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The Space Barbarians **by Mack Reynolds**

PART ONE COUP!

Chapter One

JOHN OF THE HAWKS brought his steed to a sudden halt just short of the top of the hill they had been ascending. Some instinctive alarm had sounded. Something there is in the warrior born that warns of danger, and if the warrior would live, he heeds it ever. Were this not so there would be scarce a clansman from Dumbarton to Stonehaven, for the ambush is a way of life on the planet Caledonia.

He slid from his animal and snaked his carbine from its scabbard. He tethered the animal lightly, so that no time would be wasted were it necessary to beat quick retreat, and made his way quietly to the hill's crest. The last few yards he went on hands and knees; the last few inches he squirmed on his belly.

There were several bushes on the crest. He wiggled up behind one and peered through its branches and leaves. John of the Hawks sucked in air.

Below was a stream, flanked by trees and other vegetation. By the stream were standing four saddled horses and three draft animals. The latter were burdened down with what were obviously butchered cattle and, since this was Hawk preserve, obviously raided beef cattle.

Now he could make the men out. Three of them, and from their kilts, they were of the Claim Thompson. The kilts they were in the process of removing. The situation was obvious. They had butchered the animals and were now about to take a swim to clean up. Being deep in Aberdeen

territory, they had not wanted to be slowed down by herding the beef back to their town but had butchered them on the spot and packed the choice portions of the carcasses on their extra animals.

Moving slowly, quietly, John flicked three cartridges from his bandolier. He threw the breech of his carbine and inserted one of the shells. The other two he stuck, point first, into the ground near his right hand, instantly available for a quick reloading.

The others had left their saddle guns in their scabbards, but John had no illusions about the fighting qualities of the Clann Thompson. Thieves they might notoriously be, but also competent fighters. Once he opened fire, the bets would all be down. There were three adult clansmen down there, and he was but a lad, not yet raised up to full phyletic level.

Three of them?

He hesitated at squeezing the trigger, though he already had the sights trained on one who was just about to enter the water. There were four saddle horses.

He let his eyes go over the scene again and immediately received his answer. Slightly upstream, in a thicker clump of trees, was the other member of the party. She had drawn away from the men for privacy. John of the Hawks made a wry mouth. He had heard that the women of the Thompsons were shameless, but it was unseemly and not meet that one should accompany a raiding party.

He watched for a long moment. All were in the water now. The girl's body gleamed white in the clearness of the stream. She was young, probably having no more years than John's own seventeen.

He grunted his irritation. One does not fire upon men in the presence of their feminine kyn, although in this particular case there was little, if any, danger of his bullets going so far off aim that she would be endangered. There was no stronger bann than that against injuring a woman, even though vendetta was involved. The male of a species does not destroy the female, not even man. At least, not on the planet Caledonia.

He thought about it. It was too far back to Aberdeen to expect to be able to ride for assistance, enough assistance that the raiders, girl and all, might be captured without bloodshed.

But even as he thought about it, he knew the answer. It was foolhardy, without doubt, but it was the only thing lie could do, given the situation.

He took up the two extra cartridges, and returned them to his bandolier and began squirming backward. Once off the rise, he came to his feet and hurried to his animal. He put the carbine back into its scabbard and then unbuckled his belt with its claidheammor and skean and attached them to the saddle. He took his coup stick from its sheath and tucked it temporarily in his belt and then ascended the hill again.

They were all swimming, and even at this distance he could hear their shouts and jests as they made at their horseplay. He grinned wryly as he began squirming his way down the hill toward them. They would sing a different song, if John of the Hawks was successful in his scheme.

He took what advantage he could of trees, shrubs and bushes and finally achieved his immediate goal, a place in the shrubbery along the river, between the girl and the men. Now he had a slight advantage. If the clansmen heard him stirring in the brush, they would think it the girl; if she heard a stirring, she would think it part of the noise the men were making as they splashed, dived and swam.

On hands and knees he crawled toward the animals. This, now, was the crucial point. It was all a matter of how soon they spotted him.

And there was a matter of sheer luck, too. There were four saddle horses. If he made the mistake of attempting one that was so trained that it would seat only its master, he was destroyed.

The answer to that, or so he hoped, came to him as he crept nearer. One of the beasts had no carbine scabbard. The girl's, of course. And a girl's horse- was less apt to be clansman trained to accept no stranger on its back. At least, so was his prayer to the Holy.

There was a shout from the riverbank.

He was on his feet and dashing.

The shouts tripled.

He flung himself on the back of the animal he had chosen, and even as he mounted, he was tearing free the tether that had tied the horse to a

small bush. He sunk heels into the beast's side, screaming the battle halloo of the Clann Hawk. He pulled the coup stick from his belt and slashed at the other three mounts. He gripped their tethers one by one and pulled them free. He slashed their haunches, driving them before him. From the river's edge, the Thompson clansmen were coming at the run, shouting their anger in d threats.

He pulled hard on the reins of his mount, turning it, and headed back for the raiders. Only now did they see what he held in his hand, and they tried to take last-minute measures to avoid him.

The coup stick came up and down so fast as to be a blur.

He slashed them, one two three, calling in repetition so quickly that the words came out all a jumble, "*I-count-coup-I-count-coup-I-count-coup!*"

Then he was around again and away, dashing after the horses he had just stampeded. He looked over his shoulder in triumph and just in time, even as he was shouting his halloo.

Two of the three were seated on the ground, heads in hands, wailing their disgrace and frustration. But the other had turned and sped back to the river's edge. And only now did John see the carbine leaning there against a tree trunk.

He cut short his battle cry, in midsyllable, and flung down on the far side of the horse, clinging to the saddle by but one heel, his left hand grasping a handful of mane.

And just in time. The carbine barked its command. One of the horses screamed. John came back full into the saddle now. The wounded horse ran another twenty yards then stumbled and pitched suddenly and fell.

John considered, only momentarily, halting long enough to strip it of its trappings but gave up the possibility. For all he knew, the rifleman had additional rounds of ammunition, and John was still within range. He scrambled up the hill, kicking his heels ever into the frightened animal In? rode, herding the remaining two beasts before him.

There was another element. Undoubtedly, behind him the Thompsons were already stripping the beef carcasses from the remaining animals and would soon be in pursuit John doubted that the draft animals were as fast

as those lie now possessed, but one never knew. They had the carbine, and give the Clann Thompson its due, they were as good marksmen as ever participated at the annual shoots at the assembly of the Dail of the Loch Confederation.

Up the hill, shouting again the halloo of the Clann Hawk, up and over the crest. He galloped to his own steed and Hung himself from the saddle of the girl's horse, into the one to which he was more accustomed, without descending to the ground.

He took up the reins of the three remaining captured beasts and started off, making a beeline for Aberdeen and the security of the town of his birth. He was chuckling happily now. He had taken his risk, and all had come off as though rehearsed.

He had counted coup on three of the redoubtable Clann Thompson raiders and had stolen their horses and most of their weapons. How the town would respond! How the criers would shout his name. Though he was but of seventeen years, none would dare speak against his being raised up to full participation in the phylum. The sachem himself would acclaim him, the caciques and sagamores. He would be a man among men and free to participate in the muster.

He pushed hard, not sparing the horse.

When he had ridden out of Aberdeen, a single lad on a horse, though warned by his uncles to take care, if he went beyond the lands of the clann there were none to say him nay. A clann does not remain strong by preventing its young men from learning to scout, to raid, to defend themselves from the foe. But he had been in comparatively little danger then. Had he run into a raiding party of Bruces, Davidsons or Thompsons, for that matter, he could honorably have run for it, being one against many. And it would have been unlikely the others would have taken after him, there being small profit in chasing lads still not of full phyletic age.

But he was now in possession of worthy booty and fair game for any clansman, save the Hawks and the sister clanns, of course, did any spot him returning to Aberdeen.

He rode through the night, the pace being awkward since he continued to hold on to the reins of the captured beasts, rather than try to herd them. They were unused to him and nervous, after all the excitement, and

he was afraid of losing one or more in the night.

He entered Aberdeen in the early afternoon of the following day, both he and the animals exhausted. He had paused along the way only for water. His luck had held, and he had seen no clansmen, not even his own kyn.

At the gate, the warder goggled at him. The other was a Fielding, not a Hawk, but he knew John well, having stolen a Hawk girl as his bride.

"Where in the name of the Holy did you find those animals, John of the Hawks?" he called.

"It was nothing," John grinned down at him. "I came out from ambush upon three, nay four, if one counts women, of the Clann Thompson. I confounded them and seized these, their horses, as well as two carbines and these other trappings you see."

The other was still staring. "Did you kill any?" he demanded, unbelievably. He was fully aware that John was under no compulsion to tell the truth to him, a Fielding and hence not a clansman of John's even though of the same phylum.

"*Kill* any?" John said loftily, still grinning. "I counted coup on all three!"

The other snorted. "As to that, I will wait to hear your declamation before the muster." He snorted again. "No one exaggerates before the assembly of the muster. That is the bann."

But John was a man now, before men, and he said coldly, "Do you suggest that I would break a bann, before the muster or anywhere else, warder of the gate?"

The other grunted but backtracked, being in the wrong and knowing it and also being conscious that whether or not John was exaggerating, somehow he had acquired three priceless battle steeds, the proof being there before him.

"No, I make no such suggestion, John of the Hawks. Enter, and congratulations."

John was grinning again, even as he herded the loot before him. "There

will be shouting of my name by the criers tonight," he boasted.

The other had his petty revenge. "I doubt it," he said.

John halted his horses and scowled in puzzlement. "How do you mean?" he demanded. "How long has it been since either a Hawk or a Fielding counted coup on three raiders in a single day and seized their possessions as well?"

"A long time indeed, John of the Hawks, and your feat is praiseworthy. But unfortunately for your moment of honor, the muster is to go into session shortly."

It was John's turn to stare. "The muster! But this is only Apriltime."

"Yes, and ordinarily the sachems and caciques would not join in the muster for three months; but they are gathering to discuss the travelers from Beyond."

"Beyond? Beyond what?"

"You do not read the Holy books sufficiently, lad," the warder said condescendingly. "Surely you have heard of Beyond."

"But that's legend! Myth!"

"You'd better not let any Keeper of the Faith hear you say that. Besides, the proof is there before you. Two days before this, the ship from the sky arrived, landing between Aberdeen and Dumbarton. The travelers from Beyond sent out a group and now accept the hospitality of our town."

John gaped.

Chapter Two

FOR THE MOMENT, however, the sensational news could wait. John was weary and hungered beyond the point where anything else mattered. He rode toward his clann's long-house, somewhat miffed at the timing of his moment of glory. Travelers from Beyond, indeed!

At the entrance to the longhouse, two of his closest friends duplicated the goggling of the warder of the gate.

John of the Hawks dismounted with considerable dignity and tossed his reins to one of the others.

"Don of the Clarks," he said loftily, "be a good lad and take my animals to the pastures." He looked at the other young man, who wore kilts similar to his own, those of the Clann Hawk. "And Dewey, would you mind, first, stripping the animals of the weapons and harness and taking them to the council hall, until I need them in my declamation before the muster, upon being raised up to the phylum?"

The one addressed as Dewey stuttered, "Where... where... where... ?"

But John raised a hand, exaggerating his weariness. "Later, lads, later. You'll hear it all when each clansman recites his victories to the assembly."

He turned and entered the community house and headed for his family's quarters.

They called after him, something urgent, but he was too tired now to chatter with them, no matter the glory. He wanted food, a bath and fresh clothing. The aftereffects of the excitement and hard riding were upon him.

In the small room that was his own, he began to strip but then paused, scowling. He could hear voices in the next room, the family living quarters, but they were not the voices he recognized, those of his mother, younger brother and two sisters. They were adult male voices, and now he realized they spoke with a strange accent.

He went to the door and pressed an ear against it, frowning still in puzzlement. The voices were clearer now. One was saying, "Well, you're the nearest thing to an ethnologist we've got. What do you think?"

There was a pause before another voice said hesitantly and dourly, "I'm no ethnologist, and your guess is probably as good as mine. I'd say they're the result of a crash of some pioneer group, Skipper. A very bad crash, since they lost communication."

"Why pioneers? Why not some passenger ship?"

"For one thing, they've got horses and cattle. Even trees of Earthside

type, now adapted, of course, to this world's ecology. Besides, what would a passenger ship be doing this far *in*?"

A third voice broke in. "What was a pioneer ship doing this far in, for that matter? From what we've seen so far, they've been here a long time. They're obviously originally an Earth culture, but they don't seem to have much more than legends about their origins."

The first voice, heavier than the others and with a note of command in it, said. "Well, it goes both ways. I've never heard of them either. They must go so far back that you'd have to go deep into the archives to even check on the possibilities."

The third voice said, "I just thought of something. They must go so far back that they might have had trouble with the warp. One of the very earliest colonizing ships, before the bugs were all ironed out. They must have had trouble with the ship's warp, and the ship was thrown all the way in here."

"Maybe," somebody else growled in disgust. "They're certainly primitive. Look at this. Look at these plumbing fixtures over here."

A fourth voice spoke up for the first time. "What're you complaining about? We're lucky they've got plumbing at all. Did you notice those overgrown stickers all the men 'carry? Good grief, swords, in this day and age."

"They also carry rifles," the second voice said. "We're lucky we weren't assassinated before we ever got the chance to tell them who we were."

"Single shot rifles," the second voice said. "Krishna! Look at these plumbing fixtures."

"What about them?"

John of the Hawks drew back from the door and stared at it. He was tired to the point where his mind was half blank or the reality of the situation would have come home to him quicker. He scowled his puzzlement and put his ear back to the door.

A voice was saying, "They're *platinum*." "Platinum? Don't be ridiculous."

"I think Harmon's right. Look at this, Skipper."

"Who'd ever use platinum for faucets?" Another voice, the second one John had heard, broke in. "A people who have so much of it that it's comparatively worthless, that's who." There was an element of awe in the tone.

"Here, let me scratch it with this knifeblade." John had removed his belt with its skean and claidheammor, but now he went over to his bed and picked the harness up again and belted it about his waist, still scowling. He went back to the door and pressed his ear against it once more.

The voice that had disclaimed knowledge of ethnology, whatever that was, was saying, "A really primitive culture. They must have an unbelievable system of rituals and taboos."

He who was addressed as Skipper said, "Why do you say that?"

"Because their language has changed, over a period that must amount to centuries, so little from Earth basic. And they still retain so many customs of the original Earth. Only very strict adherence to taboos and rituals would maintain such institutions so well. It's too bad we're not a larger expedition with a few anthropologists and such along."

"Oh, no it isn't."

The skipper's voice said, "What do you mean, Harmon?"

"I mean platinum. Probably mountains of it. There are only eight of us. Four back on the ship, and us. Good. Only that number to split it with." There was a long pause.

John could stand it no longer. He opened the door and walked through, staring.

There were four of them, and he'd never seen such dress in his life. It was evidently some sort of uniform, and all were garbed almost identically, so undoubtedly they were fellow clansmen. The dress was colorless, drab by any kilt standards, and each leg was completely sheathed. Above everything in strangeness was that though all were obviously adult, none wore claidheammor or even a skean.

It came to him then that these, of course, were the travelers from Beyond, in short, men from another world. Until this very moment, John had never really believed in such, in spite of the Holy Books and the preachings of the bedels and the Keepers of the Faith.

And It came to him also that although the others wore no swords or daggers, the bolstered devices on each hip were undoubtedly weapons, and weapons that would have mine under the bann in any phylum John of the Hawks had even heard of.

Two were seated in the most comfortable chairs the room provided, and two were leaning against the fireplace. All eyes turned to John when he entered.

He blurted, "What are you doing in this home?"

The youngest of the four, one of those leaning against the fireplace, let his hand drop nonchalantly to the bolstered object on his hip. It was, John decided, probably some sort of gun, though he had never seen a gun smaller than a carbine.

The eldest, who was seated, scowled at the intruder. "Who in the name of Krishna are you?"

Although their voices were heavily accented to John's ear, the words were almost all understandable, although he didn't know what *Krishna* meant.

He said, "I am John of the Hawks, and these are my assigned quarters."

The other seated man said, "Oh. Of course. Sorry, John, uh, of the Hawks. The... what did they call him? The head man."

One of those at the fireplace said, "The sachem."

"That's right. The sachem offered us this apartment. Your family has been moved in with one of your cousins, I think he said. You were away. We're very grateful, of course."

John of the Hawks flushed. "I am shamed. My home has been honored by being chosen to provide hospitality for travelers."

The oldest, a heavysset, heavy faced man, said, "I am Skipper William Fowler of the exploration Spaceship *Golden Hind*. And these are three of my officers." He indicated them. "First Officer DeRudder; Perez, First Engineer; and Mr. Harmon, my second."

Harmon, who had put his hand on his weapon when John had entered, was seemingly not very much older than John himself, possibly twenty-five, and notable largely for a somewhat twisted, sardonic mouth.

Perez was a little man, and nervous of movement. De-Rudder, next in age to the one they called Skipper, was the largest of the four, which wasn't saying much. None were more than six feet tall, so that even John, who hadn't reached his full growth, towered above them.

Still flushing embarrassment, John said, "May the bards sing your exploits. My family is honored. My excuses for bothering you. Undoubtedly, you rest before the council of the muster. My claidheammor is at your command." He turned to leave.

The one named DeRudder said, "Just a moment, son."

Son? This was a term that could be used only to a fellow clansman, and from an elder. Certainly the otherworlder couldn't claim to be kyn of the Hawks. John was taken aback. However, he turned politely.

The other said, "In there. I suppose it's a bathroom. That metal the faucet's made of. What is it?"

John looked at him blankly, but now the conversation he had eavesdropped upon came back to him. It wasn't quite clear just what the excitement had been about.

"Why, it's called platinum, I believe. The Hawks are herdsmen, not scrabblers in the dirt or metalworkers. However, it is called platinum."

There seemed to be a narrow eyed quality in all four of the strangers now.

DeRudder said carefully, "And it is in good supply on this planet, uh, Caledonia?"

John said blankly, "Why, honored guest, it is certainly the most

common of metals, is it not?"

The other licked his lower lip unconsciously. "Your sword, there, is steel, isn't it?"

John nodded, still uncomprehending of this bent of conversation.

"Ah, is platinum more common than iron? Cheaper?"

"Cheaper?" John said blankly.

The skipper was leaning forward, and John again got the impression of narrowed eyes, though he didn't know why. The older man said, "We don't know anything about your means of exchange, but this platinum is so abundant that you use it instead of iron for such things as household fixtures?"

"Why yes, honored guest. I suppose so. As I say, we Hawks are herdsmen, not metalworkers. I know little about it."

DeRudder cleared his throat. "All right," he said. "Thank you." !

John shrugged inwardly and turned again to leave.

He heard their voices, in excited conversation, when he had emerged into the long hall beyond. He made a face, accentuating his youth. The travelers from Beyond were certainly an incomprehensible group.

Robot, Sachem of the Clann Hawk, came hurrying up, his face anxious. As was usual, he was a clann elder and deserved the respect granted him by his clansmen. Past the age of raiding, he devoted full time to participating in the government of the clann and of the phylum, and younger Hawks took over the burdens of herding the flocks and otherwise participating in the economies of the clann.

John saluted him respectfully.

The sachem said, "John! I left messages for you, but evidently you have failed to receive them. Your home has lid 11 relinquished to travelers."

"Yes," John said unhappily. "I am shamed. I intruded upon them."

The sachem looked at him. "There was no intended discourtesy, and

hence it was not unseemly." He beamed suddenly. "Don of the darks has informed me of your triumph. If all wasn't confusion, with the coming of the travelers from Beyond, I would insist we adjourn to my quarters, and over your first glass of *uisgebeatha* of manhood, you could tell me in detail. As it is, I must summon the visitors for the muster. But quickly, did you kill or wound any of the raiders?"

John smiled his satisfaction at the compliment of his clann sachem. "Robert of the Hawks, I counted coup on three of them."

He was again awarded the goggling that had already been shown the warder of the gate and his two younger friends.

"Coup! On *three*?" John nodded.

Robert stood suddenly straighter. "It will be until June-time before the next regular meeting of the muster, but on my own responsibility as Sachem of the Hawks, I grant you permission to sit with the clannsmen at this assembly." John was stricken speechless.

The sachem turned to hurry on, but as he went he muttered, "Three! In all my life I have counted coup but twice. *Three!*"

John, in a daze of glory, made his way to the apartment of the cousin with whom he suspected his family would be quartered while the strangers occupied their usual chambers. He was correct, for although no one else was present he recognized various possessions of his mother, sisters and brother. He found a container of his own things as well, and after stripping and bathing, he put on fresh clothing.

He then went to the community kitchen and found food. There was no one else here, either, and he realized that all must be in the town square for the unusual muster of the sachems, caciques and sagamores.

Tired as he was, he made his way in the same direction, unable to resist the opportunity to join the clannsmen as a fellow. Ordinarily, he could have expected at least another five years of acting as a herdsman and scout before being raised to full clannsmen.

The muster was in progress. The four strangers were seated together in positions of honor in the circle of the eight sachems of the Aberdeen Phylum. Behind them were seated the second circle of the phylum

caciques, sagamores and noted raiders. Behind them were seated circles of clansmen, each clann together. Beyond, a respectful distance, were standing the women, young men and children of the phylum, and beyond them, crowded against the walls of the council building, the great kirk, the phylum arsenal and the structure that held the archives, were the clannless ones.

Trying not to be ostentatious but failing miserably, John made his way through the ranks of women, children and younger men to where the Clann Hawk sat, passing his mother, brother and sisters as he went. They stared at him, uncomprehending, as he joined the full clansmen and took a place.

There were a few raised eyebrows from his adult kynsmen, but none spoke. He knew they would hold him to account later, probably not having heard of the sachem's permission for him to join them.

The eldest of the phylum sachems, Thomas of the Clarks, was speaking, he alone of the inner circles on his feet. The speech was predictable. He was welcoming the outworlders, tendering them the hospitality of Aberdeen as travelers in a strange land. Evidently, a bedel, or possibly one of the Keepers of the Faith, had already completed the praise.

When Thomas of the Clarks was finished—and he was a garrulous speaker—he resumed his place among the other claim sachems, and all eyes went to the newcomers.

The one who had announced himself as Skipper William Fowler came to his feet and cleared his throat. He looked about at the assembled muster and bobbed his head, in a sort of greeting, in all directions.

"You must forgive us if we are unacquainted with some of your customs," he said. "As you know, we come from a great distance."

Which was a strange thing to say, John thought. Surely customs were the same everywhere. The banns laid down by the Holy were as necessary on one world as on another, and surely the Holy presided over all creation.

The commander of the strangers was saying, "Briefly, we are part of the crew of the exploration Spaceship *Golden Hind*, and our assigned task is to map out this sector. We represent the League, a confederation of planets settled by the human race, originally from Earth. You will, of

course, be invited to join the League. Frankly, we had been of the opinion that the *Golden Hind* was the first craft ever to penetrate this far into the galaxy. But here you are."

Robert, Sachem of the Clann Hawk, came to his feet. His face duplicated the expressions of puzzlement of all the sat hems and caciques.

He said, "But honored guest, this League of which you speak—surely you must realize that this muster represents only the Phylum of Aberdeen, and we can speak only for ourselves. The meeting of the Dail, of all the Phyla of the Loch Confederation, would still only represent this immediate region. And even the Dail could speak only for *our* confederation. We know of twenty-three other confederations to the north, south, east and west, and how many more lie beyond, what man can say? Save for our two sister confederations, with whom we are at perpetual peace, of course, how could we possibly hold council with the others to decide whether to join this League?"

It was the skipper's turn to frown lack of understanding. "You mean you are at war with all other, uh, confederations?"

"War?" Robert of the Hawks said in puzzlement.

"War. Conflict between nations, uh, that is, confederations."

One of the caciques said, "Ah, he means raids."

The skipper looked at him. "More than that. A conflict in which the full, uh, confederation would throw its united power against another confederation."

A bedel came to his feet, his face in horror. "But that would be against the bann!"

The otherworld officer who had been introduced to John as DeRudder said hurriedly, "A taboo. Easy, Skipper."

The leader of the strangers said smoothly to the bedel, "I was not advocating war, simply requesting information about the way of things on Caledonia."

Thomas of the Clarks came to his feet. "Assuming that by some means

it was possible to unite all the confederations of Caledonia into a gigantic Dail and all agreed to join this League—of what advantage would it be to us?" He sat again.

The skipper held out his hands in a gesture to indicate the answer was obvious. "Why, for trade, for one thing."

One of the caciques spoke up. "Trade of what?"

The skipper said, "Why, that would have to be decided. Trade for the things you have in abundance, for goods, ideas, and so forth, of which you have need."

A sagamore said, "But I can think of nothing we need from the stars. Those items for which we must trade are easily available from other phylum, and we need go no further than the yearly Dail."

DeRudder stood and said, "Do you mind, Skipper?"

The Skipper muttered, a frustrated element in his voice, "You're the nearest thing we have to an ethnologist. Go on."

DeRudder said, "Perhaps we can start this trade right here and now. Evidently, somewhere near Aberdeen there is at least one mine from which platinum is extracted. Very good. We will draw up a paper giving all rights to exploitation of these mines to us eight crewmen of the *Golden Hind*. In return, we will immediately have shipped to Caledonia, and to your town of Aberdeen, enough repeating rifles and submachine guns to arm each of your clansmen."

Thomas of the Clarks stood once more. "I do not understand. Some of your words are confusing. What is a repeating rifle, and what is a submachine gun?"

DeRudder said, "You have single shot rifles and use cartridges in them. These guns fire the same type of cartridges at great speed, five hundred a minute and more."

The bedel was on his feet again, his eyes popping. "But that is against the bann!"

Thomas of the Clarks motioned him to his seat. He turned to the

strangers coldly. "You are travelers and hence eligible to remain in Aberdeen for the three traditional days of hospitality. But as to granting you the exclusive rights to the mines of platinum, obviously that is against the bann. The products of the earth belong to all. Even should we wish to grant them to you, the other phyla would hardly agree. And above all, we would not trade them for what you call repeating rifles, which are most surely against the bann. Furthermore—"

But he was interrupted by the sounding of the conch.

Clannsmen leaped to their feet, dashing for their individual longhouses. The caciques and sagamores were shouting orders. Women ran for the arsenal for extra bandoliers of cartridges.

A voice shouted from a housetop, "Raid! Raid! The Thompsons! Raid!"

Chapter Three

JOHN OF THE HAWKS, with the speed of youth, got back to the longhouse where he had left his carbine as quickly as did any of the clannsmen. He tore into the room he was sharing with his brother, ripped his rifle from the wall, grabbed up a bandolier, made a snap decision and sped to the roof, deciding he had no time to await the orders of the raid cacique of the Hawks.

The longhouse of the Hawks served on one side as part of the defensive wall of the town of Aberdeen. The wall was windowless on the side looking out over the fields and the roof flat, save for a parapet.

John sat down behind the parapet, slipped a cartridge from the bandolier, threw the breech and inserted the bullet. He breathed deeply, getting his breath after his run. They were after the horses, that was obvious. There were shooting and shouting over in the direction of the pastures, and a great deal of dust.

Undoubtedly, the raid caciques would shortly launch a counterblow, but meanwhile John's position was an advantageous one, just in case the aggressive Thompsons attempted to force the town.

He heard someone come up behind him but didn't turn. He had his elbow:, resting on his knees, the muzzle of the gun resting on the parapet.

The newcomer sat down next to him. It was one of the men from Beyond, the one called DeRudder. He was puffing. He said, "What's happening?"

John said, "The Thompsons. They're raiding our horses."

"Oh. Members of one of the other confederations, eh?"

"No. The Thompsons are part of our confederation." The other stared at him. "And they're attacking you?" John put off answering for the moment. Through the swirl of dust a double score and more of mounted men came dashing at full tilt, shouting the battle halloo of the Clann Thompson. In the fore, at breakneck speed, rode two who held only coup sticks in their hands.

John's lips thinned back over his teeth in a grimace of excitement. They were not quite in range. He held his fire. At the pace they were coming, they would be to the wall and directly below him before he could get off more than two or three rounds from his carbine. He pulled two more shells from the bandolier and placed them on the low parapet.

DeRudder said, "Mari, mother of Krishna, look at them come! What are those small weapons the first two are carrying?"

"They aren't weapons," John said. "They're coup sticks." He darted the other a look of surprise.

"Sticks? You mean the only weapon they have is a stick of wood, and they're riding into rifle fire?"

John had no time to argue the niceties of the glory of an unarmed man counting coup upon an armed enemy. His eyes narrowed, and he drew a bead on the first of the fast approaching Thompsons. He thought he recognized the man and wondered at the speed at which the other had been able to organize this raid, after his disgrace at the stream.

He squeezed the trigger gently, but at that split second the two leading raiders flung themselves to the sides of their horses, even as John had done in the affair at the stream, clinging by foot and hand to the far side of the beasts they rode.

DeRudder said excitedly, "The horse! Get the horse, and the man'll

break his neck when he falls."

John was so startled at the idea that he took his eyes from the carbine's sights and looked at the space explorer. "But one doesn't shoot a good animal deliberately." He shook his head and returned to his gun. His eyes narrowed, and he began the squeeze again. The carbine barked.

DeRudder blurted, "You hit him. You hit his foot! Krishna, what a shot!"

John grunted in satisfaction, threw the carbine's breech, extracted the spent cartridge with a flick and inserted a new one. He upped the gun again for another shot.

The leading Thompson, wounded, had fallen from his beast, but one of the others who trailed behind caught him up with a sweep and turned his own beast around to head back.

Others of the Clann Hawk were streaming up from below now, joining in the fire. The raiders were firing back, while at full tilt. John kept his head as low as was compatible with staying in the action, being fully aware of the famed marksmanship of the Clann Thompson.

DeRudder, in high excitement, pulled his hand weapon from its holster. "Here," he blurted. "Let me train this on them. I'll show 'em what a *real* gun can do."

Shocked, John of the Hawks dropped his own gun and knocked the barrel of the other's weapon up, just in time. A livid beam reached far into the sky, seemingly into infinity.

DeRudder stared at the Hawk clansman. He said, "I can wipe them all out with one sweep of this."

"And break the bann by using such a weapon! Do you wish a bloodfeud with the Claim Thompson when there are but eight of you?"

"But they're firing at us!"

"It's only a raid. In revenge for my stealing four horses from them."

DeRudder crouched down behind the parapet. "I give up," he muttered.

The charge had been broken, the oncoming raiders realizing that their attempt had come a cropper, that too many of the Aberdeen clannsmen had come on the scene to make the surprise successful. Besides, John suspected that all this was but a diversion, whilst other Thompsons rounded up as many of the Aberdeen animals as they could before the main body of the defenders came up.

There was no further value in remaining here. John joined his fellow clannsmen in dropping to the ground on the far side of the wall and dog trotting toward the pastures where the main body of the raiders was making its play. He left the spaceman behind, not bothering to speak to him further. John was still feeling his shock at the other's words and actions. The man conducted himself like a clann-less one.

He thought he understood what must have happened. The group of four, counting the girl, had been a small unit of a larger group of the Clann Thompson, a major raiding party rounding up Clann Hawk cattle. After John had stolen their horses they had recontacted the other Thompsons and followed him to take their revengement at the disgrace of three of their clannsmen being counted coup upon.

Their luck had been better than they could have hoped. When they arrived at the Hawk pastures, they had found that there were but a handful of guards. Almost the entire population of Aberdeen had been at the muster to gape at the visitors from Beyond.

Somehow, in the heat of combat, John had shaken off the better part of his fatigue, and he was among the first of the defending clannsmen to arrive on the scene of action. It was a debacle.

The Aberdeen clannsmen and young men who had been guarding the herds had been cut down or driven off, and the Thompson raiders, ever top men in this sort of thing, had decided upon an off-beat strategy. All had dismounted from their own tired horses and thrown their saddles upon fresh mounts. Each was now busily rounding up a half dozen or more captured steeds and driving them off, leaving their own jaded mounts behind.

Here and there, hand to hand combat was taking place, claidheammors flashing, as the Thompson clannsmen attempted to break off the action

and make their escape. They knew themselves outnumbered, representing but one clann, whilst in Aberdeen there were a full eight. Those who were escaping were scattering, heading in a dozen different directions, rather than remaining in a single, easy to pursue group.

John of the Hawks gritted his teeth even as he dashed into the fray. On wearied horses, the Aberdeen clansmen would have their work cut out catching up with all the raiders. And those whom they did successfully trail would, when caught up with by revenging clansmen, simply de-sc-it their booty and ride for it back to the safety of their own town of Caithness.

Aüi! He came up upon one of them who was having trouble with a Clann Clark steed he had captured. John knew the animal well, a highly trained stallion that fought against having any other on his back save his master.

Shouting the battle halloo of the Hawks, John brought up his carbine to fire. The other rode toward him, swinging his claidheammor, desperately fighting the animal, tearing its mouth with the heavy bit the animal suffered, a raiding bit, deliberately designed for use on captured steeds. Ho shouted the halloo of the Clann Thompson and slashed at the man on foot.

John caught the blade on the barrel of the carbine, which he only now found was empty. He dropped the gun and tore his own claidheammor from its scabbard.

