and ears of the machine. When he willed a limb to move, the impulse was passed to the machine and one of its pseudo limbs moved in response. If and when he went into battle on behalf of Mirfak, his brain would plan and order the necessary movements and the machine would execute them. He and the machine were one.

"Crispin," he said quietly. "At the moment I'm stuck. But someday and somehow I'm going to find a way to kill you, if it's the last thing I do!"

"It would be! You can't kill me. You can't kill a Mirfakian. You can only kill their enemies. And you can't even disobey an order. What they tell you to do, you'll do. Unless you want your brains scrambled."

"We'll see, Crispin. We'll see."

The interview ended there ; and with no sense of transition—in time or in space—Kramer found himself in the training field which he had last seen while still a man.

He refused to let the transition worry or startle him. Instead, he used it as one more piece of information : he was learning

that in his present state he was more machine than living flesh and blood ; it appeared that the aliens could switch off his consciousness as easily as switching off a light.

One moment he had been talking to Crispin. The next, he was in line with a whole squad of new Soldiers—and another new fact was learned. Apparently they could switch him out completely and yet keep the part of him that was machine still going. There was no other way to explain his presence on the field, since he doubted that the aliens would go to the trouble of transporting Soldiers there when they could get their under their own steam.

A command cut short his theorising. It was a dual command, he sensed, one part for him and one for the machine. He wondered whether the commands would always be like that or whether it was simply a training device until he and the other rookies had learned to work with their mechanical components.

The command burst into his mind. It told him to scatter, deploy, seek and kill.

He put himself to a test from which he emerged satisfied. He assumed that each Soldier's mechanical equipment was identical and that any difference in individual performance could be chalked up to the man inside.

The command had barely ended when he broke from the ranks. He was halfway down the field before his fellow Soldiers had scrambled.

In the distance, the orange targets had begun to scatter in their scurry to avoid death.

Kramer could see them better than last time. A glance at the sky told him that this too was a night exercise. Yet with his new eyes he could see the targets as clearly as if it was daytime.

He could see them in their monstrous individuality. Some were short and bulky, some were thin, spindly and many-limbed, some had definable heads, some were of an all-over shapelessness with the eyes that appeared and disappeared as first one side and then the other faced in the direction of the oncoming Soldiers.

With the rookies still a hundred yards behind him, Kramer specified his self-imposed test.

The quicker the targets were killed the better it would be for themselves. Kramer decided he would take them all himself—

and unwittingly made the first merciful decision of his entire life.

He did not know which of the targets were human and which had been alien captives from strange worlds. But he did have an astute sense of mob psychology. They would deploy in two ways, he knew. There would be those who would put their faith in the safety of numbers, who would bunch together in the hope that some of them would emerge from the attack alive. And there would be those who would avoid their fellows, in the hope that scattered individuals would be harder to catch.

He took the gregarious first. They had huddled into a corner of the field.

He streaked towards them, admiring as he went the efficiency of his mechanical uniform. As his eyes noted the change of terrain from hard to soft going, he could sense the machine using different forms of locomotion to suit the going.

The targets were massed tightly in the corner. He killed them without stopping.

He skidded down one edge of the field, made a sharp right-angled turn. And as he passed the corner, his solitary hand triggered the jets of searing flame that squirted from his middle.

Turning again, he was facing upfield. He spared an instant to marvel that his hand had automatically found the right control without his having any knowledge of having been told what to do. Then he was rapidly calculating which trajectory would take him to the scattered targets in one uninterrupted run.

His machine responded as fast as he thought and he was zig-zagging up and across the field, mowing down the targets as they came into range.

He counted off the tally. Ten . . . twelve . . . thirteen . . . turned back sharply, only winged that one, finished it, turned again—

To find that the job was finished. About twenty targets had remained alive when he had diverted his course after the bad shot. Now there were none and the total time passed since the issue of the command was only a few seconds, so short a time that most of the rookies were still yards away.

All except one.

Near the cindered targets, with its belly vents still smoking, stood one Soldier.

It said to Kramer, "I thought I was quick ! But you—! I very nearly didn't get any score at all !"

An order came through to re-form ranks. Kramer noted two things. One, no attempt was apparently made to stop free conversation between Soldiers. Two, there was also a certain freedom of movement—as he discovered when he deliberately positioned himself in the ranks next to the Soldier who had spoken to him.

“What do you call yourself?” the other asked.

“Kramer . . . from Earth.”

“Mm! That would make you a humanoid type, eh? My name is Masuda. Without this outfit I would look as unpleasant to you as you would to me. I’m from Algol Two.”

“Algol? Isn’t that where we—”

“—meet the enemy? That’s Algol Four. They’re peaceful types, not hell-raisers like us.”

“You know them?”

“Been there once or twice. Funny people. Live in the ground like plants most of the time. Not like us. We’re never still.”

Kramer asked, “What have they got that makes this mob so keen to annihilate them?”

“Ask me another. I know I wouldn’t have the place as a gift.”

“There must be something before these crazy Mirfakians—” Kramer broke off and shrieked as a bolt of intense pain tore through his brain like a hot wire had skewered him from ear to ear.

He got a personal message from the aliens. “Your performance in the test field was excellent. However this does not permit you to utter sedition. You are a Soldier. The first duty of a Soldier is loyalty.

Kramer gasped his answer. “Where I come from, loyalty is a spontaneous thing, it doesn’t have to be enforced. You’ll never get the kind of loyalty I know from me!”

“Provided we get obedience we are not concerned about how it is obtained.”

Kramer threw a defiant oath. “—yourselves!”

He detected laughter. “Your spirit shows that whether you like it or not you are a good Soldier. Good enough to be tactical leader of this squad when it beaches on Algol Four.”

“Don’t depend on me!”

“We won’t. The master tactics are planned right here. You’ll be concerned only with final on-the-spot details. Nothing you do could possibly foil the master plan—not that you could even try, of course, unless you wish to pay the price.”

"It might be worth it."

"To escape by death? We shouldn't be so obliging. We know your type, Soldier. Pain is the best whip for you."

The voice acquired a meditative sadism. "It might be interesting to see how much you could take—"

"You shouldn't have baited them," said Masuda. "That was bad."

They were in the bowels of a great ship, beating their way through subspace to the sun called Algol. The Mirfakians were desperately impatient. The fight with Algol Four was not going well. As fast as new recruits were found, made into Soldiers and given a perfunctory training, they were sent out.

Kramer said, "I never took threats or orders from any man!"

"In this case I think you should. You haven't got much choice, have you?"

"Whose side are you on, Masuda?"

"Circumstances force me to give an official answer. I am a Soldier of Mirfak."

Kramer lapsed into disgusted silence. He began to run over his orders. On the face of it his squad's job looked easy. In the sector on which they would be landed, the enemy were holed up in a valley. Three sides of the valley were enclosed by precipitous mountains—and by all accounts of the enemy's size and shape there was little likelihood that they could escape. Twin peaks guarded the only direct entry into the valley. Between the peaks there was a convenient gully. The job looked easy.

The briefing had mentioned that the Algoli were like sandworms. They lived with most of their bodies buried in the soil. Only their heads showed. The difference between the Algoli and sandworms was one of dimensions. The head of an Algoli was a flat disc anything up to twenty feet in diameter.

Kramer pictured them as fat and sluggish in their movements—if they ever moved out of their holes in the ground. He could not see them having the necessary speed to thwart a frontal attack through the gully.

Yet the attempt had been made several times and always it had failed.

He looked for a way to make his attack a success. He figured that until he was ready to fight against the Mirfakians he might as well fight for them. Never a sentimentalist, he felt no compunction at the prospect of killing Algoli.

