

## Part II: *Boot Camp*

### A QUESTION OF ATTITUDE

Dan Bergen lay motionless on his narrow limb amongst the big green leaves, and wished he had never heard of the Interstellar Patrol.

A yard from Bergen's nose, the constrictor glided ahead, then stopped. A small bump on its back bulged up and an eye looked out. The eye swiveled around like a rotating radar antenna, then came to a stop with its gaze fixed on Bergen.

Bergen didn't move. He looked at the eye. The eye looked at him.

A long moment passed.

The eye swung away again. Bergen instantly looked away. The eye swung back, its gaze again fixed on Bergen. Bergen didn't move. The eye swung around, then pulled inside. The bulge on the constrictor's back diminished to a small bump. The snake glided ahead.

Bergen allowed himself the luxury of a breath of air. He relaxed.

The snake continued to glide ahead.

Before, the constrictor had moved, at most, a few feet at a time. Now, yards of it were sliding past.

Frowning, Bergen looked around.

About three feet above the level of his head, and perhaps eight feet away, the big leaves thrust aside. A pair of large opaque green eyes looked at Bergen over a blunt green-and-brown snout.

Bergen for a split-second balanced the question whether he should roll off the limb. That would send him in a headlong plunge through wide-spaced branches toward the forest floor a hundred and eight feet below. Or should he—

The snake's head blurred. Its jaws clamped, in a burst of pain, on his left shoulder.

Bergen struck at it with his right fist.

The head twisted and wrenched, sinking its fangs deep into his shoulder. There was a steady hiss as the rest of the snake slid forward. A thick coil looped around him.

Bergen sucked in a deep breath, and stabbed at the snake's eyes with his extended forefingers.

A thick skin blurred down over its eyes. Another loop passed over Bergen's body. The muscular coils tightened. There was a crushing pressure at his ribs.

Through a red haze, Bergen's right hand found the snake's eyes. The head moved, something gripped his hand, mashed and snapped and ground it, then crushed it at the wrist.

Somewhere within Bergen, a cool sense of calculation told him the fight was all over. But at the same time, he knew he *had* to get free.

For one white-hot instant, this urgent need took control of his body. For this instant, the contractions of the constrictor's huge muscles were blocked, and Bergen struck savagely at its head with his mangled right arm. His left hand, caught in the loops of the snake's body, nevertheless contracted in a grip that tore a section of tough hide from the underlying muscles.

A savage yell of defiance burst from Bergen, and for just a fleeting instant the snake's gaze held a look of blankness—such as might appear in the eyes of a constrictor in the jungles of Earth, when the victim it has selected turns out to be an adult male gorilla.

The instant passed. The energy was gone, and in place of defiance, Bergen felt a wave of exhaustion. There was a final, horrible, increasingly distant sense of crushing pressure, and then dizziness. For an instant something took place that Bergen could not quite recall afterward.

And then he was lying on his back, looking at a gray ceiling overhead.

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Very cautiously, Bergen drew up his right hand and looked at it. It was unharmed. He felt of his left shoulder. His left shoulder was unharmed. He sat up. A slight dizziness passed as he swung his feet to the floor.

The memory of the past few instants came back, and Bergen could vividly see the head of the constrictor twist and wrench as the big loops settled around him—

Bergen sprang to his feet and swore savagely. Full consciousness had now returned.

"Damn it," he said, forcing the mental picture of the constrictor out of his mind by focusing his attention on the immediate cause of the trouble—the people who gave these tests.

A buzzer sounded its peremptory warning. Bergen again became conscious of his surroundings. He noted the gray bulkheads, gray steel deck, and gray ceiling overhead. There were three short rows of steel cots in the room, and above each cot was a long wide bulge in the ceiling. With a sense of relief, Bergen noted that the other cots were empty—had been empty when he'd gained consciousness. That meant that, though he had failed at the end, he had at least outlasted the other candidates.

A small speaker nearby said, "Bergen to Evaluation. Candidate Daniel Bergen report to Test Evaluation Office."