The horse reared up, shrilling its fear and anger at being dominated by a stranger.

John darted under its belly, coming up on the other side of the desperate enemy clansman. He slashed upward, cutting deep into the other's side, and slashed again, before the man could turn to defend himself.

The other's sword dropped from his hand. For the briefest of moments, he tried to keep his seat on the plunging animal. Then he fell, crashing to the ground.

John of the Hawks was up and onto the steed, taking over the position of stranger in the saddle. But at least he knew the animal's name and had,

in his time, petted it in admiration.

Now, even as he battled, he spoke soothingly, calmly, called it by name, resorted to knees, rather than heavy use of the bit. Around him, as he fought to dominate the horse, the battle faded off.

Most of the Clann Thompson were escaping, heading in all directions as the Aberdeen clansmen attempted to catch horses, saddle them and get on with the pursuit. Unhappily, little harness was available, most of it being back in the town. The Hawks, Clarks, Fieldings and other defenders of Aberdeen scrambled up bareback in excited attempt to pursue the thieves.

John was one of the few with a saddled mount and a fresh one at that. He darted his eyes over the ground, looking for his carbine. He couldn't see it. He and the horse had moved over a considerable area in the past few minutes.

No matter. He had claidheammor and skean, weapons enough for any clansman. He headed after the foe at full gallop, blade in hand.

But then his eyes narrowed. This was what the enemy had in mind. At best with such tactics, he would catch one, or at the very most two, of the raiders. And even then, he might be fought off by a Thompson who still retained his firearm.

His mind raced. There must be something more effective than chasing off after a retreating enemy and vainly shouting his battle halloo. In fact, there was a ludicrous quality to it all, and without doubt at the next meeting of the Dail, when the clansmen of all the confederation's phyla recited their victories, there would be great laughter on the part of the Clann Thompson at the expense of the men of Aberdeen.

And it suddenly came to him that much of the laughter would be directed at him, John of the Hawks, who, although he had stolen three horses, had not been able to retain them for more than a few hours, so quick had come the revengement.

There must be something more effective...

And yes, there was! The raiders were scattering, but in order to return to their own town, they must sooner or later head toward it, after they had

eluded the Aberdeen pursuit.

As a Hawk scout and a young herder of the cattle, John knew this countryside as well as he knew the long-house of his birth. He cast his eyes around quickly, trying to spot one or more fellow clansmen he could bring into his plan, but there simply were none. His fellows who had also acquired mounts were taking off after the enemy in all directions. He must go it alone.

John shrugged and dug heels into flanks and headed out over the countryside. Any of the Aberdeen clansmen who saw him must have thought him either daft or a slink, for there were no enemies, herding their booty, going in this direction. He grimaced, knowing the dishonor that would be his, did his plan fail.

He rode hard, pushing his newly acquired and dominated animal. Over field, over heath, through clumps of trees, up and over the hills. Aüi. He knew this land well, but never had he ridden it at such breakneck speed.

The hills grew higher as the horse began to weary, and shortly he was in a narrow valley. Narrower and narrower.

Until at last, he reached his destination. Reached it and passed through the narrow way.

On the far side of the pass, he leaped from the horse's back, took its reins, hurried it into the shelter of the patch of trees to one side and tethered it. He momentarily considered binding its mouth so that it could not whinny at the sound of other horses approaching. But no, the animal was too weary from its hard gallop to be interested in the company of its fellows.

John took in hand the scabbard of his claidheammor, to keep it from tripping him up, and began his ascent of the steep hill at a trot.

At the top, at the spot he'd had in mind from the first, he looked back over the way he had come. And doubts hit him. There was nothing in sight—not so much as a flurry of dust. Perhaps he had miscalculated.

But no, how could he have? Given scores of Thompsons scattering, and then converging again on their hometown of Caithness, surely at least one enemy clansman and his stolen horses must come through here. Simply

must. If not, all was disgrace for John of the Hawks.

He settled himself down to wait, sitting on a rock. At this stage he would not be spotted. He considered his plan of action, when and if the raider or raiders did appear. He cursed himself now, for not having taken the few more moments of time it might have taken to locate his carbine. A more beautiful ambush than this could hardly be asked. The fleeing raiders would not be thinking in terms of Hawk clansmen *before* them but would undoubtedly be constantly looking over their shoulders. Given a carbine, John could knock at least two off their horses before they could take defensive measures. But there was little profit in dwelling upon that. The fact remained that all the weapons he had were his heavy claidheammor and his skean.

He thoughtfully picked up a large rock and hefted it. But no. The foe would pass directly below, and it was possible he might hit one in the head—possible, but hardly probable. He was no great marksman with a thrown stone. There was no occasion for him to be. The youth of Aberdeen played with wooden weapons, not balls.

And now, at a distance, he could spot a cloud of quickly rising dust.

Aüi! He had won! At least, to this point he had won.

Just in case, he gathered half a dozen suitable heavy stones and put them ready to hand. Then he crouched behind his boulder. It would hardly do for the other or others to be keen enough of eye to spot his movement up here.

The newcomer: were approaching at a rapid pace, and he could make out individual forms. Four horses and but one rider. As a now full-fledged clansman or, at least, one suffered to sit among the clansmen until being formally raised up at the next regular muster, he couldn't admit relief that there was only one foe to deal with, but deep within him the relief was there. In spite of his efforts of the past two days, he was a young man still, with neither the physical capacity nor the experience of a Thompson clansman.

He ducked lower and peered from behind his defense. And now he scowled. There was something he couldn't quite put his finger upon...

And then it came to him. The lead horse, scurrying along before the

others, herded by the raider, was his own personal steed, stolen with the other Hawk animals in the pastures. And—added wonder—now that they came closer, he saw that the rest were the three he had stolen himself at the stream, precipitating this whole affair. He was taken aback. It was an unexpected coincidence.

He tried to measure the enemy clansman who was pounding along hard behind the rapidly tiring beasts. And again there was relief. Unless he was mistaken at this distance, the other could be little older and larger than John himself. Possibly not even a full clansman, but simply a youth brought along to help with the stolen herds.

John gathered himself. His plan of action was now clear. He put his claidheammor down beside him and took up one of the stones.

The fleeing group had entered the narrow way, slowed slightly by the rocky character of the pass. And on they came.

Suddenly, he heaved the rock in his right hand at the first, riderless horse, even as it passed beneath him. He quickly shifted his second stone to his right hand and threw it as well.

The lead animal screamed terror and reared, slowing all those behind, who also took fright.

He jumped to his feet, grabbed his skean from his belt, and leaped. Luck was ever with him. He launched himself full onto the back of the Clann Thompson raider, who, completely startled by the unexpected attack, toppled from the horse, John still atop.

While they were atumble on the ground, John raised the knife, preparatory to the stab. But it was uncalled for. The enemy was unconscious, a cut on the side of the head from the fall.

But there was another reason John of the Hawks stayed his blow.

There was no stronger bann than that against injuring a woman.

Chapter Four

AND AS JOHN of the Hawks came to his feet and stared down at the woman he had struck down, he realized that she was not even a woman

but merely a lass. Certainly no older than he himself.

She wore the kilts of the Clann Thompson, and her hair was cut short in the style of young men. And at her side was a skean. He gaped at her. In all his life, he had never heard of a lass so desexing herself. Shameless, Thompson women might be rumored to be, but most certainly he had never seen one at the yearly Dail dressed as a man and carrying a weapon.

The horses, all trained battle steeds, had come to a halt at the far end of the pass. John, deciding she would be out for a time, at least, or, if she recovered, would still be of little danger, went and secured them and tied them where he had left his own animal. Then he went to the hill crest and regained his claidheammor and returned it to its scabbard.

He strode down then to where he had left her.

She was beginning to regain consciousness.

He had no water, or he might have bathed her head a bit. As it was, he sat on a boulder and waited, still scowling disbelief. So far as he knew, in all the history of his phylum, never had a woman, armed or otherwise, participated in a raid. There was even a puzzling aspect about it. How did one defend himself against a lass? Suppose she came at you with carbine, claidheammor or skean. What did a clansman do—turn and run? What else was there to do?

But now she was stirring and moaning. John of the Hawks squatted down beside her, lifting her head to his knee and stroking the forehead awkwardly.

By the Holy, she was a pretty thing! High forehead, reddish hair, cut short though it was, a generous mouth, perhaps just a shade too wide. Teeth that were white, white; a firm chin.

And suddenly, blue eyes staring unbelievably up into his own.

She snatched Quickly for her skean.

John took it from her as gently as the situation allowed and threw the damper down the pass.

He said awkwardly, "I would not harm you, lass. We of the Clann Hawk

do not harm women."

She sat up now, and John came to his feet. He scowled at her, not knowing what to say. What did a clansman say, upon capturing a raider who turned out to be a woman—a lass?

She stood up too and looked at him scornfully but then began to sway. She put a hand to the cut at the side of her head, brought it back and looked at it and seemed about to swoon at the sight of the blood. There was not much, but it was blood.

John stepped forward and put a hand about her waist.

She began to react in fear, but he said gently, "Easy, lass, I wouldn't harm you. Come over here and sit on the heather a bit. You'll get over your dizzy spell."

She suffered him to take her over to a softer area and to seat her more comfortably than would have been possible in the stony pass.

He waited patiently for long minutes and finally realized that she was peering at him from between the fingers she had been holding over her eyes.

Seventeen—perhaps only sixteen, he decided. What in the name of the Holy did the Thompson clansmen have in mind, bringing such a child on a raid? He was conveniently forgetting that he himself was not yet eighteen and, except in an emergency at the time of a raid, confined to such activities as holding the horses of full clansmen whilst they fought on foot, or bringing up ammunition or water, perhaps assisting the wounded.

Trying to force gruffness into his voice and failing miserably he said, "Now tell me all about this."

"About what?" she said defiantly.

"Come on, lass, the proof is there before us. You are armed. You are on a raid of the Clann Thompson against Aberdeen."

She had taken her hands from her face and was now looking at him. She said slowly, "But you are the young Hawk clansman who stole our

horses at the riverbank."

He grunted. "And counted coup on three of the Clann Thompson who had been astealing of Hawk cattle."

She said wonderingly, "But you are such a young clansman to have done so much."

There was no answer to that, though he wished he looked older. She was as pretty a lass as he had ever seen, he realized. And it came to him that it would not be too many years before he would be faced with stealing a bride from some clann other than the Hawks.

She said, "What will you do with me?" But there was only the faintest of fear of the unknown, far in the background. The girl was no slink, but then, she had already proved that.

John said, "First, I will demand you tell me how you are here, under these circumstances."

Her mouth tightened stubbornly, but he held his peace, waiting, and finally she spoke. "I am Alice of the Thompsons."

He nodded to that. "I am John of the Hawks."

"I was but one lass, in a family of five sons." He couldn't see what that had to do with it. Most families of Caledonia had at least as many children as that, and a large percentage of males was certainly preferable, considering the number of casualties taken by the clansmen in raids and in defense of the flocks.

But she was going on. "It was not a family for a lass. My mother had been captured in a raid from the Edin Phylum, and I was raised by my kyn and my brothers. I was more prone to play with the toy claidheammors than with dolls and the other nonsense of girl children. Until I was all but a woman, this was true."

"Go on," John said.

"So it was that when my five brothers were killed in a raid of clansmen from Aberdeen, attempting to protect our herds—"

"*Five!*" John said blankly. "All five in one raid?"

"All five. Two came home that night with but wounds; however, they died before the week was out, when the fleshrot set in."

"*Aüi, lass!*" John murmured.

She took a deep breath. "I was still a child, but I took an oath that I would have my revengement on Aberdeen. I took it before my clann elders, and in their pity, none laughed. But as the years went by, over and over I told all that one day I would have my revengement. And I set aside childhood and practiced as best I could and as best my kyn would allow me with claidheammor and skean and carbine, though it was seldom indeed I could cozen a clannsmen into allowing me to use his firearm." John of the Hawks was staring at her.

She took another breath. "And always, after I had grown to womanhood, I pleaded with them to take me on their raids. And sent praise to the Holy, that it would be so. "Until finally, perhaps worried of my health, the sachem and caciques discussed the matter, and one was appointed a spokesman to remonstrate with me, since it had become a scandal in the Caithness Phylum and I made all uncomfortable. When I held to my oath, then he demanded if I would be satisfied with but one raid against Aberdeen and would then subside, let my hair grow long, and participate in the activities of women."

"Go on," John said, his eyes still wide in disbelief. He had never heard such a tale. Surely it could never happen in Aberdeen amongst his own kyn.

She said bitterly, "I was not to find out until later that the raid was a minor one, deliberately planned for my sake. We rode to the outskirts of the heath of Aberdeen—"

"And the preserves of the Clann Hawk," John muttered.

"Yes. And there we proceeded to do no more than round up and butcher the cattle. Far from danger of meeting the clannsmen of Aberdeen."

"But that was when I, on a long scout, found you."

"Yes. And counted coup on Will, Raid Cacique of the Clann Thompson, and two of his sagamores."

"Aüi!" John blurted. This would be something to relate to the muster when he was raised up to full clansman.

"So then," she said, "all was forgotten about the original purpose of the raid. The whole party was gathered together, and we rode at full pace for Aberdeen, Will, the Raid Cacique, riding ahead in a furious rage."

She shrugged. "You know the rest. Your herds were practically unguarded. We rounded up the horses, and each member of the party was given a few head to herd back to Caithness. Will was revenged, at least in part. If mine, alone, of the horses have been recaptured, then it is the biggest raid known in the memory of living clansmen."

"Yours will not be alone," John said sourly. "But I will admit, it was a gigantic raid—and well executed." The last was hard to bring out.

"And now," she said, her voice again bitter, "I suppose von will return me to Aberdeen to become a clansless one in your household."

For a long time he stared at her. Finally, he shook his head. "No, lass. You were never meant to be a kitchen drudge. Before the week was out, you would be stolen from our longhouse by a Clark or a Fielding or one from the other clans of Aberdeen."

"What difference that to you? They would have to pay the brideright, and a few horses or cattle—I would surely bring a few horses—must be welcome to a clansman as young as yourself. I see that you are already wed. Or is it that you do not find pleasure in my appearance yourself?" There was a wistful quality in her voice as she touched a feminine hand to her hair.

"I am not wed," he said gruffly.

"Aüi," she said, her voice bitter still. "I am not so sure that the clansmen of your phylum will find me desirable either, John of the Hawks. Undoubtedly, the younger men will think of me as you do. If I am honorably stolen by one of your Aberdeen clansmen, it will be by one of the older clansmen, perhaps incapacitated by wounds, who desires youth in bed and a strong lass who can be driven to hard work at his hearth and

in his quarters."

John of the Hawks had come to his feet again. He stared down at her for a moment, then walked over to where he had tethered the horses and returned with the one upon which she had been riding when he had leaped from his ambush.

He held the reins to her.

She looked up at him blankly.

"Return to Caithness," he said. "I am not as yet raised up to full clansman, Alice of the Thompsons, and will not be until the next muster. Thus, I am not eligible to steal a bride. And if I returned with you to Aberdeen, someone else would take you before it was meet that I could. So return to your kyn, Alice of the Thompsons."

She stood and looked at him, bewildered.

He added, "And I will come for you another day."

She blushed then, as a good lass must "If you come, my kyn will defend me."

He twisted his mouth in amusement.

"And if they fail," she insisted, her head high, "I will take my own life with my skean."

"I have heard of the tradition," he said with amused skepticism, "but I have never heard of its happening. Besides, at the next meeting of the Dail I will ask the Sachem of the Hawks to confer with the Sachem of the Thompsons and honorably arrange for the stealing of Alice of the Thompsons, arranging in advance with her claim for suitable payment of the brideright."

In a sudden, seemingly uncalled for fury, she raised her hand to slap him.

But he was having none of that. He grabbed her strongly and kissed her full on the mouth. She held tense for a long moment, then her mouth went soft, as though unwillingly. Through her jerkin, he could feel the softness

of her breasts. Finally, he released her and stood back, smiling.

She rubbed her hand across her mouth. "But... but I am not your bride," she said in horror. "And it is against the bann."

He grinned at her. "It surely is," he said.

She turned and jumped astride the horse and glared down at him in feminine rage. "I have been shamed," she snapped.

"I doubt it," he told her. "For none know save you and me."

She dug furious heels into the steed and was gone. And John of the Hawks stood and watched after the woman he loved until she was long out of sight.

Largely, as he rode back to Aberdeen, herding the recaptured three animals, his mind was on Alice of the Thompsons, as was to be expected of a young man yet to be wed. But he dwelt also on the men from Beyond, and because the distance was passing far for one who rode and herded animals, he had ample time to consider ramifications.

The weapon the one named DeRudder had demonstrated was cause for thought. On the face of it, the man from other worlds was not averse to using the frightful thing. And what had he said? "*I can wipe them all out with one sweep of this.*"

John suppressed a shudder as, unworthy of a clansman though the thought might be, he couldn't help considering what a handful of such weapons could accomplish on a raid. The men from Beyond named themselves explorers, and if John understood the word correctly, they were on a peaceful mission. But suppose they had come in raid? Who could resist them, with such weapons?

There were other aspects. On the face of it, the other-worldlings were far and beyond the Caledonians, whose most advanced vehicle was a simple two wheeled cart. Even John could envision the span between a horse drawn cart and a craft that could cross space.

The light was fading rapidly now, and his exhaustion came upon him, and he could make it no further. He drove his animals to a hidden gully, hobbled them, and threw himself to the heather.

When he awakened, it was well toward noon and he was well refreshed, though he had slept upon the ground with not even a cloak. Thus is youth, especially on Caledonia, where, long since, man and nature had eliminated the unfit.

He retrieved his horses, who had not wandered far in their search for graze, in view of the hobbles, and took up again his ride to Aberdeen.

As he drew nearer to the town, he occasionally spotted others, undoubtedly fellow clansmen, heading in the same direction. A few herded horses, but most rode dejectedly without.

Alice of the Thompsons had been correct. It had been a raid of raids, and so far as the clansmen of Aberdeen were concerned they had counted few, if any, coups, killed few of the raiders indeed, and recovered but a fraction of their stolen animals. It was a black day, a day Aberdeen bards would never sing, though most certainly those of Caithness would. He winced to think of the coming Dail, in spite of his own glory.

Closer to the town, he met his friend Don of the Clarks, who, besides the mount he rode, herded another animal before him. It was not a battle steed but an older draft animal, and there was an air of dispirit on the face of the other.

John hailed him, keeping any elation from his voice, for John of the Hawks was maturing rapidly. His own three recaptured steeds were sleek, in their prime, and well trained. Above all, they were not property of related clansmen, and hence, it was not necessary to return them to former owners. They were enemy horse and hence John's own, save, of course, the one he rode.

Don asked, "Where did you find them?" He was of John's own age, and they had grown up together, shared many an experience in common. However, somehow he appeared strangely young now to John. Callow, perhaps.

The other was not a Hawk, so had he willed, John could have lied to him. However, he made a half truth, realizing only now that he hadn't the slightest idea of what story he would tell the sachem and the war cacique of the Hawks.

He said, "I took them from one of the raiders. All except one fast steed

upon which the Thompson hurried off toward Caithness, slightly wounded."

"Aüi!" Don of the Clarks said in disgust. "If only I had such a story. I spotted not even one. I found this ugly nag straying. The Holy only knows to whom she belongs."

John nodded. "There will be shame in Aberdeen this day."

From there on they rode in glum silence.

At the gate, the warder and his men greeted them with compliments, by which John assumed that few indeed were the clansmen who had done even as well as he.

They turned their mounts and recaptured animals over to youths to be led back to the pastures. Then, after brief farewells, they headed toward their respective longhouses, carrying their horses' harness and their weapons and coup sticks.

Bemused with both thoughts of the action of the day before and his experience with Alice of the Thompsons, John made the same mistake he had on the previous afternoon. He automatically headed for his own family quarters and the room in which he had been quartered for the greater part of his life, forgetful, for the moment, that the apartment had been turned over to the strangers from Beyond.

He caught himself almost immediately after he entered, though evidently the otherworldlings were not using his chamber, the rest of the apartment being ample for their needs. He turned to leave the room by the door that led to the long hall, but once again he heard voices.

He hesitated. Eavesdropping was beneath the dignity of a clansman, though there was no definite bann, or even established custom.

However, he told himself in excuse, they were not members of the Clann Hawk, or even of the Aberdeen Phylum. And for that matter, their strangeness was such that they bore looking into.

He pressed his ear to the door that led to the living quarters. As before, the others were obviously alone and once again in full debate. It would seem that these men from the League, as they called it, were as mystified

by the institutions of Caledonia as John and his fellow phyletics were by the ways of the men from Beyond.

He decided it was DeRudder's voice he was hearing. The second in command of the *Golden Hind* was saying, "And I claim we better get out. Did you hear what their big mucky-muck said at the muster? They've got a traditional three days of hospitality for the traveling stranger. All right. What happens after the three days are up? And that's today, mind you."

One of the other voices—Harmon's?—said sneeringly, "What could happen? We've awed them. They don't know what to make of us."

The skipper's voice said slowly, "No, we haven't awed them. They don't know what to make of us, but we haven't awed them. You know what they're busily up to now?" There was no answer to his question, and the skipper went on, "They're rounding up a raiding party, to replenish their herds of horses."

DeRudder said, "You mean they're going to go after this gang that hit them yesterday?"

"No, not at all. One of the war caciques told me that wouldn't do. The Thompsons, or whatever their name was, would be prepared and ready to defend themselves. So they're going to attack another town. They're going to raid somebody else that they haven't had any trouble with recently."

"Krishna!" a nervous voice said. "What a people! I'm in favor of getting back to the ship. I wish we'd brought the skimmer with us instead of the groundcraft."

Harmon said, "I'd like to stick around and see if there isn't some way of changing their minds on signing over exploitation rights to their mineral resources. We could offer them just about anything. On the face of it, they're practically poverty stricken so far as commodities are concerned." The nervous one—Perez, John decided—said, "What would we do with it, if we got it?"

Harmon's voice said, "Don't be empty. We'd ditch this so-called exploratory cruise and head for some of the nearest frontier planets, those with early free enterprise type economies. Can you imagine being able to dump an almost limitless amount of platinum onto an open market? And do you realize the scale of living of the really rich on those planets? Why,

the Caesars never had it so good."

The skipper said thoughtfully, "Harmon's right. Given the concession, we could find means of profiting by it. The problem is getting the concession."

John of the Hawks was scowling. About half of this, He didn't understand at all.

It was DeRudder's turn. He said, "I'm in favor of immediate return to the ship too. We've already fouled things up here, in trying to learn what makes them tick. We'll have to go on to some other town. Some other phylum, as they call it. We've got a little background now and can do better. By the way, do you know what *phylum means?*"

There was no answer, and his voice took over again. "It means tribe, in this connection, if I'm taking it from the Greek correctly. I would say that they've got a system of several clans that make up each phylum. These phyla, in turn, are loosely made up into confederations. From what the old boy said yesterday, there are such confederations all over the planet. He mentioned knowing of twenty-three others."

"So?" the skipper said.

"So we'll set down in the territory of some other confederation and start all over again."

"Start what?"

"Subverting institutions, to put it bluntly. Somewhere we'll find a phylum that's just taken such a licking from a neighbor that they'll accept our offer of repeating rifles."

Harmon said, "By the way, where are we getting anything as primitive as repeating rifles and submachine guns? The only place I've ever seen such things was in historical fiction shows."

"Don't be a dully. We could take half a ton of platinum to any of the frontier planets, and they'd tool up and whomp them up for us in a week's time."

"Why not more sophisticated weapons?" the nervous voice said.

"You're being particularly dense today, Perez. We don't want to give them the sort of firepower that'd enable them to work *us* over."

"I guess you're right."

The skipper's voice said, "And what if we find the same thing elsewhere that we ran into here? That none of these phyla, or whatever you call them, will sign over their mineral rights?"

DeRudder's voice went suave. "Skipper, there are ways. Obviously, we must abide by the League Canons, but at this distance, that will be no problem. And we can take a page from early Earth history. There are ways for, ah, civilizing backward peoples whether they want to be civilized or not. Remember the European pilgrims and pioneers and the Amerinds? For instance, I note that they have a distilled spirit here they call *uisgebeatha*, and, believe me, it's potent. Very well, where you have potent nip, you've got people who are hooked on it. All we have to do is find a sachem or so hooked on *uisgebeatha*, get him binged and have him sign over mineral rights to us."

His voice expressing interest, Harmon said, "How do you know that under local laws the sachems have such power?"

"What do we care? They're kind of a chief, aren't they? With the papers signed by one or two sachems, we can go to one of the less punctilious planets and get some military beef to back up our legal rights."

The skipper said heavily. "Mr. DeRudder, I can see you missed your calling. But what if we can't find any such sachems?"

DeRudder laughed. "In that case, Skipper, maybe well elect one or two of our own. Once the chaos starts, who can say who the *legal* sachems are, and who aren't?

"Just a minute," Harmon said abruptly. His heavy boots sounded on the floor, as he moved rapidly across the room toward the door behind which John of the Hawks stood.

Chapter Five

But SOME INSTINCT had warned John a split second before. He spun and scurried across the room to the door to the long hall and was through

it before the other could expose him.

In the hall, he shot his eyes up and down, having no immediate plan of action. Where would he find the Sachem of the Hawks? Obviously...

He was saved the problem.

Through the door to the living quarters of his family stepped DeRudder. On spotting John, he whipped his side-arm from its holster.

"All right, boy," he said. "Step in here."

John of the Hawks looked at him. "I have no fear of your weapon," he said. "A shout and my kynsmen will be upon you."

"But you will be very dead by that time, boy."

"I am not afraid to die. I am a Hawk."

DeRudder hefted the gun up and down. "However, you have seen what the weapon could do. Would you expose your relatives to it?"

John thought about that only briefly. He stepped forward. DeRudder stood to one side, the gun trained, as John entered the room where the others from Beyond were gathered.

He stood there before them defiantly.

DeRudder closed the door behind him and said, "The overgrown dully's been snooping. What'll we do with him?"

"Let's get out of here," Perez said quickly. "The fat's fixing to be in the fire before we know it."

The skipper looked at John, remaining seated in the same chair he had been in the day before. He said. "How much did you hear, son?"

"Do not call me son. I am not kyn of yours."

"Oh, belligerent, eh? Not quite the same polite boy you were yesterday." The skipper looked at DeRudder and then to the other two of his officers. "If you've got anything around here, gather it up quick. We're going back to the *Golden Hind*."

DeRudder jerked his head at John. "What do we do with our empty friend, here?"

The skipper considered it, his face dour. Finally he said, "Bring him along. We can use a hostage. Besides, I'd like one of them to question a little more. Half of this whole setup leaves me blank."

"Let's get going," Perez said.

"I refuse to go with you," John said.

DeRudder chuckled. "Boy," he said, "you remember the beam that came out of this gun when I shot it up into the sky? Believe me, with it, in ten minutes I can cut down this whole pint-sized village of yours."

The skipper said gruffly, "And it's not the only gun we've got on hand, son. Come along."

John said, "Ten minutes is a long time. The clansmen of Aberdeen are not slinks."

Harmon grunted contempt. "And they're not in Aberdeen, either. Practically nobody but women and children are in Aberdeen. Half of your men are still out chasing Thompsons or whatever you called them. The other half have already taken off to raid another town. You Caledonians seem to spend most of your time butchering each other."

"So if there's any fighting," DeRudder said, "it'll largely be with women and children, eh? Well, boy..."

"I will come," John said.

DeRudder made a mocking gesture with the gun. "After you, John of the Hawks. Our groundcar is parked behind the building, in that area you use for your saddle animals that are in immediate use. Take us there by the shortest route. And careful, boy. The slightest trick and we unlimber our artillery and shoot our way out."

John didn't know what the word "artillery" meant, but he could guess. He said stiffly, "I told you I would come. And even though you are not my clansmen, I do not lie to you."

He led the way out into the long hall and down it to the entry that led to the paddock. They passed only three or four fellow residents of the Hawk community house as they went, and none of these were clansmen. Harmon had been right. The men of the Clann Hawk were highly occupied.

In the paddock, John's eyes widened, whether he would or not. The vehicle there was a far cry from anything he had ever expected to see on Caledonia. It was of metal, streamlined and beautiful. There were two doors, one on each side, and several windows. There were no wheels, which mystified him.

Perez opened one of the doors, saying, "Let's get out of here," although obviously that was exactly what they were already doing.

DeRudder said to John, "Take off that belt, boy. I think we'd better relieve you of that set of toad stickers."

John kept his shame to himself as he turned over his claidheammor and skean.

The skipper motioned him inside, and he entered the vehicle from Beyond and took a seat in the rear. There was seating for ten persons and ample room for luggage or whatever to the rear.

The others got in, the officer named Harmon behind a set of bewildering dials and switches and a small wheel.

In spite of the position he was in, John of the Hawks was fascinated.

The others settled themselves, and Harmon dropped a lever. There was a faint hum, and John's stomach turned over in surprised rebellion as the heavy craft lifted slightly from the ground. Harmon trod upon another gadget, and they began moving forward.

The vehicle from Beyond progressed slowly to the entry of the paddock and then, as they entered the broad street before the longhouse of the Hawks, sped up. They headed for the Aberdeen main gate, going faster still.

The gate was open, and as they passed through it, John could see the warder, wide eyed, staring at them. Only at the List minute did he see that

John was in the craft, along with the otherworldlings.

Once in the countryside, Harmon flicked another lever, and the craft rose another foot or two and increased speed considerably. They were now progressing as fast as any horse upon which John had ever ridden. He set his facial muscles, hating to show these others that he was amazed. And faster still, and faster. The countryside sped past in bewildering rapidity. In a matter of moments, they had covered ground that would have taken a horseman hours.

DeRudder, who still carried his weapon in his hand, albeit loosely and nonchalantly, grinned at John. "Now if that sachem mucky-muck of yours hadn't been so empty, we might have made a deal to turn over a few of these Goundcars in return for platinum rights," he said. "Can you imagine the advantage of taking one of these on one of your raids?"

John said, "Undoubtedly, the Keepers of the Faith would have decided it was against the bann."

The skipper said to him dourly. "Everything seems to be taboo on this damned planet. Why should repeating rifles be against the bann?"

"That, like all banns, is in the hands of the Holy," John said without inflection.

"Great," DeRudder grunted. "But somehow the Holy, by whatever name you want to call him, usually makes with his words of wisdom and his threats through the lips of some intermediary or other. Such as your Keepers of the Faith, or bedels, or whatever you call them."

John had never thought of that aspect, but he kept his peace.

DeRudder said in irritation, "So what do your Keepers of the Faith teach you was the reason for a bann against rifles that shoot more than once?"

John of the Hawks had never been particularly reverent; however, he had done the usual amount of reading of the Holy books when he was taking such schooling as Aberdeen saw fit for its youth to assimilate.

He said, "It is written that in the misty days, shortly after the *Inverness Ark* came from Beyond—"

"The what?" the skipper said sharply. "What was the name of that ship?"

"Ship?" John said.

"The name of the, well, whatever it was you came in from, uh, Beyond?"

"The *Ark*," John said. "All of the people of Caledonia came in the Holy *Inverness Ark*."

"Krishna!" the skipper said. "I remember now. Possibly the first pioneer craft ever to be lost in space. Crewed largely by colonists from northern Great Britain."

John didn't know what the skipper was talking about. DeRudder said, "Go on. Why the bann against gun that shoots more than once?"

John continued. "In the misty days, there were few people in all the land, and only slowly did the first phylum multiply. And at that time it is written that there was strong bann against man raising his hand to man, even though honor was involved. All lived in peace, as all will live in peace when the Land of the Leal is achieved."

DeRudder said, "Great. But about the bann against repeating rifles?"

John said, "But when the people grew so numerous that there was no longer space for all the herds or sufficient game for the hunters, then there was a meeting of the sachem fathers of each clann, and it was decided that half the people, half from each clann, would gather together and move far off to a new land. And so it was. So that now there were two phyla, rather than one. And time passed, and still the people grew in number. So both the new phyla split, and half their number moved away to new lands."

DeRudder was staring at him. "I'll be damned. So finally, you spread over the whole planet, tribe by tribe, splitting as soon as there got to be so many that your primitive economies were fouled up by overpopulation."

John didn't understand that. For that matter, he was largely reciting what he had always considered legend or myth, and much of it wasn't clear to him.

He went on, "But then, as the number of the phyla grew throughout the

land, man began to ignore the original bann against raising hand against his fellowman, and the raids began. So it was that the Keepers of the Faith and the bedels gathered, and it was revealed to them by the Holy that there must be banns to control the relationship between the phyla. So it was that it was ruled that it is more glorious to count coup on man than to kill. So it was that the weapons of all were decided upon, and a carbine must fire but one shot at a time, so as to minimize the number that might be killed in a raid. All this so that the population would not be decimated."

Harmon said, "There's the ship. Krishna! What's going on?"

They were coming in fast, and John's eyes bugged. The craft was double the length of a longhouse and all obviously of metal. Could any clannsmen swallow the nonsense that such an object could fly between the stars?