But when the ship beached his squad within quarter of a mile of the valley, he still had no definite plan of attack—except that he must send in a small unit of Soldiers, see what happened to them and take it from there.

The squad had five hundred feet of climbing to do before they reached the gully and saw the valley which looked like a vast stretch of farmland with neatly planted rows of crops. But the crops were flat discs of a delicate blue tint. Kramer estimated their number at close on fifty thousand. Even for a knockover as easy as the Algoli looked, he didn't care much for the odds.

He led the squad down the inside of the gully until they were on the floor of the valley. Telling the others to stay put, he nominated five Soldiers to advance and attack the first row of blue discs.

The nominees fanned out to attack one Algoli each. The blue discs did nothing. Kramer watched his Soldiers advancing, wondered when the enemy were going to show the unknown powers that had so far foiled previous Mirfakian raids.

When his little patrol was in range, he gave the order to open fire. Instantly, five flat blue heads were engulfed in roaring flames. The Soldiers cut their jets, moved away from the blackened holes that marked the graves of the enemy and started towards the next row of blue discs.

Kramer had a premonition of disaster. The slaughter of the five Algoli had been too easy. He urged his own mechanical body out into the valley and raced across to his Soldiers.

Even as he streaked towards them, his power-assisted senses saw his premonition about to come true.

In the path of each of the five advancing Soldiers, he could see the ground tremble, he could hear subterranean rumbles. The Soldiers seemed oblivious to the danger. He urged his body to make more speed. He reached one Soldier just as the ground erupted in a minor explosion and a pale blue circular head blossomed forth.

Sphincter muscles had tautened the rim of the circle so that the head was moulded to the shape of a cup.

Kramer charged into the Soldier, sent him reeling aside before the blue cup could engulf him. But already he knew he had failed. He had saved one Soldier, but he was too late to save the other four who were disappearing underground, trapped in the maws of the Algoli.

He wheeled himself towards the holes with the faint hope that he might be in time to rescue some of them. But the blue heads had been completely retracted. The soil was crumbling inwards to fill the holes. Selecting one of his major weapons, he stood at the brink of one hole and pumped disrupter shells into it, flinging himself back to avoid the molecule-rendering explosion that followed seconds later.

To his hypersensitive senses the noise was a deafening agony. Yet underneath that noise he detected another. It was behind him.

He guessed what it was, tried desperately to change direction. In throwing himself back from the explosion of the shells, he had sent himself flying straight towards another newly erupted Algoli head. He triggered the flame jets around his belly, determined that if he was going to be swallowed, he was going to kill the Algoli in the process.

Another explosion threw his immense weight off balance. He teetered on the brink of the new hole and fell on his side. He rolled desperately away from the hole. And quickly as it had all happened, he assessed it. Another Soldier had seen the danger he was in, had rushed from the rim of the valley and shattered the flathead with a disrupter shell.

"You disobeyed orders," he snapped when they were gathered again at the inside of the gully. "But thanks, Masuda. That was quick thinking."

"A good Soldier does not stand aside while his leader is in danger."

Kramer wondered whether Masuda was being sarcastic, off-handedly modest or what. He reserved his judgment.

"You took a hell of a chance," he said. "That shell could just as easily have hit me."

"I can aim. You should know that."

"Forget it. I guess I'm touchy about losing those four Soldiers."

"You're not the first leader to lose Soldiers. And according to what we've been told, you could lose a lot more. This isn't the first squad to try taking this valley. And if the others failed—"

Kramer grunted. "Maybe we can do what the others couldn't."

"You've got ideas?"

"Not yet. But all it needs is the right strategy. That's all you ever need. Make your plans, make them perfect, and you can do anything. Maybe you could help."

"Tell me how."

"You come from this quarter. You must know something about this planet, something about those flatheads out there. You must know of some weakness or flaw in their make-up."

"Such as?"

"Anything. You tell me all you know about them. I'll decide which facts we can use. Knowing your enemy is half the battle."

Masuda obliged. He apologised for the paucity of his knowledge, but excused himself by reminding Kramer that he had only been on Algol Four on three occasions. Most of his information Kramer already knew from the briefing the Mirfakians had given.

The flatheads spent most of their lives in the ground. But there were occasions when they emerged. Algol was a double star and these times of emergence were connected with the movements of Algol's dark and almost dead companion sun. Masuda asserted that the dark sun had no physical effects and that the peculiar habits of the flatheads must be put down to some ritualistic reason.

It was during these rare periods that visitors were welcome. It was during three such periods that Masuda had made his previous visits.

Kramer asked why the Mirfakians did not time their attacks to take place when the enemy had left their underground sanctuaries.

"They will, I expect. But the flatheads only come out once every fourteen years by your time. I guess the campaign so far has been a preparatory softening up operation. Our masters are impatient."

Little else of what Masuda said seemed to give any clue as to why the Mirfakians wanted to take over the planet.

The Algoli were an old race, the oldest in the system of seven planets. They had fought their way out of Algol Four's original heterogeneous life-pool, establishing themselves as the dominant species. With the beginnings of civilisation they had gone through the long phase when brother fought brother to see which branch of the family tree was going to rule the planet. Then they had gone further than most races, further than

Terrans or Mirfakians. They had progressed to the stage where they had seen the futility of war.

All of their later history was concerned with their building of a culture, a culture based on mutual aid, on the creation and appreciation of beauty, on the development of pure intellect.

In their resting stage, when they lived almost entirely submerged in the ground, they devoted their time to thinking. They made poems and music and formulated new philosophies. They created new theoretical sciences and elaborated the older ones to new peaks of perfection.

Kramer thought he saw a light. He said, "That could be it, that could be what our Soldiers are out to get."

Masuda laughed. "Poems and music?"

"Not that. The other stuff. We once had a guy called Einstein. All *he* did was think. No machines. No tools. Just pencil and paper and thinking. Out of that thinking our world got weapons, new sources of power—"

"I'm with you—you don't have to draw a diagram. But you're off the line, Kramer. I don't doubt that the flatheads know things that any planet would fight to get—"

"What stops them?"

"The flatheads may be idealists but they're not fools. When visiting and trading times come around, you don't think they peddle their secrets, do you? They keep their theories under their blue lids and only peddle gadgets based on those theories. The only things visitors are welcome to in their original form are the poems and the music. As for the rest—"

The rest, Masuda said, were sold as toys. You could buy a box, no bigger than a man's head, and by looking into the box you could take an armchair trip around the galaxies. Think of a world and its image appeared in the centre of the box. Think of a place in your own world and you could see it too. Think of a person and you saw nothing, for the box remained dark and black when anyone's privacy was in danger of being invaded.

"But," Masuda said, "if you try to take the box apart to see what makes it tick, it goes up in a puff of smoke—and you with it. And the flatheads have other toys. Intricate game-playing toys that teach you higher mathematics as you play. Dream realisers . . . now there's a line for you! I guess the flatheads meant them to be used for purely moral purposes, to help people with their thinking, to give scientists a chance to

see an image of the machines they wished to create. But they can make other dreams come true. I guess that's why somebody put the finger on me. Realisers are illegal on my world—you can guess the sort of purpose I was buying and selling them for. I was caught, elected for extinction."

Kramer said, "I thought you said the flatheads had nothing to offer! Soldier, they've got enough to make anybody want to invade them. If Earth had only half the things you've been talking about—"

"Earth, maybe yes," said Masuda. "But not Mirfak. The people we're fighting for are no slouches. You've already seen that they must be the smartest bio-surgeons in creation. And they're not so backward in the physical sciences either. I wasn't lying when I told you I can't think why they want to lick the flatheads."

"There's got to be some reason," Kramer insisted. "And there's got to be a way."

"You find it, then. You find how to kill immortals!"