"Coming," said Bergen. He braced himself for the walk through the Special Effects storeroom. He drew a deep breath, opened the air-tight hatch, and stepped into a shadowy space jammed with apes, alligators, imitation dead trees, grizzly bears, hollow lichened boulders, simulated rotten logs covered with moss, rolled-up bolts of spider web with spiders attached, one dozen wharf rats packed head-to-tail in a crate, and other unattractive odds and ends that loomed, half-recognizable, through the gloom. Bergen was grumbling to himself as he reached the hatch leading to the corridor. Then he straightened up, assumed an alert, resolute look, and stepped out into the corridor.

A brisk walk brought Bergen to a hatch marked: "Test Evaluation, Colonel Sanders." Bergen knocked, heard the colonel's crisp "Come in," and stepped inside. He was in a small compartment lined with filing cabinets and electronic equipment, and with wires and odd headsets dangling from the ceiling. A spare athletic individual with colonel's leaves, a shock of crew-cut hair and a look of cool objectivity eyed Bergen from behind a bare-topped desk. Bergen reported his presence. The colonel motioned him to an olive-colored drum that doubled as a chair.

Bergen thoughtfully eyed the drum, which was labeled: "RATTLESNAKES, 1 doz. (assorted)." He made sure the lid was on tight, and gingerly sat down. He looked at the colonel. The colonel looked back coolly. A period of time passed. Bergen forced himself to wait.

The colonel cleared his throat, clasped his hands behind the back of his neck and leaned back in his chair. His eyes came to a sharp focus. He said accusingly, "That was a stupid stunt, Bergen."

"Sir?" said Bergen, pathetically uncertain which particular stunt the colonel had in mind.

"Why didn't you just put both hands out in front and dive straight down his throat?"

Bergen cast around mentally, then said, "Oh, you mean the constrictor, sir?"

The colonel snorted, and Bergen felt an overpowering sense of stupidity. Whenever he entered this room his I.Q. seemed to drop off twenty or thirty points. He would recover his lost intelligence when he returned to the corridor, and then he would *really* see how dull he had been.

"Well?" snapped the colonel.

"Sir?"

"*Sir?*" mimicked the colonel. His face reddened, and he roared, "*Answer the question!*"

Bergen looked at him blankly.

The colonel sat up and leaned forward on the desk. "Why," he said, "didn't you just put your hands over your head and jump down the constrictor's throat? You'd have accomplished exactly the same thing, and with a great saving of energy." The colonel had the air of a person putting forth a reasonable suggestion.

"Well," said Bergen, trying dully to synchronize his reactions with those of the colonel, "my purpose, sir, wasn't to get killed."

The colonel nodded, and leaned back. "But so far as the simulation was concerned, that's exactly what you accomplished, isn't it?"

Bergen could now see he had walked into a trap. Gloomily he said, "Yes, sir."

"Why?"

"Sir?"

"Tell me, *why* did you get killed?"

"I guess I did the wrong thing."

"*What* wrong thing?"

Bergen hesitated.

The colonel waited.

Bergen shook his head. "If I'd dropped off that limb, sir, I'd have smashed right to the bottom of the forest floor. That was certain death. I don't see that I had much choice."

The colonel shook his head. "You made a series of mistakes. To begin with, you looked directly into the constrictor's dorsal eye. That was the first error, and a serious one. When you stand at attention during an inspection, do you look *into* the eyes of the inspecting officer?"

"No, sir."

"What do you do?"

"I look straight ahead."

"Why?"

"Well . . . it's regulations."

The colonel nodded. "It's regulations. But there's a reason *why* it's regulations. If you look *into* the eyes of the inspecting officer, you make, as it were, personal contact with him. He will notice it, and of necessity he will have to respond. An inspection is an impersonal matter, and he will reprimand you. And yet, you had no hesitancy about looking into the dorsal eye of that constrictor. Did you think that because the constrictor came from another planet, it wouldn't sense you were looking at it?"

"Well, I—" Bergen paused.

"Yes?" prompted the colonel.

Bergen finished lamely, "I guess I just didn't think about it at the time, sir."