But while he goggled at the vehicle from Beyond, the others were taking in the clannsmen who, concealed by hillocks or any other cover they could find, were firing their carbines at the huge spaceship.

When the groundcraft approached from the rear, the startled clannsmen were up and away, scurrying for new cover, or possibly even for their horses.

"Bruces," John said contemptuously.

"What?" the skipper said.

"Clannsmen of the Clann Bruce," John said. "A whole clann of slinks."

"If that means coward," Perez said, "I'd hate to see a hero on this damned planet. Here they are, attacking a ship with nothing but single shot rifles."

The skipper said, "Take her into the port, Harmon. We don't want to get out here—there might be some of those sharpshooters still around."

As they got nearer to the *Golden Hind* they passed over several kilt clad bodies, Bruces who must have fallen in a charge on the ship.

To John's amazement, as they approached the rearing otherworld spaceship it seemed to grow even larger than his first estimates. In volume it was at least the size of three or four longhouses. And as they drew near,

slowing now, one of the metal walls slid open, and where earlier he could have seen no indication of an entry port, now there was one and a ramp of metal to ascend to it.

Harmon expertly jockeyed the groundcraft up the ramp, and they slid into the interior. He flicked his lift lever, and the vehicle sank to the metal flooring. Harmon stretched and yawned. "Home again," he said sourly.

Perez opened a door manually and stepped out. Another otherworldling came hurrying up. He was dressed as were the four who had come to Aberdeen, but there was a bandage around his head, and his arm was worn in a sling. When all, including John of the Hawks, had disembarked, the skipper scowled at the newcomer. "Where is the chief?" he growled. "What in the name of Krishna's going on a-round here, Wylie?"

"The engineer's dead," the one named Wylie said excitedly. "Where've you been, Skipper? All hell's busted loose since you left. We were afraid they'd got you. T. Z. Chu's dead too. If you hadn't come back, we couldn't even've lifted off."

"Dead?" Perez said in shock.

Darting a glance at John, but then coming back to his fellows, Wylie said, "The raids started right after you left. It was the first one got us. They came charging in on horses, shooting and with these big swords, and they caught the engineer and Chu outside. I tried to come out to help, and they nicked me. Jerry and I managed to run them off with flamers, but it was too late for the chief engineer and T. Z."

The skipper turned coldly to John. "I thought there were three days of hospitality for traveling strangers."

John said, "The kilts on those clannsmen outside are those of Bruces. They are not of our phylum. You are on Aberdeen lands. We have granted you the three days of hospitality, in spite of your actions. But the Clann Bruce is not affected by the bann in this case. Do you know nothing at all of honorable usage?"

The skipper turned from him in disgust and back to the wounded man from Beyond. "What else happened?"

"Jerry and I have been fighting them off ever since," the man called

Wylie said. "At first we bowled them over like nothing. But they're smarting up now. They don't come within range of small arms or at least, not so we can see them. They just lay off and ping away at us."

Harmon said. "What harm can they do?"

Wylie said to him, "Nothing, against the hull of the ship. But we can't go out. They tried to build a big fire up against us last night. I tell you, they're tricky."

John was taking all this in, without overmuch surprise. The men from Beyond were fair game for any clansman save those from Aberdeen, and now that the three days were up, they were game for Aberdeen, too.

The skipper grimaced. He thought about it. In irritation he snapped at DeRudder, "Put this dully in confinement somewhere, and everybody come on into the lounge."

DeRudder upped his weapon and motioned to John with it. "This way."

John preceded him down a long corridor of metal. John of the Hawks had never seen so much metal in his life. It gave him a strange feeling of being shut in, a disturbing feeling. The halls were more narrow than those of the long-houses. The ceilings were lower, and he felt as though they were squeezing him down. He wondered how long it must take to come from the Beyond to Caledonia and how the otherworldlings could bear to be confined, whatever the time involved. Did they not feel the demand to dash outside and see the sky above, the distances stretching away? It would have been a horror to him. Indeed, it was a horror even in so little a time.

He was conducted to a small compartment—smaller even than his young man's quarters in the longhouse—and ushered inside. The door was closed behind him, and he heard a noise that was a lock, though this he didn't know, the institution of locked doors being unknown on Caledonia;

And then came the most trying ordeal in the seventeen years of John of the Hawks. For confined though the corridor of the *Golden Hind* might have seemed to him, it was like all space compared to this small hold which measured little more than his height in length, breadth and depth,

His soul screamed against his imprisonment, as that of the eagle or

hawk must when encased in a space so small that it cannot spread its wings, as that of the timber wolf must when brought to the zoo from its woodland range.

All his tendency was to beat with his fists against the metal door and scream to be released, but the pride of a score of generations of clansmen came to his aid and preserved sanity. He refused to play the slink before these foe.

Chapter Six

HE FOUND some release in closing his eyes and pretending to be in his own quarters. There was a cot, much too short for him, but at least he was able to recline. And finally sleep came.

He was awakened by a noise at the door and at first didn't comprehend where he was, but then it came flooding back to him.

It was DeRudder, and the other carried his weapon in hand. He said, "Come along, John, the skipper wants to talk to you."

John came to his feet and followed the other out into the corridor. DeRudder gestured again with the gun. "That way."

They proceeded down the metal hall again, to emerge at last into a fairly large compartment, large enough, at least, so that the awful feeling of confined space was not quite so bad. There were various chairs, tables and other furnishings, and the four spacemen John had originally met were augmented by two others, Wylie and another. John noted with satisfaction that the man with Wylie was also wounded. Evidently, the Clann Bruce was doing fairly well—for the Clann Bruce. John slightly altered his opinion of their fighting abilities.

The skipper, who was seated at a table, a glass of some darkish liquid before him, said gruffly, "Sit down, John. We want to talk to you."

"I will stand, Skipper of the Fowlers."

DeRudder said, "Would you like a drink?" He added sarcastically, "Our nip isn't quite up to that *uisgebeatha* of yours, but it'll take the lining off your throat."

John of the Hawks was somewhat taken aback by the offer, but he said, "I will take no hospitality from you."

"You must realize that there is now vendetta between the Hawks and the Clann DeRudder, and my kynsmen will take revengement of my honor."

The skipper said, "Don't be empty."

John looked at him. "And you also, Skipper of the Fowlers." His eyes went to Harmon and Perez. "And you two also. My kyn will take their revengement on your clanns."

Harmon snorted amusement.

DeRudder said, "Among other things, we don't have clanns to fight feuds, even if we were primitive enough to have such an institution. We don't use the same type of relationship as you do, boy. You still evidently have a gens system. We of the League have been beyond that for a few thousand years."

"You mean you are clannless? You are without kyn?" John's lips were going white. "And you laid hands on me, a Hawk? Dishonored me by taking me prisoner and stripping me of my weapons, rather than letting me face black death in honorable combat? How can my kynsmen take revengement if you are clannless men?"

The one named Perez shook his head. "The words are Earth Basic, but half of what he says doesn't come through. At least, not to me."

Harmon leaned forward. "Why should your relatives, your kinsmen, want to revenge you?"

"What else could they do, after my blood has been shed?"

DeRudder wiped the back of his hand over his mouth in frustration. "Look. Nobody is going to shed your blood."

John of the Hawks stared at him in utter disbelief. Finally he said, "Then what will you do with me?"

"Well turn you loose, of course."

"To return to Aberdeen, weaponless to the Hawks?"

"Why weaponless? You can have your damn weapons. All we want to do is ask you a few more questions about how this dully of a planet works."

John shook his head. "Why would you do this to me? What have I done to you that you should desire to make a woman of me? Why not count honorable coup of me, or at least kill me?"

The skipper, who had remained silent during all this, stirred. "We don't want to kill you, son. We want a little more information, so that when we go up against the next town we'll know more of the customs. You're free to go, sword and all, as soon as we're through."

His voice shaken, John said, "I will follow you. Somehow I will follow you. The word spreads throughout the countryside, and somehow I will learn where you are, and somehow I will follow you until I have killed you all or you have killed me."

DeRudder rolled his eyes upward in appeal to higher powers. "Great. So why don't we just kill you "here and now, eh? And then we won't have the damned threat of you coming charging around a corner someday whirling that overgrown cheese knife."

"This is to be expected," John said evenly. "And then my kyn will come to find revenge, and you will be killed as clannless ones are killed. And there will be no one to take revenge or pay the bloodright for you."

"It's still going past me," Perez muttered.

The skipper was interested. He leaned forward. "Look, son, how many of you Hawks are there?"

John said, "We number some 1,500 full clannsmen."

"All right. Now, suppose they all come charging after us. You have seen some of our weapons. Believe me, we have more powerful ones. If we were interested in wiping out those dullies outside, we could do it. Maybe we will, later. But if your Clann Hawk came charging up, we'd polish them off in short order."

"Then," John said, "our two sister clans, the Clarks and the Fieldings, would take up the vendetta."

"The skipper grunted. Finally, he shrugged and said heavily, "All right. And what happens when we have polished them off as well?"

John of the Hawks was obviously taken aback by the ignorance of honorable usage these clanless ones showed. He said, "Each clan has two sister clans. We have the Clarks and the Fieldings as our sister clans. The Clarks also have two sister clans, the Hawks and the Davidsons. The Fieldings have two sister clans, the Hawks and the Deweys."

DeRudder was staring now, as well as the skipper. "What you mean is, before you're through, the whole phylum of Aberdeen would be in on the feud, or vendetta, or whatever you call it."

John looked at him blankly. "But, of course."

The skipper sighed his distrust. "All right. Now, what happens if we wipe out the whole village of Aberdeen? Say we dropped a scrambler on it?"

John said reasonably, "Then our sister towns, Elgin and Gleneagles, would take their revenge for us. And their sister towns, in turn."

Harmon closed his eyes in pain. He said in complaint, "Carrying this on, I suppose ultimately your whole confederation would be involved. Okay. Do you realize that this ship could destroy every town in your confederation, without bothering to come down to the ground?"

"And then, Mister of the Harmons, our sister confederations would take up the vendetta."

Unbelievably, the six of them gaped at him.

At long last, the skipper shook his head. He said, "This is fantastic. What you're saying is that ultimately a blood feud, what starts with our killing you—in self-defense, by the way—would involve every person on this planet."

John nodded. "You might slay as many as you say. You might slay by

the thousands with your weapons that know no bann. But if you plan to land anywhere on Caledonia, sooner or later the clansmen would take their revengement. They would charge you on their horses on the heath. They would rush you in the narrowness of the streets of their towns. They would snipe at you from a distance with their carbines. Sooner or later, men from Beyond, they would take their revengement."

The skipper was disgusted all over again. He said, "If what you say is true, then there wouldn't be a soul left alive on this whole world. Obviously, it's ridiculous. How do you end one of these damned vendettas, once it starts? It seems easy enough to start. There has to be some way of stopping them."

John said reasonably, "Of course. At the first meeting of the Dail, the sachems of the respective clans involved meet honorably and arrange for there to be made payment of the bloodright to the kyn of the slain. Accounts are balanced. Then all are cleared of the need for vendetta."

"All right!" DeRudder said. "We plan to remain on this planet. We've got some business projects in mind. So well confer with your sachem and pay up for making the mistake of, uh, dishonoring you by taking you as a hostage.

Well apologize. We'll end the damn vendetta before it starts."

John scowled at him. "You jest, of course. How can you approach Robert, Sachem of the Hawks? You have admitted that you have no kyn. You have no sachem to represent you. It is against the bann for such payment of bloodright to be arranged by other than the sachem of your clann."

The skipper ran his palm over his forehead. "Mari, mother of Krishna!" he muttered. He looked at DeRudder. "Throw this dully out! Give him his sword and dagger and throw him out!"

John said levelly, "If you free me, I shall seek you out. I shall inform my clansmen of my dishonor, and they will take their revengement. At the next Dail, I will announce my shame, and the word will go out. And at the Dails of the other confederations the word will go out to the Hawks that their bloodline has been shamed. And from one Dail to the other, the word will go out. Until nowhere on all Caledonia will you be safe from the revengement of the Hawks."

Harmon said urgently, "Look, this is completely empty. There must be some way to turn this off. So we're clannless men. Okay. In your towns you have clannless ones. Servants and so forth, evidently. What happens if one of them attacks a clannsman? How is the whole thing settled?"

John turned his haughty stare to the youngest of the otherworldlings. "Why, all honorable men unite and kill the shameless clannless one."

Harmon winced. "I should've known better than to ask," he muttered bitterly.

For a long time, again, the six otherworldlings contemplated him.

DeRudder said, "That warder at the gate saw him go out with us."

No one said anything to that. The implication was obvious.

The skipper's face was working in frustration. Finally he snapped, "Gentlemen, we have just stopped being entrepreneurs and have become explorers again." He looked at his first officer. "Mr. DeRudder, throw this barbarian out, then prepare the ship for space."

DeRudder looked at him. "We're leaving?"

"Can you think of any goddamned alternative?"

Harmon snarled. "It's one big nugget of platinum."

"That will be all, Mr. Harmon."

"Yes, sir."

"Come along," DeRudder growled at John of the Hawks.

His lips white again, John said, "You mean you are not going to honorably kill me?" He snatched his coup stick from his belt and slashed the first officer across the cheek. "I count coup!" he snapped. "Though, indeed, it is a worthless coup, since you are clannless."

DeRudder's face went livid. The gun came up.

"*Mister* DeRudder, that will be all," the skipper's voice bit out.

DeRudder conducted him down another corridor and finally to the compartment they had entered in the groundcar. The first officer of the *Golden Hind* activated the sliding door, which opened in the hull. The ramp snaked out.

He handed John of the Hawks his belt and scabbard, keeping the handgun trained on him always.

John said flatly, "The Hawks will seek you out. The Clann Hawk of every confederation on all Caledonia will hear of the shame done their bloodline and will be watching for you..

"Shut up!" DeRudder snapped. "Shut up, or I'll bum you down right here. Then your damned Clann Hawk will have to figure out some way of crossing all space to get at me!"

John turned in dignity and walked down the ramp. He didn't turn to look until he was over the nearest hillock. He was moderately jittery about running into some of the Bruces that had been besieging the *Golden Hind*, armed as he was only with claidheammor and skean and having no horse.

However, his nervousness was unnecessary. On the far side of the hill were Don of the Clarks and Dewey of the Hawks, along with a dozen more of the younger men of the phylum. All were flat on their bellies on the crest of the lull staring their amazement at the gigantic ship from space.

Don blurted, "We knew they had you, and were planning the rescue."

"What happened to the Bruces?"

"They made off when we approached. I believe they thought us the full power of Aberdeen."

John squatted down and watched also. "They return whence they came," he said.

"Why did they take you?" Dewey of the Hawks demanded.

"They wanted more information about the ways of Caledonia, so that they could rob us," John said. He continued to watch the spaceship.

"And what did you tell them?"

John shrugged. "I cozened them. I told them a good deal of nonsense, to make them feel it impossible to remain on Caledonia."

Dewey said, "You mean you *lied*?"

John looked at him coldly. "They are not Hawks. It is not against the bann."

He turned his eyes back to the *Golden Hind*. The spaceship shivered, then slowly, with great dignity, rose into the air.

A sigh went through the ranks of the Aberdeen youths.

When it had reached an altitude of some two hundred feet, the great craft tilted slightly upward and began to progress straight ahead and up. It gained speed in a geometric progression.

Don of the Clarks stood and, watching still with a considerable awe, as were they all, said, "They have gone."

John, too, was looking off into the sky at the disappearing dot. "But they will return," he said, with a wisdom beyond his years. "They, or others like them. For now we have been found, and the old days are gone forever."

PART TWO KRISHNA

Chapter One

JOHN, RAID CACIQUE of the Hawks, drew rein and looked into over the valley below. Don of the Clarks came up beside him, and together they contemplated the town. The rest of the troop remained behind awaiting their leader's command.

"There it is," John said. "I do not think it is the same one as before, the *Golden Hind*."

"No," Don said. "This one is perhaps larger. Nor, from what we have heard, is it alone. They have landed at least a dozen places on Caledonia. This time, they have come in more force."

The spaceship they were discussing sat perhaps half a mile from the

walls of Nairn.

John raised a hand in signal and proceeded toward the main gate. He said to Don of the Clarks, "The Nairn Phylum is noted for being quick on the trigger. I hope we can approach sufficiently near to explain our mission, before they decimate us."

Don shrugged and grinned sourly. "We are all volunteers and knew the chances we take. Off hand, I cannot remember hearing of such a case—the clansmen of one phylum approaching those of another, between the meetings of the Dail. However, it is not against the bann, and The Keepers of the Faith found the correct procedure in the Holy Books."

"Let us hope the sachems of Nairn have heard of the procedure," John said. "Frankly, I feel naked without my claidheammor."

There were sixteen in all, in the little troop, two from each clann of the Aberdeen Phylum. They were weaponless, save for the short skean each wore at his left side. They held their apprehensions from each other, but all felt as naked as their cacique without their swords and carbines. Each had seen the town of Nairn before, but only on raid.

Why they were not fired upon as they neared the gate, John of the Hawks could not imagine. Perhaps it was the slow speed at which they progressed. Perhaps the warder felt that the nearer he allowed them to approach, the more certain was his eventual fire to be complete in its destruction. Perhaps he even hoped to count coup on some of them, rather than kill them outright.

Perhaps various things, but the fact remained, they were not greeted by a blast of carbine fire. John, in front, finally raised a hand in a universal gesture of peaceful intent.

"Clansmen of Nairn," he shouted. "We come in honorable peace and are unarmed."

The heavy wooden gate was closed, and he couldn't see whence came the answering shout.

"What do you will, Raid Cacique of the Aberdeen Hawks?"

John was mildly surprised. The answer was in keeping with the

procedure found by the Aberdeen Keepers of the Faith in the Holy Books. Evidently, the chiefs of Nairn had also been delving in the old volumes. It was quite unprecedented in the memory of living clansmen.

John shouted, "We come in peace to investigate the rumors of ones who claim to be holy men from Beyond."

"They enter in peace the preserves of Nairn." The voice departed from printed procedure now and added, with a stubborn inflection, "But we shall not allow you within the gates."

John was inwardly amused. There were only sixteen in his band, and unarmed at that. Aberdeen's reputation as the producer of raiders must be high in Nairn. While here, John must keep his eyes open, with future raids on the local herds in mind.

A small door, set within the gate, opened, and an older man issued forth. Surprisingly enough, he wore neither claidheammor nor skean and carried no carbine. Behind him came a dozen more of the Nairn clansmen, and they, at least, held guns at the ready. The eyes of all were suspicious.

The leader said, "I am Willard, Sachem of the Corcorans and eldest of the sachems of Nairn. What do you will? For surely, though the Holy Books provide for your coming in peace, unarmed, it is a rare thing indeed."

John said correctly, "May the bards sing your exploits, Willard of the Corcorans. I am John of the Hawks, and this is Don, Sagamore of the Clarks." He didn't introduce the balance of his troop, who sat their horses in quiet, hiding their nervousness at being thus exposed to armed clansmen while being weaponless themselves.

Willard of the Corcorans nodded and returned formally, "May the bards sing your praises, Clansmen of Aberdeen. And what do you will?"

John said, "Ten years ago and more, a craft from Beyond landed on the preserves of Aberdeen, and the occupants were granted the traditional three days of hospitality as travelers. But the strangers were clannless men and knew nothing of our ways. Often, they even violated the bann. They claimed to be explorers from a great confederation of worlds from Beyond, which they called the League. They claimed that they wished Caledonia to

join this great League, but they were shameless men, and we were pleased to see them leave in their great ship of space;"

The Nairn Sachem was nodding.

John went on. "And now the rumor spreads throughout the land that the men from Beyond have come again, this time in many ships of space. In but a few days, the meeting of the Loch Dail will take place and all the phyla either in assembly. I, and my troop, have been sent to inquire into the meaning of this new coming, for the rumors are that these clannless ones from Beyond claim to be holy men, and thus the bann is against attacking them in honorable raid. So we have come to confront these from Beyond and hear their tale and then report to the Dail of the Loch confederation."

The other was nodding again. "It is true, John of the Hawks. And there is great confusion in Nairn, even amongst the bedels and Keepers of the Faith. The newcomers teach a new religion, that of the Avatara of Kalkin, and claim it has swept all other faiths before it, throughout all the worlds settled by humankind."

John was scowling down at the older man. "Confusion?" he said. "How can there be confusion? Surely, the Keepers of the Faith have stated that the preaching of this new religion is against the bann."

Willard of the Corcorans said slowly, "Yes. But that was before the coming of the black pox."

"The *black pox!*" Don of the Clarks blurted.

There was a stirring in the ranks of John's clannsmen. It was not deemed safe to be within a quarter mile of a town struck by the pox.

Willard was nodding. "A clannless one evidently brought it from afar. He came to the gates of Nairn, steedless, hungry and in rags, and applied to the Sachem of the Stuarts for position as servant, and, in pity, the sachem took him in. Only later did we find him to be the sole survivor of the far Phylum of Ayr. In justice to him, he knew not that he carried the pox, since he, himself, was seemingly immune to it. Too late was he cut down by the Stuart clannsmen. The black pox was upon us."

John's face was drawn.

He turned and snapped to his men, "Ride hard for the hill. I will remain and secure the balance of the information and later shout it to you from a distance, so that you may return to Aberdeen and repeat it to the Dail. But now, get out of here."

The fourteen clansmen wheeled their horses.

Don said, "How about you?"

"I will stay. We must have the information. You go. Take over the troop."

"No. I will remain and share your fate."

But Willard of the Corcorans was holding up a hand. "There is no need to depart. There is no danger."

John stared at him. "No danger in the black pox!"

"No more. The guru cured all."

John's men had come to a puzzled halt.

Don of the Clarks said, "Who, in the name of the Holy, is the guru, and what do you mean, he cured all? There is no cure for the black pox. Not even the bedels can cure the pox."

"In the name of the new religion, the guru from the *Revelation*, the ship from Beyond, cured the black pox by invoking Lord Krishna." Willard of the Corcorans had defiance in his expression, as though challenging them to refute him. "The proof is here before you."

He added, "Since then, many of Nairn have taken the soma and entered into the Shrine of Kalkin."

"Soma?" John said. "What is soma?"

The Nairn Sachem scowled. "I am not sure. I am poorly informed, but tomorrow I myself plan to take it and enter into oneness with Krishna."

For a long moment John of the Hawks stared down at him. Finally, he said, "May the bards sing your exploits, Willard, Sachem of the Corcorans." He whirled his horse and snapped to Don of the Clarks, "Let

us go to the ship and confront these so-called holy men from Beyond."

As long years before, when John had approached the exploratory spaceship the *Golden Hind*, this vessel appeared to prow as they approached. When finally it loomed above them, it seemed in volume at least that of five or six long-houses. Behind him, he could sense the stirring in the ranks of his troop, most of whom had not seen the *Golden Hind* when it had visited Aberdeen. Made all of shining metal, it was mindshaking to think that this vessel from Beyond could lift itself and travel to the stars and back.

John of the Hawks came to a halt and stared upward. There was a ramp that led to an open entry port.

He had nearly decided to dismount and ascend, when a figure appeared and started down toward them. The first men from Beyond John had met had all been in a strange colorless uniform, rather than wearing the kilts of their respective clans; indeed, they had confessed to having no clans. But this solitary otherworldling was attired all in black, as a bedel might dress on Holy days devoted to praise.

When he had reached the ground, he looked up and said, "Welcome to the *Revelation*, John of the Hawks."

John looked at him emptily. "You are unarmed, Mister of the Harmons, as am I. But perhaps you forget that I carry the bloodfeud with you."

The other, a man of approximately John's own years, twisted his mouth in sour amusement. He held his hands out to either side. "I am always unarmed, John of the Hawks. You see, I have entered the Shrine of Kalkin as an acolyte."

"You mean you are a bedel?"

"Not exactly."

"You are one of the supposed holy men who spread a new religion other than that taught by the Keepers of the Faith?"

The other nodded. "That is correct. I am now skipper of the *Revelation*. All members of the crew also follow the footsteps of Krishna. None are armed."

Don of the Clarks said, "And so are protected by the bann." He grunted. "I suspect you cozen us, Skipper of the Harmons."

Harmon looked at him in amusement. "They're your customs and taboos, not mine. I, and the others of the *Revelation*, have come with the message of Krishna and to bring you to the Shrine of Kalkin."

John looked at him for a long moment more before saying, "Very well. We have been sent to secure information of this new faith and of your purpose here on Caledonia. Tell us more of... of Krishna and your so-called shrine."

Harmon raised his eyebrows, and there was a mocking quality in his eyes. "But I am only an acolyte and not fit to spread the word."

- Don of the Claries scowled. "You talk in circles, man from Beyond."

But a new figure had come to the entry port and now slowly began the descent of the ramp. He was an older man, bald of head and with a great calm dignity in his every motion. He wore a robe of orange, an unprecedented dress as far as John and the other clannsmen were concerned, and there were sandals upon his feet.

When he had reached their level, Harmon made a respectful obeisance to him, then turned to the Caledonians and said, "This is Mark, Guru of the Shrine of Kalkin, our leader and teacher."

John nodded courteously. "I am John of the Hawks," he said. "I assume you are a bedel who teaches this new faith that is against the bann."

"There is only one bann, my son. 'Thou shall not harm.' This Lord Krishna has revealed to us."

Don snorted, "There are many banns, and obviously there have always been many banns and will continue to be. Otherwise... why, otherwise, there would soon be no living clannsmen on all Caledonia."

"No more, my son. And when you have taken your soma and have entered into the Shrine of Kalkin and are one with Lord Krishna, then you, too, will harm no more."

"What is this soma?" John demanded.

The guru said gently, "Many millennia ago, my son, the Lord Vishnu, in his first avatara as Lord Matsya, gave to man the blessing of soma. But man was then incapable of following the way of Krishna, and soma was lost through the centuries. But with the final avatara of Lord Vishnu, that of Kalian, soma was again found by a great guru who deciphered the ancient writings of Mohenjo-Daro, in the Indus valley of Mother Earth."

"What does *avatara* mean?" Don said.

The older man looked at him. "Reincarnation, my son."

"Who is this Krishna you keep talking about?" John demanded.

The gentle eyes came back to the raid cacique. "The Lord Krishna is the eighth avatara of Vishnu, my son, and our redeemer. It is he that united us all into one in the glory of the Shrine of Kalkin with the holy soma."

John of the Hawks grimaced in impatience. "Do you mean, before you can understand this new faith, you must take this thing you call soma?"

"Yes, my son."

"And you have taken it?"

"Yes, my son."

"I am not your son," John said impatiently. "We are not even kyn. Have all the people from Beyond taken your soma?"

"No, my son. Not all." The guru looked at Harmon and frowned slightly. "Not even many of those who follow the path of Krishna."

Harmon said, "I have yet to feel myself worthy to unite with the Lord Krishna."

John looked at the *Revelation's* skipper. "So you haven't taken it but recommend that we do."

Harmon said evenly, "One day I shall, when I feel myself worthy."

John grunted and looked back at the older man. "Then, what happens after you take soma?"

"Yon become one with Krishna, our redeemer, and follow his teaching the rest of your years until the end of mortal life comes and you are gathered into the bosom of Kalkin."

"What teaching?"

"Thou shalt do not harm."

Don snorted.

John said, "Look, Guru of the Marks, it is impossible to go through life without harming someone."

"Not just someone, my son. Any living thing."

The Caledonians were staring at him.

"Any living *thing*? How can you eat a steak of beef without harming the steer?" one of the clansmen blurted.

"You cannot, my son. Followers of the path of Lord Krishna eat only of the vegetables of the fields and the fruit of the trees."

John said, "Look, Guru of the Marks, do you claim that if one takes this soma, he will go through the rest of his life unable to harm any other?"

"He would not wish to harm any other, my son. Once he has taken his soma, he walks in the same path as the Lord Krishna."

John stared at the older man even as he thought it out. "I don't believe you," he said finally.

"You will when, at long last, you have taken your soma, my son."

John continued to stare at him in frustration. Finally he wheeled his horse and barked, "I want a volunteer."

Fifteen hands went up.

He ignored them for the moment. "It is of great implication to our whole confederation. It will mean perhaps death, though probably not. It will possibly result in the volunteer being branded a slink and stripped of his clann kilts. You have heard this so-called guru. I want a man to take

soma and report his experience. I would do it myself, but I am the leader of this troop and responsible to the Dail for the expedition's report."

The hands of the clansmen remained up, but there was despair in all faces.

John looked them over. He called finally, "Robert of the Fieldings." The clansman rode forth, holding his reins in his awkward left hand. Other than his crippled arm and scarred face, he was a beautiful specimen of Caledonian manhood, well over seven feet in stature and carrying sufficient weight to be considered brawny. John had chosen deliberately. Robert had no immediate family—a raiding party had set fire to his hut on the heath where the then herdsman had built outside the Aberdeen walls. His wife and three children had burned, and since then Robert had spent his life on raid, never failing to volunteer for each expedition but thus far having been unable to find honorable death in combat.

John wheeled back to Mark, the guru. "This man will take your soma."

The older man said, "Each must himself decide, my son."

John looked at Robert of the Fieldings.

The clansman said, "I wish to take this soma." But there were blisters of cold sweat on his broad forehead.

The guru frowned in hesitation.

Harmon said, "Let the dully take it. Why not? Our task is to spread the message of Krishna. He'll be the first convert in Aberdeen."

"Very well. Follow me, son Robert."

John said, "A moment. How long will this take?"

"He will return to you at this hour tomorrow, my son."

The orange clad guru turned and began to reascend the ramp. Robert hesitated only momentarily before following. Harmon, a faint amusement on his face, brought up the rear. And now John could see two other orange robed figures at the entry to the *Revelation*. Evidently, this Mark was not the sole guru about the spaceship.

For a moment, John of the Hawks was about to call to Robert of the Fieldings, to recall him to the ranks of his fellow Aberdeen clansmen. But then he shook his head. They could not return to the assembly of the Dail without full information on this precedent smashing situation.

He turned and said to Don, "We'll make camp here."

Don scowled toward Nairn.

John said, "No. They will not raid us. I suspect that many of them have taken this soma. Perhaps there are not enough true clansmen remaining in the whole phylum to raid us."

The following day, the small troop drew up again before the ramp of the *Revelation*, waiting. The entry port was still open, but there was no sign of life.

Don growled, "If we had our weapons, we could raid them. Undoubtedly, there would be much booty inside."

"Undoubtedly," John said. "However, it is a difficult position. They are unarmed men who claim to be teachers of religion, and I suspect it would be against the bann to attack them, or even to count coup upon them."

Don snorted his disgust. "Religion! There is only one religion, and that is the religion of the Holy. Any Keeper of the Faith can tell you that."

John didn't answer his friend. There were many ramifications to all this, and he had by no means thought them out to a conclusion that satisfied him.

The troops stirred. Harmon, the self-proclaimed skipper of the spaceship, had appeared at the top of the ramp. Following him was Robert of the Fieldings.

They descended the ramp, and Harmon stood to one side, his expression amused. Robert of the Clann Fielding approached them and stood before John and the others.

And then John of the Hawks lost his characteristic dignity. His eyes bugged, and he rasped, "Where... where is the scar that ran from your ear to your chin?"

There was a strangeness in the face of Robert. It would seem the dour clansman had lightened several degrees in complexion. There was a glow about his face, a shine in his eyes. He lifted his left arm and touched the side of his face, and all gaped anew.

Don blurted, "Your *arm!*"

Robert said in an unwonted soft voice, "I have been walking with the Lord Krishna and hence have been cured of all ills."

Chapter Two

THIS YEAR the meeting of the Dail was being held in Aberdeen. The plain before the city was a mass of tents, large and small, banner; flying above those which housed the sachems of the various phyla. The markets were in full swing, and feet had trampled the heather to the point where all now was dust, which billowed up as herds of cattle and horses were brought in for the bartering. There were the skirl of music and a continuous shouting, bickering, arguing, the last in particular from the men's tents, where *uisgebeatha* was for offer.

In such a tent John of the Hawks found the clansman for whom he sought.

John stood beside him at the improvised bar and ordered a small dorris of the potent spirits, at first pretending not to notice who was at his left. He sipped his drink, then said, "Ah. May the bards sing your exploits, Will, Sachem of the Thompsons."

The other turned.

John said, "Perhaps you do not know me."

Will of the Thompsons said jovially, "I recognize you immediately, John of the Hawks. May the bards sing your exploits." He laughed his good humor. "Indeed, I assume they have. While you were still but a lad, you counted coup upon me, who was then Raid Cacique of the Thompsons.

John said politely, "The Holy granted me great fortune that day, Will of the Thompsons."

"He did at that," the other said. He had obviously already downed more

than one of the dorrises that were being doled out by half a dozen barkeeps to the clamoring clansmen. At this rate, John thought, the hospitality of the Aberdeen hosts of the Dail this year would be strained to the point of not having a drop of *uisgebeatha* left in town before the assembly was over.

The Thompson Sachem said, "Come, have a dorris with me. John of the Hawks. Perhaps when next we meet, it will be at claidheammor point."

John took the drink proffered. "Happily," he said, "that will be unlikely, since you have been raised up to sachem and no longer lead the Clann Thompson as raid cacique."