The Kramer who had been a hellion as a man, and who had been biding his time since his recruitment as a Soldier, came roaring back into action. As in his Earthly days, he weighed up the situation, assessed the facts, made a decision and put the whole lot into violent action in less time than it takes most men to start thinking about what to do.

Masuda was a threat to his life.

He put that thought strong in his mind. It was the only way to cheat the monitor in his brain.

Masuda was a threat to him, and he—Kramer—was leader of the squad. Therefore Masuda was a threat to the squad and its mission.

Excluding all else from his thoughts, he blasted Masuda with his cannon. He kept on blasting until the metal machine was ripped apart and the meat inside was exposed and seen to be lifeless.

Before any of the other Soldiers could question his action, Kramer was off. Down the last slope of the gully and out into the valley he roared.

He was out of range before his built-in monitor assessed his motives and decided he had cheated. He was nearer the flatheads than the Soldiers when the pain lanced into his brain, occluding all thought, stopping all motion.

When the initial stab of pain was over, leaving only a sustained squeeze of agony, he desperately tried to ignore the pain itself and concentrated on its location.

It was on the right hand side, midway between the eye and the ear. He remembered what Crispin had said : there was a wire in his temple, connected to the power unit.

The pain did not recede completely. The monitoring block in his mind was waiting to see what his next move would be, whether he would heed the warning and be sensible or whether he would continue to act against his instructions.

He tensed himself inside, summoned together his courage. He tried an experimental glide forward, making it purely random, putting no purpose behind it.

The movement was permitted. The level of pain was not increased.

He continued gliding, getting closer to the blue discs.

He was within striking distance of one. He was so near he could see that the disc was minutely fluted like a huge open fan. The corrugations were moving, rippling in a pattern.

He took time off to see what the Soldiers were doing. They were motionless. He used a tiny private part of his mind to congratulate himself—he had killed the right one. Masuda would have followed, urged by his monitor to keep tabs on Kramer. But the others were of lower mental calibre. Pretty soon they might swoop down to stop him, but at the moment they were neutral.

Kramer decided to reinforce their neutrality. He aligned his firing jets on the flathead. He had his one and only thumb on the trigger when the rippling blue corrugations suddenly registered on his consciousness.

He remembered. The language of the flatheads was one of the many which he had been hypnotically taught. The giant worms of Algol Four were non-vocal. They communicated by the visual patterns created by the crenellations on their heads.

His thumb muscles were already tensing when the message of the flathead shocked him into rigidity.

The last thing he expected to read was : " Fire ! Kill me !"

Kramer fired. This was a time for action first, thinking afterwards. His jets were trained precisely on the blue head. The disc was crisped, the epidermis burst and his flaring jets consumed the whitish flesh that was exposed. In seconds the head was reduced to glowing toast.

The pain in his head eased off. He had done his duty. And with the lifting of the pain he was able to think more coherently.

He knew for a certainty what would happen next. And he did nothing to stop it. He simply waited for it to happen.

The noise was there behind him, the sound of the ground erupting. He did not turn around. Yet he could sense the emergence of a blue head, could almost see it cupping as it reached for him.

Then he was in darkness and he could feel himself being dragged down into the ground.

Engulfed as he was by the flathead, there could be no possibility of the darkness lifting. Yet he felt he was beginning to see.

It was not a return of visual sight. It was a warm feeling of comfort, an opening up of his mind so that he could see without eyes. It was a realisation that the flathead was friendly towards him—loved him almost.

"Why did you make me fire?" he asked and knew that he would be heard.

"We do not—cannot—attack unless first attacked ourselves. This is a thing we have imposed on each other. But there is no time for explanation now. You must act quickly."

Kramer's faith was complete. "Whatever you say."

"We cannot help you while you are in danger of being exterminated by the Mirfakians. Soon they will have evaluated the motives behind your actions. They will kill you in spite of our protection . . . You have one hand; can you move it?"

"Some."

"Upwards. You must squeeze it up through your neck-piece, grasp the wire which is the fuse that will kill you. You must remove the wire."

Kramer passed on a thought of acknowledgement and started to obey.

He had to bend his arm at the elbow, then rick it backwards until his scapula burned with protest. He ignored the pain in favour of the greater agony which was beginning to return to his temple.

When the hand was through the confining constriction at his waist, he turned it so that the fingers pointed upwards. He

tucked the arm close to his side and slid the hand over his shoulder.

To accomodate the masses of equipment in his metal body, the interior of his uniform left less than an inch of space at his neck. Getting his fingers through that space, he had to press hard on the veins at the side of his neck.

The blood began to pound in his head. Lack of oxygen made his brain fuzzy. But at least it modified the pain at his temple.

He had his fingers on his face. Irrationally, he thought it was time he had a shave. Then he could move his hand no further. His fingers were half an inch from his temple. The butt of his hand was choking him.

"I'm stuck!" he groaned. "Do something!"

"We cannot. You must reach that wire. It can be done. Others have done it."

Kramer heard dimly. But he heard enough. If somebody else had done it, so could he. He was better than any man. He blanketted his mind to everything except what he was trying to do.

His nails dug into the skin under his beard, his fingers clawed their way to their objective. Millimetre by millimetre they strained upwards.

One finger felt the wire. Tantalisingly, he could touch it yet could not grasp it. He pushed harder, felt the wire slide into position between two fingers.

He scissored the fingers, made to withdraw them.

The wire slid out of his grip.

He redoubled his concentration to ignore the agony in his head. His fingers sandwiched the wire once more. Avoiding his first mistake, he continued inching his hand up until he could hook one finger round the wire.

With the blasphemous equivalent of a prayer, he pulled. And it was as if he had pulled his brains out.

There was red excruciation, flaring yellow fear, then black oblivion.

When his senses returned, he whispered weakly, "I'm bleeding. Badly, I think."

"Don't be afraid. We can help you now. Do as we say."

He wondered how many Soldiers the flatheads had captured, and how many of these had been ex-Terrans. They seemed to know exactly how the metal uniform should be dismantled

from the inside. Following their instructions, he undid connection after connection, until at the last touch he felt the pieces of the uniform loosen. He thought they would have fallen off him if he had not been in the belly of a flathead.

There was a new ache in his head, a purely physical ache. He knew he was losing blood at an alarming rate. He did not see how the flathead could help him. Yet he was calm, swathed in a warm glow of trust.

The tranquility blended smoothly into sleep. He could not say just when he ceased to be aware of his situation. But he was very much aware of his sharp return to wakefulness.

It was a voice in his mind that awoke him. "You are whole again," it said.

He moved his good right arm across his body, brushing it against warm folds of tissue. He touched his left shoulder, moved his right hand downwards. He felt his left arm, renewed to the very fingernails.

"My legs too?" he asked.

"You are as you were before you became a Soldier of Mirfak."

It sounded fine. But characteristically he looked for the catch.

"How can I be alive? How can I breathe in here?"

"You are not breathing."

"I'm speaking. I need breath to speak."

"You are not speaking with your voice. Of course you cannot breathe inside this body. You are being kept alive by an umbilical cord between your body and this one."

"Get me out!"

"There is no oxygen in this atmosphere."

"Then what's the good of making me a man again? I want to get out. I want to get back to Mirfak, to kill Crispin and to settle my score with the Mirfakians."

Suspicion returned and he added, "Why did you do it?"

"We hate violence. We hate killing even more."

Kramer scoffed. "It's time you changed your likes and dislikes. Because sooner or later the Mirfakians are going to wipe you out. All of you."

"That would be difficult."

Kramer detected an inflection of pride, he thought.

"Because you can regenerate?"

"That's one reason. Every time one of us was burned by a Soldier, the part of our body that is underground immediately restored the burnt part—as I did, when I took you into my custody."

