

The Sphinx

Daniel Hall met the enemy in the blue skies of NRG 984-D but it cannot be said that the enemy was his. Neither can it be said that he was the enemy's. In point of fact, about all that can be said about the encounter is that it never quite came off. One minute there were two trim scout ships, one Terran and the other Uvelian, arrowing toward each other, and the next minute there were two trim scout ships veering off at right angles to each other and dropping rapidly planetward. What happened to the Uvelian pilot will be touched upon later. Right now, the camera is focused on Daniel Hall.

He came down near the edge of a wide tableland and plowed a long furrow in a stretch of snow-white sand. The impact tore one of the viewscope brackets loose and sent it ricocheting from wall to wall. On the third ricochet it sideswiped Hall, ripping through both layers of his spacesuit and tearing open his left arm from elbow to shoulder. Still not satisfied, it struck the radio panel and smashed the transmitter. Then it gave up the ghost and dropped to the deck.

Hall hadn't meant to make such a hard landing. He hadn't meant to make any kind of a landing. An invisible force had seized the controls and torn the ship out of the sky, and he hadn't been able to do a thing about it.

He tried the controls now. He tried them singly and in pairs. No matter how he tried them, they did not respond. Next, he had a go at the radio. He knew even while he was beaming his S.O.S. that it would never get beyond the stratosphere and that all he would receive for his pains would be static. He was right. He turned the radio off.

Well anyway, NRG 984-D had a reasonably amiable climate and a reasonably amiable atmosphere—his instruments told him that much. So he could stay alive for a little while at least.

Hall grinned. "A little while" was right. The Terran fleet's imminent engagement with the Uvelian wouldn't be postponed merely because an unimportant space scout who had been sent on ahead to determine whether or not the planet in whose vicinity the engagement was to take place had intelligent inhabitants, failed to report back. The assignment had been no more than a token gesture in the first place—a gesture that would sound good on the flagship's log-tape when the war was over. Whether NRG 984-D had intelligent inhabitants or not, the commander of the Terran fleet would carry out his original orders, and if a planet-wide tectonic upheaval resulted from the side effects of the battle—and only a miracle could avert such an eventuality—Terrankind would hold themselves no more responsible for it than they held themselves responsible for Carthage, Dresden, and Deimos.

ACCORDING to Terran intelligence reports, the resemblance between Terrans and Uvelians was cultural as well as physical; hence, the odds had it that the Uvelian pilot had been on a similar token assignment and that if he, too, had been rendered helpless and incommunicado it would have a similar lack of effect on the commander of the Uvelian fleet. Anyway you looked at the situation NRG 984-D was going to have to pay dearly for being in the wrong place at the wrong time—i.e., at a point in space equidistant from Earth and Uvel at the precise moment when the crucial battle of the Earth-Uvel war was going to take place.

Hall's arm was beginning to throb, and waves of weakness were washing over him. Breaking out a first-aid pac, he sterilized the wound and dressed it. The bleeding stopped, but he still felt weak and he knew that he should rest. However, he couldn't bring himself to do so. For one thing, he knew that regardless of what he did, he was doomed anyway, and for another, during his descent he had glimpsed a number of vaguely familiar structures in the distance. He hadn't been able to make them out clearly, but

structures usually spelled intelligent beings, and he was eager to find out whether or not these structures were in keeping with the rule. It was silly of him, he supposed, to want to know what kind of beings, if any, he was going to share extinction with; but he wanted to know just the same.

So, after removing the cumbersome outer-section of his spacesuit and taking off his helmet, he opened the scout-ship's locks and stepped outside. NRG 984 was well past meridian. Using it as a reference point, he oriented himself. To the north and to the east, the tableland dropped away into hazy foothills; far to the west, stalwart mow-crowned mountains rose sheerly into the sky. The structures which he had glimpsed lay to the south. There were four of them altogether, and three of them were pyramidal in shape. The fourth stood a little to the east of the others and was radically different from them. It looked like—it looked like—

Hall squinted his eyes against the glare of the sunlight. If he hadn't known that such a thing was impossible, he would have sworn that the fourth structure was a sphinx.