The other sighed his regret and tossed his drink back over his palate. "I suppose you are right," he said. "A sachem's duties are such that he has little time for raids."

John cleared his throat and said, "Ah, there is something that I would discuss with you, Will of the Thompsons."

"Of course." The sachem was signaling to one of the barkeeps for a refill.

John said, "For many years, at each meeting of the Dail, I have sought the hand of Alice of the Thompsons..."

The other was staring at him in surprise.

John hurried on "At each Dail I have offered a generous brideright, so that I might honorably steal my bride. However-"

Will said indignantly, "You approach me as an individual to discuss a Thompson lass? This is not meet,- John of the Hawks. It is not forbidden by the bann, but it is not meet."

John said hurriedly, "No discourtesy was intended, Will, Sachem of the Thompsons. I... I extend my apologies. I... I will be back."

He turned quickly and left the tent. He stood for a moment at the entry flap, his eyes darting around the area. He shook his head, not finding him whom he sought.

But finally he made out someone he knew and strode quickly over. "Dewey!" he said. "Have you seen the sachem?"

Dewey of the Hawks was evidently mildly befuddled. He blinked owlishly at his fellow clansman, "Robert? Robert was here but a moment past. He went... he went over that way."

John hurried off in the direction indicated and, sure enough, found his clann sachem in discussion with two sagamores of the Clann Davidson. He stood impatiently to one side until noticed.

Robert, Sachem of the Hawks, looked over at him and said, "Yes, John?"

John nodded to the two sagamores, neither of whom were known to him, and murmured quickly, "May the bards sing your exploits." And then to his chief, "It is a matter of importance, Robert."

The sagamores excused themselves and wandered off to watch a performance of trick riding.

Robert was frowning slightly, but there was also an almost apologetic something in his eyes. "I assume it is the usual matter of importance that you bring to my attention at each meeting of the Dail, John."

John said hurriedly, "Robert, there is a new Sachem of the Thompsons this year. Will, the former raid cacique, has been raised up to the office. Perhaps..."

Robert sighed. "Very well, John. I shall approach him and represent you. However—"

John said quickly, "He is over here in the tent." He began to lead the way, his hand on the other's arm, urgently. "He is in good mood. Perhaps... perhaps this time. Robert, offer him twenty horses, twenty cattle."

Robert looked at him in irritation. "You do not have twenty horses, John."

John said, "Don of the Claries is indebted to me. He will loan me the balance."

Robert was scowling unhappily. "I realize that you have twice saved the Clark clansman's life in raid, but he is a fellow phyletic. One does not take reward for such action when the other is a phyletic. It is not against the bann, but it is not seemly."

John sighed impatience and despair. "He is my blood companion. We are not kyn, but we have taken the oath of comradeship. All that is mine is his, and vice versa."

Robert grunted sourly. "The proof is there before us that he has the worst of the bargain, since you evidently won't have anything in short order. Twenty horses! Two would be generous." He added gruffly. "Don't the Thompsons steal enough of our horses and cattle in their raids, that you have to offer them forty head, in all, in return for a lass? What is wrong with an Aberdeen lass? Why not have me approach the sachem of the Clarks or Fieldings? For two horses you could steal any girl in Aberdeen, you who are Raid Cacique of the Hawks before you have thirty years."

John shut his eyes in despair but said nothing and still hurried his chief along.

They entered the tent, and John whispered, "There, up against the bar." He dropped behind and let the sachem precede him.

Robert, Sachem Of the Hawks, approached Will, Sachem (it the Thompsons, and said, "May the bards sing your exploits, Will of the Thompsons."

The other nodded. "And yours, Sachem of the Hawks."

"I would have a word with you."

John hurried over to the other side of the extensive tent and jerked his head at four Hawk clansmen seated at a table. They looked up at him in half-drunken irritation.

He said urgently, "The two sachems wish to confer. Robert speaks in my behalf."

The story was one with which his fellow clansmen were familiar. Two of them looked at him in commiseration as they came to their feet. The

other two, further gone in their cups, merely stumbled away, heading for the bar and alcoholic oblivion.

The two sachems took chairs, and John stood anxiously to one side, not too near, though still able to hear. They ignored him. It was not against the bann for him to stand there as they talked, but it was mildly unseemly.

Robert said formally, "I say the praises of my clansman John of the Hawks."

But Will of the Thompsons raised a hand and shook his head. "I know your plea, but we need go no further. It is an impossible plea."

Robert said doggedly, "He is a young man, in his prime. Already, the bards have sung his exploits a dozen times and over."

"I know," Will said wryly. "One time my name was involved. I was shamed."

Robert said quickly, "But all was resolved between our clans at the next meeting of the Dail."

"I hold no bitterness. It would be against the bann for me to do so. However, the Claim Thompson would never consent to the stealing of Alice by a Hawk."

"He is already raid cacique of his clann, though still a comparative youth. He is highly regarded by the Keepers of the Faith and the bedels, since six times he has counted coup, rather than shed the blood. He offers twenty horses, twenty head of cattle."

"Twenty!" Will blurted, taken aback.

The other nodded in disgust. "Given the opportunity, he would undoubtedly strip the clann of its little wealth for this single lass."

Will of the Thompsons looked over at the obviously miserable John but still shook his head. "I myself would be in favor, honorable Sachem of the Hawks. However, though I am sachem and my voice is respected in our clann musters, as you know, my vote is but one, and the great majority of the Thompsons, who have suffered much down through the years, have refused to become kyn to the Hawks through marriage. True kyn, we

would not be of course, but still kyn through marriage. The Thompsons refuse to consider that one of theirs would produce Hawk clannsmen who would one day raid their herds and kill their clannsmen."

His voice slightly huffy, Robert said, "At each Dail, the deeds of violence of the year are wiped out by honorable consultation and balancing of accounts between the sachems. Why else should there be such an office as sachem? Since the misty years, indeed since the coming of the Holy *Inverness Ark*, the Keepers of the Faith have thus secured us. If such were not the bann, the vendettas would soon accumulate to such degree that all Caledonia would be depopulated. How is it, then, that the Clann Thompson refuses an honorable offer to have one of its unwed lasses stolen by a clannsmen of the Hawks?"

There was an apologetic aspect in the other's face as he looked over at the anxious young clannsmen in question, but he continued to shake his head. "It is not against the bann," he said stubbornly. "Although all accounts are now balanced and we carry no blood feud with you, it is still up to us to decide, and the vote has been against it."

Robert snapped, "And the lass? I understand she is still unwed, though very comely. Why is it that the lass has not shown her preference for some clannsmen of your Phylum of Caithness? Could it be that she *wishes* to be stolen by John?"

Will looked at him coldly. "Do you think us so shameless in Caithness that we allow a lass to make such decisions?"

"It is not a matter of being shameless. As all men know, though the full membership of a clann must needs decide by vote to whom a lass will become bride, still the lass is invariably consulted and her wishes almost always abided.

Will took a deep breath. "I am sorry for John of the Hawks and bear him no ill will, but the Clann Thompson refuses to allow him to steal Alice for his bride."

Robert glowered at him in frustration. Finally he said, "As sachem, undoubtedly you are also a Keeper of the Faith. I ask that you look into the Holy books. All that is there, all about the holy chromosomes, the sacred nature of which has been lost to us since the misty years, urges that the clanns mix their blood. So it is that Hawk cannot marry Hawk, nor

Thompson marry Thompson. Although it is not against the bann to marry within the phylum, so long as you steal your bride from another clann, still the Holy books urge that brides be stolen from other towns, so that the blood be even more widely mixed. Such is the teaching of the chromosomes, although we know not what chromosomes may be."

Will sighed, shook his head and came to his feet. "May the bards sing your exploits, Robert of the Hawks. However, it is impossible. There is not a family in the Clann Thompson but has lost close kyn to the raiding Hawks. Too much violence has transpired between us. And now, with all respect to the Sachem of the Hawks"—he looked over at John—"and to its raid cacique, I will repair to the bar and continue to enjoy the hospitality of Aberdeen."

He turned his back and walked away.

Robert got up, approached John and put a hand on his shoulder. "I tried."

John nodded. He turned away and left the tent.

He knew where to find her. The women of the Phylum of Caithness were famed for their handwoven textiles and, at each meeting of the Dail, erected several booths for bartering.

Alice of the Thompsons must have seen him approaching even before he spotted her, since when he came up her face was already slightly flushed, as became a good lass being looked upon by the man who loved her.

As he came up, she kept her eyes lowered and said, "May I interest you in this kilt material, Clannsmen of the Hawks?"

John said, "Ten years, Alice."

She put down the material and looked up, her own misery a reflection of his. "You appear well, John of the Hawks. The Holy has seen fit to preserve you through the, year since the last Dail, even though now you are a raid cacique and subject to much danger."

"Yes," he said. "And you look... well, Alice of the Thompsons." He held his silence for a long time, merely looking at her. Finally, "I have had

Robert, sachem of our clann, speak in my behalf to Will."

She said nothing but lowered her eyes again to the bolts of material on the improvised counter before them. One of her small hands went out and picked meaninglessly at a thread.

He said, "It was as always before."

"I know." Then suddenly, in a rush, "John, why do you not choose a lass of Aberdeen? It is hopeless. My people pride themselves on their sense of revenge. Even the bann does not prevent them from carrying spite beyond the assembly of the Dail."

He said, "And why do you not choose from among the young clansmen of Caithness who clamor for the right to steal you as a bride?"

There was no answer, but her flush had reappeared.

A Thompson clansman approached, his hand negligently on the hilt of his claidheammor, which was uncalled for at this, a meeting of the Dail of the Loch Confederation.

He said, "Do you then speak to an unwed lass of the Thomspsons, clansman of the Hawks?"

John looked at him emptily. "Only in passing, Clannsman," he said. "No disrespect of the Clann Thompson is intended." He turned and walked away, Alice looking after his tall, straight figure in misery.

As he went, John heard the voice of one of the older Thompson women tending the booths. She was exclaiming, "But it is ridiculous. Someone has stolen from the bolt of Thompson kilt material! How could it be? The material is useless to any save a Thompson clansman, and certainly a Thompson could never steal from a fellow clansman. It is against the bann."

Another voice said, "You must have mislaid it. As you say, it is useless except to us Thompsons. Besides, stealing at a Dail is unheard of."

He headed for one of the men's tents. John of the Hawks was not much of a drinking man, as Caledonian drinking men went, but he could think of nothing else for the immediate moment.

However, the conch sounded then, and a crier went by calling, "The assembly of the Dail convenes! The Dail convenes!"

John reversed his direction and headed for the temporary amphitheaterlike stands where the sachems and caciques were to be seated. His report on the spaceship from Beyond was sure to be early on the schedule, and he would have to be there with Robert of the Fieldings.

On his way he saw Don of the Clarks and said to him from the side of his mouth, "You got it, eh?"

Don grinned at him.

John said, "Nobody spotted you? Nobody at all?"

Don shook his head. "I took no chances. What a cry would have gone up, under the circumstances. The Keepers of the Faith would have howled for my kilts."

John grunted. He said, "Now the problem is to get someone who will sew them for us. Someone capable of keeping her mouth shut."

In mild indignation, Don said, "Sally, of course! My wife is a lass who is game for ought. And besides, she knows your woe and is as indebted to you as I am myself. It would be unseemly for her not to offer her services."

"She will not feel shamed? I would not shame the lass."

"Certainly not! It is a lark. Besides, no one will ever know."

"All right," John said. "And the sooner the better. We would not want some sharp minded Thompson to think out the theft to its obvious conclusion."

Aberdeen did not possess a hall large enough to seat the assembled sachems and caciques of the Loch Confederation. Few towns in the confederation did. As an alternative, they had built a wooden stand on the heath outside the city walls. A half moon in shape, it reared six tiers of seats in height. Each sachem sat with his caciques, whose number differed in each clann. The office of sachem was permanent, in that the man elected to the position held the office for life, unless removed by majority vote, and upon his death, a new sachem was chosen. A cacique, however,

was raised up to his position through deeds of merit or special abilities, and his chieftainship died with him.

As Raid Cacique of the Hawks, John sat with his sachem, Robert, the agricultural cacique, the two caciques of the herds and the hunting cacique. Other clans numbered more caciques, sometimes having as many as three raid caciques alone. It made no difference in the voting. Each clan had one vote, no matter the size or the number of its representatives to the Dail.

When all were seated, phyla by phyla, Bertram of the Fowlers, eldest of all the bedels, open the meeting by saying the praise to the Holy. When he was through, he left the amphitheater and retreated to the ranks of the bedels and Keepers of the Faith, who stood nearest of all to the assembly of chiefs, even before the sagamores. Beyond the sagamores were the full clansmen and behind them, the women. Children and clannless ones were not allowed to participate in the Dail.

Thomas of the Polks, eldest of all sachems in the Loch Confederation, came to his feet and walked in dignity to the amphitheater's center. He looked up at his fellow chiefs.

"If there is no word of protest, the first matter to come before the Dail will be that of the strangers from Beyond. Since their advent was first here in Aberdeen, a decade and more past, I shall turn the rostrum over to Robert of the Hawks, senior sachem of the Aberdeen Phylum, if there is no word of protest."

He stood a moment in silence. No one spoke. Thomas of the Polks returned to his place on the lowest level of seats.

Robert of the Hawks rose and took the speaker's stand. He said, "If there is no word of protest, I shall call upon John, Raid Cacique of the Hawks, to address you, since he, of all the clansmen of Aberdeen, has dealt most with the men from Beyond. If there is no word of protest."

He held silence for a moment, but no one spoke. Robert of the Hawks returned to his place, and John stepped out.

It was the first time he had ever spoken at the assembly of the Dail, and John of the Hawks was a man of action, not of words. However, he looked up at them, all the most prominent men of the confederation, and said

loudly, "I am of the opinion that these men from Beyond must be destroyed."

A sachem from Dumbarton called, "We do not ask your opinions, John of the Hawks. At least, not at this stage. We want solely facts."

John flushed and began to retort, but Thomas of the Polks said evenly, "He is correct. Tell us all that has transpired, and then we shall each have our word, they who would speak, and we shall each of us vote upon the course of action. If we reach agreement, then it shall be put to the vote of the total assembly, to ratify or not. Such is the way of the Dail, as each man knows. But now, John of the Hawks, tell us all of the men from Beyond."

And so he did, in detail, omitting not even such shameful things as the occasions upon which he had eavesdropped upon the strangers. Omitting not even that he had been stripped of his arms and made a woman of by the men from Beyond, who had left so that he had no way of clearing his name and the name of his clann by taking his revengement.

He told everything of his experiences with the men of the exploratory ship *Golden Hind* and then took up his more recent expedition to the *Revelation*. There were stirrings of disbelief when he described the strange behavior of the clansmen of Nairn, particularly those who had consented to tike the soma.

He was interrupted here, which was unseemly but not difficult to comprehend in view of the startling nature of his disclosures.

A sachem of the Edin Phylum called, "But you claim that this guru of the strangers, this self-named holy man, cured all of the black pox. Surely there is no illness on all Caledonia more fearsome than the pox. If such be their powers, why then did you begin your declamation with a demand that they be raided and destroyed? Surely the Holy smiles upon them."

John answered by turning and shouting to the Hawk contingent of clansmen. "Robert of the Fieldings!"

Robert came forth and walked toward them. He wore the kilt of a field worker, rather than that of the Fieldings, which was passing strange at an assembly of the Dail. At a Dail, a clansman was inclined to clothe himself in his proud best. Nor did Robert wear claidheammor or even skean.

He was at his ease as he joined John of the Hawks, even though he was a simple clansman before the ranking chiefs of his confederation and before the teeming thousands of the adult members, men and women, of the assembly.

He smiled at John and, his voice mild but still carrying, said, "I am no longer Robert of the Fieldings but simply Robert, now that I have joined with the Lord Krishna."

A shocked hush fell.

John, who had been through it all before, said, "You have renounced your clan and become a clannless one?"

"There are no clans before the Shrine of Kalkin. All humankind is one great clann. All are my brothers."

Thomas of the Polks, even his great dignity shaken by the unbelievable, came to his feet and began to speak.

However, he was interrupted by the sounding of the conch and a crier shouting, "Strangers come! It is the men from Beyond!"

Chapter Three

THE NEWCOMERS could not have staged a better entrance had it been rehearsed. The craft, which later they named a *skimmer*, settled to the ground gently, between the amphitheater stand and the rows of bedels and sagamores.

A sigh went through the great assembly, for all there knew that such a craft could not possibly float through the air, as they witnessed. Obviously, some great power, un-known on all Caledonia, was involved, and these from Beyond controlled powers unbeknown to the holiest bedel or Keeper of the Faith.

Many eyes turned to the ranks of bedels, one for each clann represented at the Dail, But the faces of the bedels were blank; indeed, some went beyond blankness. Their expressions were of despair, for what can a speaker of a faith do when confronted by an obviously greater faith?

The craft came to a halt, and an entry port appeared where there had

seemed but a wall of metal. An orange robed figure issued forth, then turned to assist another behind him.

John of the Hawks, standing side by side with Robert, once the most fearsome raider of the Clann Fielding, remained impassionate. He had not expected the others to arrive quite so soon, but he had known that the confrontation was inevitable.

There were four of them in all—the one named Mark, Guru of the Shrine of Krishna; two younger men, similarly robed and shod but obviously of lesser rank in the hierarchy of this new faith; and, last from the craft that flew through the air, the skipper of the spaceship, Harmon.

Bertram of the Fowlers, senior bedel, came now and stood beside John. Perhaps his faith was stronger than that of the rank and file of his colleagues, but in his face, too, was something John of the Hawks was dismayed to see.

The guru, as before, carried an aura of calm dignity that dominated all. He approached now and nodded gently to John of the Hawks.

"My son," he said, "have you considered as yet and decided to take the soma and enter into the Shrine of Kalkin?"

John looked at him levelly. "Nor will I ever, Guru of the Marks." He gestured to the seated sachems and caciques. "We are assembled now in the Dail of the Loch Confederation and are even at present discussing how to meet the coming of you from Beyond. I point out that receiving you in peace means eventual ending of all our institutions, even that of our faith."

The older man spoke gently, and he spoke to all, rather than just to John. "I come from afar in the sky to bring, not to take. All, all of you, will find your eternal peace through following the Lord Krishna to the Shrine of Kalkin."

Bertram of the Fowlers had regained some of his poise.

Now he said, and his own dignity was considerable, "The Holy Book says,

And that inverted Bowl they call the Sky, Whereunder crawling cooped we live and die, Lift not your hands to It for help—for It As impotently

moves as you or I."

The guru looked at him quizzically. "What holy book is that, my brother?"

The bedel was surprised. "But there are only four. Holy Books, as surely all men know. Though still there are some who dispute the traditions that before the great fire, on the coming of the Holy *Inverness Ark*, there were many, many Holy Books which were lost, either in the fire or during the misty years. And some would make ceremony of mourning the loss of the Holy Books no longer possessed by humankind, but some of us find wisdom in:

The Moving Finger writes; and having writ,

Moves on: nor all your Piety nor Wit

Shall lure it back to cancel half a line,

Nor all your tears wash out a Word of it."

The guru was not beyond the capability for fine amusement. He smiled now and said, "My brother, there have been many holy books, and all have their element of good, perhaps. However, now, with the final avatara of Lord Vishnu, all faiths must unite into one, and all holy books are of little more than historic interest. Perhaps someday we shall have occasion to discuss some of them, to fill an idle hour. But as I say, they are of little more than passing interest, my brother."

"I am not your brother, we are not even kyn," Bertram of the Fowlers said in indignation. "And one must not speak thus about the Holy Books; it is against the bann! And though my eyes, in retreat as my years advance, no longer allow me to contemplate them, so much have I read in the past that they are all but memorized."

The guru nodded and looked more closely at the other. "Cataracts," he murmured. Then, "My, brother, as soon as we are established, you must be first to allow Lord Krishna to intervene in your behalf. You shall read again—tomorrow, at the latest."

The elderly bedel stared at him, his aged mouth working. "You mean...?"

"Yes," the guru said simply. He looked about. "As soon as we can be settled in quarters, I shall invoke the Lord Krishna in your behalf immediately."

Thomas of the Polks was coming forward. He said. "We have not yet voted upon how to receive you, strangers from Beyond. However, you are travelers and hence welcome to a minimum of three days of hospitality, even though the last time your clansmen visited Aberdeen our hospitality was abused."

John of the Hawks said to Harmon, who had been standing to one side, his face characteristically sardonic, "When you were here before, Mister of the Harmon, my quarters, in the longhouse of the Hawks, were relinquished to you. Though you are now my bloodfeud foe, it is as the sachem has said—you are travelers and hence eligible for three days of hospitality. If you wish, my quarters are again available."

Harmon made an amused half bow. He turned, to the Guru. "As good a place as any. I'll have the men set up your portable clinic, ah, that is, your *shrine*."

The guru frowned at him, albeit gently. "A pagoda, my son, does not depend upon surroundings. It is where the heart of the follower of Lord Krishna is."

"Of course," Harmon said dryly. He returned to the skimmer.

John turned and left the amphitheater, heading back for the rows of sagamores, the subchiefs.

Don was among them. John jerked his head toward the edge of the assembly, and Don, his eyebrows high in surprise, followed.

"When they were out of earshot of everyone else, Don demanded, "Why in the name of the Holy did you offer that slink your quarters?"

"You'll see," John growled. "Long years ago, through accident, I heard much of the plans of these men from Beyond. This time, it will be no accident. We must hurry, because almost surely, when they first enter the quarters, thinking themselves alone, they will discuss their purpose here."

Even as he strode along beside his blood comrade, Don was both

mystified and surprised. He said hesitantly, "Do you mean you plan to spy upon the travelers who have been granted the hospitality of Aberdeen?"

John snorted. "True enough. I would be stripped of my kilts, were the Keepers of the Faith to know. I did it before, long years ago, but then I was but a lad and not a full clansman, and besides, as I say, it was an accident. However, this situation is more serious than most seem to know, and I sacrifice my honor for the greater need. Not only is Aberdeen at stake, but the whole Loch Confederation. Indeed, all Caledonia."

Don maintained an unhappy silence.

They reached the Hawk longhouse, entered, and made their way by ladder to the flat roof. As they proceeded, John explained, "I always believed that those from Beyond would return. The explorer ship came first, and they were insufficient in number to achieve what they wished. I prepared for their return—if and when chance brought them again to Aberdeen and the longhouse of the Hawks."

They had reached the point immediately above his chambers. John knelt, and his hands moved deftly.

"Here," he said, stretching out on his belly.

Don of the Clarks, still frowning, joined him. There were small holes leading down through the roof, and through these holes the living room of the small apartment below was observable.

They had a wait of perhaps fifteen minutes; then two of the orange clad men from Beyond entered, carrying various equipment. Mark, the guru, entered next, followed by Harmon.

Harmon was saying in amusement, "I see you follow the old adage 'Don't talk with angels, talk with God.' "

The guru said, "I don't believe I understand, my son."

Harmon chuckled. "Picking out their senior religious figure for your first miracle. Curing that old boy's eyesight will have them flocking in. It will start with the really bad cases, paralytics and so forth, but before the week is out you'll have half the town making your soma."

The guru said, "Down through all history, my son, the spreaders of faith have performed miracles in order to win their followers. Joshua of Nazereth, Mohammed, even Vishnu in his ninth avatara as the Buddha."

Harmon said, "But the followers of the Lord Krishna, such as yourself, Guru Mark, have a great advantage in miracles. Modern medicine certainly puts you in a position to perform miracles far and beyond those of any of your predecessors."

John could see the guru's face, and it expressed surprise. "But my son, it all leads to their taking their soma and becoming one with Lord Krishna."

"And the ends justify the means, eh?" Harmon laughed again. "I detect a slight Machiavellian quality."

Don whispered to his companion, "What does that mean?"

"I don't know," John said. "Listen."

Mark was saying, trouble in his voice. "My son, though you wear the robe of the acolyte, I sometimes wonder at your faith. For instance, when we first embarked upon this missionary expedition to a new world which had as yet not heard the message of the Lord Krishna, I did not know you had other interests than bringing the Shrine of Kalkin to Caledonia."

Harmon said, "Guru, somebody said once, I forget who, to give unto Caesar that which is Caesar's and unto God that which is God's. There are many facets to human existence, Only one of which is religion."

"By far the most important!"

"Of course." Harmon didn't bother to keep cynical amusement from his voice. "However, there are other things. The syndicate which I represent is based on one of the new planets where—shall we call it free enterprise?—is still in full force. We are interested in bringing, ah, civilization to Caledonia, so that its minerals can be exploited. So long as this fantastic barbarism continues, we haven't got a chance. Very good. You have no complaints. It was through us that you were able to mount your missionary expedition. It is through us that you are able to spread your message here. Lord knows—that is, Lord Krishna, of course—you don't reach many ears elsewhere."

"There is deep cynicism throughout the League, my son. It is a great sadness that so few will take the soma and follow in the path of Lord Krishna."

"Well, at least you're having your big chance on Caledonia."

One of the other orange robed ones spoke then, his words indistinguishable, and both Harmon and the guru moved out of range of the peep holes being utilized by John of the Hawks and Don of the Clarks.

The two clansmen looked at each other.

Mystified, Don said, "But what is this soma?"

John shook his head. "Whatever it is, I will go down to black death before taking it. These are shameless, clannless men of evil.

Scowling Don said slowly, "No, not the old one. He is a holy man. Whether this new religion of his is a true religion, I will not say, but he is a holy man."

John of the Hawks snorted. "He serves evil," he growled.

Chapter Four

JOHN AND DEWEY of the Hawks and Don of the Clarks rode hard. Each man was mounted on one war steed and led two more. Periodically, they changed horses.

Largely, they rode in silence, but Don broke it at last.

He said, "It is no time to be leaving Aberdeen, with the strangers there. Bertram, Bedel of the Fowlers, has announced that if this so-called guru can cure his blindness, he will take the soma."

John said in irritation, "You know it is the only time. We have discussed and discussed, and there is no other time in which we could possibly force the city. Four years and more in planning this has taken. Another year and it might not work."

Dewey of the Hawks growled, "This year it may not work. The more I think about it, the more I am of the opinion that we all play the fool."

John didn't answer him.

"Let's change horses," Don said. "Mine becomes jaded. We must preserve them. They must be fresh on the return, since we will have half the Clann Thompson on our trail."

"We shall have all the Clann Thompson on our trail," Dewey amended sourly.

Eventually, they reached their destination, a clump of trees overlooking the Caledonian town below. Even though the distance was still considerable, they fell into whispers as they dismounted.

John said, "Where is that confounded chart?"

Dewey brought a large piece of parchment from a saddlebag. "By the Holy, it had better be correct."

John spread it out on the ground and hunkered down on his heels. "It is correct," he growled. "It has taken four years to compile, from every source of information we could find." He traced with a finger. "This is the longhouse of the Thompsons. These, the quarters of unwed lasses who do not live with their families. Here she must be, for she has no family, all having been killed in raid."

Don of the Clarks said unhappily, "If we're spotted by warders..."

John was impatient. "For all practical purposes there are no warders. All were at Aberdeen and the Dail." He looked up at the sky. "Soon it will be dark enough. Listen!" He cocked an ear. "They are beginning to return. Hurry. The kilts."

He and Don began to strip, as Dewey brought forth clothing from another saddlebag.

Dewey said, "Sally did a good job with the Thompson material. Aüi She must have been embarrassed. And imagine climbing into the kilts of another clann. Have you two no shame?"

Don laughed. "None at all. Give me that."

They donned the disguises, and the Clark clannsmen began to buckle

his scabbard back around his waist. But John shook his head and hung his own sword and dagger over the pommel of his saddle.

"Are you daft?" Don blurted. "You mean to go down into Caithness unarmed!"

John of the Hawks brought his coup stick from its saddle sheath and tucked it in his belt. He said, "I cannot shed the blood of my bride's kyn on the night I steal her. Especially since I steal her without honorable permission."

Don rolled his eyes upward in supplication. "But *I* can! For many a year I have raided, and been raided by, the Thompsons. They know me well, and any of their clansmen that see me in Caithness would—"

"No," John said. "Besides, we will look less suspicious if we appear unarmed."

Don silently and unhappily hung his own scabbard over Iris animal's pommel. He said to Dewey, "When we come back, we'll come back on the fly. Have all ready." He took up a coil of rope from behind his saddle.

"I know, I know," Dewey of the Hawks said. "*If* you come back. I still say we're all three daft."

John had started down the hill. Don followed him, after shooting one last longing glance at his sword and dagger.

They were already out of earshot when Dewey muttered,

"There'll be vendetta after *this* night. And a full year to go before a meeting of the Dail to reconcile it."

From the far side of town, John and Don could hear the returning clansmen entering the main gate, and they hurried. When they reached the wall, relieved that there had been no shout of a warder spotting them, John brought forth the parchment chart.

"Here. This is it," he whispered, staring upward. This side of the longhouse was blank, being part of the wall defenses of the town.

Don had been carrying his coil of rope, a grapple tied to one end. Now

he swung it, tossed the grapple up and onto the roof. The first time it failed to catch and made what seemed a considerable noise when it scratched across the roof and then fell with a clatter back to their feet. John groaned.

Don recoiled the rope, tossed again. It caught. He grinned success at his blood comrade and, without a word, started up the rope, hand over hand, his feet walking up the wall. When he was at the top, he looked about quickly, then turned and gestured for John. John followed him up the line.

On the roof, they checked their map again. "This way," John whispered. "Over there should be the entry nearest to the quarters of the unwed lasses."

"I know the way by heart," Don muttered. They approached the roof entry and were relieved to find it open and a ladder in place. The nights were hot this time of year, and the occupants of the longhouse took full advantage of any breath of air that could be induced to enter their community home.

They descended quietly, reached the hall below and took a brief pause to orient themselves. The building was all but identical to their own longhouses back in Aberdeen, so the problem was inconsiderable. "This way," John whispered.

They found the area they sought. John of the Hawks took a breath and reached for the latch.

A voice said, "Where in the name of the Holy are you two going?" on whirled. A Thompson clansman had stepped into the corridor from a room behind them. Even as the newcomer's eyes began to widen, Don came in fast. His fist lashed out into the other's belly. The Thompson doubled forward, his mouth trying to open in shout.

John stepped in close and slugged him mercilessly on the side of the head. The man collapsed. Don caught him, his eyes darting up and down the corridor.

"What'll we do with him?"

"Back into the room he just came from," John snapped. "And say

praises to the Holy that there's no one else in there." He took a quick step to the door through which the enemy clansman had stepped and threw it open. The room was empty. A small room, evidently some sort of storage area.

Don dragged the Thompson into the room and let him slump to the floor. He took his coup stick from his belt and looked down at the fallen clansman.

He scowled and said, "Can you count coup on a man who is unconscious?"

John thought about it. "I don't know. I have never heard of such a matter. However, he wasn't unconscious when he first confronted us. And he is armed."

"It will have to be left to the Keepers of the Faith," Don said. He brought his coup stick from his belt and tapped the Thompson, saying, "I count coup."

John shrugged and brought forth his own coup stick. "I count second coup."

They stuck their coup sticks back in their belts and left the room again, after checking the unconscious one. He looked as though he would be out for quite a time.

They returned to the quarters of the unmarried females of the Clann Thompson, and again John took the latch in hand. They pushed in and ran immediately into the presence of a girl who most certainly couldn't have been more than sixteen years of age.

Her eyes widened, as she opened her mouth to scream. Don grabbed her as gently as possible and stuck a hand over her mouth. John closed the door behind them.

"What'll I do with her?" Don demanded. "Aiii! She bit me!"

"Into one of the bedrooms," John snapped. "We'll tear up some bedclothes and bind her. Quick. They'll all be returning. There could be more, any minute."

They dragged the struggling Thompson lass into a nearby bedroom, gagged and bound her with torn bedsheets, then returned to the anteroom.

Don said unhappily, "For all we know, your lass will be the last to come. Perhaps she won't come at all. Possibly she works in the community kitchen. Who knows? Perhaps she has duties elsewhere."

"She'll come," John said.

However, two more innocents turned up before Alice of the Thompsons. And each was treated in similar wise to the first.

Don muttered, "We can't tie up the whole Clann Thompson. Besides, we've got to get out of here, before the corridors are swarming with clansmen. I wish I'd never let you talk me out of my claidheammor."

But then she entered.

Like all the others, her eyes widened in first reaction to the presence of men—albeit in the correct kilts of the Thompsons—in the quarters of the unwed of the clann. But then the second realization came, that these were strangers and not kyn. And then, recognition.

"John!" she gasped. And then, as a good lass must, her had darted for the short skean at her side, and she drew deep breath to scream for her clansmen.

John grabbed her, growling in despair, "Alice, Alice! I've come for you."

Don caught up some of the torn bed clothing. "All very good, but the lass is no slink, and the proof is there before us. Slip this into her mouth."

"I can't gag my bride," John said in indignation.

"Oh, you can't? Well, I can!" Don snarled. "She'll have the whole building down on us!" He deftly gagged the girl. "You take her," he said. "I've been bitten enough this night. Not to speak of being kicked until I'm black-and-blue."

John took her up and slung her over his shoulder, murmuring apologetically and quite senselessly. Don opened the door, darted looks up

and down the corridor.