Kramer told the flathead, "I guessed that much. In fact I gambled on it. It's no accident I'm here. I played along with the Mirfakians until I figured a way to beat them. I thought this was it. I was wrong."

The flathead asked him to explain.

Kramer obliged. "I thought if somebody could help me stop those killers it was you. I've heard about some of the things you can do. Maybe you don't care much about yourselves, maybe you're prepared to die. But the Mirfakians won't stop when they have beaten you. They would go on, wiping out world after world, for no reason except the pleasure it gives them to do so, and without risking so much as one of their own fingers. Most worlds don't have your powers. When they are killed, their people die. Nor have they the science to hit back. And the biggest injury of all is that those who survive will be pressed into Mirfak's service to help kill other people."

The womb around Kramer tightened with emotion.

"We know of at least one world which could stand up for itself. Only—"

"Only what?"

"It is three galaxies away."

Kramer sensed his advantage. "And how many worlds will go under before Mirfak ventures that far? I'll tell you something else—even that world would be taken as easy as wink."

"Not so. They are stronger and wiser than those of Mirfak."

"Maybe. But they're not immortal!"

"Nor are the Soldiers of Mirfak."

"They will be. They will be. When the Mirfakians have licked you and discovered your secret of regeneration, there's nothing going to stop them from then on. Their only real handicap at the moment is lack of Soldiers. But when their Soldiers are unkillable—!"

The flathead went dead on him, left him in isolated silence for so long that he wondered what it was thinking.

His guess that it was having a private debate on the ethics of exterminating a murderous pest came pretty close.

"We did not realise," it said at last. "It would seem that your assessment of the situation is better than ours. Unfortunately, we are conditioned against violence. We cannot fight the Mirfakians aggressively, we can only defend ourselves."

Kramer said, "That doesn't go for me. I can kill!"

The flathead had another long silent struggle with its conscience before telling him, "Yes, it must be done through you."

"You'll give me something to fight them with?"

"Reluctantly."

"Look," said Kramer. "I'm going to be fighting a people with more science than I'll ever have. If you're going to give me a stick, make it a big one!"

"You have it."

"I'll also need forces, men to help me . . . what was that?"

"You have your weapon. You mentioned our many powers. One of them has just been given to you. Since you would not understand, there is no point in explaining how it functions. But it is the greatest weapon we can give you."

Kramer exploded. "That's fine! You give me something but I don't know what it is or how it works!"

"You'll know when the time comes."

Kramer cursed a blinding oath. Then he said, "So all I get to fight them is faith! What about help? Can't you release the other Soldiers you said you had captured?"

"There are none. Not as such. You are the first and only one we have regenerated as he was. The others were reconstructed in our own image."

"Why me?"

"You were strong, the others were weak. We only supply the regenerative protoplasm. Your psyche was strong enough to help your body and mould it as you would have wished. The others became like us."

Kramer was prepared to argue, to demand more information about his supposed weapon. But he got nowhere at all.

"You must go," he was told. "While appreciating the need, we still loathe the thing which you are going to do. You must go while we are still of a mind that it is necessary."

And that was it. That was the last he saw or heard of the flatheads of Algol Four.

The late Masuda's revelations had fallen far short of a complete dossier on the flatheads. One major fact he had omitted to tell Kramer about was their fantastic telekinetic powers.

Kramer had heard of poltergeists. He had even heard that a school had been started on Earth for the purpose of training potential tee-keys to develop their abilities. But he had never heard of anyone being able to use his mind to transport a living creature across light years of space, from one planet to another.

It was the complete lack of sensation that most perturbed him. One minute he was cradled in the belly of a flathead, entirely dependent on it for his existence. The next he was standing on Mirfak, the umbilical connection severed, and he was breathing deeply as if his respiratory rhythm had never been interrupted.

His eyes were feeble human instruments again. This he noticed at once. It was night on Mirfak, and where as a Soldier night had been as clear as day, it was now a time of darkness.

The place was familiar. He was stationed at one end of the field which the Mirfakians used as a training ground.

He decided to rest, to wait for daylight and to wait for the enemy to come to him.

He did not sleep but used the time between darkness and dawn to plan his course of action against Crispin and the Mirfakians, and to ponder over the nature of the weapon which the flathead had supposedly given him.

When a few hours of concentrated thought produced no definite ideas on either point, he abandoned thinking about them. He mused instead over the things he would do when he had settled his score and was back on Earth.

With the first weak light of day, he was on his feet, working the stiffness out of his muscles and testing the strength of the limbs which had been restored to him.

He did not have long to wait for the appearance of his foes.

At the far end of the field a familiar group showed up. There was a handful of the beetle-black, skinny-legged aliens. There was a score of metallically uniformed Soldiers. Among the aliens there was a pair of humans, strangers to Kramer. Between these two men was another, short and strutting and obviously talking a blue streak. Kramer focussed his eyes and his hatred on Crispin.

Behind him he heard the sound of transport pulling up. He turned and saw a contingent of orange targets being unloaded. He realised suddenly that he was at the wrong end of the field.

If he had stopped to think about it, he would have said his next action was crazy.

He began to stride up the field towards Crispin and the aliens.

He was unarmed. He was one against a planet. Yet his stride became more confident. He felt as if he was walking hand in hand with God.

Crispin had been the prime object of his intended retaliation. Next to him had come the aliens. But, strangely, it was the two men, the two recruits from Earth that commanded his attention.

They must have been executed in some manner prior to their appearance on Mirfak. Before that they must have been ruthless criminals—as he had been.

In the past, these men might have been his comrades. Certainly they were his kind. But now he saw them differently. His new feeling was not the superior revulsion of a convert. Rather it was one of compassion.

Kramer knew then that the umbilical cord—a mental umbilical cord—between him and the flatheads of Algol Four had not been completely severed. He was not, and never would be, the Kramer of old.

He also knew the nature of his weapon.

An order must have been given to the Soldiers. As he passed them, they turned, aligned their fire-jets on him.

He smiled, wondering what agonies they suffered because they were unable to burn him down.

He was close enough now to see the consternation on Crispin's face, the agitation among the aliens.

He walked on determinedly, a song in his heart which was still of Earth and a sad dirge in his mind which was welded to the minds of the flatheads of Algol Four.

Evil, his mind insisted, must be dealt with. The alien part of his mind still wished the method did not have to be so drastic; the part of him that was Kramer was exulting.

For this was the way he would have chosen to die. Not ignominiously as before in a death chamber. But dying as and when he chose. Going out in a blaze of glory.

Crispin ?—he thought. How could he have been so petty ? Crispin was nothing, a tiny cog in a big machine of destruction. It was the machine he was after, the great war machine which was Mirfak.

He stopped when he was face to face with the aliens. He was aware that their mental forces were hammering at him, but he was also aware that they could no longer touch him.

He wondered if he should say anything, taunt them, torture them with fore-knowledge of what was to come. But he resisted the temptation.

He took a deep breath and summoned the aid of the flatheads.

It was like wishing.

Or praying.

He felt immeasurable power flowing through him as he murmured the incantation, the formula which he used yet did not understand.

And the murmur was barely finished when the power at his command was unleashed.

The ground began to rock and tremble. The sky was rent asunder by hyper-electrical phenomena. A chasm split at his feet and the aliens disappeared in a screaming flounder. There was a great sigh and he knew that the atmosphere had gone. More chasms appeared everywhere, deep gashes that sliced the planet from pole to pole, disintegrating it into asteroids that leapt into the orbit that was to take them into the heart of Mirfak's sun.

Only when all was destroyed except the tiny foothold that Kramer occupied, was he allowed to go. Only when the flatheads were sure the menace to peace had been removed.

For the second time in his life, Kramer died. But this time he did not curse. This time, as he dissolved into the nebulous vapour which is the beginning and the end of all things, this time there was a smile on his lips.