The colonel nodded. "That was your basic error, underlying all the other errors. You didn't think about it. The next thing you didn't think about was looking *away*. The constrictor looked away, *you* looked away, then the constrictor looked back, and promptly noticed the change in the position of your eyes. Next, you didn't think about the snake's *motion*. You saw it glide forward, knew it was moving a lot farther than it had before, knew it had seen you, and yet *you didn't change your position*."

Bergen stared at him, blinked, and shook his head in weary disgust. "Yes. Now I see it."

"You've been talking," said the colonel, "as if your only alternative was to jump off the limb. Not so. The snake *had to get into position to strike*. While it was doing that, you could have moved, and at least gained time."

"I see it now, sir."

"But you didn't see it when it counted."

"No, sir. I didn't."

"All right. You made a number of mistakes. First, you stared the snake in the eye, then when it looked away, you looked away; both of these things the snake noticed and correctly interpreted. Next, you stayed where you were till it was all set to get you. Then, in addition, you *still* stayed where you were when there was an instant left to act."

"Well, sir, I admit I was wrong before. But there was still *some* chance the snake wouldn't do anything. Whereas, if I dropped off the limb—"

"You'd have caught a vine about nine feet below," said the colonel.

Bergen slowly brought his jaw shut.

"Pretty stupid, wasn't it?" said the colonel.

Bergen drew a deep breath. "Yes, sir, I guess it was, at that."

The colonel sat back. "Most of us are accustomed to think of ourselves as intelligent people. We move through life in our accustomed orbits, expect things always to remain basically as they are now, have repeated opportunities to rehearse our behavior patterns for the few standard situations we meet, and nevertheless we fall into one mess after another—because we don't really think. If things turn out badly for us, our reaction is to complain that the situation *wasn't set up right in the first place*."

The colonel looked at Bergen intently, and Bergen sensed that this comment had a personal application. "Yes, sir," he said.

The colonel leaned back and said thoughtfully, "There are two basic attitudes, or ways of looking at things. The human race uses these two attitudes to move forward, much as a man uses his legs to walk. And it's just as catastrophic for a member of the human race to misplace these two attitudes as it is for him to cross his left leg in front of his right leg, and then try to take a step with his right leg.

"The first attitude is that of recognizing the defect. In one form, this is pure gripe, the attitude of 'headquarters is too stupid to get their head out of their boot.' But it's also the attitude of the man who looks around, and asks himself if things couldn't be improved. From this attitude arises a lot of noise, but, properly used, it's also one of the main driving forces for progress. If men had always been satisfied, who would ever have tried anything new?

"So, you see, it's useful to see imperfections. But it's useless to *keep our minds focused on imperfections*. Having seen the imperfections, next we shift our attention to look for some means of improvement. We see the obstacle, then look for the way through or around. And that is what you *didn't* do. Right?"

"Yes, sir," said Bergen miserably.

"Don't worry about it," said the colonel. "It takes time to develop the right attitude. But you have to show strong enough signs of it or you can't pass this last test. You've got to be alert. Never be dismayed at the most stunning examples of basically unfair mechanisms and situations. Assume that somewhere in the mess there is something you can use, an opening you can get through, and set yourself to find it. Remember, mountain climbers regularly go up vertical rock faces that the average man wouldn't think a fly could climb. It is obviously *unfair* to expect a man to climb a thing like that. And yet, the holds are there, if you can find them, and if you have the few pieces of fairly simple equipment that will help you get a grip."

"And if you slip," said Bergen drily, "you're finished."

The colonel shrugged. "You could also say, 'Why climb?' That's beside the point. The object is to show what people *can* accomplish if they look for the handholds, instead of deciding at a glance that the slope is too steep, so it's impossible."

This was a longer lecture than Bergen had gotten any of the other times, and he was starting to feel uneasy. The colonel was watching him intently, and seemed to be waiting for the significance to sink in.

"Yes, sir," said Bergen dutifully.

"Now," said the colonel, "I wouldn't bother to say all this if you hadn't gotten up into a respectable category for a candidate. You started off with a class of fifty, distributed to various testing facilities. This fifty has so far been given a total of four tests. About half of you flunked the first test, and roughly the same proportion have flunked each test since. One candidate died of heart failure. One candidate blew up and quit. That leaves exactly three of you coming up for the fifth test."