"Let's go!" he said. "Fast!"

As quickly as carrying a kicking girl would allow, they started down the corridor toward the ladder. They rounded a corner and ran into the arms of a clansman in his middle years. Don straightarmed him and kicked him in the side of the head even as he fell. John hurried on with his burden, but Don stopped long enough to grab out his coup stick and strike the man.

"I count coup," he hissed, before following after his companion.

They reached the ladder by which they had entered the longhouse, and John started up it, one hand holding the girl to his shoulder, the other on the ladder rungs. Alice had let off kicking, at least temporarily, perhaps in fear of causing a fall, but perhaps in subconscious wish that the escapade succeed.

There came a shout of rage from down the corridor.

Don groaned. "Quickly," he yelled. The fat was now in fire.

They scrambled up the ladder, and John headed for where they had left the grapple and line.

When Don reached the roof he turned, grabbed his coup stick and slashed with it across the face of the Thompson clansman immediately behind. The other, encumbered with his drawn claidheammor and wishing to evade the ultimate insult, fell backward, taking three or four of his fellows along with him to the floor beneath.

Don half-yelled, half-laughed down at them, even as he hauled up the ladder. "I count coup!" He got out of the way just a split second before a carbine barked from below. He turned and scurried after John and his burden.

Not bothering to utilize the rope, Don grabbed the edge of the roof and swung over. He hesitated a moment, then dropped, hit on his feet, fell backward with a grunt of pain, jumped to his feet again and stared upward into the dark.

"Quickly!" he yelled. "They'll be on us in moments."

He could see a shape being lowered down, and when "she was near enough, he grabbed her about the legs. John had tied the rope beneath her armpits.

She began kicking again as soon as he had hold of her, and all his instinct was to clip her one; however, he didn't want to answer to John, later on, in regard to that.

"Hush!" he snarled. "Are you daft? Do you think this is child's play? If we are caught this night, John and I will hang in Caithness square before dawn."

John dropped from above. A carbine barked from somewhere.

They started hurrying up the hill, the girl on her feet now. John had whipped the gag from her mouth. It meant nothing at this stage. The pursuit was on, and all bets were down.

Don hissed at her, "Run, lass. Those carbines cannot distinguish you from us."

And run she did, John keeping immediately behind her, attempting to shield her body from the slugs that tore the air. She had hiked her skirts up, and now her white legs flashed in the night. Happily for their escape, it was a superlatively dark night by now.

They could hear horses behind them, and John groaned. "Faster, lass," he called to her.

Don had gone on ahead as rapidly as he could. They heard him shout something to Dewey, and then came the rattle of his harness as he strapped sword and skean about his waist and dragged his carbine from its saddle sheath. He came charging back again.

"Onto the horses," he yelled. He fired back the way they had come, threw the carbine's breech, jammed another shell into the gun, fired again.

John was boosting Alice of the Thompsons onto the back of one of the horses. Dewey, in the saddle, was firing and reloading as rapidly as he

could throw carbine breech. John's orders against shedding blood this night were obviously being ignored by his desperate companions.

John vaulted into his own saddle and struck the rump of Alice's beast sharply. "Let's go!" he yelled.

Don, shouting the battle halloo of the Clarks, came scrambling up the hill. He leaped into his saddle and hurried after the others, laughing now in full glee.

He called after Dewey, "Wait until the bards sing this at the next muster."

Dewey, slightly behind John and Alice and still firing back over his shoulder, shouted his own claim's halloo but made no attempt to answer. They rode hard into the night, and behind them they could hear the pursuit. By this time, the revenge minded Thompsons must have realized that this was but a very small group and not a large raiding party to be approached respectfully.

It was a matter now of whose horses were freshest. Had the Thompson clansmen taken the time to secure fresh horses, or had they taken up the pursuit on the animals they had just ridden in from Aberdeen? If their horses were fresh, then the four would be overtaken, for in spite of their spare war steeds, it had been a two day ride, with little rest.

Dewey and Don had dropped slightly behind to fight a rear guard action, but now they pulled up closer.

Dewey called, "John!"

John turned in his saddle and looked back. His two companions were behind, but Don's face was pale, and he reeled in his saddle.

John blurted, "Don!"

Don grinned at him, then grimaced. "I've taken a slug in my side," he said.

Chapter Five

BY MORNING they had shaken the pursuit, at least temporarily, and

stopped at a waterhole both for the animals and to inspect Don of the Clarks' wound.

Alice of the Thompsons, though she avoided the eyes of the obviously lovelorn John, cooperated. It was somewhat unseemly, for her abduction was not quite complete yet, nor would it be until they got her safely back to Aberdeen.

They stretched Don out on a cloak, and with her own stean she cut away his clothing at the point the carbine slug had entered and also where it had emerged. No bone had been shattered, but it was an ugly wound and he was pale, having lost considerable blood during the night's pounding ride.

Being a clansman, he allowed himself not even a groan ns she worked on him, but several times he winced involuntarily.

It was no time for feminine shame. She lifted the skirt of her gown and tore a long strip from her undergarment. John and Dewey stood anxiously to the side, staring down at their wounded companion. They had seen carbine hits before, and this one boded no good.

Alice worked deftly. She, too, had seen men torn in combat in the past. Indeed, she had lost all her immediate male kyn in such fray.

Finally she came to her feet. She turned, and for the first time she looked into John's face. "He should rest," she said. "And he shouldn't be moved for a time."

John of the Hawks shook his head. "For the moment, we have shaken them. But they must have a dozen troops scouring the heath, and we are barely over the line into the preserves of Aberdeen."

Her voice level, Alice said, "The proof is there before you. He should not be moved. Leave him here with me, and I will await them. I pledge on the honor of the Clann Thompson that he will not be killed but taken into our clann as a servant."

"And stripped of my kilts and made a clansless one?" Don snorted. He rolled to one side and struggled to get to his feet. Dewey bent and helped him.

"Tie me to my steed," Don ground out. "I'll make it."

John rode on one side of him, Dewey the other, and they took up the way again to Aberdeen,

As they neared the main gate, they could hear the conch sound.

Dewey groaned, "You forgot to change. You're still wearing the kilts of the Clann Thompson!"

They were already within carbine range.

Dewey dashed forward, desperately, his hands high above his head. He alone among them wore the kilts of a clanns-man of Aberdeen.

By the time John, Alice and Don had arrived at the gate, the warder and his men had been sufficiently warned to do no more than boggle at them. Never before had they seen proud clannsmen, fellow phyletics, attired in the kilts of another phylum. Never, for that matter, had they seen a bride *literally* stolen.

But John had no time now for explanations or reflecting in glory, though surely the criers would shout this to the housetops, far into the day.

He snapped, "Don of the Clarks is sore wounded. Hurry him to his bedel."

Four men untied the wounded clannsman from his saddle and, as gently as ever they could, carried him away. They ignored his shame. Don of the Clarks had long since fainted.

John looked after him for a long moment In dismay but then shook his head. First, he had other duty.

He turned to Alice and said, "Lass, I will take you to be presented to the Sachem of the Clann Hawk."

She could do nothing but abide by the correct procedure. She followed after him. Phyletics, both male and female, adult and child, watched their progress to the long-house of the Hawks, and largely eyes were wide, and many looked askance.

Word had evidently gone on before them, since when they knocked at the door of the quarters of the sachem, they were immediately bidden to enter, and Robert of the Hawks stood there in his living room. Several of the members of his immediate family were also there, eyes wide, but he dismissed them, a bit curtly.

He ignored Alice and looked John directly in the eye. John failed to quail. "I present Alice of the Thompsons, whom I have honorably stolen to be my bride."

"Honorably! You have then, without doubt, paid the brideright to her kyn!"

John said doggedly, "It is not against the bann. For long years I approached the Clann Thompson through their sachem at the yearly meetings of the Dail. And always I was refused. I read deep into the Holy Books and all accounts that have come down to us from the misty years and before."

Robert, Sachem of the Hawks, was interested. "And what did you find there?"

"That in the old days, before the Keepers of the Faith had devised upon the present method of paying brideright, and thus eliminating much shedding of blood, clannsmen were wont to steal their brides at point of claidheammor, and it was not against the bann to do so."

"But it is against the bann now!"

John looked him in the eye. "No. It is not against the bann. At most it is unseemly and not meet, but it is not against the bann, and I have had great provocation."

The sachem thought about it. He said finally, "I will consult the Keepers of the Faith and the clann bedel and will inform you of our decision later. And now"—he turned to Alice of the Thompsons—"until you have been taken by John as his bride—if that is allowed to happen—you will be a servant lass." He added, his voice more kindly, "I will take you into my own family, and my wife will make you at home and show you your light duties. Perhaps Hawk has been shamed by your abduction, and you will be returned to your kyn."

She said evenly, "If I am returned to my kyn, I will be shamed and undoubtedly stripped of my clann position, for I failed to attempt my life upon being stolen."

His voice was still kindly. "I will mention that aspect to the Keepers of the Faith," he said. "However, I am sure you were seized by force and hence could not honorably take your own life."

Alice was a well brought up lass and knew how to conduct herself before a sachem. She said, "I submit to Robert of the Hawks."

It was unseemly now for John of the Hawks to speak further to her. He saluted his chief and turned to go.

But Robert said, a different tone in his voice, "A moment, John. What transpired? I suspect, if the Keepers of the Faith report that all is well and that the bann has not been broken, that the bards will sing this exploit."

Avoiding the eyes of Alice, since her clansmen had been shamed in the events, John said, "As soon as the Dail had adjourned, I, with Dewey of the Hawks and Don of the Clarks, rode by back routes to Caithness. While Dewey guarded the horses, Don and I scaled the walls and—"

"You entered Caithness!"

"Yes. And hid ourselves in the quarters of Alice of the Thompsons until she appeared. We then seized her and made our escape, Don of the Clarks counting coup upon three of her kyn and I counting second coup on one."

"Counting coup at such a time! How many, then, did you find it necessary to kill? Aüi, the vendetta will rage this year. I must triple the guard on the herds before the day is out."

John said, "We spilled no blood, thinking it not meet under the circumstances. At least we spilled none in Caithness, though perhaps Dewey and Don did whilst covering our retreat."

Robert stared at him, though he himself had long been a man of action. He said, "The bards will certainly long sing this exploit. I have never heard, in their oldest praise, of such an event."

John said, "With your permission, Robert, I shall now go to Don of the

Clarks, who was badly wounded in the fray."

"Aüi, lad, hurry. I know how close you are." Robert turned to Alice. "Come now, and I will present you to my good wife. You have no fear in this longhouse, Alice of the Thompsons."

"I have no fear," she said, and let her eyes follow John as he left, which was slightly unseemly but only amused Robert of the Hawks, who was himself married to a lass of Caithness, though not a Thompson. Perhaps his wife was acquainted with Alice...

John stared down at Don of the Clarks, who was sprawled on a cot in his quarters in the Clark longhouse. The bedel was there, as was Sally, but the two young children had been hustled from the room.

Don's face was flushed and had a thin, drawn look that was bad.

The bedel said, "I fear the fleshrot."

Sally held the back of her right hand to her mouth.

John said, "It is too early to know that." There was accusation in his tone.

The bedel shook his head. He was an old man, well versed in medicine. At least, as well versed as any in Aberdeen. "I am not sure, but I fear. The wound should have been cleaned more promptly and better, and the spider dust should have been applied."

We had no time even to boil water. The Thompsons were in pursuit."

The bedel shrugged.

Don got out, "It is not important. I will be up and around before the day is through. The Thompsons do not dispose of Don of the Clarks quite so easily."

John reached down and mussed the other's hair fondly. "That they don't, Don," he murmured. "I promise that."

Don fell into a sleep, and John, not wishing to leave him, drew to one side of the room with the bedel, while Sally sat at her husband's side. She was a slight girl and now infinitely worried, as she had occasion to be; one

seldom recovered from the fleshrot.

John of the Hawks whispered, "What has happened with the strangers since we have been gone?"

The bedel scowled. "Bertram of the Fowlers took the soma."

"And?"

"And within twenty-four hours his sight has become that of a twenty-five year old clansman."

John sucked in air—not that he was greatly surprised.

The bedel said, "Nor is that all. The gnawing pain in his belly is gone. For the first time in long months, it is gone. The guru used some mystic term 'cancer,' which not even we bedels and Keepers of the Faith understand. But whatever, the pain is gone."

"And what else has occurred?" John of the Hawks could sense what was coming, but he must know.

"Bertram has been cast down from the post of Bedel of the Fowlers, and his kilts have been stripped from him, and he is now a clansless one. However, he cares not, no more than Robert of the Fieldings cares, and he was once the boldest raider of Aberdeen."

"I know," John said. "What else?"

"Others take the soma, or say they will, and there is great talk against the strangers amongst the Keepers of the Faith and the younger clansmen, though the women and those elderly enough to feel the burdens of age and sickness speak largely for them."

John thought about it. "And what do the younger men wish to do with the men from Beyond?"

The bedel said in disgust, "What *can* be done? Obviously, the guru, at least, is a holy man. He performs miracles."

"He performs medicine," John growled. "While we of Caledonia have remained stationary with our banns and our traditions, they have advanced in every direction. The so-called miracles of the guru are simply

medicine far in advance of what we know in Aberdeen, or in any phylum, for that matter."

The bedel was scowling again. "You sound as though you speak against the bann, clannsmann. Let me point out to you that it is beyond a simple war cacique to understand all aspects of the Holy and of the Holy Books. It takes long years of study, long years of contemplation, before one can even begin to interpret the true meaning of the Holy Books. I cite a simple example, the first verse from one of the four.

The stag at eve had drunk his fill

Where danced the moon on Monan's rill

"Now then, lad, it is commonly understood that a stag was an animal of the chase, on one of the worlds Beyond. But tell me, what is a moon, and how does it dance? And above all, what is a Monan's rill? And these are but simple problems that we bedels and Keepers of the Faith must dwell upon."

"I don't know," John said. "But it is I who wish to preserve the old ways. These so-called holy men will destroy all, and it will result in clannless men such as this Mister of the Harmons stripping us of the products of our lands."

The bedel said, "Why do you think all this? How do you know?"

"I haven't the time now to reveal, Bedel of the darks; however, I will tell all at the next Aberdeen muster."

He turned back to Don, who was breathing hard in his sleep, and stared down at his feverish comrade in blood. He turned again to the bedel. "You are sure it is the fleshrot?"

"I am fairly sure."

Sally closed her eyes and moaned.

John gripped her shoulder and squeezed. "I have promised Don of the Clarks will survive."

"You promise more than you can deliver, John of the Hawks," the bedel

grumbled.

John of the Hawks went to his own longhouse and to his assigned quarters and banged on the door.

It was opened by one of the expressionless younger orange clad strangers. The two were remarkably colorless. John wondered, in passing, if taking soma did this to a worshiper at the Shrine of Kalkin.

He said, "I wish to talk to Mister of the Harmons."

"He has returned to the *Revelation*," the stranger from Beyond said tonelessly. "Aberdeen is not the only town in which we spread the word of Lord Krishna. There are duties elsewhere."

John said impatiently, "Then Guru of the Marks."

"The guru is meditating upon the path of the Lord Krishna."

The other was a man of no more than six feet, a puny creature compared with John of the Hawks. John, irritation, put a hand on the stranger's chest and pushed him back and to the side.

"It is a matter of great importance," he growled. He looked about the room. It was furnished quite differently than it had been when he was in residence. Various shiny metal devices and gadgets were here and there. Grey metal cabinets, holding John knew not what, lined the walls of the chamber. There was a high raised hard bed in the room's middle, which reminded him strongly of the beds the bedels used when surgery must be performed upon the wounded.

The orange clad stranger began to remonstrate with him, albeit in a gentle voice, but at that moment Mark, the guru, entered from, a back room.

He said, with his usual calm dignity, "Ah, my son. You have come at last to take your soma and follow the footsteps of Lord Krishna?"

"No," John said. "I have not. I have come to ask you use your medicine to cure my blood companion Don of the Clarks."

"He is ready, then, to take the soma?"

John's eyes narrowed. "No, he is not."

The other said mildly, "Then how can I invoke the Lord Krishna in his behalf?"

John said impatiently, "Guru of the Marks, you use your words in double meaning. I am beginning to suspect that such is the custom of all men of religion. The truth! Is it necessary to take soma for you to cure ills incurable by our bedels?"

The guru looked at him for a long moment. Finally, he said, "What is wrong with your friend, my son?"

"A carbine slug in his side. We were on a raid against the Thompsons of the Caithness Phylum."

"Thou shalt not harm, my son. Evil begets evil."

John snapped, "Nevertheless, the fleshrot has set in, and our bedels are helpless to cure the fleshrot when it is in the body. An arm or a leg, yes. They can amputate. But not in the depths of the body, and this wound is immediately beneath the lung."

"Gangrene," the guru murmured unhappily. "How long since the wound was taken?"

"Three days and more."

"Too long," the orange clad assistant said. "Only the autohospital in the *Revelation* could handle him if the flesh has been gangrenous for that long."

John's eyes went from one of them to the other. "What is an autohospital?" he demanded.

The assistant looked at the guru, who said, "The Lord Krishna has seen fit, my son, to provide his followers of the path to the Shrine of Kalkin with the means whereby to cure all ills, save those of time. So it is that we who walk with Lord Krishna live lives free of sickness until we are ready to be gathered to the bosom of Kalkin."

John snapped, "You still talk with double meaning, Guru of the Marks.

But this autohospital will free Don of the Clarks of the fleshrot?"

"Yes, my son. But Harmon has returned with the skimmer of the *Revelation* and is not to return for a week. By that time our work here in Aberdeen will be through, for the time, and we will proceed to the next town, leaving the good work here to be continued by those who have taken up the path of Krishna."

Without further words, John of the Hawks turned on his heel and left.

Outside the longhouse he barked orders to several of his clansmen who were standing about. Two horses were brought up, a litter rigged on one of them.

Dewey said. "What do you propose?"

"The fleshrot has set in. This Guru of the Marks informs me that on the ship from Beyond there is means to cure it. I take Don of the Clarks to Nairn."

"But it is a three day ride!"

John looked at his kinsman.

Dewey said, "He will be dead before you arrive."

Chapter Six

JOHN OF THE HAWKS brought his steed to a halt and looked up at the looming spaceship. As before, the ramp was down and the entry open, though no one was in sight He wondered vaguely at the arrogance of the strangers from Beyond. Did they believe themselves immune to raid?

He dismounted and turned to the other horse and its burden. As gently as was possible, he worked at the litter, unbinding the unconscious Don, taking him in arms. There was a nauseating stench of putrefying flesh.

He slung his companion in arms over his left shoulder, so that his right hand could be free, and began the ascent of the ramp.

The ship's defenses were not as negligent as all that. As he reached the entry port, two of the strangers from Beyond stepped forth. Both were

dressed in the clothing of Harmon, the dark garb of the acolyte of the religion of the Shrine of Kalkin. However, neither was of the caliber of the guru or his orange clad assistants. At least, so their expressions suggested.

Nor were their voices exactly the gentle tones of Mark.

One said, "Where do you think you're going, big boy?"

John came to a halt and said, "I have come to cure the fleshrot in the autohospital told of by Guru of the Marks."

The second of the strangers wrinkled up his nose. "If you think you're going to bring that stinking specimen into this ship, you're more of a dully than you look."

The other one said, "None of the monks are around, big boy. Go on over to town, there's a couple of them there. They'll take care of you."

John said evenly, "I am not of Nairn. I am of the Hawk Clann of Aberdeen. I have ridden far to reach the auto-hospital, and my comrade is near death."

"That's too bad, but you're not coming into the *Revelation*. Skipper's orders. No Caledonians inside the ship, unless the guru personally brings them in."

The bleakness of the wastelands in his voice, John said, "I take my blood comrade to the autohospital, man from Beyond. I suggest you do not attempt to hinder me."

The other answered that by darting his hand inside his jerkin. But he reckoned without the abilities of the most celebrated war cacique of Aberdeen. His handgun had hardly cleared his clothing before he felt the sharp sting of the skean bite deep into his side, then rip toward his belly. All turned black, even as he caved forward.

His dagger free again, John of the Hawks turned to the other, the bleakness in his eyes now. "You will lead us to the autohospital, man from Beyond, or you will share the fate of your fellow."

The other was obviously a slink, John of the Hawks realized. His whiteness of face proclaimed that. He turned and started down the metal

corridor, his shoulders held in such wise that he was obviously afraid of having the clansman behind him, expecting momentarily to feel the skean in his back. John sneered his contempt and shifted the body of Don of the Clarks slightly, to relieve the cramp of his burden, for his blood comrade was no small man.

The corridor was long and unrelieved by other than periodic doors. They tramped along wordlessly.

At long last they reached a portal somewhat larger than the others, and the spaceman turned, his face surly. "This is the entry to the autohospital," he said.

"Very well. Lead the way."

The other shrugged and opened the door and entered, John immediately behind. The man from Beyond stood to one side.

The room was fairly large, furnished considerably as Mark the guru had furnished John's living quarters in Aberdeen, that is, with equipment obviously of a medical nature, though not understood by John—with metal files, and medicine chest and all spotlessly sterile.

And in the center of the room, a sardonic twist on his mouth, stood Harmon, a weapon in his hand directed at the belly of the Caledonian.

"Welcome to the *Revelation*, John of the Hawks," he said.

John looked at him.

Harmon said, "Did you labor under the illusion that you could force your way into a spaceship without setting off alarms? Are you so empty that you couldn't guess that every word you've spoken since you entered the ship has been picked up?"

John said, "I have brought Don, Sagamore of the Clarks, to be treated in the autohospital, Mister of the Harmons."

The other spaceman blurted, "He knifed Petersen. I think he's dead. Give him the flamer, Skipper!"

Harmon said thoughtfully, "I don't think the guru would approve of

that, Jim. Besides, it would ding up our image with the locals. Remember our bit, thou shalt not harm."

"But he finished Petersen!"

"In honorable defense," John said. "He drew his weapon."

Harmon stepped back and sat down in a chair, his gun still at the ready and his face thoughtful.

"A sagamore, eh?" he said. "That's kind of a subwar-chief, isn't it? And you're raid cacique of your clann, aren't you, John? It occurs to me that you are two of the top bullyboys of Aberdeen."

John, ignoring the other's hand weapon, stepped over to the white sheeted operating table and deposited Don there, making the unconscious clansman as comfortable as possible. He turned then, back to the *Revelation's* captain.

"He is dying," he said. "Where is the autohospital?"

Harmon nodded toward a door studded with dials, switches, small wheels, meaningless to John of the Hawks. "In there," he said.

John said, "We must hurry, or he is dead."

Harmon said musingly, "It would be quite impressive if the two of you returned to Aberdeen as loyal followers of Lord Krishna, wouldn't it?"

John stared at him.

Harmon jiggled his weapon. "Jim," he said, "help this overgrown dully put his friend in the autohospital and activate it."

Jim growled, "He knifed Petersen."

"Forget about Petersen. Evidently, it's too late to worry about him now."

Grumbling, the spaceman opened the indicated door and motioned to John, who took up Don in his arms, as a baby is taken up, and carried him into the small compartment beyond. The interior was only bewildering to him. However, there was another metal bed.

"Take his clothes off," Jim directed sourly. "Bandages and all."

He will bleed to death!

"He won't have time to. The minute we step out of here he begins to get blood transfusions." The other began to throw various switches.

John obeyed orders.

"All right," the one addressed as Jim said. "Now get on out."

Back in the room with Harmon, John watched as the spaceman closed the door, isolating Don of the Clarkes.

John said, "What happens now?"

Harmon said, "Over there. Sit down, where I can watch you. Jim, get back to Petersen. If he's still alive, get one of the other boys and get Petersen into the autohospital. If he isn't, put him in Disposal and get back to your watch. We're short handed with so many out spreading the good word of Lord Krishna."

Jim left, and John of the Hawks seated himself as directed, keeping his eyes on Harmon.

Harmon jiggled his gun again in an amused fashion and smiled mockingly at the clansman. "What happens now? We wait about an hour or so, and then your buddy buddy comes out all whole again. And then the two of you take your soma and return to Aberdeen to set a good example. Six months from now, oh, perhaps a year, and you'll both be working in the new mines, all civilized, along with everybody else on Caledonia."

"What is this *civilized*?" John said. Inwardly, he quailed, but he would have been shamed to have the other see it. He knew the power of the other's weapon. It was what DeRudder had once called a flamer. But it was not the gun that caused him to feel a slink, but the other's threat to make both him and Don take the dreaded soma.

"Civilized?" Harmon said, a cynical grin on his face. "You wouldn't know, would you? We've got time to kill, John of the Hawks, so I'll tell you a story. It's a story about you. You and the rest of Caledonia. I think I've got it reconstructed fairly well. Krishna knows, it's taken me the better

part of the past ten years to trace it down. It started some centuries ago, when one of the early colonist ships, the *Inverness Ark*, was thrown out of warp and wound up here, far, far from where it was headed. The ship crashed, and it must have been one dilly of a crackup, since evidently things were destroyed to the point where they only rescued four books."

"The four Holy Books, you mean?" John said.

Harmon laughed. "A volume of quatrains by an ancient Persian, an epic poem by a British romantic period writer named Scott, *Ancient Society*, an early work on American ethnology, and a volume by H. J. Muller on genetics. Holy Books! What a combination upon which to base a whole culture!"

John didn't understand the amusement, but he said, "Go on with the story, Mister of the Harmons."

"Of course. Practically everything must have been lost, and in the attempt to survive, a tribal culture based strongly on ritual and taboo evolved. The earliest of the Caledonians—that name, and other names you use, bear out the fact that most of the colonists were Scottish—must have understood your books well enough to take steps to strengthen your bloodlines by diffusing the genes as universally as possible. They adopted a gens system, based on Morgan's anthropological work among the Amerinds."

John, scowling and getting only a portion of the other's meaning, said, "You mean the holy man, Lewis of the Morgans?"

Harmon laughed. "Is that what you call him? At any rate, the steps taken to preserve the colonists from interbreeding resulted in your society becoming ossified. You're at about the same stage of development as the Iroquois, although you've got a few things, such as gunpowder and the working of metals, that they hadn't."

The skipper of the *Revelation* yawned. "However, that'll all end now. We'll bring you out of barbarism and into civilization in one generation. The last generation, in fact. After that, Caledonia will have to be colonized all over again, soma being soma."

John said, "What is this soma that you intend to force us to take?"

Harmon jiggled his gun again. "Soma, my friend, is the most notable of the psychedelics, or hallucinogens, if you will." He pointed with his gun. "Over there, on the table."

John looked. On the small table indicated were two of what looked to be tablets of sugar.

"I got them out for you and your brawny friend," Harmon said in mock agreeableness.

"What is a hallucinogen?" John said.

"Well, it's a long and interesting story," Harmon said. "Man's history does not go back far enough to give the origins. Indeed, some scholars, such as the early Englishman Robert Graves, explored the idea that the raw mushroom *amanita muscaria* was the so-called ambrosia of the worshipers of Dionysus and that the Eleusinian, Orphic and other mysteries associated with Dionysus were all based on eating this early hallucinogen. Indeed, the eating of the mushroom *psilocybe* by the Masatec Indians of Oaxaca, Mexico, invoking the mushroom god Tlaloc, was very similar. Fascinating subject, don't you think, John of the Hawks?"

John realized the other was cozening him, but he kept his peace.

"My own belief," Harmon continued, "is that the guru is correct when he tells us that the soma of the early Indus Valley civilization was a hallucinogen that so affected the people that they could not bring themselves to violence. Thus it was that when the, ah, impetuous Aryans came down from the north they found such towns as Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa without even walls in the way of defense. Archaeologists, in excavating the Indus Valley towns, find much in the way of art and artifacts, practically nothing in the way of weapons. You see, soma then, as now, so affected its takers that they could subscribe only to the, ah, you would call it a bann, 'thou shalt not harm.' The tradition of being vegetarians came down well into historic times among the Hindu Indians."

John said evenly, "I do not understand much of what you say, Mister of the Harmones. I suspect you jest at me and remind you that already we carry the bloodfeud."

Harmon chuckled. "Another hour or so, my outsized lad, and you will feud never again, neither with me nor anyone else. A great prospect, eh? But to get back to our hallucinogens. One of the earliest was *cannabis sativa*, known variously as hemp, kif, bhang, hashish, ganja, charas and marihuana in its various forms. A rather mild hallucinogen, as a matter of fact, though the ambitious Hasan-i-Sabbah is said to have put it to profitable use. Ah, it is from his name we derive the term assassin."

He was obviously enjoying himself. "Then, of course, there was peyote, beloved of the Amerinds but not really to come into its own until mescaline, its active ingredient, was extracted in the laboratory. In fact, the hallucinogens as a whole didn't achieve to their heights until they were taken up by the scientists, and the whole field of biochemistry was precipitated into a new look at the brain. The real breakthrough took place when a new compound of lysergic acid, derived from a common fungus called ergot, was synthesized. Lysergic acid diethylamide, or LSD, if you will."

John said, "You mock me, Mister of the Harmons, with your unknown words; however, you have still to tell of this soma."

Harmon jiggled his weapon in amusement. "But that is what I *have* been telling you, friend John. Soma is king of them all. He who takes soma is cured of all mental ills. He, ah, reaches nirvana while still on this mortal coil, so to speak. All passions are beyond him."

"All passions?" John was scowling. "You mean that even sex becomes meaningless? The love between man and woman?"

"Exactly. That and all other passions, my bullyboy, as you are soon to discover. But not just sex becomes meaningless, but the desire for, well, say, fame, power, wealth. All things that ordinarily men strive for become meaningless when one has walked with Lord Krishna."

Inadvertently, John ran a tongue over his dry lips. "That is nonsense. It is but a saying, walking with Krishna."

Harmon grinned mockingly. "To the contrary. Evidently, when one takes soma he actually, in his hallucinations, thinks he meets and talks and walks with Lord Krishna, who explains all to him."

"All of what?"

Harmon shrugged. "But how would I know? As yet I have not taken soma. Perhaps when I am an old man, and free of human passions, I will. But for just now, no, thank you. I feel as do most. I can wait awhile."

John said very evenly, "But if the relationship between man and woman became meaningless, then there would be no succeeding generations."

Harmon smiled jovially. "Of course, but that is not deemed of importance to the guru and the others who worship at the Shrine of Kalkin. The sooner all are gathered to the bosom of Kalkin and are united in one transcendent, ah, *soul*, the better."

There is a great difference between a warrior born and a soldier trained. Harmon, as a younger man, had once taken military training on one of the more backward planets belonging to the League. However, it would not have occurred to him to rush a man who had him covered with a weapon as deadly as a flamer. Nor would he have dreamed that a man as large as John of the Hawks could move so fast.

He jiggled the hand weapon once too often. Momentarily, the muzzle was directed at the ceiling.

The weapon flamed briefly, a pencil of light and heat, but Harmon had not the time to direct it with accuracy. John of the Hawks was upon him—less than gently. A fist the size of a quart container banged upon the side of his head, and he went under into temporary oblivion.

John stared down at him momentarily, then stooped and swept up the gun and stuck it in his belt. He went to the small table upon whose top sat the two soma pills and picked one of them up. He stooped down again and pried open the fallen man's mouth and popped the pill inside.

"If you choke on that, so much the better." he growled.

He stood for a moment in thought, then returned to his chair and sat himself again, waiting patiently for Jim or one of the other members of the *Revelation's* crew.

They took almost as long to return to Aberdeen as they had taken on the way to the spaceship, since, although Don of the Clarks was healed in body, he was still weak from loss of blood and from his descent so deep into the valley of death.

They talked it out considerably on the way and had reached conclusions by the time they came up to the gates of Aberdeen.

"We have the means now to rally the clansmen," John of the Hawks had said. "We shall recommend to the muster that two criers go forth at greatest speed to Caithness and to Dumbarton, one to each, and spread the word of warning. Caithness will send forth, by fastest steed, two criers to give warning to two other towns, and Dumbarton will do the same. And thus, on and on. Each town will warn two more. Within three months, surely every phylum on Caledonia will have had the warning."

"Aii," Don said grimly. "And it will not be too soon, for by that time, how many will have taken this accursed soma?"

"Too many," John admitted. "But there is naught else we can do."

"And then what?"

"Then the plans of these otherworldings will be thwarted —for the time, at least."

Don looked at him questioningly.

John said, "But they will come again. And next time, undoubtedly, in other guise. We must prepare, Don of the Clarks."

"Prepare? Prepare for what? And how?"

"Some of the old ways must go. No longer is Caledonia unknown to these men from Beyond. They know we are here, and some, at least, yearn for our resources. To repel them we must change many of the old ways."

Don stared at him. "But that is against the bann!"

John said, "That is one of the institutions that must go."

When they reached the gates of Aberdeen, John shouted loudly, "As Raid Cacique of the Hawks, I summon the muster for emergency council!"

A crier who had been standing nearby dashed for the town square to sound the conch.

Dewey came riding up, grinning elation. "John! The Keepers of the

Faith have ruled! Our raid was not against the bann! I am to be raised to sagamore at the next muster, and it is rumored Don of the Clarks will be made a raid cacique! Your exploits are being sung by the bards!"