—Robert Presslie

ARTICLE

The entire history of the Earth is written in the sedimentary deposits at the bottom of the oceans. A project is on hand to read the hidden writing—and incidentally open up new scientific possibilities.

THE MOHOLE

by KENNETH JOHNS

It is thirty years since Conan Doyle's irascible Professor Challenger—the Great G.E.C.—proposed drilling an eight mile deep hole through the Earth's crust. The story of this project was unfolded in 'When the World Screamed ;' but it is doubtful if Conan Doyle expected his idea to be taken seriously.

This is the age when it is fashionable for flights of the imagination to be taken seriously, the time when much of fiction is becoming fact. Drilling holes into the Earth comes under this heading, and the Mohole is the latest example of science fiction predicting with some accuracy an engineering

project of the future. Backed by the National Science Foundation, scientists are planning to drive, in 1960, a hole down six miles through the Earth's crust to reach the unknown mantle. The mantle lies nearer the surface under the oceans than beneath the continents, so three sites are being considered for the Mohole — two in the Pacific near Guadeloupe and one in the Atlantic.

Surveying of the Atlantic site began in May, 1959 and has now been completed. Four American survey ships mapped the undersea contours of a 200 by 150 mile area some 200 miles north of Puerto Rico. Gravity measurements and underwater seismic explosions enabled them to trace the depth of the Earth's crust and deep sea ooze covering it, whilst sample cores from the mud will help them to guess at the chances of finding fossils further down.

To find out just why scientists are interested in drilling a strictly non-commercial hole deeper than any previous one (the cost will be near £7 million) we must consider the present-day picture of the outer part of the Earth and the extremely skimpy information on which this picture is based.

Geologists see the terrestrial surface as a series of granite rafts floating in a sea of plastic rock. Covering the rock sea between the rafts is a thin layer of basalt, above which the oceans reign supreme.

The granite rafts are the continents; like icebergs their bases go down further into the sea than their mountains climb skywards. The continental bases are twenty miles below sea level—twenty miles through which a drill would have to penetrate, fighting all the way, to reach the mantle.

The sea of plastic rock in which the continents float is the mantle, a mixture of silicate rocks and nickel-iron alloy making up the greater part of the Earth. It is 1800 miles thick. Denser than the rocks above it, it is rigid enough in its outer 400 miles to fracture under strain to create earthquakes; but is also plastically deformable by the pressure of the continents, for they rise up out of the mantle as their mountains are eroded away and their masses consequently lightened by the sediments washed down to the oceans.

The nearest approach of the mantle to the surface is under the deep ocean floors where only three and a half miles of basalt

and sedimentary deposit may separate the mantle and the seabed. But here at least two and a half miles of water lies on top of the seabed, sealing it off from the surface.

Most of our knowledge of the mantle comes from gravity and earthquake data, the latter amplified by plotting the waves from dynamite explosions in the ground or sea. These waves change direction and speed when they pass through the boundary separating different types of rocks or materials. It was this change in the speed of earthquake waves at the crust/mantle boundary that was first noticed by the Yugoslavian seismologist A. Mohorovicic just fifty years ago. The transition zone became known as the Mohorovicic Discontinuity, soon shortened to the Moho. Searching for a suitable name for their projected hole to reach this zone, it was not long before American scientists came up with Mohole—and so it was officially christened.

Most of our knowledge of the material making up the interior of the Earth comes indirectly from inspired guesses based on the composition of meteorites, chunks of durite rock thrown out by volcanoes and astronomical observations as to the mass and density of our planet. More recently, data on heat leakage to the surface and world-wide gravity and recordings of the waves from earthquakes have been combined with magnetic field measurements and more guesstimates on the way the interior solids' and fluids' properties change with high temperature and pressures.

For instance, the pull of gravity is less in mountainous continental areas than in the lowlands, and reaches a maximum in the deep ocean basins. This has been taken as being due to the large low density continental rafts exerting less attraction than the dense rocks making up the ocean floors.

The idea of digging holes is ingrained in all of us from our earliest years—the picture of a small chubby child industriously probing away with a tin spade in the sand is a world-wide one—and so to offer other reasons for digging a super-hole we must look carefully at the ostensible reasons given by science. The two main reasons advanced for the need of a Mohole are the desire to check and amplify our knowledge of our planetary crust and mantle, and the equally important desire to plumb the unknown depths of Earth just to look for something new.

Ideally, a single Mohole should satisfy many sciences. In cutting through miles of rock it will also cut through millions of years, for the sedimentary deposits in the deep ocean basins have been little disturbed for aeons, perhaps since the first trickle of water washed down the original surface. In some places these sedimentary layers go down six miles ; but in most places in the ocean abysses there is a half mile thick deposit.

As the long drill descends, cores cut from these age-old deposits will be carefully examined. Fossils will be searched for, particularly those from pre-Cambrian times when life was evolving in the seas and left little evidence of its passing. Physicists will determine the direction of orientation of magnetic particles in the mud, for from this data they can chart the prehistory of the movement of the magnetic poles. Other physicists will check on the ratio of oxygen isotopes in the calcium carbonate of sea shells from each core, using this as a thermometer to gauge the temperatures of the seas in these long gone eras. The presence of dust from space and volcanic explosions will tell of cosmic and terrestrial catastrophes and convulsions.

Then, boring ever deeper, the non-sedimentary rocks will be reached and the drill will continue to slice down like an apple corer, bringing up new rocks that will strengthen or destroy our theories of how the Earth began and is constructed.

Thermometers and radiation counters lowered down the hole will tell us if radio-activity is slowly warming up the Earth and if there really are giant upswellings of plastic rock deep down, bringing heat up from the core of the globe. High temperatures should not be a problem, as it is expected that even six miles down the heat will reach only a temperature of 150°C .

Not all these problems will be solved by just the one Mohole, of course ; trial borings will be made first and, depending on progress, more than one Mohole will probably be drilled.

Remembering that the deepest oil well yet drilled is about four miles deep, how do scientists expect to reach down through two and a half miles of water, half a mile of soft sediment and three miles of rock ?

Geologists recognise the difficulties ; but point out that they are not insuperable. Already the trawl lines of tapered steel cable used to reach the deepest ocean floors are six miles long, holes have been drilled one mile deep from a barge anchored in a third of a mile of water and new ideas for deep, fast drilling are awaiting development.

The specialised technique for starting a drill hole in deep water has been developed by oil companies using CUSS I, a 3,000 ton barge carrying a ninety eight foot high drill tower amidships. The barge is securely moored at six points and a technique of using what nature has provided locally in the operations has been extensively developed. Further improvements of this technique are now being worked out.

A cone-shaped hole is first drilled in the bottom mud and then filled with concrete. The steel base for the underwater gear is cemented into the solid base. Control and continuous inspection of these undersea operations is carried out using TV cameras based on the systems first used successfully in finding the sunken submarine 'Affray.' The drills are then run through the base and into the bottom.

So far the standard drilling method of using a rotating drill pipe to drive the cutting bit at the bottom of the hole has been used ; but this involves pulling up the drill string and disconnecting each section of the pipe every time the bit wears or a core is pulled up. Frequent withdrawals of up to six miles of drill pipe will evidently make the job a very long range project.

Better, say some engineers, to develop first a turbo-drill operated at the bottom of the hole by high pressure sea water. Combined with a system of pulling up cores and worn drill bits through the pipe by cable, the Mohole could be drilled in a few months. The drill bits would be collapsible and could be replaced by lowering inside the pipe. Cooling of the high-speed drill would be similar to cooling techniques used from CUSS I, the mud itself is used to cool the drill and also to remove cuttings.