Bergen blinked. "Forty-seven out of fifty are washed out already?"

"That's right."

"How many more tests after this one?"

"The fifth test is the last, unless there are special circumstances."

"And only one of us can pass this test?"

"No. All or none of you may pass the fifth test. We've had both things happen."

"Suppose I flunk it? Is there any second chance?"

The colonel shrugged. "You can take the tests as often as we offer them. Moreover, taking these tests isn't the only way to get in. But it's the only way open to you right now, and even if we should offer them again, you have to take the full series each time. We'd advise you to put everything you've got into passing this one test you've still got in front of you."

Bergen thought of the miserable spot he'd been in and to which he'd return if he failed this test. Bergen, a natural hater of authority, had had the poor luck, when called up for military training, to find himself under a natural martinet. The fellow tore beds open to inspect the mattresses, then sent the recruits on K.P. because their beds were unmade. Accompanied by a few toadies, he would snap on the barracks lights at 2:00 on stormy nights, and order everyone outside into the rain, while he and his sycophants searched the barracks for concealed liquor. Returning to the outside steps of the barracks he would note angrily that these men were up after taps, and would order them marched through the soaking downpour all night for punishment. On the following day, he would harass them for their sluggish unsoldierly bearing, and, to correct their attitude, would give them close order drill till they were dead on their feet.

One day, following a lengthy lecture on soldierly behavior, some worn strand of Bergen's self-control snapped.

The officer and an admiring toady strolled past in front of Bergen as he stood in ranks. Bergen's right hand reached out as if of its own accord, gripped the officer by the uniform jacket and jerked him around. The hand released him, then came up again, to strike him full in the face. As Bergen stepped out of ranks, several companions came to life and grabbed him. Bergen was about to bash the officer's head against a post when they finally got him stopped. In the resulting court-martial, the officer's numerous and flagrant misdeeds came to light. But Bergen nevertheless was still in the stockade when Sergeant Hale of the Interstellar Patrol came through searching for recruits, with his talk of good pay, forgiveness of past sins, and a splendid future—if he could pass the tests.

"Now," said the colonel, his cool voice snapping Bergen back to the present, "we might as well get on with this final test."

Bergen once again found himself lying flat on his back. This time, the cots to either side were empty, as no other candidate on the ship had gotten this far. Bergen closed his eyes, and was conscious of a drifting sensation such as he had felt before the previous tests. Then a voice was speaking to him, saying, "You have passed each of the first four tests. Each was designed to test certain elements of your physical or mental make-up, and of your basic character. The test which follows is intended to examine one particular personal trait. This trait has been tested only incidentally in previous tests. But it is a trait especially important to a member of the Interstellar Patrol.

"History shows that in any given situation, certain individuals tend to survive. In a group of gunfighters, for instance, certain men stand out over a period of time. Is this a matter only of reflexive speed, or is there also *something else*? Amongst politicians, some rise rapidly to prominence, then fade into insignificance. Others remain steadily in office. Some businessmen maintain a high position while others rise and sink around them. Why? Is it a matter only of luck, friends, special skills, or inherited wealth? Men have had all of these and failed. Others have begun with none of them, and succeeded. Why? Is there some special skill—or perhaps some higher skill—that enables a man to use other skills and advantages, combining them to gain his ends? If there is, you will need it badly as a member of the Interstellar Patrol. You have already been given some idea of what we consider this special skill or attitude to be. We will give you just one more hint:

"Julius Caesar, like many other great leaders of the past, had this quality in good measure. Caesar was once confronted by a walled town on a steep rocky hill. To attack it, he must advance uphill. The enemy could hurl their missile weapons down at him, while his troops had to throw theirs uphill. The

enemy was sheltered. Caesar's troops were exposed. The walls were strong. The enemy had an abundance of food stored inside, and, for water, had built close to the site of a spring. To besiege the place would be a long, slow, time-consuming process. To try to overwhelm it suddenly was likely to result in heavy losses.