"Aüi!" John yelled. He leaped to the ground and threw the reins of his horse to his kynsman. "Here, take the animal. Meet me at the square in but five minutes, for the muster. I go to see Alice of the Thompsons."

He ran for his longhouse, even as the conch began to sound, summoning the phyletics.

He banged into the great hall of the Clann Hawk and hurried to the door of Robert, the sachem. Without knocking, he dashed in.

She was there, alone, in the living room. And at his entry, looked up, her eyes shining.

He came to her. "Alice!" He put his hands on her shoulders. "The Keepers of the Faith have ruled that you can honorably be my bride."

There was a serene quality in her face that he didn't quite understand. He said, "Alice, what's wrong?"

She said gently, "Nothing is wrong, John of the Hawks. And nothing will ever be wrong for me again. I walk in the path of Lord Krishna."

PART THREE OPPORTUNIST

Chapter One

SUBLIEUTENANT MABSTEN heard the detector beginning to beep and walked over to the screen. He said to his warrant, "What is it, Venizelou?"

Warrant Venizelou was scowling down at the screen. "Four men, on foot. No, five. Metal on them, but not much."

Marsten said, "Who's on the laser rifles?"

"Jenkins and Motoshi on the one covering that direction."

The sublieutenant looked down at the screen unhappily. "What in the name of Krishna are they doing, just walking toward us like that? You

better have Jenkins cut them down."

"Maybe they're women."

"Women don't carry weapons."

"Maybe they aren't carrying weapons. That's not much metal indicated."

The sublieutenant was irritated. He was a younger man than the warrant—younger and considerably less experienced—and was continually reminded of it. He knew that the warrant and the eight enlisted men in his detachment were aware that this was his first command and that he was newly out of cadet school. Not that anything had been his fault, nor had he lost any of his small command, but everything seemed to go wrong in this remote post.

The warrant added, "Not enough metal to be a carbine or even a sword."

The sublieutenant said, "We ought to be able to see them visually. Let's go up on the roof."

They went over to the side of the room where a ladder led upward. The building was approximately one hundred feet long and of roughhewn wood. The roof was flat, and at each end, behind sandbags, were rifle emplacements, two men at each.

The sublieutenant wore binoculars and now trained them. He looked for a long moment, then handed the glasses to Warrant Venizelou. "What do you make of it?"

The warrant put his eyes to the glasses, adjusted them slightly. "The one out in front's got an orange robe on."

"I'm not blind," Marsten said.

"They're coming from the direction of Nairn," Venizelou said. "Nairn's supposed to be pacified. United Mining's been recruiting there."

The lieutenant took the glasses back. He walked to the end of the roof and trained them on the approaching group again.

The two men stationed at the laser rifle looked up at him. One of them said, "Something, Lootenant?"

Marsten said, "Five men on foot."

"You want we should ventilate them?"

"They don't seem to be armed."

The other enlisted man snorted at that.

The sublieutenant said unhappily, "They're not even wearing kilts."

"The only good Caledonian's a dead one, sir, like everybody says."

The sublieutenant said snappishly, "If we killed every native on the damned planet, United Interplanetary Mining'd have to import labor all the way from Sidon. The cornet's warned us there's been too much bloodshed already."

He came to a sudden decision, returned his binoculars to their case and turned to the warrant, who had come up to stand beside him.

"We'll go out and interrogate them."

"Yes, sir." Warrant Venizelou looked down at the riflemen. "You two keep slick, understand?"

"Sure, Warrant, we're not empty. I still say, ventilate them."

"That's up to the sublieutenant to decide. Just keep that rifle trained." The warrant turned and followed his officer.

In the room below, Warrant Venizelou picked up a short hand weapon and hung it over his shoulder by its sling before following Marsten through the door.

They issued forth into the open and advanced about fifty feet from the building and awaited the coming of the unknowns.

After a few minutes the warrant growled, "They're all Caledonians."

"How do you know?"

"The *size* of them. The shortest must be seven feet. We don't grow 'em that size. That lead one in orange might be done up like a monk or guru, but he's local."

Sublieutenant Marsten said, "A lot of these people have taken soma, Warrant. Quite a few have even studied at the pagoda in New Sidon City."

However, he unsnapped his holster and loosened the handgun. Warrant Venizelou slipped his own weapon from his shoulder and held it at a nonchalant ready.

Marsten called, "All right. You're near enough. What do you want? This is a military post, and civilians are not allowed."

The orange clad one continued to amble toward them, as though he hadn't heard—or didn't care. There was a dour quality in his face, but superimposed upon it was a gentle meekness, characteristic of one who has taken the hallucinogen soma. The others brought up the rear.

The warrant raised his weapon to the ready and trained it. "You heard the sublieutenant," he snapped. "One more step, and I cut you in two."

The orange clad one came to a halt and said mildly, "We walk in the path of Lord Krishna and hence know no evil." He looked at the sublieutenant. "Have you taken your Soma, my son?"

The sublieutenant said impatiently, "I am a soldier; obviously not."

The monk said, "That is true, my son. He who is of the military has not accepted, as yet, the teaching of Lord Krishna, 'thou shalt not harm.' "

Marsten said, "What is it that you want, guru?"

The other said, "I am David and come from the town of Nairn, where I am in charge of the Shrine of Kalkin." He turned and indicated the four men who followed him. All of these were attired in black robes, and all kept their peace. They were typical Caldonian clansmen, save that y wore no kilts, nor did they carry claidheammors at their sides. "These are acolytes, desirous of taking their soma and entering into oneness with Lord Krishna." All right. Very praiseworthy, I'm sure. But what are you doing here? Civilians aren't allowed in the vicinity of military posts, thank Krishna for that!"

"My son," the Guru David said chidingly, "you must not take the Lord Krishna's name in vain, for it is he who leads us along the path to the Shrine of Kalkin."

Warrant Venizelou wagged the muzzle of his gun back and forth in a negative gesture. "You heard the sublieutenant, guru. What'd you want here? You better turn around and git on back to Nairn. Out here you got a good chance to get picked up by some raiding party, and most these clannsmen don't go for none of you people that's taken soma."

The monk looked at him in gentle reproof. "When you have taken your soma, my son, all evil will depart you, and no longer will you even dream of harming any living thing."

"I know, I know," Venizelou grunted. "But what'ya want here?"

The orange clad monk looked back to the sublieutenant. "My son, when the Guru Mark left Nairn to spread the message of Lord Krishna elsewhere, in my care he put a supply of soma sufficient for the needs of all in Nairn who might wish to enter into the Shrine of Kalkin. However, two weeks past, a raiding party from Dumbarton entered into the city and seized and destroyed the sacred soma. These four acolytes"—he gestured at his followers—"wish to follow the footsteps of Lord Krishna but have so soma."

"Why come to me?" Marsten said. "This is a military post, not a pagoda. The nearest pagoda is in New Sidon."

"But my son, that is many miles from here, and we have not even horses. Since so many of the people of Nairn have taken soma, the raiding parties, unresisted, have driven off all the horses, and we lack transportation. Is it not possible for you to communicate with the pagoda and have a fresh supply of holy soma sent to us?"

The sublieutenant thought about it. He said finally. "My detector indicated metal on you. What is it?"

"Metal?" the monk said blankly. Then, "Ah." He looked at his four followers in mild reproof. "The acolytes have not as yet taken their soma and hence have fears unknown to the initiates. They carry skeans, so as to fight off the wild dogs."

"Wild dogs," Venizelou said. "That's a new one. What wild dogs?"

The guru said, "My son, long years past when the *Inverness Ark*, which carried the first settlers to Caledonia, crashed, there were aboard various life forms from Mother Earth, including pets. In the misty years that followed the crash, many of these took to the wilderness and multiplied. Today there are both wild dogs, who run in packs, and wild cats, descended from the common house cat."

The sublieutenant said, "Warrant, stay here with the guru and his converts. I'll put in a report on this."

"Yes, sir."

Marsten turned and strode off for the building that housed his detachment. On the roof, both laser rifles were trained on the small group from Nairn. At the windows, the four enlisted men off-duty were staring out at the newcomers. The lieutenant disappeared inside.

The guru's eyes went about the vicinity.

"I do not believe I have been here before," he said. He took in the considerable wreckage. "There was disaster?"

"Kinda," Warrant Venizelou said. "This usta be some kind of village of herdsmen, like. When the cornet based us here, these wild clansmen were dullies enough to try'n give us a hard time. So we had to flame the resta the houses down."

There was infinite hurt in the face of the monk. "You mean this was a small town and you have driven the folk away?"

"That's one way of puttin' it, friend. But it's the only way of dealing with these people. They're born bandits. They don't work. Or anyway, just enough to barely get by. They spend full time stealing from each other. They'll spend a week sitting behind a rock on a hillside, waiting to get a potshot at their neighbor, when they oughta be out plowing or whatever."

"But... my son, this was their town."

The warrant was contemptuous. "They couldn't get it into rough their empty skulls that we were going to be based here if they wanted it that

way or not. We had to flame down half the clansmen the first day. The rest took to the hills. For a while we let the women and kids stay, but you couldn't even trust them. Finally, we cut the houses down, except for the one we're in, and sent the rest of them packing."

"But where do they live now?"

Venizelou shrugged. "Up in the hills somewheres, I guess. From time to time they pull some trick. Used to come especially at night. Guess they didn't know our detectors can see as well at night as day. But we still can't get any distance from the base without running the chance of being cut off or sniped at."

Sublieutenant Marsten returned. "All right," he said. "I called New Sidon City. The skimmer was coming out today, anyway with stores. A supply of soma is being sent. Come on into the longhouse. You must be hungry." Silently, the five followed him.

Warrant Venizelou slung his weapon back over his shoulder and brought up the rear.

Inside the commandeered longhouse, the sublieutenant led them to the living quarters and gave instructions to one of the enlisted men to get food and drink for the visitors. The acolytes quietly took seats, but the orange robed monk was obviously intrigued, in a horrified way, with the military establishment. The former clann longhouse had been converted into a barracks and military spick and span was the order.

The sublieutenant, somewhat proud of his first command, was not averse to showing him around, and the follower of Krishna was properly impressed by such devices as the autostove and properly shocked by the weapons.

He said, gentle reproof in his voice, "My son, before I took my soma, upon the urging of the Guru Mark, I, too, was a clansman, a raider. But my weapons were simple affairs, a claidheammor, a skean, a carbine. But these terrible things..." He gestured at the warrant's short hand weapon.

The sublieutenant grunted. "Fires a limited range laser beam. Actually, weapons aren't as sophisticated as all that. No reason to be, I suppose. They haven't progressed to any degree beyond the point they were at way back when world government was first established on Mother Earth. By

the time the League of Planets was formed, everybody took a dim view of further development of arms, and it's now against the League Canons. I suppose if ever man ran into another intelligent life form in the galaxy, especially an aggressive one, we'd go back to research, but as it is."

"Laser beam?" the guru said.

"Ummm!" The other tapped the pistol at his hip. "This is the smallest size. It will cut a man or horse in two at a thousand yards. The warrant's gun, there, triples that range and more. The rifles up on the roof will cut through a spaceship just as easily, and the range is all but infinite. The laser's by far the superior of any projectile weapon ever devised."

The guru shuddered and in protest murmured, "My son, my son."

Marsten shrugged. "If this planet is ever to be developed, we've got to curb these bandits. And the only thing they understand is force. They'd rather raid than eat. We've got nearly as many soldiers on this planet as there are men in the mines. And if anything, we could use more. Sink a mine shaft, and friend, you'd better have a military post right next to it, or you'll wake up some morning with all your technicians and laborers dead and everything portable stolen."

The guru said in puzzlement, "But my son, what is it that motivates you? You come from a far world to thus aid in the pacification of Caledonia. But why? Why do you feel it urgent to do so? The followers of the path of Lord Krishna who came from worlds beyond, I can understand, for verily the word of the final Avatara of Vishnu must be spread. But you have not taken your soma and thee do not proselytize."

Warrant Venizelou chuckled.

Marsten glared at him in irritation but said to the monk, "Actually, the warrant is right. We're motivated by personal gain, actually. You see, we come from the planet Sidon. It's one of the frontier worlds, and the socioeconomic system is free enterprise, each man for himself and the devil take the hindmost."

"I do not understand, my son."

Marsten looked at his wrist chronometer. He scowled and said, "That skimmer should be coming in. Warrant, take a look at the detector, focus

it on long range."

Warrant Venizelou left the room, and the sublieutenant looked back at the monk. He returned to his subject. "In a society based on money, guru, if you're not born with it, then you'd best devote your efforts to acquiring it as quickly as you can, because life can be pretty basic without an adequate supply. I was born with precious little. When the opportunity presented itself to come to Caledonia at triple the usual pay of a soldier and the possibilities of bonuses, I took it."

The guru was aghast. "But my son, you mean you fight for pay? You harm your fellowman for personal gain? Verily, my son, it is time you took your soma, turned your back on crass materialism and walked the path of Lord Krishna. The sublieutenant sighed. "Yes, I know. However, there is a girl back on Sidon and a business I can buy into. Besides, this planet needs opening up, needs to be civilized, and if I didn't do it, somebody else would. United Interplanetary Mining has the concessions and so far has been able to satisfy the League authorities that all is legal and aboveboard here on Caledonia." The sublieutenant chuckled sourly. "It's fairly easy to convince authorities that are so far away that it takes a year and more to get a message back, but I've got a sneaking suspicion that if a representative ever came through here the fur would fly."

"I don't understand, my son."

Marsten grinned. "The League's got some pretty rugged rules pertaining to the development of one planet by another, when both are populated. United Interplanetary Mining has a reputation for cutting corners. I don't really know if the League of Planets is even aware that Sidon military forces are on Caledonia."

The warrant came back in and said, "I've got the skimmer on the detector, sir. I imagine it'll be in in a matter of minutes."

The sublieutenant came to his feet. "All right, Warrant. Let's go. I hope to Krishna they brought a ration of nip. The men are going around the bend in this Krishna forsaken post."

Warrant Venizelou said, "Yes, sir. However, if they have brought a few bottles, we're going to have to be sure that we get hinged only two or three at a time. That's all these raiders need, is for us all to be smashed at once." The monk trailed along behind them, saying, "I am always fascinated to

see one of the vehicles that travels through the air. Verily, the Lord Krishna works miracles beyond belief for you who come from the far stars." They strolled out to a cleared space that had probably once been the small town's public square. The sublieutenant was followed by the warrant, the orange robed guru and two of the enlisted men who were off-duty. They stood at the side of the square and stared off into the north.

Shortly a speck appeared and began to grow larger.

The sublieutenant said, "We used to use groundcars, hovercraft, but some of these clansmen are getting slick. Not in this vicinity, as yet, knock on wood. But the Highland Confederation raiders have captured some laser small arms and have flamed down several of our vehicles."

The guru was shocked. "Caledonian clansmen using ought but carbines? But that is against the bann by which they live."

"Yeah," Venizelou said sourly. "They're learning fast."

The approaching skimmer was growing now. It swooped in, hovered for a brief moment above the field, as though checking before descent, and then dropped quickly and settled to rest in the square's middle. It was a craft of considerable size, quite capable of holding a score of men and their field equipment or an equivalent amount of freight.

The group, started off toward the aircraft, the guru walking diffidently to one side.

An entry port opened in the side of the vehicle, and a uniformed officer in his early middle years stepped forth. The soldiers, headed by the sublieutenant, snapped to the salute.

Marsten said, "At your command, Comet DeRudder." He turned and indicated the orange clad religious leader. "May I present the Guru David of the town of Nairn?"

DeRudder's face darkened in a scowl. He stepped closer to the Caledonian monk and stared upward into his face.

He said finally. "It's been a long time, but I've been able to follow your career from a distance."

He turned to the sublieutenant and snapped, "His name isn't David, and he isn't from Nairn. He was born in what was the town of Aberdeen, and his name is John Hawk. He's also not a guru. He's Sachem of the Clann Hawk and Supreme Raid Cacique of the Loch Confederation!"

DeRudder spun and shouted at the aircraft, "On the double!"

Chapter Two

BUT JOHN OF THE HAWKC was upon him.

He threw both arms around the smaller man and carried him flat to the ground.

Even as he did so, a beam of sizzling light reached out from the roof of the longhouse and, in a sweep, literally cut in two the sublieutenant and his three men. Troopers began to pour from the entry of the skimmer, arms in hand, the last two stumbling as the skycraft began to ascend.

The beam flamed them down and then touched as though with a magic finger the skimmer, which fell back to the ground in two parts and began to burn furiously.

John of the Hawks wrenched from the struggling cornet's holster the handgun and rolled aside to direct the weapon at the door of the longhouse and the two remaining soldiers who came running forth. He cut them down, before they could bring their own weapons to bear.

All was death in the square now, save for John of the Hawks and Cornet DeRudder, both of whom now came to their feet.

John of the Hawks snapped, "Don't move!"

From the longhouse came two of his fellow Caledonians, both of them shrugging out of their black robes. Beneath, they wore kilts. One of them contemptuously wiped his skean on the robe before he tossed it away.

When they came up, John snapped, "Quickly, both of you. Into the vehicle of the air before it is entirely consumed. Any weapons, especially, and books or tapes. Throw them out the door. Remain inside searching as long as you can bear the heat."

The two ducked into the smoking, burning skimmer, and shortly various objects began to be tossed out onto the ground.

The remaining two Caldonians, also now in kilts, rather than black robes, issued from the longhouse and came up.

John said, "All are dead?"

One shrugged. "Why not? They are puny men. In close combat, any clansman is worth a half dozen of such."

John of the Hawks said, "Don't be overconfident, Thomas of the Davidsons. It seldom becomes a matter of close combat with these men from Beyond. They deal their death at great distance."

He looked at the skimmer, which was beginning now to burn more fiercely. "I had thought to build a signal fire for Don of the Clarkes," he said. "But it will hardly be necessary. Aüi, their so-called laser rifles are a deadly tool."

Thomas of the Davidsons looked at the silent, deep breathing Cornet DeRudder. "This is the one for the assembly of the Dail?"

"None else are left. Besides, he is a chief and hence more suitable." He looked at the dead men. "You had best gather up their weapons. Then return to the longhouse and begin to gather such books and tapes, weapons and charges for the weapons as are here. And also their medicines. But above all, the books and weapons."

The second of the two clansmen looked at him strangely but turned and followed Thomas of the Davidsons to obey his superior's orders.

John turned back to DeRudder, even as his other two clansmen stumbled out of the destroyed skimmer, coughing, their faces flushed from the fire.

One called, "We can do no more, John of the Hawks."

DeRudder said, "We'd all better get away from the vicinity of the ship. It might go up at any time. Explode."

John rapped, "Gather up the weapons. Get them away. They are the

most valuable things on all Caledonia. They and the books."

The others followed his command hurriedly, while John and DeRudder made their way to the side of the square.

"So we meet again, Mister of the DeRudders," John said.

DeRudder, who was obviously shaken by the precipitous actions of the past ten minutes, said, "*Mister* is a title, something like your *sachem* or *sagamore*. My name is Samuel DeRudder, and my rank is cornet, somewhat similar to your rank of raid cacinue."

"And what has happened to your companions of ten years and more ago? They who first came in the skyship *Golden Hind* and tried to cozen from us the products of our mines?"

DeRudder looked at him. "Harmon's, ah, fate, I understand you are familiar with. He showed up at New Sidon and for a time spread the faith of the Shrine of Kalkin— since you stuffed soma down his throat. The skipper of the *Golden Hind*? He died several years ago. He wasn't a young man, and this exploitation of Caledonia didn't go as quickly as we first hoped it would. Manola Perez? Manola is still with us. He holds down an executive position with United Interplanetary Mining."

"And you?" John said. "You also hold a position with United Planetary Mining?"

"Yes, of course, and a military position with the Sidonian forces as well."

A cloud of dust was beginning to manifest itself on the skyline. John looked in that direction, diverting his attention from DeRudder for the moment.

Approximately sixty clansmen, carbines in hand, came riding up. Leading them was Don of the Clarks. His eyes went around the square, as did those of the whole troop.

"Aüi," he blurted to John. "All succeeded. I hardly expected it to."

He looked at the prisoner and scowled in memory. "It is Mister of the DeRudders. Older, but the same."

The clansmen were whooping and laughing in exuberation.

John snapped orders. "To the roof. Dismantle those two guns behind the emplacements. Rig litters on horses so that we can carry them. Get all the charges for them they have on hand. Go through the longhouse with care. I want every weapon, every book, all the medicine."

One of the clansmen, a sagamore of the Clann Fielding, said, "But we have no spare horses for such plunder as this."

John looked at him. "We will dismount sufficient men to make room."

Don said unhappily, "It is a poor place to be dismounted. We can ride two men on a horse. Double up."

John shook his head at him. "No. We must ride hard, for these posts of the men from Beyond are in continual contact with the forces in New Sidon City. When communication is interrupted, they will send out additional craft to check on the reason. We must get these weapons and the prisoner back to the assembly of the Dail."

He turned to one of his subchiefs. "Richard, Sagamore of the Coopers, choose twenty men to be dismounted. We need their steeds."

Richard of the Coopers said blankly, "But what will they do?"

John said, "They can make their way on foot to Nairn and raid the Nairn herds. The whole town is composed of clannless slinks, by now. It will be nothing."

Richard said, "There are precious few horses left in the Nairn herds." But he turned to obey the command, calling for volunteers. There were few of these, however. The Caledonian is all but born on horseback and does not walk save in dire necessity. To volunteer for an action meaning certain death, yes; but to volunteer to give up one's battle steed? No.

DeRudder said, "What are you going to do with me?" His throat was dry.

John looked at him in calculation. "You are the reason for this raid, Samuel, Cornet of the DeRndders."

"The name is Cornet Samuel DeRudder," the other said sourly. "What do you mean, I am the reason? Obviously, *you* never expected to see me when I emerged from the skimmer."

"The Loch Confederation convenes in its annual Dail. The sachems and caciques wish to speak to a man from Beyond, to send a message to the Dail of the city of New Sidon."

"There is no Dail of New Sidon City."

"Whatever then is the equivalent."

DeRudder looked at the men pouring in and out of the longhouse, laden down with spoil, which they were loading onto the beasts. "However, you don't seem averse to doing a little looting whilst securing your messenger."

John didn't answer him. Instead, he began shrugging out of the orange robe. One of his clansmen came up, carrying shoes and a belt with sword and skean. The supreme raid cacique sat on a rock, took off the sandals he had worn in his guise as a Shrine of Kalkin monk and replaced them with the shoes.

However, he took the belt, with its sword and dagger, and threw it away, to the ground. He said to DeRudder, "Your sidearm holster, please." He still carried the other's laser pistol in his hand.

DeRudder silently unbuckled his belt and handed it over.

John of the Hawks slipped the gun into the holster.

The clansmen in the vicinity were staring at him.

The one who had brought him his shoes and sword belt offered him a carbine.

John of the Hawks shook his head dourly. "Keep it, if you wish."

The other stared at him. "But it is your carbine, issued to you when you came to first manhood."

"No longer." John patted the handgun he had appropriated from DeRudder. "Not with weapons like this available." He brought the gun forth again. "See that tree, up the slope?"

He pointed the gun and squeezed the trigger. A beam of light penciled forth and reached for the tree. It missed by a yard or more. He moved the gun infinitesimally, and the beam cut through the tree, toppling it. He released the trigger and looked about at the dozen or so clansmen who were watching him.

John said, "A man with a carbine would hit the tree, surely enough, but a hundred rounds of cartridges would never cut it down."

There was a hush.

John looked at the young clansman who had had custody of his things. "What is that in your belt?"

"Why, my coup stick."

"Break it. Throw it away."

"But suppose I have an opportunity to count honorable coup on one of the strangers from Beyond."

"Kill him instead."

If possible, the hush deepened. Even Don, Raid Cacique of the Clarks, blinked.

"But... it is not against the bann, but it is unseemly to shed the blood when it is possible to count coup instead."

"Not with Sidonians. These are not clansmen, they are clannless ones, and they come from the planet Sidon not in honorable raid, but to strip our world. They know no banns and never count coup. They only kill and kill and kill, and they will do so until there are no clansmen left on all Caledonia, save only slinks and slaves."

John returned the gun to its holster and said to Don of the Clarks, "There is another such weapon on the body of the dead sublieutenant over there. I suggest you arm yourself with it."

His blood companion hesitated. "I'll... I'll think about it," he said. "As you know, such weapons are against the bann."

John snorted and turned to one of the other clansmen who had pulled

off his leather shoes and was busily donning a pair he had brought from the longhouse.

"What do you have there?" John said coldly.

"Shoes from Beyond. Boots of the soldiers from Sidon."

"What is wrong with your own shoes, made of good leather?"

The young clansman grinned. "It is well-known that the material from Sidon wears forever, or nearly so."

"Do you realize that if you become used to these articles from Beyond, your desire for them will continue to grow? Soon you will wish your kilts to be of the textile from Beyond, soon you will develop taste for the delicate food from Beyond, for the drink, rather than our own *uisgebeatha* of our fathers."

One of the sagamores laughed. "That last, at least, I can understand. The drink of the otherworldlings is the drink of the Holy!"

John turned his cold eye on him. "Develop such tastes and ultimately you will seek this method of barter they have, money. To get money you must needs work for the Sidonians, in their mines, in their cities, as a clannless one works. In time, given such tastes and desires, you will become as though clannless yourselves."

The one who had liberated the boots grinned again and said, "Not so long as I can take these things in raid."

The looting of the longhouse converted into barracks had been completed, and the laughing, shouting clansmen were tying the foreign weapons, books and tapes to the horses they had commandeered from the twenty unhappy raiders. The litters for the two laser rifles gave them some trouble but didn't present an insurmountable problem, although the clumsy rig slowed the animals down considerably.

John of the Hawks said to DeRudder, "You can ride?"

DeRudder said, "On the planet of my birth, it is a sport. I can ride." He swung into the saddle of the horse the other had indicated.

John of the Hawks shouted, "Quickly, now! We ride hard, or we will be overtaken by the Sidonians before we reach the shelter of the hills."

With John, Don of the Clarks and the prisoner in the lead, the column galloped off, the pack animals between the advance elements and the rear guard.

DeRudder said, "How did you know how to operate the laser rifles?"

John, whose eyes were most often on the sky, in the direction of New Sidon City, said, "Clannsmen of the Highland Confederation, some months ago, seized some of your weapons in a raid. They also took prisoners some of your soldiers and, ah, convinced them it would be well to give instructions in the use of your weapons from Beyond."

"But you are of the Loch Confederation."

John looked at him. "We are beginning to learn, Samuel of the DeRudders. A delegation of the Highland Confederation came to us and showed us the workings of your laser guns."

DeRudder looked unhappy. He was a small man, by Caledonian standards, but even in his middle years, well proportioned, and even as a prisoner of these barbarians, possessive of a cool dignity. Cornet Samuel DeRudder was no coward, whatever else he might be.

Don of the Clarks grinned at him mockingly. "It does not sit well, that in the future you will perhaps be faced with your own weapons that break the bann, eh, man from Beyond?"

DeRudder growled, "If you dullies weren't so empty, you'd voluntarily come to our cities or mining towns and get with it. This planet is one of the richest in the system. Once under full exploitation and you'd have a paradise on your hands. This world could be a garden."

John's eyebrows went up cynically. "A garden for whom, Samuel of the DeRudders? Those who work in the mines are almost all, save for a few of your technicians, as you call them, Caledonians. I have never been in a mine, but from what I hear they are not gardens, Samuel of the DeRudders."

"Just Samuel DeRudder," the other said. "You've got to work before you

enjoy all the things we've introduced from Sidon; better food, better medical care, better education, better entertainment, better clothes, better houses—better everything."

Don laughed at him mockingly. "Perhaps you think these things from Beyond are better, Samuel, Cornet of the DeRudders, but for us, perhaps we prefer our own food and clothing and the longhouses in which we were born. Perhaps we prefer to spend our days in honorable raid upon our enemies, rather than the blackness of the mines."

DeRudder looked at him scornfully. "And do you prefer the mumbo jumbo medicine of your bedels, when you've been wounded in one of those endless skirmishes of yours? I understand, you yourself were once' cured in one of our autohospitals."

Don was silent to that.

John said, "Some things, admittedly, that you have brought from Beyond are desirable. One of these is your medicine. But these things we can learn to use, without becoming slaves and spending our years toiling for your United Interplanetary Mining."

DeRudder was still scornful. "And you'd prefer to get it by stealing, rather than decent work."

John of the Hawks was irritated. He let his eyes sweep the far sky again, before answering. Then he said, "This work that you are so keen that we Caledonians take up—if it is so decent, so desirable, why do you not do it yourself? I do not note, Samuel of the DeRudders, that you spend time in the mines personally."

"I've worked in my time, John. For long years I was a ship's officer in the Exploratory Service."

John snorted. "Until one day your ship stumbled upon Caledonia, and you saw the great opportunity to rob a whole world of its treasures. Then you stopped working yourself and began to scheme to get others to work for you, even though it meant the destruction of whole towns and the dishonorable killing of thousands of women and children."

DeRudder looked at him. "You've been doing some reading. I don't think I've ever met a clansman with what you could call an education."

John said in a low voice, "That is one of the other things worthwhile that you have brought from Beyond, Samuel of the DeRudders. And we of the clanns are beginning to realize that if we are to be able to expel you from our world we must adapt to some of your ways."

Don of the Clarks scowled at his words. He said sourly, "Actually, as the Keepers of the Faith continually say, all necessary knowledge is in four Holy Books."

DeRudder allowed himself the luxury of a chuckle.

John was shaking his head. "No, Don of the Clarks. The Keepers of the Faith are wrong. The four Holy Books are only the small remnant of the books that must have come to Caledonia on the *Inverness Ark*. On this planet Sidon, and on all the other worlds Beyond, there must be..." John looked at the otherworldling for confirmation. "There must be dozens of other books." He added sharply, "Why do you laugh?"

"A joke of my own," DeRudder said wryly.

One of the sagamores behind called, "A vessel of the sky!"

John of the Hawks shot a quick glance back and upward.

"Scatter!" he shouted. "Make for the caves in the hills! Those who have weapons of the Sidonians, rally with me here. We will take the animals with the two laser rifles. Otherwise, all scatter and make for the assembly of the Dail!"

Chapter Three

IN TIMES PAST, the meetings of the Loch Confederation Dail had been held each year in a different phylum of the loosely united claims. Today, with many of the towns leveled by the beams and bombs of the Sidonian invaders, it had convened in a large natural amphitheater in the mountains. Unlike the past, there were few women present, and there was little bartering going on. The invasion from the stars had cut the population, although the rate of decline had slackened now that the clannsmen had adapted to the new methods of warfare.

As John of the Hawks and his prisoner and small troop came riding in, he let his eyes go about the vicinity. There were large natural caves, which

had been increased in size even further through the efforts of the clansmen. He nodded approval. In case of discovery by the enemy, all would be able to find shelter.

He said to Don of the Clarks, "Remove the blindfold from the eyes of Samuel of the DeRudders and have him put under guard. He would never be able to find this place again. I go first to see to the emplacing of the laser rifles, to defend us if we are raided whilst in session. Then I go to report to my fellow sachems."

Don grinned at him. "Stay clear of the bedels, John. Rumor has it that they are out for your kilts, for the proof is here before us that you have broken the bann a dozen times over."

John of the Hawks snorted. "And will break it a dozen times more, if ever we are to defeat the clannless ones from Beyond." He turned his horse and led his group off to locate suitable stations for the laser rifles.

DeRudder looked after him thoughtfully and said, to no one in particular, "There goes the most dangerous man on all Caledonia."

Don said mockingly, "Perhaps that is the way you think of it, Samuel of the DeRudders, but for us, there goes the hope for victory for the clans."

DeRudder looked at him. "There can be no victory for the clans, Don Clark. Brave, your supreme raid cacique undoubtedly is, but it is the existence of such that will continue to lead to your decimation, since he will never give up, and others will continue to be led to their deaths because of him. I recall to mind a great... war cacique, you would call him, in the history of Mother Earth. He led a lost cause in a great civil war. So loved and respected was he, and such a genius in the military field, that he kept the war going for at least two years after his side had no chance of victory. His country was devastated as a result, and tens of thousands of brave men on both sides who could have lived, died. For decades, for a century and more after the conflict ended, his countrymen continued to honor his memory, never realizing that he had been a curse, not a blessing, to his people. His name was Lee."

Don of the Clarks was scowling. He said. "We will see, man from Beyond. But brave clansmen can never be defeated by clannless soldiers, slinks who are afraid to fight honorably with claidheammor, carbine and skean but must hide behind the defenses of large cities and kill at great

distances and from ships from the air."

DeRudder said dourly, "It is an often held fallacy, clansman. Down through the ages, it has been repeated. However, I can think of few examples of tribesmen defeating civilized man with his weapons. You have never heard of them, but off-hand I can think of Fuzzy-Wuzzies and Aztecs, Zulus and Incas, Sioux and Iroquois, courageous men all, who also held to the delusion that brave barbarians can defeat lesser men, when *it* comes to courage, but armed with the weapons of technology."

Don said, "I do not follow you, Samuel of the DeRudders. But come I will see that you are held in custody until the convening of the Dail." He indicated the way.