Other suggested techniques include a flame gun to melt and drill through rock, and a powerful drill gun to fire steel pellets to erode the rocks.

No doubt there will be pointed comments about scientists drilling down without any specific object at the end of their

equipment. There will be no dramatic gushers of oil, although even gushers are these days out of fashion with new capping techniques, and no sudden excited shouts of triumph as the drill bites into the treasure for which the miners seek. But the patient decipherment of the story of the Earth, the possibly entirely new ideas we will have to adopt on the formation and construction of our planet, will be reward enough.

The Russians, too, have stated that they have the equipment to drill a Mohole, and a Soviet committee has been studying for a year now, the methods and possible sites.

We may yet see a race for the Moho parallel to the current race for space, a race based purely on the national desire for prestige.

—Kenneth Johns



November 7th

Rounding off this interesting issue of authors, E. R. James is a Yorkshireman with scores of science fiction short stories to his credit, being one of the writers who supported our companion magazine New Worlds in its formative years.

REFRIGERATOR SHIP

by E. R. JAMES

Illustrated by LEWIS

Nearing the end of her long voyage, the *Cold Comfort* slowed into the range of vibrations governed by the frequencies of light.

Unapproachably remote Galaxies showed through the neutrality of lightspeed and over, like strips of violet light. As these shortened and brightened with the ship's lessening velocity, Captain Gore took sightings on them for the first visual check on her position within the normal Universe for nearly a year.

In the object lenses of his instruments the images shimmered weirdly. His brows drew down over cavernous eyes and lips beneath a hawk nose thinned to a single line.

He fed data into the astrocomputer. He stared at the tape coming out with the answers. "We're arriving," he muttered, "in the right place and on schedule, but something is affecting the colour shift. Some vibration at light-speed is modifying the appearance of those sky marker stars by its own wave length superimposed on theirs."



The two crew members standing the watch leaned from their seats to catch his low words, then looked at each other, eyes glinting in the half light of the cabin—which was deliberately darkened the better to see the heavenly sphere becoming visible around them.

Within their own Galaxy now, stars most distant from the ship emerged from the dull flux and shortened and changed colour as more of their spectrums became light to the watching human eyes. As other stars, nearer the ship, added their light to the varicoloured, ever changing heavens, Gore suddenly moved, hitting switches, sending shutters over the observation windows until only a tiny square of leadglas in front of his out-thrust head was open to the sky. The crewmen held their breath as the colours changed on his aquiline face, etching its bold lines with ever deepening shadows.

And then, light burst over his head, unbearably bright. The two watching him hid their faces behind upraised hands.

Unseen by their dazzled eyes, Captain Gore thudded to the floor. But presently they discerned that a shaft of light, glaring violet, seemed to transfix the cabin and actually to blaze into the metal of the rear wall.

Gore was fumbling at the chair from which he had fallen. He was moaning. "Get me up, you fools!" he rasped through his agony.

The crewmen started up. One leaned sideways as he neared the dreadful beam of light, the other ducked under it. They half guided, half lifted Gore. Immediately his hands touched the panel of switches they seemed to become possessed of a life of their own, crawling forward with a practised speed as though independent of the shocked man to whom they belonged.

The blinding glare vanished. Only a faint glow—actually seeming to come through the metal of the shutters—remained to show its previous point of entry. While the two men, standing on either side of Gore, still half supporting him, gaped at this fantastic glow dead ahead, the ship creaked around them in response to the Captain's moving fingers.

"What is it?" breathed the taller man, somehow suggesting by his tone that he knew what it must be, but dared not face the truth without the others' moral support.

Gore fumbled for his seat, sank into it out of their nerveless grip. His breathing laboured in short, painful gasps as he covered his eyes with his hands. It was plain that only sheer determination to make the logical reaction had kept him going so long.

"When the . . . radiation of a star . . . increases a thousandfold or more like . . . that . . ."

"... it's a nova?" finished the tall man. His voice shuddered out of a throat contracted as though he might vomit at any moment. "The colony will have been wiped out." He stared, wide eyed at the light penetrating the metal of the shutter. "And we—we—" He turned his stunned gaze towards the shorter man on the other side of Gore.

Plump, fair, partly bald, Holtz stared numbly back.

In the chair Gore swayed, hands still over his eyes, his breathing quicker than ever. "Got to stop ship—and turn back—or divert—I've started her turning—" He broke into uncontrollable moaning.

Holtz looked up at the light in the metal. It inched very slowly towards their left. He looked over Gore's jerking head at his comrade. "Can you do what he says, Shep?" His voice was high-pitched, brittle.

Walt Shepherd drew a long breath. "I can if . . . I have to. Got to take stock of everything first. This means we have come a distance of over forty lightyears from our Sol to this star Capella for nothing. The violence of the radiation of any star turning nova will have scorched all its inner planets clear of life, the colony perishing with the rest. We have nowhere to land—"

"Aren't you wasting valuable time?"

"Get all the crew awake—" gasped Gore's harsh voice while they glared at each other. He writhed in an agony which was evidently both mental and physical. "And passengers, ex-Captain Hadrian might—" He was getting heavy in their hands. "Do what—" He slumped forward, and they eased him back so that he would not again fall off the seat.

Shepherd reached a long, thin arm to the light switch. Brilliance from the ship's lights dimmed the glow shifting slowly around the shutters. Eyes screwed up, the two crewmen looked down at the unconscious Captain.

Holtz gulped. "Look at his eyes."

The pupils white instead of black, Gore's eyes stared sightlessly.

"So we have a blinded Captain," Shepherd muttered.

Holtz turned away, but Shepherd caught his plump arm.

"What are you going to do, Peter?"

"Fetch this other Captain to turn the ship back," snarled Holtz, and struck aside Shepherd's arm. "It needs guts to risk our last fuel stock, guts and know-how."

Shepherd nodded sombrely. "Don't expect me to take offence at that. I can accept what is right. We are at the end of a journey which has taken us one ship-year even though we have travelled at an average speed of forty times that of light. Our fuel is low, and we need the best available pilot to take the Captain's place for a turnabout back towards Earth."

With the Captain hunched lifelessly in his seat between them, with the light in the metal shutter slowly edging around as the ship swerved aside from its objective in the endless emptiness of space, their eyes met and they stood still, as though petrified.

Holtz cleared his throat. "You said our fuel is low?" Receiving no answer he gave Shepherd a confidence of his own. "It won't be safe to use the refrigeration system for more than another few days. Intravenous feeding fluids ran out over a week ago."

"What?" Shepherd whistled in righteous indignation. "Four other crewmen, three hundred colonist passengers . . . You mean they have only a few days left of hibernation in your low temperature lockers?"

"It was considered a safe enough margin in a trip of one time-year."

Shepherd laughed harshly. "By you?" he asked mockingly, "or by those on Earth who weren't going on this trip?"

"By everyone concerned," said Holtz, his face ashen and the plump cheeks drawn into hard lines. "How could anyone imagine that Capella would do anything so unlikely as to go nova?"

Shepherd's shoulders drooped. "You're right. One cannot plan for every unlikely possibility." His large brown eyes brooded as though over the fallibility of all mankind. "I, myself . . ."

Slowly turning, he walked with reluctant feet to a bank of dials to frown over their readings. "I agreed to the reserves of fuel which would be carried. It seemed so certain that we would be able to obtain heavy hydrogen from the oceans of that third planet of Capella." The edge in his voice was an admission of a quiet complex.

Holtz asked sharply, "Well, how much reserve have we?"

"It was calculated to be sufficient to give the ship a little more than twice lightspeed after bringing her to rest on the planet, and, considering the costs of everything, that seemed a generous margin to cover any emergency."