"What should Caesar do? Should he attack with all his troops? Or should he carry out a slow, methodical siege?"

"Answer: Caesar cut the underground channel that fed the enemy's spring. With the spring dried up, there was no water, and the enemy quickly surrendered.

"The test will now begin."

The drifting, floating sensation ended. Bergen opened his eyes to find himself lying on a sloppily made-up cot. He was in one corner of a cabin, with a window opening sawed through the log wall near the head of the cot. The log at the bottom of this window had been smoothed to form a rough sill, and on this sill sat a crude earthenware jug with a corncob in it for a cork. As Bergen watched, a dirty hand reached up from outside, and took the jug off the sill. There was a *pop!* followed by a gurgling sound. Then there was a long sigh. The jug reappeared on the sill.

Bergen frowned, and looked around. The situation seemed to make no sense. But the apparent senselessness might itself be part of the test.

Bergen carefully sat up and looked around the room. A double-bitted ax with broken handle lay on the rough plank floor across the room. A long-barreled gun had been slammed against a corner of the stone fireplace with enough force to chip the stone and knock the gun barrel out of line. The gun lay on the floor near the ax. A number of smashed handmade tables, chairs and benches made several heaps of wreckage that cluttered the room. Large chunks had been chopped out of the log wall, and chips were strewn around on the floor amidst the wrecked furniture, ax, and gun. The general effect was as if someone had gone into a maniacal rage, and wrecked everything in sight. As Bergen's eyes adjusted to the gloom, he could see the remains of a smashed earthenware bowl, and bits and pieces of what had evidently once been a rough window glazed with a cheap transparent plastic.

Evidently, he was on a colony planet of the most primitive kind. And, somewhere nearby, was whoever had been driven half-crazy by the conditions that just naturally existed on such a colony planet.

Bergen cautiously put one hand on the foot of the cot, and leaned on it to step across a pile of debris. The cot teetered and collapsed. Bergen was struggling to regain his balance when a billet of wood came through the open window and struck him in the back of the neck, knocking him into a pile of broken furniture with jutting legs and braces. One of these caught him in the middle of the forehead. He saw a dazzling burst of sparks.

Outside, someone spat.

Bergen dizzily picked himself up. His head was throbbing painfully. In the previous tests, he'd at least had a definite purpose. Now, he was told to manifest some obscure quality that was supposed to distinguish successful gunmen, politicians, businessmen, and generals. Bergen snorted. He wasn't even sure there *was* any such quality.

From outside came a deep male voice. "Coming out? Or do I *drag* you out?"

A burst of laughter followed, as if two or more men were outside, enjoying the situation.

Bergen was now sure that he must be on a colony planet in an early stage of development. Only on such a planet would he be likely to find a roughly-built log cabin, with ax and gun used as tools, and with a light plastic, flown in by the supply ship, to serve the function of glass.

As he was thinking this, the cabin door flew open, and an individual whose shoulders spanned the doorframe came in, glanced around and slung a billet of wood at him.

Bergen ducked. His opponent sprang across a pile of trash, gripped him by the shirt and slammed him against the log wall. There was a burst of lights, then blackness and dizziness.

The colonel's voice was saying, "You're very close to failing this test, Bergen. If your total score had been a little lower in the other tests, we'd flunk you now. Do you hear me?"

"Yes, sir."

"Anyone with a brain in his head could have made better use of his time than you have. The room was filled with potential weapons. You had more than enough time to collect one. Instead, you did your meditating on the situation before you were armed, even though that block of wood in the back of the neck should have shown you had enemies. When your opponent came in, his vision was momentarily dim because of the bright light outside. But he found you in full view and empty-handed. Your performance so far is pathetic."

"Yes, sir."

"Thanks to this pitiful start, the simulator has you on a track where you'll find yourself completely at the mercy of petty opponents. This is going to be an unpleasant experience. If your performance is no better than it's been so far, you'd be better off to stop now. If you want, we'll end the test."

"No, sir. I want to go on."

"You're warned, Bergen."

"Yes, sir. Thank you."

"All right."

Bergen felt dizzy.