"What do they want with me?" DeRudder growled.

Don grinned at him. "It is hardly for me to say, but for the assembly of the Dail itself."

When all else had been attended to, John of the Hawks, his heart heavy, stopped off briefly at the tent that bore at its top his pennant as Sachem of the Hawks.

She whom he sought was carding wool in the women's quarters when he entered. She smiled up at him gently.

"Alice," he said. "Alice of the Thompsons."

"John," she said softly. "Perhaps at long last you are prepared to take your soma and enter with me into the Shrine of Kalkin."

Agony came over his face. "Aüi, Alice. That is forever impossible. As impossible as our love, for there is no love for those who have taken this cursed drug of the men from Beyond."

"All love is with those who walk with Lord Krishna, John," she said with gentle reproof.

He took her by the hands and brought her to her feet and stared in misery into her eyes. "I know not why I keep you here. All others who have taken soma we have driven from the phylum, save only you. Perhaps I should let you go to New Sidon or one of the other cities. There, at least,

you could attend the pagoda with the others who follow the new religion that is against the Holy. There, perhaps, you would at least be happy."

She looked into his face and frowned slightly. "But I am happy here, John. We who have taken our soma are happy anywhere, for we walk with Lord Krishna. And here perhaps I can do the work of Kalkin, the final Avatara of Vishnu, by urging you and others to take the holy soma."

He closed his eyes in pain and drew in a sighing breath. "Aüi, Alice," he said meaninglessly.

He turned and left her. And she looked after him, deep, deep behind her eyes a hurt trying to come through.

John, as Sachem of the Clann Hawk, sat with his caciques in a body in the great circle that composed the assembly of the Dail of the Loch Confederation. Behind them stood the sagamores and renowned raiders, and behind them the multitude of full clansmen. In his immediate vicinity were the other clan leaders of the Aberdeen Phylum, including Don, who, as Raid Cacique of the Clan Clark, held sufficient rank to participate in confederation decisions.

One of the elder bedels said the praise to the Holy and then retreated to the ranks of his fellows.

The aged Thomas, Sachem of the Polks, took his place at the amphitheater's center and said, "If there is no word of protest, the first matter to come before the Dail will be that of the invaders from Beyond. Already the criers have informed us that a major chief of the Sidonians has been captured by the supreme raid cacique and can be sent with our ultimatum to this huge town New Sidon City. If there is no word of protest, I will ask that the man from Beyond, Samuel, Cornet of the DeRudders, be brought before us."

He held his silence for a moment, but no one spoke. Two clansmen brought DeRudder from the cave in which he had been held, to the center of the amphitheater, and then withdrew to the ranks of their fellows.

Cornet Samuel DeRudder lacked dignity no more than he did courage. He stood erect and looked around at them, his eyes level.

He barked, "What do you want with me? I warn you now that this is

one more crime to be punished. I would have thought you already had listed enough. In my kidnapping, your war chief and his group butchered a post consisting of ten men, not to speak of the entire complement of a Sidon Spacefleet skimmer."

Thomas of the Polks looked at him evenly, "Do not speak of crime and punishment, man from Beyond. We hardly knew its meaning before your coming. Now we are beginning to learn. All over Caledonia, young people have been cozened into coming to your cities and mining centers. There they learn dishonorable ways, clannless ways that once they were taught were against the bann. There would seem to be no bann in your cities, save only these numberless laws you bring, each of which results in punishment if not observed, though some would seem impossible to observe."

DeRudder said, "We bring the laws of civilized men!"

And Thomas of the Polks said, "We do not want them."

"But you will get them, if you want them or not. Slowly, perhaps, but surely, the Caledonians are accepting the new. The younger people in particular are beginning to realize that the old ways were cruel and hard. Possibly half of your males were killed or crippled in your raids in the old days. It was a primitive society, hardly beyond the Neolithic, and it was fated to go."

There was a stirring in the ranks of the assembled chiefs of the Loch Confederation, but none added to the voice of Thomas of the Polks, their senior.

He said now, "Our bedels have, Samuel, Cornet of the DeRudders, gone to the effort of reading some of your books, and although it has been difficult to understand many of your ways, still a certain amount has come through to us. It would seem that although you speak greatly of your laws and the ways of what you call civilization, your words have double meaning. In much the same manner that you arrived long years ago with your supposed holy men who wished to give all soma and make clannless ones of them, so now you attempt to cozen us with lofty praise of your laws. However, we find that you do not, yourselves, abide by them."

"That is a lie!" DeRudder barked.

A sigh went through the assembly.

Thomas of the Polks said evenly, "You are not kyn of mine, and thus the bann does not apply; however, I do not lie. We have perused your books of laws of Sidon and of this League of Planets to which you belong. And thus we have found that illegally, by your own usage, you steal the products of our mines and also the products of our fields, of our seas."

DeRudder said, "That is a lie! Every action taken by the United Planetary Mining Company is condoned by Sidon law and the Canons of the League of Planets." He snorted. "We have a panel of solicitors as long as your arm, making sure no League Canon is broken. We're not dullies. Sooner or later a representative from the League will show up. We want everything to be aboveboard."

"And how do you explain, Samuel, Comet of the DeRudders, the fact that before you arrived on Caledonia, all the lands, the mines and the seas belonged to the clannsmen. Now you claim ownership of wide areas, and they the richest."

"We bought them! We legally took possession of areas not claimed by anyone and bought the rights of exploitation in other cases."

"But there were none who had the right to sell," Thomas said reasonably. "The lands, the seas, the mines belong to all. A single man cannot sell such things."

"They were no ordinary men. We signed our treaties with sachems, chiefs of tribes. If *they* haven't the right to sell their own property, who has?"

"No one has," the sachem said. "You do not bother to learn our institutions, man from Beyond. A sachem is elected by the clannsmen to perform definite duties, which are multiple. But he has no power to sign away the lands of his clann."

DeRudder said, "All property belongs to *someone*, by our laws. If a head of a clann or the combined heads of phylum wish to sell the rights to mining properties, they can. So our jurors have ruled."

"We do not completely understand these jurors of yours and how they can rule on matters here on Caledonia. But this we say. The phyla of the

Loch Confederation reject your presence on Caledonia, as do, we understand, the Highland Confederation and that of the Ayr and, undoubtedly, many other confederations beyond these. We reject your claims to rights to mine our resources, to plant the fields for your own uses, to fish the seas. We reject all this and demand you return to your world of Sidon and leave us alone and to our own Holy and our dreams of the Land of Leal to come. That is the message we wish you to take to the Dail of your City of New Sidon and to your United Interplanetary Mining Company."

DeRudder looked at him contemptuously. "You went to a lot of trouble to send a message that'll be ignored, old man. United Mining isn't about to leave Caledonia. And what are you going to do about it? You have no power capable of enforcing your desires. Half your towns have already been destroyed. And here you are, sulking in the hills, afraid to attempt to raid the cities any more. Afraid to come out like men, take your punishment and join up with the rest of this planet on its march to progress."

"You will see whether the clansmen of the Loch Confederation are slinks, man from Beyond, all in good time. And now, prepare to return to your New Sidon City." Thomas of the Polks turned from him and addressed the assembly once more.

"If there is no protest, the second matter to come before the Dail will be submitted by Donald of the Warrens, Senior Bedel of the Loch Confederation."

No one spoke, and an elderly, black clad religious came forth from the ranks of the bedels and Keepers of the Faith.

There was a defiant element in his aged voice. "I say the faults of John, Sachem of the Clan Hawk of the former town of Aberdeen and Supreme Raid Cacique of the Confederation."

There was a hush that could be felt.

John of the Hawks stood, shocked. He looked about him in bewilderment.

The bedel went on doggedly, "Since being raised up to supreme raid cacique, John of the Hawks has broken the bann a score of times and

more. He has forbidden his men to count honorable coup on the enemy, which is against the bann. He has used weapons that are against the bann. He has read books other than the Holy Books, books from Beyond that should be read, if at all, only by bedels and Keepers of the Faith. It is against the bann. He has spoken slightly of the powers of the Holy and has cast doubt about the existence of the Land of Leal, for which we all yearn when life is through. It is against the bann."

John of the Hawks was breathing deeply. When the other paused, he held up a hand. "Now hear me. You have listened to this clannless one from Beyond. He has explained to you that the Sidonians will never leave of their own will. If they are to go, we must expel them. Think you, Donald, Bedel of the Warrens, that we can expel them with claidheammors and carbines? We must learn from them. We were like children when it came to killing, when first they arrived. We must learn to use the laser rifles their handguns and pistols that fire a beam of light."

"It is against the bann!"

"Then the bann must go!"

"The bann is the word of the Holy!"

"I doubt it. Who says so, besides the bedels and Keepers of the Faith?"

"It is against the bann to speak thus!"

"Then so be it, Donald of the Warrens. But if I and my clansmen are to defeat the Sidonians, then we must use these new weapons. We must read the books and find still other methods to confound them. Can you tell me another way in which we can expel them from Caledonia?"

"Yes! By returning to the ways of the Holy. Since your breaking of the bann, his face has been turned from us. Thus our towns have been destroyed, our people slaughtered. It is all because we have turned from the faith of our fathers." The bedel spun and addressed the chiefs. "I say John of the Hawks be cast down from his post as supreme raid cacique."

David, eldest bedel of the Aberdeen Phylum, came to his feet. "I say John of the Hawks be cast down from his rank as Sachem of the Hawks."

William of the Hawks, the clan bedel, came sadly to his feet. "I say John

of the Hawks be cast down from clannsmen and that his kilts be stripped from him."

Don of the Clarks was on his feet. "I say the praises of John of the Hawks," he shouted. "Who among us has so often been sung by the bards? Who among us has so often had the criers shout his exploits through the streets of the town?"

Donald of the Warrens said, "It has never been a question of the bravery of John of the Hawks or how often the bards have sung his praises. It is a matter of breaking the bann and bringing disgrace to the Clann Hawk, the Phylum of Aberdeen and to the entire Loch Confederation. He must go, before the Holy allows us all to be destroyed."

William of the Davidsons called from the ranks of the sagamores, "I say the praises of John of the Hawks. Since he has led the clannsmen in raid, never before have we had such success. Why, even three days before, we killed sixteen or more of the men from Beyond and seized much of their property, and not one among us was lost. He is the greatest raid cacique that ever the bards have sung."

And Donald of the Warrens answered doggedly, "It is not contended that John of the Hawks is not a leader of men. No one would ever brand him a slink. But it is not the matter. He violates the bann and thus turns the face of the Holy against us."

Richard of the Fieldings was on his feet. "He has saved my life three times in raid. I say the praises of John of the Hawks!"

It was William Bedel of the Hawks, who answered this time, his voice infinitely sad. "He is my own kyn, but he breaks the bann and teaches that others break it. He must be cast down, or the faith of our fathers is destroyed."

There were more to have their say, many more. First from the ranks of the sachems and caciques, then, in their turn, the clannsmen, but the final say was from Mildred, a Keeper of the Faith, as respected as any.

"The question today," she said, her voice carrying, in spite of the softness of tone, "is not that of John of the Hawks. None would deny his position as our greatest raider. The question is, do we abandon our traditions, in our efforts against the men from Beyond, or do we go on

secure in our faith in the Holy? I say, John of the Hawks must be stripped of his clansman's kilts and turned away."

Ultimately, it was put to the vote of the sachems and caciques, and shock came over the face of John and his closest supporters when the vote carried by a small majority. He turned in his bewilderment to the assembly of the clansmen, but when the vote was taken here his shoulders slumped in disbelief.

Donald of the Warrens said, "It is now time to dishonor John, the clansless one. Who among all will volunteer?"

Several clansmen and even caciques began to move forward, old enemies and rivals, John saw dully.

But Don of the Clarks stepped forward more quickly than any others. He stood before his former commander.

John shook his head. "And... and you, too, Don of the Clarks?"

Don, agony in his face, struck him symbolically with his coup stick. "Only that none other could dishonor my blood comrade," he said hoarsely.

He reached out and unbuckled the belt of John's kilts and pulled them away. A clansman came up and proffered the colorless kilt of a clansless field worker. Dully, John belted it about his hips.

Don had taken the bolstered laser pistol that John had appropriated from DeRudder. Now he took it to the cornet.

"You'd best have this," he said flatly. "On your return, you will possibly be subjected to raiders. Not of this confederation, but others do not know of your position as messenger from this Dail to New Sidon City."

Samuel DeRudder belted the holster about him. He gestured with a thumb toward John, who, his head low, was being escorted away by two clansmen, both of whom wore shame on their faces.

"What happens to him now?" DeRudder said.

"What matter to you?" Don of the Clarks growled.

"I just wondered," DeRudder said dryly. "There goes the man that but a few hours ago you named the hope of the Caledonians."

Chapter Four

DON OF THE CLARKS and Cornet Samuel DeRudder ate before the Sidonian was again blindfolded, mounted on a horse and led away by the Clann Clark Raid Cacique. During their ride of an hour or more, Don said little, immersed in his own bitter thoughts.

Finally they halted, and the blindfold was removed.

Don of the Clarks pointed. "In that direction lies your cursed New Sidon City. You will probably not make it before late tomorrow, at earliest. In your saddlebags are bread and meat. For the sake of your message, I hope you are not stumbled upon by raiders from the Highland Confederation or those from Ayr."

DeRudder looked at him questioningly. "Your friend John seemed to be in favor of uniting with these other confederations to combat us. I wonder why you haven't done it."

Don looked at him uncomfortably. "Perhaps because although it is not against the bann, it is not meet. The Keepers of the Faith oppose such large scale raids that whole confederations would be involved. Too much of the blood would be spilt."

DeRudder laughed suddenly. "The United Interplanetary Mining Company ought to subsidize these Keepers of the Faith of yours."

The clansman's face darkened, but he said nothing.

Instead, his eyes had gone to the ground, and he scowled at something he evidently saw there.

He said, "I'll go on with you for a way."

DeRudder was mystified but shrugged it off and kicked heels into the side of his beast.

A few minutes later, he saw the reason for the other's continued presence. They topped a rise and sported before them John, trudging

across the heath, alone and unmounted.

He heard them shortly and turned. His face was empty.

Don drew up and dismounted. He unstrapped the harness around his waist and held out the claidheammor and skean scabbards and the reins of his animal.

He said simply, "I can walk back."

John looked at him. Finally he said, "As a clannless one, I am forbidden the wearing of the claidheammor."

Don said, "Yes, I know. And any clannsman who found you without clann kilts and bearing arms would attack you. But what is the alternative... John? Your only way to survive now would be to enter the longhouse of some clann as a servant. And I do not think he who was once supreme raid cacique could ever become a servant. I understand that in the mountains some clannless ones, products of the destroyed towns, have banded together and survive by raiding both the Sidonians and the phyla. Perhaps you can find them."

John shook his head at him in surprise. "You would have me turn into a clannless bandit?"

"I would have you live, for until you were stripped of your kilts... John, we were blood comrades. And... and though it be against the bann, for me, we still remain." He turned and walked back in the direction from which he and DeRudder had just come.

John looked after him until he disappeared over the rise of hill.

DeRudder said dryly, "Greater love hath no man, eh?"

John said, "You wouldn't understand, Samuel of the DeRudders." He swung his leg up over the saddle.

"Perhaps I would," DeRudder said. "There's another alternative to joining up with the hill bandits, you know."

John grunted. "Yes. I can continue to roam the heath until I run into a raider band and am cut down."

DeRudder fell in beside him. "You can come to New Sidon City."

John grunted again. "It had never occurred to me."

"Think about it."

John was irritated. "What would I do in this city of yours? I know nothing of cities. Besides, you Sidonians carry the bloodfeud with he who was once Supreme Raid Cacique of the Loch Confederation."

"We don't have any such institution as the bloodfeud, John. And above all, we need capable men, and especially capable Caledonians, if ever we are to develop this fantastic world."

John was scowling. "But you and I carry the bloodfeud. You shamed me when I was but a lad."

DeRudder said in deprecation, "You forget your own ways, John. I thought a clannless one, such as yourself, was not allowed such luxuries as vendetta."

The big man flushed. "You are correct," he said in a low voice. "I had forgotten." He added, "For that matter, you too are clannless. We are both men without honor."

"Among civilized men, you can gain or lose honor only through your own actions."

The conception was new to the Caledonian, and he could only scowl as he thought about it. "But one who is born clannless?"

"Like everyone else, makes or fails to make his own degree of honor, or ethics, if you will."

"Any Keeper of the Faith can tell you that true honor and faith are only in the hands of the phylum and down, through it, to the clans."

DeRudder looked at him in amusement. "Don't you think you have finally arrived at the point where you should reject some of these teachings of the Keepers of the Faith? In fact, you already have. That's why you're on your own. By the way, you'd better make up your mind whether or not you wish to accompany me to New Sidon City."

"Why?"

DeRudder pointed. "Because there is a skimmer, and they've probably detected our body heat and will be on the scene shortly."

John stared up at the distant dot in the sky. "It seems as though my decision has been made for me. If I refuse to go with you, they will undoubtedly cut me down with their flamers."

"I can see no particular reason to allow you to take to the hills and do your best to raid our mining developments."

As the aircraft grew larger, John, staring up at it, said, "What makes it fly?"

DeRudder chuckled. "John, you wouldn't understand if I tried to tell you."

"I am not a fool, Samuel of the DeRudders," the Caledonian said coldly.

"It is not a matter of being a fool. You would not even understand the terminology. When you are in New Sidon City, you can attend school, possibly at night. At least you can already read and have even done a certain amount of studying of some of the books you've captured from us—in spite of the bans of your Keepers of the Faith. In a year or two, perhaps you'll have progressed to the point where aerodynamics need not be a complete mystery."

"School?" John said. "I thought you would put me to work in your mines."

"School, too," DeRudder said. "I keep telling you, we are here to develop this benighted planet. Uneducated half savages don't lend themselves to a civilized culture. One of our biggest tasks is to get the population into schools. Besides, our mines are not the only projects that call for employees. There are a thousand tasks involved in conducting a city such as New Sidon. Where you'll fit in, I don't know at this stage."

The skimmer came swooping in, circled them twice, then settled some fifty feet off.

A loudspeaker said, "Identify yourselves."

DeRudder barked, "I am Cornet Samuel DeRudder of New Sidon City, and this is John Hawk, formerly of the town of Aberdeen but who now is to take a position with United Interplanetary Mines."

An entry port opened, and a warrant and two enlisted men issued forth, all three with hand weapons at the ready. The warrant saluted DeRudder but turned a beady eye to the giant Caledonian.

"Drop those toad stickers you're wearing, friend. You won't need them in the city."

John unbuckled his belt and let the claidheammor and skean drop to the ground.

Even as he dismounted, DeRudder said, "You can take us to New Sidon? I don't seem to recognize you, Warrant."

"Yes, sir. We're from Berkeley, sir, but sure we can take you back to your own city. It's more or less on the way. What are you doing out here, sir?"

DeRudder said briefly, "I was captured by clansmen of the Loch Confederation, but they turned me loose. This man volunteered to return to New Sidon with me."

"Turned you loose? That's a new one, sir." John had dismounted too. Now the Sidonian warrant approached him warily and gave him a quick frisking. "Sorry," he said, "but you know how it is."

"I vouch for him, soldier," DeRudder said testily.

"Yes, sir. However, I know a case where one of these dallies got taken prisoner and into a skimmer, and what d'ya think happens? Once a couple of hundred feet up into the air and he whips out a sticker like they carry and nigh finishes off the whole crew before somebody manages to flame him down."

John bore the search, which revealed nothing. The warrant led the way back to the skycraft, the wary enlisted men, guns still at the ready, bringing up the rear.

Inside the craft, John took a deep breath as it began to rise. Long years

before he had once ridden in a surface craft of the men from Beyond. Now, as then, there was a sinking in the belly as the strange means of locomotion began. They were seated in the rear, in only moderately comfortable metal seats, obviously a compartment for soldiers being airlifted from point to point when trouble arose. By straining, he could see out a small port. He closed his eyes briefly as the ground sank away.

DeRudder said mockingly, "And how, John Hawk, are your clansmen going to defeat enemies that have devices such as this at their command?"

John cleared his throat. "I don't know."

Through the port, John could see the city loom before them. He had seen it before, from a distance and from the hills, but he had not realized its magnitude. And this was but one of the cities of the men from Beyond, nor did he know whether it was the largest. But certainly no town in the Loch Confederation began to rival it, or any other in all Caledonia, as far as he knew.

It was a walled city, situated along a river, and in the approximate center was a great cleared space, obviously landing ground for such craft as the skimmer in which they rode, and for great ships from space as well. Their own airborne vessel made for it, the pilot receiving landing instructions as they came in.

John attempted to disguise his relief that the trip through the air had ended without tragedy. Although in his time, he had scaled fairly formidable mountains, he had never liked the sensation of height.

They issued forth from the skimmer, and a small land car, supported by air cushions, came skittering up.

"Take us to the ad building," DeRudder said to the enlisted man behind the controls.

"Yes, sir, Cornet." The other saluted.

John followed the Sidonian into the back of the vehicle and surreptitiously held on, as they zoomed off.

The ad building, as DeRudder had called it, was to the far side of the field. There was an air of ultraefficiency about it never witnessed by the

Aberdeen clansman before. Caledonians were on the philosophical side when it came to even such matters as obeying sagamores and caciques during their raids. Obedience to a raid chief was a voluntary thing, not truly a requirement.

They left their vehicle, and John followed DeRudder into a large entrance. Two guards at the door snapped to attention, presenting their hand weapons in a salute. The cornet flipped them a semi-salute in return and strode on, unspeaking. John looked at them from the corner of his eye. Little men, by Caledonian standards, as all these Sidonians were little men; few indeed were as much as six and a half feet tall. However although he didn't know the old saying of another frontier age, he was aware of the truth of it. "All men are created equal—Sam'l Colt made 'em that way." He would hate to see what these two could do to a raiding party, with their weapons, from a distance of half a mile or more.

Samuel DeRudder came up before a desk. The man behind it looked up, startled, and then began to scramble to his feet to salute.

DeRudder said, "At ease, Ensign."

"Cornet DeRudder! We had given you up for lost. The detachment at—"

"I know, I know. I was the sole survivor. Clansmen of the Loch Confederation took me prisoner."

"You're lucky to be alive, sir!" The ensign sank back into his chair.

DeRudder said, "Any developments since I've been gone?"

"Not especially." The ensign ran a hand back through his hair, as though in despair. "Two more skimmers banged up. Both got back, though. A patrol was wiped out up in the hills where those Highland Confederation clansmen are. It's evidently worse up there than here, sir. Leading a patrol through those mist shrouded hills full of murderous seven foot howling barbarians is like trying to collect crocodiles in the Amazon Park by diving into the river and swimming after them. And air transport's no good either. Those Highlanders are crack shots, and sitting in all those mist covered hills, in caves and such, where the detectors won't spot them. Come down below the mist to take a look, and what do you know? You're dead."

Cornet DeRudder wasn't amused. "Got any answers, soldier?"

"No, sir. I sure haven't. Trying to pacify this wild bunch of cattle rustling, horse stealing, murderous pillagers is more of a job than we ever thought it was going to be. We thought it was kind of a police action. We raid them if they gave us any trouble. But that's their favorite occupation raiding and being raided. It's like saying, "Junior if you take any more of that cake, I'm going to make you eat a whole dish of ice cream.' "

The ensign could evidently see that the comet still wasn't amused. He said, "Who's this, sir?" He pulled a report blank toward him.

"John Hawk. A Caledonian from the former town of Aberdeen. He's come to take a job with the company."

The ensign frowned unhappily, taking in the looming former clansman and war cacique.

I vouch for him," DeRudder said impatiently. Yes, sir. It's just that we're kind of busy. Won't be able to process him for several days."

"I'll take him into my quarters. He's a cut above the ordinary, Ensign."

"Yes, sir." The ensign made some marks on the report. "Got it, sir."

"And, Ensign, see to it that a new ID credit card is cut for me and sent up to my quarters. All my things were taken, of course. My ID number is M-16A-15.643."

"Yes, sir, I'll do that immediately."

John followed the other back through the entry. DeRudder waved a hand, summoning another of the small land cars. It came swooping up to them, and they climbed in.

As they progressed through the streets of New Sidon City, John again tried to hide the wide eyed element he was projecting. He had never seen so large a town; he had never seen such numbers of people; nor had he ever witnessed such a scurrying, such an amount of construction, such obvious purpose in what on the surface would have seemed utter confusion. A Caledonian town was on the slow moving side, even during the yearly festival of the Dail. DeRudder hid his amusement.

They darted down a side street and shortly to an apartment house. It was, John decided, at least the size of a longhouse on the ground floor alone. But then it towered some ten stories, as though one longhouse had been stacked atop another. For the moment, he could see no advantage to such an arrangement, for surely the aged and the very young would have difficulties climbing such a height.

He was glad he hadn't said anything to that extent to DeRudder, since all was explained when they entered the gravity lift and were whisked upward. It had taken considerable courage for John to step into the shaft after the Sidonian, nor did he object when the other took his arm to steady him. There was no shame in not knowing how to conduct oneself in situations through which one had never been before.

The cornet's apartments were on the top floor and so situated as to dominate the city. It came to John that this man must rank high among the chiefs of the Sidonians. As high, perhaps, as John had once ranked in the Loch Confederation.

DeRudder led him into what was obviously a living room, though furnished and decorated in a manner completely foreign to the Caledonian. He walked over to a piece of furniture set into the wall and said over his shoulder, "A drink? I suspect we could both use one."

John was not particularly a drinker, but a good many things had happened to him within the past twenty-four hours. He said, "You have, perhaps, *uisgebeatha*?"

DeRudder said, "I have a descendent of your national beverage. We call it whiskey." He selected a bottle from (he shelves, brought forth two glasses and poured. He handed one of them to John.

To the Caledonian warrior's amazement, the contents were cool, although the surface of the glass seemed at room temperature.

"You want water or anything with that?" DeRudder said. John shook his head. "We have a saying in Aberdeen, that there is already too much water in *uisgebeatha*."

DeRudder grunted. "It's a saying that seems to have spread about a considerable portion of the galaxy, whatever the beverage involved." He held his glass up. "To your successful adaptation to New Sidon City, John

of the Hawks."

John held his own glass up, but his words were bitter. "You forget that I am no longer John of the Hawks, but a clannless one." However, he tossed the drink back.

He was prepared to snort and cough his throat clear, but then his eyes widened. He stared down into the glass. "It is *uisgebeatha*, without doubt," he said. "But such *uisgebeatha*!"

DeRudder poured him another slug. "I told you that civilization has its advantages when it comes to material things. Among them, nip that can be appreciated and drunk for pleasure rather than just to get binged."

He led the way into what was obviously, even to the Caledonian, a bedroom.

"You can stay here until you're assigned quarters of your own. Over there's the bathroom." He made a grimace. "You could use a bath, if you don't mind my saying so." He looked at John with mild suspicion. "You wouldn't have lice, would you?"

"Lice?"

"Or this planet's equivalent. Little bugs that particularly get into your hair."

"No," John said. "Though it has been more difficult to maintain body cleanliness since you flamed us out of Aberdeen."

DeRudder looked at him. "I was opposed to that, John. Not that I wouldn't have been in favor had I thought it would end the continual raids. However, I don't believe you bring barbarians to heel by bombing their towns."

"What is a barbarian?"

"I doubt if you'll understand. It's an ethnic period in man's social evolution. You have savagery, barbarism, eventually, ah, civilization. All three periods are subdivided."

"And what period is this city of New Sidon at, Samuel of the

DeRudders?"

"That's a good question. Come on in here, and I'll show you how to work the plumbing. As I recall, you have running water and somewhat primitive plumbing in your long-houses, but not bathtubs, refreshers, or even showers, as we know them." DeRudder hesitated and there was a wry element in his voice again. "New Sidon? I suppose you could say she's at an early period of civilization, considering socioeconomic system and such."

In the bath, DeRudder demonstrated hot water, cold water, needle sprays, soap and towels. John was astounded. He asked various questions, such as where the hot water was heated, where the refuse went, and finally just what soap was.

"I'd forgotten you didn't have soap," DeRudder muttered. "One simply presupposes soap. How in the world did your culture lose it, after the *Inverness Ark* crashed?"

"I don't know," John said defensively. "Evidently, we lost many things during the misty years that followed."

"All right," DeRudder said. "You're on your own. I'll get you some other clothes."

"What is wrong with my clothing?"

"It's dirty, among other things. Besides, this is New Sidon City, not Aberdeen. If you went around in those kilts, you'd stand out like a walrus in a goldfish bowl."

"What's a walrus and a goldfish bowl?"

"Never mind. I'll be in the other room."

John experimented with the bathing facilities. He hated to admit that they fascinated him as well as refreshed him beyond any point he could ever remember. There were many aspects to this way of life of the men from Beyond.

In the next room, he could hear Cornet DeRudder on some sort of communication device. The other was saying, "I want you to send up

several outfits to try on a Caledonian. He's about average size, perhaps a little bigger, say seven feet two, give or take an inch. No, he has no insignia yet. Hasn't been processed. Just send standard United Mining coveralls."

The voice broke off and after a few minutes spoke again. "Cornet Samuel DeRudder reporting." The language then deteriorated into officialese that John couldn't follow.

When he emerged from the bath, he found several outfits laid out on his bed. He scowled in distaste. Never in his life had he worn other than kilts, shirt and jerkin. Nor did the outfits that the men from Beyond clothed themselves in seem either meet or comfortable.

DeRudder called from the living room, "Could you hurry, John? I have to leave."

The coveralls weren't hard to figure out. John found the outfit that fitted him best and climbed into it. He wondered, a bit narrow eyed, what would happen to his field worker's kilts. Possibly his benefactor, if such DeRudder could be thought, would dispose of them in some manner. For a moment, he hesitated.

In the living room, the other was seated in a chair, another drink in hand. He looked at the giant of a man thoughtfully. "Nobody'd ever take you for a Sidonian," he in uttered.

There seemed no particular answer to that. DeRudder said suddenly, "John, I'm going to warn you. No tricks."

"Tricks?"

"You're unarmed and don't know the town. There are police all over it. They are armed, and they keep track of Caledonians, particularly Caledonians whose clothes indicate that they aren't long in town."

John said bitterly, "I am as though in a different world, and you are the only person I know in it. I don't even understand how to leave the building, did I wish to leave. What kind of trick did you expect of me, Samuel of the DeRudders?"

"Sam DeRudder," the other sighed. "And you're simply John Hawk, as

of arrival in New Sidon. Come on into the dining-kitchenette and I'll show you how to manipulate the autochef."

As John followed him, he looked at the smaller and older man from the corner of his eye. "Why do you do all this, -Samuel... Sam DeRudder?"

DeRudder said, "I don't know. Perhaps because as I told you, we need good men if we're ever going to develop Caledonia. You're a good man."

Chapter Five

RUDDER GAVE his new guest a tour of the apartment, finally winding up back in the living room.

He indicated a desklike piece of furniture upon which was situated a blank screen. "This is a standard, universal communicator," he said, sitting down before the screen. "Its workings are simple enough; however, you won't be using it, at least for a time, except for reading. This switch connects you to New Sidon's library."

For the next ten minutes, DeRudder demonstrated to the fascinated Caledonian how to utilize the library banks.

Finally, his voice holding a trace of awe, John said, "What else will this box from Beyond do?"

The other chuckled. "Well, as I say, it's a universal communicator. It's a combination videophone—"

"What is a videophone?"

DeRudder told him, keeping impatience from his voice.

In seeming disbelief, John said, "You mean, with this you can talk to and be seen by anyone on all Caledonia?"

"Not exactly," Sam DeRudder said wryly. "The other chap would have to have one too. Then you could talk to him simply by dialing his number. You see, here is the number of this communicator. If anyone dials it, then a summons rings and I answer. If I am not here, the message is taped and I play it back when I return."

"But anywhere on all Caledonia? Any distance? With no trouble whatsoever?"

DeRudder chuckled again. He said, "Well, there is one small necessity. If your call is made anywhere outside New Sidon, you'd better have a valid ID credit card."

"What is a valid ID credit card?"

DeRudder brought a wallet from his tunic and flicked it open. "Here's my new one. Your friends back at the Dail confiscated my original... precious lot of good it will do them. At any rate, in ordering anything that involves credit exchange, it is necessary to put your credit card in this slot. The cost of the product or service is then deducted from your credit account."

John shook his head. "Perhaps I will understand later. Will it be necessary for me to have such a card?"

DeRudder put his wallet away. "Yes, of course. As soon as you have been found employment, you will be issued a restricted card. It is impossible to survive without one, under ordinary circumstances. So long as you live here with *me*, of course, I will handle all matters pertaining to your expenditures."

"What is a restricted credit card?"

DeRudder took a breath and looked up at the chronometer on the wall. "The kind issued to Caledonians."

John looked at him. "Caledonians are in New Sidon what clannless ones are in one of our towns. Is it not so?"

DeRudder was uncomfortable. He came to his feet. "Not exactly, John. However, there is such a thing as security. I am a cornet in the Sidon armed forces. As such, I have access to information and resources available not even to lesser ranking Sidonians. And now, I'm going to have to leave you temporarily. Make yourself at home. Eat and drink what you will. I suggest you spend your time at the library banks, familiarizing yourself with the layout of the town and with a few of the"—he made a wry face—"banns that exist under the Canons of the League of Planets."