NRG 984 was a KO star. However, if the rays which were mining down upon the tableland were a dependable criterion, it wasn't very far from attaining GO-hood. Hall felt dehydrated before he had gone half a mile. By the time a mile lay behind him, he was ready to drop.

He wet his mouth repeatedly from the vacuum-container of ship's water which he had brought along, each time swallowing as much of the icy contents as he dared. He could see the pyramidal structures quite clearly now—clearly enough to know that in mentally referring to them as "pyramidal structures" instead of as "pyramids" he was only kidding himself. He could see the fourth structure quite clearly, too—clearly enough to know that in the strict sense of the word it wasn't a structure, but a huge statue, and to know that whether such a thing were possible or not, the statue was a statue of a sphinx.

As he progressed, reeling now and then from the heat and from his increasing weakness, he began to wonder whether he had somehow been catapulted back through space to Egypt—to the plateau of Gizeh, upon which the Great Sphinx Harmachis guarded the Great Pyramids of Cheops, Chephren, and Mykerinos, and at whose base the Terran capital of Kafr el Haram stood. And as he progressed still farther he began to wonder whether he had somehow been catapulted back through space and time to the Egypt of over five thousand years ago when the Great Pyramids and the Great Sphinx were new; for these pyramids and this sphinx were new—make no mistake about it. The pyramids looked as though they had been built yesterday, and as for the sphinx, its excellent condition lent it a realism so remarkable that Hall momentarily expected to see it rise up on its columnar legs and come thundering over the tableland to welcome him—

Or to annihilate him.

There was a third possibility, of course, and on the surface it made more sense than the other two: maybe his growing weakness and the merciless rays of the sun had combined forces and were causing him to hallucinate.

But if he was hallucinating, why hadn't he chosen a subject more in keeping with his character? Specifically, why hadn't he projected an image of a garish street lined with nepenthe nooks and fun bars, or an image of a blue mountain lake with a shack on its wooded shore and a canoe drawn up on its beach ready to take him gliding over the cool and limpid waters? Like many adventurers, Hall pursued both solitude and sin and found peace in neither; but they were at least a part of his makeup, and Egyptology was not. He had visited the plateau of Gizeh and seen the Great Pyramids and the Great Sphinx, and he had read about Cheops, Chephren, and Mykerinos in Herodotus' History: but the pharaohs and their sepulchers and their monuments were relatively unimportant items in the synthesis of real and vicarious experiences that constituted his character, and it was highly unlikely that he would be "seeing" a sphinx and three pyramids now.

HE decided that the best way to find out whether or not he was imagining them would be to try to walk right through them, and with this in mind, he forced himself to go on, even though he knew that he would do better to return to his ship and forget about the whole thing.

Gradually, the pyramids took on greater detail, particularly the largest of the trio. It stood in the foreground, and several hundred yards to the east of it stood the Sphinx. The Gizeh sphinx measured in the neighborhood of 189 feet in length, 70 in height, and 30 from forehead to chin. If anything, this one exceeded those dimensions. Lord, suppose it were to stand up, Hall thought. Why, it would tower almost a hundred feet above the ground!

Had the Sphinx read his mind? It would seem so. At any rate, the huge head had turned and the great golden eyes were fixed upon his face. As he watched in disbelieving fascination, it stood erect on its four legs and regarded him contemplatively across the half a hundred yards of tableland that separated them.

Everything caught up to Hall then—his weakness, the rays of NRG 984, the heat rising from the white sand, the doubts that had been multiplying in his mind ever since he had participated in the destruction of the Deimos Dissenters—and he sagged to the ground. The ground, he discovered presently, was trembling. Well it might. The creature walking over it probably weighed several thousand tons.