A voice was saying, "Tickle him again, Con."

"Happy to, Milt."

A white-hot pincers took hold of the calf of Bergen's right leg and tore out a piece of flesh.

The pain snapped Bergen wide-awake. He found himself sitting up, his back toward the outer edge of the cabin's porch, with two men bent over him, one of them holding in a leather glove what looked like a large insect. Bergen tried to spring to his feet, but his hands, tied behind his back, jerked him off balance, so that his head banged back against a badly weathered post that supported the porch roof.

A familiar voice said, "Let him see how they *taste*, Con."

The nearer man leaned toward him, forced open Bergen's mouth and shoved something in. A multitude of sharp claws scraped at his tongue, teeth, and the inside of his mouth.

Bergen was wide-awake again. For an instant, he felt an uprush of rage. But then a sense of cold calculation told him that, in this spot, the rage wouldn't work. Bergen concentrated on this cool inner thought, nearly lost it, then brought it into full awareness, and suddenly he was perfectly cool himself, his mind concentrated on finding some opening. After a moment's intense thought, he saw one possibility—then an instant later he saw another. And then his thoughts moved from point to point like a lightning bolt seeking the line of least resistance, and suddenly he had a plan.

Bergen shifted his position to test his wrists and ankles. His wrists were tightly tied. His legs were free. No one was in sight save the two men bent over him. One of these was the broad-shouldered man, apparently named Milt, who had knocked him out. The other was an older man, called "Con," who now jammed the large struggling many-clawed insect further into Bergen's mouth.

Bergen turned slightly, his left foot hooking behind the left ankle of the broad-shouldered Milt, his right leg drawing back as if he would try to roll to his left to get up. At the same time, he expelled the air in his mouth, closing his lips without clenching his teeth.

He slammed his right foot forward, to hit the broad-shouldered Milt at the left knee. Bergen's left foot was already hooked behind Milt's left ankle. Milt slammed back against the wall of the cabin.

But this was only one part of his problem. Meanwhile, the big insect squirmed violently in his mouth, its light and air cut off. Bergen opened his mouth slightly. The insect urgently thrust out into the light and Bergen spat it towards the other of the two men, who sprang back out of the way.

Bergen got his feet under him and stood up, his hands, still tied together behind him, around the post of the porch. The post felt about five inches thick, was smooth to the touch, and soft enough so that his fingernails could dig into the surface.

Meanwhile, the older of the two men, Con, was just reaching to pick up a billet of wood from a

stack at the corner of the cabin. His large friend, Milt, was starting to get to his feet, a savage light in his eyes. To either side were tumbled-down cabins, with no one else in sight but a woman who now leaned against the front wall of the nearest cabin, impassively watching the fight. Bergen cast a glance over his shoulder. Behind him was a large furrowed weedy field dotted with mounds from three to fifteen feet across, and from two to ten feet high. The whole place had a desolate, deserted look.

At the corner of the porch, Con had now selected his bolt of wood, and Milt was on his feet.

Bergen was facing Milt, with the post at the center of his back. He glanced at Con. "What's the matter? Milt too yellow to fight his own fight?"

Con glanced at Milt. Milt hurled himself at Bergen. Bergen dropped.

Milt hit the post solidly.

With a splintering crack, the post gave way.

Bergen, twisting as he fell, landed heavily on his side, his hands still tied around the post, the dazed Milt on top of him.

Bergen wormed his way along the post, and got his still-tied hands over the end.

Con was now coming toward him, holding a billet of wood ready to throw. Bergen rolled to his feet, and jumped onto the porch.

The earthenware jug with the corncob cork still sat there on the windowsill. Bergen remembered the sigh of pleasure he'd heard earlier.

"Throw that, and I smash the jug."

Con hesitated. Bergen climbed in the window, twisted, and closed his fingers around the neck of the jug. "Start trouble and I smash it."

Milt now struggled to his feet. Con spoke to him in a low voice. Bergen picked his way over the wreckage to the corner of the room, dropped to a sitting position, let go of the jug, and found the broken double-bitted ax.