John was slightly taken aback. "Then you, too, have banns?"

The other said dryly, "Believe me, John, every society I have ever heard of has had banns of one type or another. Some of them can get on the far-out side."

He made his way to the door, saying over his shoulder, "For the time, I wouldn't suggest you leave this apartment. You're so unacquainted with the workings of a semi-modern city that you might get lost, or even hurt in the traffic."

"Very well, Sam of the DeRudders."

When the other was gone, John sat himself down cautiously at the communicator and threw the switch connecting him with the library. Carefully following his host's instructions, he dialed city maps and spent the next hour poring over them, his eyes strained, his forehead wrinkled in concentration.

In time, the communicator's controls became easier for him, and fascinated, he skipped from one tape to another, sampling the endless multitude of works available in the library banks.

He was stymied once or twice. When he ordered a particular subject listed in the library banks, a voice said metallically, "Security limitations. Priority of M-3. If you wish this tape, please present your ID credit card."

In each case, John looked blankly at the screen and switched to a new subject.

At long last he came to his feet, went back into the dining-kitchenette and spent some time fiddling with the autochef. Disastrously, as it turned out. In his fascination with the library banks during the past two hours, he had forgotten part of DeRudder's instructions pertaining to the ordering of food. All he could bring forth was a series of desserts. However, as with many ultraactive men not particularly prone to alcohol, John had a sweet tooth worthy of a ten year old. He polished off several pieces of chocolate cake and a slice of lemon meringue pie and returned to the communicator, deciding inwardly that if nothing else, the invaders from Beyond were far in advance of Caledonian pastry cooks.

He spent another half hour scrutinizing tapes before hearing an

unfamiliar musical note. He looked up, scowling.

It sounded again.

He came to his feet and looked about the moderately large room. But the sound had come from the direction of the apartment door. He walked in that direction, frowning still, and bent down to the point where he could look into the door's screen.

John was puzzled. There was a face there—a feminine face.

He cleared his throat and said, "I am John, Sachem of the—" But then he shook his head and said, "I am John Hawk. This is the longhouse of Samuel of the... Samuel DeRudder. May the bards sing the praises of your man-children. What do you will?"

The face laughed. "That's quite a reception. I'm Nadine Pond. Cornet DeRudder sent me over. If you'll activate that button to the right of the door, I'll come in."

"Activate?"

"Push it."

"Oh." John pushed the button, and the door opened.

By Caledonian standards she was a tiny thing, not more than five and a half feet tall. John's first reaction was to wonder if she was an adult, but then, obviously she was. She was attired in a neat, trim uniform, the skirts of which were shockingly short by Aberdeen standards, and John kept his eyes studiously from her knees.

She entered briskly and touched another button, and the door closed behind her.

She looked up at him and shook her head. "I'll never get used to the size of you people. What in the world do you eat?"

He looked at her blankly.

The question was evidently rhetorical. She led the way into the living room and, without ado, unslung the handbaglike burden she had been carrying over her shoulder and lowered it to the couch before sitting

herself down.

Nadine Pond said briskly, "Comet DeRudder is being held up longer than he had expected, being interrogated on his, uh, adventures with the Loch Confederation bandits."

"Bandits!" John blurted in indignation.

She cocked her head to one side. "What else would you call them? I had gathered the opinion that you defected and came in on your own."

John lowered himself into the one large chair that was actually suited for his build. His face was strained, as though rejecting his own thoughts. He said slowly, "It is true that my fellow phyletics stripped me of my kilts of clannhood, but... but they are not bandits."

"Why not?" she said briskly. "They refuse to come in and abide by the treaties made with the friendlies."

"The friendlies...?"

She shrugged impatiently. "A term we use for the natives who have cooperated with us, either through taking soma or desiring to take advantage of the new cities and their occupational and educational facilities."

John frowned at her. He said, "Not all of what you say is understandable. This is my first day in... in New Sidon. Who are you?"

Her voice became brisk again. "I am Assignment Clerk Nadine Pond. I've been given the job of doing the preliminary processing of you, John."

He took her in at greater length now. She was pretty by his tastes. Alert, clean of features, a bit overearnest of expression perhaps, and dark of complexion as Caledonian lapses went—but pretty. She was obviously on the efficient and businesslike side as well, a little too much so in dealing with menfolk than was seemly.

John was irritated by her. He said grudgingly, "To how many worlds do you of Sidon and United Interplanetary Mining come and confound and kill the clansmen and then, in contempt, call them natives and bandits and friendlies?"

She looked at him contemplatively. "Are you sure you've come to us with a cooperative mind, John Hawk? Perhaps it would be best if you took soma."

"No!" he said hurriedly.

She shrugged. "Those who take it never regret doing so... I am told."

"But you yourself have not."

She made an offhand gesture. "That's true. However, to get back to your question, I am not from Sidon. I work for United Interplanetary Mining, but I originally came from the satellite system of Jupiter, a Sol planet. However, the answer is *many*. In various parts of the galaxy, United Interplanetary Mining and similar organizations develop many unsettled, partially settled, or even sometimes well populated worlds. Caledonia is unique in some respects but not in that."

John's eyes narrowed slightly as he leaned forward, and the words came out grudgingly, as though he was trying to bite them back and couldn't. "And how do you explain to yourself cooperating in landing upon this world of us Caledonians and turning us into... bandits and friendlies?"

Nadine Pond turned and touched a control on her piece of equipment. "I think, perhaps, I should be recording this," she mused. "I am not sure that it is going to be easy to place you, John Hawk. However..."

She took a deep breath. "Here is how I explain it to myself. I am an anthropologist, John. Do you know what that means?"

"No."

"I am a student of man's institutions and follow a school that believes in the evolution of society. In spreading through the galaxy, man comes up with various institutions, some of them, as a result of accident—shipwreck or whatever—throwbacks to periods that we have supposedly progressed beyond. Working for United Interplanetary Mining gives me a chance to study them." She hesitated. "Do you understand what I am saying?"

"Only some of it."

"Well, your Caledonia is an example. When your *Inverness Ark* crashed,

centuries ago, you Caledonians were thrown back into a primitive society. Slowly, you have been working your way back. But slowly."

John said, "We of Caledonia were happy before the arrival of you from Beyond."

She cocked her head. "Were you? All of you?"

"Yes!"

"Even the clannless ones? Even the widows and orphans of those who died in your endless raids upon each other?" He took a deep breath and stared at her in silence. She went on. "Happiness is an elastic word. The savage or barbarian, disease racked, inadequately fed, continually on the verge of want of one type or another, ground down by rituals and taboos, may not understand that the coming of progress will eventually result in a longer, healthier, happier life. How can he understand? He's never witnessed it."

"We were happy. We wanted none of your changes, your so-called progress."

She shook her head at him sadly. "They would have come whether or not we did. We are just speeding things up. For instance, John Hawk, what was your rank before you were expelled by your clansmen?"

His head went up. "I was a Supreme Raid Cacique of the Loch Confederation."

"Ah? I have studied Caledonian institutions. I have never heard of the office before." John scowled. "I was the first."

She made an amused moue. "Ah, then you can adapt? Supreme raid cacique. The *rex*, in embryo."

"Rex?"

The democratically elected war chief of the ancient Romans. Later, the office began to evolve into carrying the prerogatives of a king. And tell me this, John—do you have a priesthood that is freed of the necessity to contribute to the clann economy?"

He wasn't sure he completely understood, but he said, "We have bedels and Keepers of the Faith. They are too busy with the Holy Books and maintaining the observance of the bann to spend time in the fields or with the herds."

"Ummm," she nodded. "Class divided society already begins to rear its head; a leisure class. And you have clannless ones, I understand, who work for you as servants but cannot participate in clann government and decisions."

"But they are clannless ones!" he retorted.

"Aren't they, though? And tell me, John, in this ultra-free, ultrahappy society of yours—do those clann members who possess a larger number of horses and cattle or other private property have a greater voice in the councils, are they more quickly listened to, more often elected to clann office? Do they sometimes control the vote of less prosperous clannsmen?"

He simply scowled at her.

Nadine Pond chuckled. "John, your Caledonian culture was at a crossroads even before the *Golden Hind* first landed and discovered you. Probably within your lifetime, regardless of our arrival, you would have seen institutions crumble and new ones arise. Possibly you would have tried to fight it and would have gone down, or possibly you're enough of a slick to have been one who profited, but willy-nilly, the changes would have taken place."

"I understand only a little of what you say, Nadine of the Ponds."

"Nadine Pond," she corrected. "John, I understand that you Caledonians recall nothing of the history of your people, the Picts and Scots of northern Britain."

"I have read very little of Earth history, in the books we have captured from you of Beyond."

"Suffice its to say that when they were first discovered they were..."—she twisted her mouth in amusement—"to use some idiom of yesteryear, reckless mountain boys that made the Hatfields and McCoys look like a bunch of flower children. Their favorite entertainment for an idle weekend was raiding their neighbors, stealing the cows and horses

and anything else portable, murdering anyone who got in the way and burning their houses—sometimes with the inhabitants amusingly barricaded within. This was generally considered just good, clean sport, not to be taken really seriously."

John nodded. "They were honorable raiders."

"Weren't they! Neither the Romans, Anglo-Saxons nor Normans invaded the Highlands; instead, they went in for building walls to keep those horrible barbarians out. Even the Vikings didn't raid Scotland, as they did Ireland, England and France. When they tried, with an army of forty longboats, they were received so joyously by the local Highlanders that they decided against a return engagement. Of the forty longboats, after the battle, only two took off down the loch, and only one of those got home.

"They were not slinks, these ancestors of mine!" John said, a touch of pride in his voice.

"That they weren't. However, time marched on, and primitive clan institutions began to be affected by the arising English civilization to the south. And there's always some native talent around that's sharp enough to see that it's not merely the way the wind is blowing, but the inevitable direction of cultural evolution. Fighting a change in the weather is one thing; trying to fight a change in the climate is something else entirely.

"Over a period of generations, such clans as the Campbells gradually got the idea of law and order instead of war and raiding. The MacGregors were another. Rob Roy, the Scottish national hero, something like Robin Hood, belonged to the MacGregor clan, the one that was too thoroughly given to stealing and murdering for even the Scots to stand, so that the Scots' Privy Council passed a law making it illegal to be a MacGregor. He was, in full, Rob Roy Campbell MacGregor.

"At any rate, such prominents among the Scots learned to adapt to changing institutions and wound up owning Scotland. When feudal ways took over from primitive clan ones, the slicks became the feudalistic lords."

John said in puzzlement, "Why do you tell me all this?"

"Because, John, the changes are coming to Caledonia, as once they

came to early Scotland. There are those among you clansmen who will see that the current cannot be bucked. Perhaps they will be looked upon as traitors by the rest, but it is they who will survive and lead the people."

"*Lead* them into slavery," he growled. She looked at him for a long, thoughtful moment. Finally, "Perhaps what immediately might seem slavery to a clansman, John Hawk, but in actuality a step forward in man's development. In nature, a species that does not develop usually dies. And in society a culture that fails to progress eventually dies, as witness both the Egyptian and the Mayans."

"Who?" he scowled.

"Never mind." Nadine Pond came to her feet and frowned down at him thoughtfully. She said at last, "John Hawk, there's something about you I am not sure of. You are possibly one of the poorest recruits that has ever come over to us. Or possibly, the best. I am going to check back with Cornet DeRudder before going further with you."

He stood as well and attempted to cover. "You must realize," he said, "that only this morning I was John of the Hawks, Supreme Raid Cacique of the Loch Confederation."

"So I am told. You have not had the time, even if it was in your nature, to learn to dissimilate. For the present, goodbye, John Hawk."

He saw her to the door, not actually knowingly gallant, as she thought, but to be sure that the door was closed behind her after she left. He stood there looking at it for long moments when she was gone.

But then he turned abruptly and made his way to the bedroom Sam DeRudder had assigned him. He went to the bed and took up the field worker's kilts he had discarded earlier. He carried them into the dining-kitchenette, where he located a sharp steak knife. He carefully inserted this into the strong hem at the bottom of the kilts and cut the threads.

A plastic card dropped into his hand, and he looked at it carefully. Only part was understandable to him. It read, ID CREDIT CABD M-16-A-15.643, CORNET SAMUEL DERUDDER, PRIORITY M-3. Otherwise, there were obvious code letters, a portrait of DeRudder and a thumbprint, as well as several punched holes.

He went back into the living room and sat himself again at the communicator. He thought about it for a long moment, then finally reached out and dialed.

A robotlike voice said, "Security limitations. Priority of M-3. If you wish this tape, please present your ID credit card."

John put the credit card in the slot and waited, unconsciously holding his breath.

The screen lit up, and he stared at it. Finally, he reached out and took up paper and stylo and began to sketch clumsily. It took him a full ten minutes.

He dialed again, and again the card was required. He took further notes and further sketches. At long last, he settled back into the chair and thought it all through with careful deliberation. But then, he didn't have much time. He had no way of knowing when DeRudder might return.

He flicked the library bank switch off and activated the videophone switch. He thought for another deliberate moment, to be sure of memory, then carefully dialed. This, now, was the crucial point. The credit card was still in the slot.

The screen lit up.

John said, "This is John, Sachem of the Hawks. Quickly, let me speak with Don of the Clarks."

Within moments, Don of the Clarks was there, his face expressing jubilation.

"John! We did not expect you so soon!"

John spoke quickly, urgently. "We were picked up by one of their vehicles of the sky. I am in the longhouse of Samuel of the DeRudders. He does not know I have his card of identity that all those of Beyond must carry. Nor does he know that you are in possession of a captured communicator through which they speak long distances. Now, here is the immediate information. I have been able to locate the city plans. Here is a sketch I have made of the sewers that lead into the river."

John held the sketch he had made earlier to the screen.

Don of the Clarks twisted his head and barked instructions.

Agonizingly long moments later, John took that sketch away and substituted the second he had made.

While it was being copied, he hurried through various questions with Don of the Clarks.

At last they were through, and Don's face again fully occupied the screen.

John, Supreme Raid Cacique of the Loch Confederation, said, "We must not waste time. At any moment, I may make some great mistake and reveal all. Send the messengers to the Highland Confederation and to the Confederation of the Ayr. The time of action is soon to be upon us."

Chapter Six

JOHN OF THE HAWKS spent the next several days in a round the clock accumulation of knowledge of the ways of the newcomers from Beyond. Sometimes he was accompanied by Sam DeRudder, but in surprisingly short order, he was able to find his own way about New Sidon, and he preferred to be alone. It was obvious that DeRudder had something in mind in regard to John beyond what had originally been the case, but thus far he hadn't brought up the question. And as far as John was concerned, so much the better. As it was now, he had the time and opportunity to check out a hundred items that would endlessly profit his long term plans.

There was much that surprised as well as interested him.

He found, for instance, a considerably larger number of Caledonians among the citizens than he had expected, nor were all of these women, children or elderly or defeated elements. He could tell himself, in contempt, that the combat age men he witnessed attending schools, working on the construction of buildings or otherwise participating in the economy of the city were slinks who should have been up in the hills fighting the invaders. However, inwardly he realized that it wasn't just that. There was something in the air that would appeal to the type of clansman with an inquisitive turn of mind. There was so much new and

fascinating—tools, weapons, ways of doing things.

He did what there was to be done in the way of checking out the city's defenses and was pleased to find what he had suspected. The military was actually a secondary thing as far as United Interplanetary Mines and the Sidonians were concerned. There was possibly one soldier among the invaders from Beyond for each four civilians. Immediate complete conquest of the planet wasn't so important as getting on with its exploitation. The soldiers were a necessary evil, not an end.

And the city defenses indicated that the invaders had made the most basic of all military mistakes—they underestimated the enemy. The walls were strong enough against raiders, equipped with carbine, claidheammor and skean; the gun emplacements at each of the four corners of the city walls would have decimated horse mounted clansmen. However, the defense authorities obviously never expected to be attacked by forces armed with more sophisticated weapons.

He didn't spend all his time wandering the streets of the city and gawking at constructions and equipment previously unknown to him. In fact, the greater part of his time was spent in DeRudder's apartments, leaning over the communicator screen.

That first evening, Sam DeRudder had taught him still another use of the device. In the library banks were not only the tapes of books, but an endless variety of films depicting life as it was to be found on a thousand and more worlds. And where fact left off, fiction took over, so that he was even able to run and rerun shows pertaining to the ancient Picts and Scots of whom Nadine Pond had told him.

Above all, he was fascinated by the Scotland of the present. His ancestral home was so far and beyond anything he could ever have imagined but a week ago that it was like a fairyland. Surprisingly enough, particularly in the smaller communities, he could still see racial characteristics that pertained to his own people. Perhaps these far cousins of his were not quite the same size as the clansmen of Caledonia, but the light complexions, the craggy faces, the eyes were all there. *He* couldn't quite analyze the strange tightening of his heartstrings.

After a surreptitious check up on sewer outlets one evening, he returned to the apartment, to find Sam DeRudder there with another.

John entered the living room and came to an abrupt halt, his eyes bugging. He blurted, "*Mister of the Harmon's!*"

Harmon looked up from where he sat on a comfort chair and said, "The name is Milton, John. Milton Harmon. Milt to my friends—such as they are."

Sam DeRudder came over from the autobar, drinks in hand. He proffered one to Harmon. "That's right—you two haven't seen each other since John's coming to New Sidon."

John blurted, "But... but you wear not the robes of the followers of Krishna."

Harmon's aging over the past few years had softened considerably his sourness of expression and acidity of voice. He said, and there was a far wistfulness somewhere, "And I am not always sure, John, that I appreciate Sam's giving me the antidote at the end of my decade rather than letting me take the booster dose."

"Antidote?" John still flabbergasted, looked from his old enemy back to DeRudder.

Sam DeRudder, amused, handed John the second drink and headed back for the bar to dial himself one. He said, "Take that. You look as though you need it."

And then, from the bar, "You've been assimilating fast these last days, John, but you simply haven't had the time to pick up all aspects of life beyond Caledonia. You might spend a couple of hours at the communicator checking out soma."

John was bewildered. "I don't understand." He looked at Harmon, as though accusingly. "You mean, you are no longer a worshipper at the Shrine of Kalkin, the false religion against the Holy?"

Harmon said ruefully, "I wouldn't state it exactly that way."

Sam DeRudder returned with his drink. "Briefly, John, when soma first came on the scene, the League took a tolerant view, as usual in matters pertaining to religion. However, there were dangerous aspects to the use of soma, which you're fully aware of and I needn't go into. League Canons

now provide that the initial dosage of soma may not be effective for more than a decade. At that point, they who have taken it have two courses. They may take their booster dose and, ah, continue to follow the path of Lord Krishna. Or they may take antisoma and return, well, to the land of the living."

Harmon said, a note of deprecation there, "It's not the way I put it, Sam. Until you have taken soma yourself and walked with the Lord Krishna, you can have no idea of the reality of the experience."

"However, no, thanks," DeRudder said. He looked back at John. "Milt Harmon is an old, old associate. When his decade was up, I made sure to be there and made sure he took antisoma, rather than a new charge."

"And what effect does this antisoma have?"

"It creates a prejudice against dosage of the hallucinogen. Otherwise..." The Sidonian shrugged. "Otherwise, there are few who wouldn't continue to tread the way of the Avatara of Kalkin and the path of Lord Krishna."

John finished his drink in one fell gulp but did not take his eyes from Harmon.

That worthy shook his head in self-deprecation. "John Hawk, I suppose I owe you apologies. You see, one effect of a decade spent with Krishna has a permanent aspect Though I am now..." He looked at DeRudder. "... now normal, many of the frailties and shortcomings of my former self have been burnt away or, if you will, cast aside. So then, my apologies for the harm I caused you"—he twisted his mouth ruefully—"or tried to in years past."

John was saved the necessity of a reply by the musical note of the door.

Sam DeRudder went to answer it and returned with Nadine Pond, brisk and efficient as ever, her recorder slung over her shoulder.

She nodded to those present. "Milt, John. Have you already got underway?"

After coming to his feet to acknowledge her presence, Harmon said, "We've just been giving John a rundown on the short and longcomings of soma."

"Longcomings," she snorted. "I've never been an admirer of the effects of soma on the average person. For some, yes; the mentally upset, perhaps, under proper medical direction.

Milt Harmon reseated himself and said softly, "If you've never experienced it, don't knock it."

"You should know," Nadine Pond told him, finding a place for herself in a comfort chair. "However, so far as outfits such as our United Interplanetary Mining sponsoring its use on recalcitrant natives, it defeats its purpose. Those who take soma are not good workers. They lack aggression, ambition, initiative. Perhaps your devoted follower of Lord Krishna is right, but whether or not ambition and aggression are desirable traits, men without them are not good workers. The zombi story is a myth. A zombi would be but worthless, even at brute physical labor. Two mentally and physically healthy men set to work digging a hole would accomplish the task in half the time a squad of zombis would. Why? Because they'd figure out some way to lighten the load which is, after all, on their shoulders. The zombis wouldn't care."

"I have heard the argument before, as one promoting free enterprise," DeRudder said from the autobar, where he was dialing the newcomer a drink.

The assignment clerk-cum-anthropologist was impatient. "Not just free enterprise, or capitalism, which is the less mealy-mouthed term, but any socioeconomic system. Even under chattel slavery that slave who was bright and aggressive and had initiative could get to the top—unless his master was an unbelievably stupid dully. Many an ancient empire was in actuality run by slaves. They might have borne such titles as secretary or major-domo, but they were the brains behind the emperor. The same applied under feudalism. That man with push and brains could overcome the handicap of being born of low degree."

"So far, you've mentioned class divided society."

"The same applies to a collectivized society. Whenever man works, the bright and aggressive will attempt to make the load lighter, and he is as valuable under socialism, or even anarchism, for that matter, as he is under private ownership. Do you labor under the illusion that when the Russians were abuilding their so-called communist state the bright and efficient, the innovator and progressive, didn't forge to the top?"

"They had a lot of disadvantages, in that particular example," DeRudder argued, although not very strongly.

"That they did. But those who thwarted them eventually disappeared from the scene, especially the zombi types. As a Caledonian would say, the proof is there before you. Because they *did* reach their goals. It took time, but eventually they industrialized and became the second of the world powers of the period, and the reason was that eventually direction eased out of the hands of the politicians, at least on an industrial level, and into the hands of scientists, technicians and engineers."

DeRudder sighed and lowered himself into his own favorite comfort chair. "So much for soma," he said. "Let us get to the project at hand." He looked at John contemplatively. "It's not up to us to make final decisions, of course. This is simply a preliminary investigation of the possibilities. However, John Hawk, how would you like to be Mayor of New Sidon?"

John, who was even still in a mental whirl over the words of the past fifteen minutes, could only gape.

"Mayor!" he blurted.

Harmon chuckled. Nadine Pond smiled amusement.

"That's right," DeRudder nodded.

"But... but if I understand... if what I have been reading this past week... but that's your equivalent of eldest sachem of a town. Even more than that."

"Ummm, that's right."

"But I don't understand. I am a Caledonian. New Sidon is a city of you from Beyond."

Sam DeRudder leaned forward. "Only up to a certain point, John. We Sidonians, and others from Beyond, as you call it, have come to a crossroads. The initial exploitation of this planet's resources has moved very rapidly; in fact, we've reached what was once called the takeoff point in industrialization. But that's the economic aspect. Now it's time for the political to be considered."

"But I'm a Caledonian," John repeated.

"Yes," Nadine Pond said mildly. "And this is Caledonia."

Harmon leaned forward to put in a word. "Were you of the opinion that United Interplanetary Mining expected to dominate this world indefinitely by force of arms?"

John looked at him blankly.

Sam DeRudder took over again. "John, the thing is this. Our mining concern is interested basically in Caledonia's platinum, nothing more. Not even most of your other metals. The value of platinum is such through the League planets that it can profitably be shipped through space. In return for exploitation rights, the company can and does give a great deal to Caledonia and would like to contribute still more. In fact, the more it does contribute, the more profitable its own efforts. For instance, it would like to sponsor petroleum production, if for no other reason than that it is extremely expensive to cart its products all the way from Sidon or elsewhere. It would like to see schools turning out local doctors, so that it wouldn't have to import such employees from the advanced planets. It would like to see skimmers being manufactured in Caledonian factories, because they're so expensive to bring in from overspace. I could go on and on."

John blurted, "But what has this got to do with my taking high office in a Sidonian City?"

"That's the point," Nadine Pond said. "This must not remain a Sidonian City. It must become a Caledonian city."

The time has come that you friendlies begin to take over the responsibilities of running your own affairs."

John settled back in his chair, his face blank.

Milton Harmon said urgently, "You make a mistake if you think that we of the League planets are simply evil destroyers of what has been the way of Caledonia. Opportunistic, we admittedly might have been, but we bring much that you need, including the wherewithal, eventually, for this planet to join the League and take its place with the other advanced worlds."

"But we Caledonians have no desire to join what you call the advanced worlds."

DeRudder snorted. "More of you than you might think, John Hawk. You have been up in the hills with the malcontents and have no idea of how rapidly many Caledonians have been coming around. There is security here in our new cities—security and plenty and the opportunities to become educated and to advance."

"But why me!"

Nadine Pond said, "John Hawk, from what you have told us, you were the youngest sachem in the whole Loch Confederation, not to mention that you also fought your way up to becoming supreme raid cacique. Obviously, you have leadership ability. You are also the highest ranking Caledonian who has ever come over to us."

Harmon said, "Do not misunderstand the offer. We do not expect simply to put you in the office of mayor and maintain you there. It would be an interim position until political matters could be mapped out to fit local conditions; then elections would be held."

"Elections?" John said. "How can you have elections? All in New Sidon are clannish."

The anthropologist took over there. "In your Caledonian society, John, you were represented in your government body through the clann. Your phylum, or tribe, governed itself by a muster of sachems and caciques, each of whom were elected by the adults of the claims they represented. But in the new system, your family would make no difference at all. You would vote for your representatives from the city ward in which you live. New Sidon amounts to a city-state. Later, when we consolidate the planet a bit more, those who live outside the cities will vote in geographic areas we'll call counties."

She looked at DeRudder, and a sarcastic aspect came over her expression. "All this isn't just altruism, of course. The fact is that United Interplanetary Mining and the planet Sidon have stuck their necks out a bit. Caledonia is rather far from the jurisdiction of the League, but it won't be long before authorities will be turning up to see if League Canons are being observed. The fat will be in the fire, unless self-government is being observed."

DeRudder said, "To quote a favorite phrase of Milt, here, that's not exactly the way I'd put it. But it's near enough. Well, John?" He looked up at the wall chronometer.

John Hawk was shaking his head. "I'd... I'd have to think about it. I know nothing of governing a city such as this. I am—or was—a simple sachem of a clann in the small town of Aberdeen."

"You are as experienced as anyone else," Milton Harmon told him. "And obviously a person of sincerity and integrity. The job is there to be done. Who would do it better?"

DeRudder came to his feet and said to Nadine Pond and Harmon, "We'll have to get along to the company meeting. I suggest we leave John to his considerations and expect a reply from him in the morning."

The other two stood as well, and shortly the three of them were gone.

John sat for a long time before finally leaving his own scat and making his way to the kitchenette. He stood over the autoserve and inserted his duplicate of DeRudder's credit card into the slot and dialed Pharmacy.

He said into the screen. "Please let me have one dosage of antisoma."

John of the Hawks left the apartment and descended the gravity lift to the street level. He turned right and, ignoring the public transportation, headed by foot toward the river front.

New Sidon's defensive walls came down to the river edge, and John strolled along the inner side of them, attracting no particular attention. It was as DeRudder and the others had said—this was, or was rapidly becoming, a city of Caledonians.

He passed an alleyway, and a voice hissed, "John! John of the Hawks!"

Without immediately turning, he looked up and down the street. All seemed clear. He reversed his way and entered the darker passage.

"Don of the Clarks!"

They embraced in the manner of clannsmen who had taken the blood oath.

"How long have you waited?" John said.

"I but arrived."

Don was attired in the same type coverall worn by John himself but was considerably soiled. He said sourly, "It is not the cleanest way in the world—through the sewers." , John said, "Your report?"

The other's eyes gleamed excitement. "All is ready. The clansmen have gathered there in the hills to the west, riding their fastest steeds. We filtered in, in small groups, and are hidden in the caves and rocks. There is no sign that we have been detected."

"They have devices that can locate a man simply by his body heat."

"So we know. However, we had herdsmen drive in large bodies of cattle before us, and now they graze in the same vicinity. Their devices do not detect a *man*, but animal heat. That of a cow, sheep or horse is no different than a man. It is our belief that thus far we have cozened them."

John took a deep breath. "What else?"

"We have selected thirty to come through the sewers. All are armed with the weapons of Beyond which we have captured. All are our top clansmen from the three confederations—sagamores, caciques and top raiders all. At whatever time you name, we will come through." He brought forth charts of the immediate surroundings and of the town and stabbed with a large forefinger. "We will divide into three bodies. One will dominate the landing field where the vehicles of the sky are kept. All of these will be flamed down, so there will be no escape and no participation on their part in the fight."

"The other two groups?"

"The two gun emplacements, on the towers at the corners of the town furthest from the river. These will be knocked out. Then we fire our signal into the air, and the clansmen will ride at full speed from the hills. There will be no laser rifles available to be brought to bear on them before they have reached the walls. They will be up and over and in the streets with carbine, claidheammor and skean before the cursed Sidonians know what is about."

John of the Hawks took another deep breath. "And then what, Don of the Clarks?"

"Why, then we will slay them. We will loot the city of nil that is worthy of looting. The women and children we will take to serve as clannless ones in our towns."

"And the Caledonians here?"

They are slinks and traitors. They will share the fate of the men from Beyond. This the supreme muster of the three united confederations has decided."

"And then?" John pursued. "New Sidon is but one of the cities the men from Beyond have built."

Don was scowling at him. "Why, then we'll go on to the next. Probably to Berkeley. And we'll sack it, in turn."

John was shaking his head. "No. Once, we might succeed, though many will go down to black death in the attempt. These from Beyond are not slinks. Don of the Clarks. Many of their ways are not ours, but they are not slinks. They will fight and fight hard for their women and children, Their property and their lives. And the word will go out to their other cities, and once warned, they will not be cozened again."

"You sound strange, John of the Hawks. This was basically your plan. It was you who devised the elaborate playacting in which you were supposedly stripped of your kilts, so that you could enter this city and spy upon the Sidonians. It was you who called for the union of confederations and the attack."

"I have learned much in the past few days, Don. If we are successful, and admittedly, we have excellent chance, they will mount further, stronger reprisals against our phyla. Their skimmers will seek out the smallest hamlet and flame it down, as Aberdeen was flamed down. It is a battle that we cannot win, no matter how brave the clansmen, no matter how staunchly our womenfolk back our efforts. It is a battle that cannot be won, for we are simple herdsmen and farmers, and they are advanced and as numerous as the blades of grass on the heath. In this League of theirs they have more planets than we have towns on all California."

The lips of Don of the Clarks drew back over his teeth. "What has *happened to you, John of the Hawks?*"

"Perhaps I have grown a bit wiser."

"You will not aid us in the coming battle?"

"There will be no coming battle, Don."

The clansman's eyes narrowed. "The plan can and will go through without you, John."

John shook his head. "No. It all depends upon surprise and your advance raiders coming through the sewers. If warned, the Sidonians would easily repulse you."

"If warned!"

"Return to the clansmen, Don of the Clarks, and tell them that I, once Supreme Raid Cacique of the Loch Confederation, have joined with the men from Beyond and will soon enter the government of the city. Say that I urge that all the clans that have thus far taken to the hills and fought the new ways make their peace with the men of the League."

He looked away, as though seeing into a far distance. "In the long run, though perhaps you and I will not live to see it, that is the shortest path to Caledonia's regaining of her liberty."

There was suddenly a skian in Don of the Clarks' right hand. "You will not betray us, John! You who were my blood brother but have now turned slink and discarded your own kilts!"

John took a quick step back and went into a fighter's crouch, his hands slightly forward. "I am unarmed, Don of the Clarks."

Don came in slowly, alertly. No one knew better than he the fighting qualities of John of the Hawks.

John tensed, his eyes narrow, his hands extended a bit further out.

And Don of the Clarks came to a halt, stood erect and tossed the dagger aside.

"I cannot do it," he said simply. "You are my blood brother and have saved my life an untold number of times. How would the town criers shout this, were I to kill you?"

John put his hand out and grasped the other's shoulder. "I do what I must do, Don of the Clarks."

"I know. I do not understand, but I trust you." He looked down at his feet in disgust. "It would have been the greatest raid of all times. The bards..."

"The bards would have sung themselves hoarse," John said sourly.

He reached into a coverall pocket and fetched forth a small box. "When you return, Don of the Clarks, give this to Alice of the Thompsons. Be sure she takes it. On your honor as my blood brother, be sure she takes it."

Don frowned down at the packet.

"And tell her," John said, "that somehow, someday, I will come to pay the brideright to the Clann Thompson and honorably steal her for my bride."