He felt the coolness of shade. Looking up, he saw the massive humanoid face looming above him, the great golden eyes gazing down into his own. Slowly, the huge head began to lower; relentlessly, the gigantic jaws began to open. Belatedly, Hall tried to draw his laser pistol, only to discover that he no longer had charge of his right arm. He retreated way back into his mind then, found a deep dark cave, crawled into it, and closed his eyes.

Cheops' Daughter

WHEREVER else he might be, Hall decided some time later, he was no longer in the cave. Nor was he, apparently, in the belly of the Sphinx. There was the softness of eiderdown beneath his back and a pleasant perfume upon his nostrils. He was completely relaxed and the throbbing in his arm had died away. Feeling fingers lightly touch his forehead, he opened his eyes.

There was a girl standing over him. Her face was narrow, the forehead high and rounded, the nose high-bridged and slender, the chin somewhat pointed. She had night-black hair, and her head was fitted with a ridiculous headdress that flared up into a flat crown. She was slim, but startlingly well-developed, and she was wearing a tight fitting halter and a tight-fitting knee-length skirt. The headdress, the halter, and the skirt were golden in color, and, peering over the edge of the padded platform on which he lay, Hall saw that webbed sandals of similar hue encased her small feet. Her skin was the color of olives.

Despite her unusual attire and her equally unusual development, plus a queenly hauteur that somehow went well with both, her eyes still managed to be the most remarkable items in her feminine inventory. They were almond-shaped, slightly slanted, golden brown, and preternaturally large. In addition, there was a liquid quality about them that came close to devastating the defenses which Hall made haste to throw up around himself.

Well anyway, she made as much sense as the pyramids and the Sphinx did, he thought resignedly. As a matter of fact, she seemed to belong in such a setting. "I suppose you're going to tell me your name is 'Cleopatra'," he said, even though he knew that the all-purpose English words were bound to be Greek to her.

She had withdrawn her hand from his forehead and had stepped back from the platform the minute he opened his eyes. But she hadn't been in the least disconcerted, nor was she in the least disconcerted now. "Behold, I have dressed thy wound," she said. "Is it not enough that a Pharaoh's daughter should have thus demeaned herself without her having to demean herself still further by giving thee her name?" Suddenly puzzlement crinkled her forehead, and she looked intently at his smartly-tailored inner spacesuit. Actually, in combination with his snappy black spaceboots it constituted as sharp an outfit as the Terran Space Navy had ever come up with, but she certainly didn't seem to think so. "Where didst thou learn to speak the language of Egypt, slave from a far land?" she asked.

CLEARLY, NRG 984-D was a planet of surprises, and by this time Hall should have been

sufficiently acclimated to have enabled him to take each new development in his stride. He was not, though—not quite—and for a while he just lay there gaping at the girl. Then he propped himself up on one elbow, noting as he did so that she had indeed dressed his wound and noting simultaneously that in the process she had somehow eliminated its soreness and brought about at least a partial return of his strength. She had also, he reminded himself quickly, called him a slave. He said snidely, "I guess you might say that I learned to speak Egyptian in the same place you learned to speak APE."

She blinked, and it was obvious from the blank look she gave him that she had missed his point completely. He had the feeling that she was just dying to put him in his place with a few well-chosen epithets but that she wasn't quite sure enough of herself to risk doing so. "Great indeed must be my disfavor in the eyes of Amen-Ra," she said presently, "for me to have been afflicted by such circumstances and by such company."

Hall sat up on the platform, which, he saw now, was a bed of some kind. The room in which it stood was on the small side, and surprisingly pleasant. The ceilings and the walls had been carved out of pink granite, and the illumination was provided by candles burning in niches that looked a lot like light-fixtures. Besides the bed, there were two marble benches, a marble table, and a slender diorite pedestal supporting a shallow diorite bowl that looked like a bird bath but which was probably a stone brazier. In the wall opposite the one against which the bed stood, a tapestry-hung doorway gave access to another room. The tapestry was heavily decorated with tiny humanoid figures with cow-like heads.