His eyes were becoming accustomed to the relative dimness of the cabin. Holding the ax head by the remnant of its splintered handle, he crossed the room to a still dimmer corner behind a clutter of wreckage. He crouched behind an overturned table, took a fresh grip on the ax head, and carefully worked it back and forth as the blade cut through the rope.

At the window, Milt, swaying slightly, looked into the room. Bergen massaged his wrists, quietly picked up a solid round table leg.

The door opened, and Con eased in, blinking and holding a billet of wood in either hand.

Bergen tossed a small broken stool across the room at the jug. The jug smashed. Con slung a billet of wood toward the noise. Bergen sprang past the pile of wreckage, and rammed the end of the table leg into Con's stomach. The rush carried him out the door. He caught a glimpse of Milt climbing in the window, smashed him on the back of the neck, knocking him all the way in, followed him inside, hit him over the head, and looked around.

Con was stretched out by the door. Milt was stretched out by the window. Bergen glanced outside. The woman was leaning against the porch post of the next cabin, watching him.

From one of the tall circular mounds in the field, a column of marching insects was winding out across the field, its far end nowhere in sight. Bergen stepped out on the porch, and looked all around.

When he glanced back, the woman was standing about six feet away, smiling. Her eyes had a glazed look.

"Honey," she breathed, and swayed toward him.

Bergen uneasily stepped back.

From somewhere came a peculiar rustling. He looked around, to see that the ribbon of insects issuing from the mound in the field had changed direction, and was approaching the cabins in a wide lane. As he watched, the insects burst out of the grass onto the porch.

The woman looked around, screamed, and fainted.



Bergen swore, heaved her onto his shoulder, and stumbled toward the next cabin. The rustling continued, apparently all around him, and he saw another wide line of insects pour onto the porch of the cabin in front of him.

A faint shadow swung across the side of the cabin in front of him.

Bergen whirled and strode toward the edge of the field. For a moment, his thinking processes were almost blotted out by the realization of what must be happening to the unconscious men in the cabin. But there was nothing he could do about it.

Meanwhile, as his thoughts dwelt on this, the shadow he'd briefly noticed streaked fast across the field, there was a rush of wind, sharp talons sank in at the base of his neck and left shoulder, there was an agonizing wrench, and then the ground was falling away, the woman lying on the ground looking blankly up at him, huge leathery wings creaking around him, and he was carried up, and up, to hover high over a large stained boulder, and then he was let go.

There was a terrific concussion.

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Bergen dazedly opened his eyes.

The colonel was standing by the cot. He beamed. "I had my doubts for a while there. But you made it."

Bergen sat up dizzily. He took a deep breath. "Your mind has to be always on the problem, doesn't it? You have to keep looking for a chance, an opening, and be poised to take advantage of it."

"Let's say," said the colonel, "that there's a certain hard-to-define attitude you have to attain, a certain frame of mind. In the other tests, it was incidental, though lack of it would finish you in time. In this test, it was central. Self-pity, complaining, prolonged indecision, fear, dread, any of a number of distractions would finish you in short order. The test was programmed to keep the crises coming at you faster and faster. You bungled the first part, but once you straightened out you did well. We're proud of you."

Bergen felt the heady flush of victory. He had succeeded. He had outwitted the stockade.

The colonel gripped his hand, then turned toward the hatch. "Follow me, my boy, and we'll get you your outfit. Then you can begin training immediately." He led the way out through a storeroom filled with temporarily paralyzed gorillas, alligators, grizzly bears, and other assorted tools-of-the-trade.

To make conversation as he passed through this place, Bergen remarked, "It'll be a relief to get to work. That's the roughest entrance exam I've ever heard of."

"Oh, sure," said the colonel, brushing aside a sack full of coral snakes. "But we have to make the process of selection tough, so you can survive the training." He gave Bergen a look of fatherly pride. "The time will come, my boy, when you'll look back on these admission tests and *smile*."

The colonel stepped out into the corridor.

A chill passed through Bergen as he followed.

As he trailed the colonel down the hall, now a full-fledged recruit in the Interstellar Patrol, a little question occurred to Bergen:

"Just what was so bad about the stockade?"

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