"Any emergency except this." Holtz's narrowed eyes avoided looking up into Shepherd's. "So we have enough power to give the ship a speed," he muttered as though thinking aloud, "which will get us back to Earth in rather longer than twenty time-years."

"More like twice that. You forget we have to save a lightspeed thrust to halt ship. Otherwise we might go on for ever in the flux with no one able to detect us."

"Radio!" The word burst from Captain Gore. He muttered unintelligibly while the crewmen stared at him, added "Message to . . . Earth—" and was silent.

"He's right." Holtz watched Shepherd. "We can do that now. You saw the radiation pressure of the nova slow us well below lightspeed. We ought to radio back to Earth before we start manoeuvring. You do that. Earth must be told what happened—even if the signal does take forty years to get to her—In case we . . . we all die . . ."

Shepherd licked his lips. "All right."

"Send and keep on sending until I get back with this man the Captain says we must wake."

"Hurry," urged Shepherd. "We will have to wake everyone and decide what's to be done as soon as we've started the long voyage home."

"Meanwhile," said Holtz, his voice flat and grim, "you do your part and I'll do mine."

He watched the radio being tuned for a few moments, then turned away from the man who was actually his superior in the hierarchy of the ship.

In front of the switches beside the hatch which gave access to the main body of the big ship, he halted. He stiffened himself, rubbed his face and made adjustments. The interior of the ship was his responsibility. Whenever no one was moving about back there, the air was drawn off and frozen solid, partly to aid the low temperature workings of the stores and frig-lockers, and partly to prevent it pushing through the tiny crevices inevitably in any hull into the vacuum outside.

He watched the pressure equalize on either side of the hatch. And then, after a backward glance at Shepherd concentrating on the radio, he undogged the hatch and went through.

On the right side of double doors marked *Stores*, a sign pointed *Women*; on the left another pointed to *Men*. He took the left passage, ducked through an open hatchway and his footfalls echoed out into a long hall, lined on one side by two levels of numbered doors each two feet square and filled with a glass inspection panel opalescent with frost.

He paused at a list. 160 Refrigerated Lockers.

Four occupied by crew members of the other two watches doing weekly tours of duty. Interstellar distances from Earth still did something to planet-born intelligences. Only the grim, almost superhuman beings who became Captains saw the entire voyage made by any ship. Holtz had never heard any of the crew envying Gore that privilege.

He ran his finger down the list of 150 male passengers. Sweat from it glistened in the harsh light like the trail left by a snail. Here was the man Hadrian. No. 101. Brief personal data beside the list caught Holtz's shifting gaze. *Hadrian, George, 24 years old on freezing. Ex-Interstellar Capt. (Being a Captain was reckoned a young man's work. They aged more rapidly than any other class of people Holtz knew. And it wasn't just comparison with the years put on to his own and other crewmen's lives by their hibernation two weeks in three. Records said that Gore of the gaunt, leathery face and gaunter frame, was only 27). Retired from the service on Medical Grounds after injury to nerves of left leg. Partner : Ellen Tresco.* Her number would be the same as Hadrian's on the Women's deck. Holtz's memory for pretty faces told him she was small, and attractive.

He tilted his head sideways, listening. He showed his teeth in a mirthless grin and moved along the lockers with a slightly waddling gait. Odd numbers on the top row. He had not realised before how far apart the lockers were set.

No. 101.

Holtz bent his back and peered from beneath his thick blonde eyebrows at the top of the head of the big man behind the rimed glass. He swallowed. And he disconnected George Hadrian out of the general hookup for mass control of the hibernating passengers and at once set going the waking process.

He hastened back the length of the place, through the emergency hatch, around the U-bend into the women's hall beyond another hatch. Impatience made the lockers stretch away endlessly. Breathing hard, he at last halted in front of number 101. He hit the switches as quickly as his trembling fingers would allow.

Returning, he saw Hadrian wriggling, stiff and feeble, out on to the floor, and called out.

"Let me help you!"

Hadrian lifted his dark, handsome face and immediately fell with a kind of fumbling helplessness to the hard deck.

Holtz reached him, lifted his head.

"I dreamed," said Hadrian. "I saw a crewman—was it you?—at the end of a very long hall, like this but much longer. It must have been very long indeed because I could see him running and the sounds of his feet were coming after they were

hitting the floor. He was a splendid example for a class studying the different speed of light and sound—”

“Never mind,” Holtz interrupted uneasily. “Have you hurt yourself?”

“No, I don’t think so.”

“And you’ll be feeling stronger by now?”

“Yes.” Hadrian’s deep voice held a note of surprise. The stimulant injected into his veins was beginning to take effect. With Holtz’s help, he climbed stiffly to his feet. “I haven’t seen this from the passenger’s angle before!” He shook himself vigorously. His eyes seemed to grow sharper. “What’s going on?”

“We want you in the cabin. Captain Gore’s been blinded. He said you—”

“Blinded? What happened?” His hibernation-pink hands, surprisingly strong already, clutched the crewman’s coverall at the side of each shoulder. His voice rang with authority.

Holtz moistened his lips. The passenger’s reaction times were still slow. He could easily have avoided being gripped if he had wanted. “Now steady, Mr. Hadrian. First you’d best let me go.” When Hadrian did so, he straightened his clothes and explained what had happened, with the addition of information which he had not given to Shepherd. “You know these ships aren’t intended to carry *consumer* passengers for long. Three hundred and seven active human beings will produce carbon dioxide so fast her air-conditioners will not cope with it for very long—certainly not for forty years. And that’s not the worst. Food and water and everything else was based on a reserve of forty-eight thousand man-days of life.” In spite of efforts at self control, Holtz began to babble frantically. “For the three hundred odd people life would last around one hundred and sixty days—less than six months! I don’t think Shep has worked that out yet. Only three people, in fact, can hope to live the forty years necessary to get back to Earth. One of them had to be able to handle the ship . . . I—I—” Holtz tried to make his wooden face smile. “I’ve woken your partner, Ellen Tresco. She would be one of the three.”

Hadrian’s young-old face was getting back what seemed likely to be its normal high colouring. Veins stood out in his powerful neck and at his temples, pulsing rapidly.

As he stared at Holtz, the tubby crewman rubbed his sweat wet hands together. "She ought to have awoken by now."

Hadrian answered through clenched teeth. "She'll be frightened, waiting all alone in the frig hall." As Holtz turned eagerly to go, he caught the shorter man's arm. "Not a word to her of what you've just told me, understand?"

"Exactly my thoughts." Holtz showed his teeth in a mirthless smile.

Hadrian released him. They went around to the women's hall. Her voice called to them from the open door of her locker. "Oh, I'm so glad to see you!" In her agitation, she seemed to have forgotten the reserve which, previous to freezing, she had maintained towards the big, handsome partner allotted to her. "I thought for a moment the ship was dead all around me."

"The ship's all right," Hadrian assured her. "There's been an accident and the Captain's been hurt. I've been asked to help out, and the crewman here thought you'd like to see me in action to help you make up your mind whether you'll want to marry me later on."

As he joked, they helped her out. She leaned against the wall, breathing quickly, her soft cheeks red. "Oh, how my heart is pounding!"

"That'll soon wear off," Holtz assured her. Taking his cue from the new Captain's manner, he winked at Hadrian. "You sure drew a pretty little partner. Most of the colonising women are so solid looking. In fact, it hasn't been often that I've helped freeze up any as attractive—"

"If Ellen can manage, we ought to get into the crew quarters right away!" Hadrian interrupted Holtz so brusquely that the plump man's leer turned to narrow-eyed suspicion.

Ellen smiled bravely. "I don't want to get in the way."

Holding her arms, they guided her stumbling feet to the cabin hatch. Holtz pushed it open and they entered the forepart of the ship.

Shepherd looked around from the radio. It seemed that he had switched it off some time before. "I've been thinking," he said quickly, "that we aren't all of us going to get back to Earth . . . Oh, you've woken one of the women. Why d'you do that?"

"She's Mr. Hadrian's partner," said Holtz as though that were explanation enough.

While Shepherd frowned dubiously at him, Hadrian went on past them both to kneel beside the inert figure of Gore. The blinded Captain's gaunt face was set like a grim mask with wrongly painted beads for eyes. Hadrian bit his lip and turned to scan the control panel.

"Looks much the same as the freighters I worked in. I wish the Captain could help . . ." He cocked an eye at Gore. Captains were expected to be superhuman, capable of any feat of strength, any exercise of will power, and any sacrifice to keep their ships in action. But Gore did not move. Hadrian motioned to the crewmen. "You must move him, so that I can sit there."

As they lifted the heavy, unconscious body, Holtz gasped at Shepherd, "Hasn't the old bag of bones shown any sign of life since . . ."

"I've been at the radio, remember." Shepherd grunted. "I did think I heard him stir once, but he was still when I looked around."

Hadrian concentrated on his instruments. As a moving body approached the velocity of light, it contracted along its length as foretold by Einstein, and the normal laws governing space and time ceased to apply to it. Except for comparatively insignificant variations it was only through multiples of light-speed that the movement of a stellar ship could be controlled. The mathematics of superspeed working called for the complete attention of the pilot. Hadrian had only the vaguest impression that Shepherd and Holtz were in argument before he forgot everything except the task of tuning in the power of a ship unfamiliar to him.

Pressure of radiation coming from the nova already showed in the clarity of nearer stars shown on the scanners. He aligned the ship's potential on the faint image that was distant Sol.

He pressed the power button. An instant of formlessness. Incoherently he was aware of the need for haste before the full power of the nova's radiation could play havoc with them. They were so very close to its expanded envelope of incandescent gases. Instantly the dials had regained their previous readings, his finger pressed the button again. The old, unthinking reflex action was there, seemingly unaffected by the numbness which still pervaded him.

He studied the dials and indicator blips. Yes the second surge of power was hurtling them back towards Earth at almost

the same speed at which they had so recently been receding from it.

He swung the ship slowly around her gyroscope to put her bulk between the nova and the humans she carried. And he watched the pressure of radiation—which had previously slowed them—tip their velocity up to match that of light.

Ellen was standing with her hands on the back of his seat. He followed the direction of her gaze.

Shepherd stood in the middle of the cabin. "I don't trust you, Holtz," he was growling. "You are planning something. I'm not going to let you do away with any of those helpless people back there. I'm going to wake them all up." Shepherd's voice boomed over an ineffectual attempt by Holtz to interrupt. "Yes, I know how to do it. They are intelligent beings the same as you or I and as such they deserve to know what has happened. Surely mankind has grown up sufficiently for individuals to be able to accept what must be." He gestured grandiloquently. "I would be willing to die voluntarily, myself, if it is only possible for some to survive." He pointed accusation at Holtz. "Do you think you are a God that you shall keep them all frozen and helpless while you decide who shall live and who shall die, without them saying a word in their own defence."

Holtz watched him warily.

Hadrian stood up and put one hand over Ellen's.

Shepherd swung on him. "I cannot imagine you, sir, to be a willing party to the wholesale murder of helpless passengers."

Holtz snarled. "Don't try to drag him into your madness! What do you want to do—fill the ship full of animals fighting for survival?"

The three men and one woman looked at each other in a silence which lengthened until it became quite unbearable. The faint humming of the ship went on, indifferent to their problem, yet a reminder of it.

Holtz moved with a speed which took them all by surprise. He was closer to Hadrian than was Shepherd. He seemed possessed of a strength much greater than anyone would have suspected was in his pudgy body. Hadrian glimpsed the man's piggy eyes and then found himself pushed. The seat of the chair cut into the back of his legs and he caught at the headrest with his numbed hands to save himself from falling right over backwards.

Ellen flung herself at Holtz's back, beating on it with her small fists. But Holtz seemed not to feel as he struggled to drag open a drawer just below the board of controls. It came completely out in his hands just as Hadrian righted himself and started to rise.

Shepherd, tall and vengeful, towered over them all at that instant. Holtz gasped, "Empty !" Shepherd flung Ellen aside like a child. The tremendous flow of emotion in the cabin seemed to have lent the two crewmen a strength quite unnatural to them, but they closed together with the awkwardness of men unused to personal combat of any kind.

Shepherd's clutching hands seized Holtz and dragged him from the control area. Holtz struck at Shepherd's arms with the drawer and dropped it. They tangled with a flurry of confused blows. Hadrian struggled to his feet and reached out to part the two men.

But Holtz went over backwards from a vicious thrust of Shepherd's long arms. His neck struck the edge of the fallen drawer, and they all heard the snapping of bone.

Shepherd stopped dead, wide-eyed, and openmouthed with horror.

The smaller man's body wobbled on the floor like a loosely filled sack. His head, inside the drawer, rolled over at a wrong angle with the rest of his backbone.

Hadrian knelt. Holtz's eyes rolled up and the pudgy chest heaved once and was still. Hadrian looked up at Shepherd.

Shepherd slowly closed his mouth and raised his hands. "The hand of God . . ." he said. "He knows that I did not mean to murder . . ." He backed away until he stood against the hatch leading into the back of the ship. "I was only trying to stop Peter from committing three hundred murders. Every human being on this ship is entitled to know what is happening." He opened the hatch and went from their sight.

Hadrian looked at Ellen. She ran into his arms sobbing, small and soft and appealing.

"Oh, George, I know it's wrong to kill people or wish them dead even, but if that little man was telling the truth, whatever's to become of us ?"

Forty lightyears from Earth, thought Hadrian. On a ship which could carry three human beings back, three and no more. If they lived long enough lives . . .

She buried her face against his coat, trembling. He put his cheek down against her hair. They clung together.

The seconds lengthened into minutes and, waiting, he knew that the last of the post-freezing stimulant was wearing off, and he closed his eyes.

A faint sound jerked them wide open. A man stood beside the hatch into the back of the ship. Hadrian, looking over Ellen's bowed head, did not recognise him. A tall man, with a gaunt face in profile, so big boned that he at first appeared to be emaciated. His big, thick-boned fingers busily clamped up the hatch.

"What—" began Hadrian. Then he saw that the eyes in the turning face were sightless, realised that it was the sound of his voice which drew the man's attention.

"Captain Gore!"

"Yes, Captain Hadrian. I am relieving you of your new command for a few minutes." Without turning his blind stare away from them, he fingered switches beside the hatch.

A whistling rustle made Hadrian's blood run cold. A reverberating clanging of hatches shutting automatically made Ellen dig her fingers into his arms and scream so hoarsely it seemed she was choking.

Gore nodded. "It is a dreadful thing. But it is a Captain's business to know all the necessary data and to do what is best for his ship and his . . . other responsibilities. But, being blind, I had to wait for my opportunity."

He put his hand into the big pocket in the front of his coverall. "I think that Holtz was looking for this just now." He lifted a pistol.

Hadrian started forward. "No!"

"Yes. It is only logical. As Captain of this ship I have made what I hope is the right decision. As a blind man, I am no longer useful to her. And I think that I have the courage to face my own convictions."

Hadrian held his breath, then spoke as he breathed in desperately. "But Holtz said that three people can go back. There's no need for you—"

"There's you," said Gore mildly, "and your girl . . . and," he smiled, "you will comfort each other during the long years to come . . . so that there may well be three to reach Earth."

He raised his pistol.

Ellen burrowed her face into Hadrian's coat.

And all around the ship, the stars drew out into red lines which faded into the gathering flux of lightspeed and beyond.

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