Hall had a hunch that he was inside the largest of the three pyramids—an upsetting enough possibility in itself without having a pharaoh's daughter to contend with too. "Which pharaoh are you the daughter of?" he asked.

She drew herself up as straight as could be and looked at him as though he were a chunk of mud that had just dropped from a chariot wheel. Nevertheless, the hauteur in her voice did not ring true, and he was certain that he detected a note of shame. "His Majesty King Khufu the blessed, slave! Dost thou dare profess ignorance of his reign?"

Khufu, he thought. That would be old Cheops himself. Which meant that the girl standing before him was in the neighborhood of fifty-two hundred years old. He sighed. "Well anyway, you dress a mean dressing," he said.

She just looked at him.

He regarded her shrewdly. "I take it we're in the neighborhood of Memphis," he said presently, "and that this pyramid we're in is the one your father took twenty years to build."

For the first time the underlying uncertainty which he had sensed in her from the start rose to the surface. Instead of bringing to mind a princess, she now brought to mind a little girl who had strayed out of her own back yard and become hopelessly lost in the next. "I—I know that what thou sayest must be true," she said, "but I know also that it cannot be true. Only the first mastuba of my father's sepulcher has been built, and it is to be the first sepulcher of its kind, yet here there are three of them, and each has been completed. I—I do not understand wherefore I am in this place, nor wherefore I am alone."

"But surely you must know how you got here."

SHE shook her head. "Behold, two nights ago I was sitting in the—" She paused, took a deep breath, and began all over again. "Behold, two nights ago I lay me to sleep, and when Amen-Ra climbed upon his throne the morning after, here I lay in this strange place in this strange land. I do not know what to do."

She looked as though she were going to cry. Hall would have felt sorry for her if the memory of her arrogance hadn't still been fresh in his mind. He didn't think much of people who went around calling other people slaves. Another reason he didn't feel sorry for her was that he couldn't bring himself to believe that she was on the level. How could she *possibly* be Cheops' daughter?

All right, who *could* she be then? A Uvelian Mata Hari? Nonsense! A Uvelian Mata Hari might try to pass herself off as a lot of things, but unless she was hopelessly out of her mind, she would never try to pass herself off as an Egyptian princess who had been dead for more than five millennia. Besides, what

would a Uvelian spy be doing on a planet which, other than on an abstract level, neither the Terran nor the Uvelian empires had ever heard about until a few days ago and which they wouldn't have heard about even then if it hadn't been for the fact that NRG 984-D was going to be occupying almost the same point in space as that which the major Uvelian and Terran forces, which were ineluctably drawing closer and closer together, would be occupying when they met in the crucial battle of the hundred-year galactic war—in the ultimate Armageddon that would decide whether the Uvelian demossocialistic ideology or the Terran sociocratic ideology was to endure?

"Tell me," Hall said presently, "is there really a monster the size of a young mountain hanging around these parts, or did I just imagine there was?"

He expected the question to disconcert her. It didn't in the least. "Oh yes," she said, as calmly as though a sphinx were no more awe-inspiring than a common alley cat, "She-who-builds-sepulchers is still with me. I feared at first that she, too, had deserted me, but she had not. But as she will not communicate with me, I have been unable to learn wherefore she interrupted her labors in my father's behalf to build these sepulchers in this strange land, or for whom she built them."

A pyramid-building sphinx was all Hall needed. Lord knew, the girl's story had been incredible enough before, but now it was fantastic. Sliding down from the platform-bed to the floor and noting to his satisfaction that his laser pistol was still in its holster at his hip, he said, "I can see that if I'm going to find out anything around here, I'm going to have to find it out for myself. So if you'll climb down off that high horse of yours long enough to tell me how to get out of this rock pile, Miss Whoever-you-are, I won't bother you any more!"

The girl gasped. She stamped her right foot. She stamped her left. She clenched her hands. "Hast thou the effrontery to imply that the noble daughter of His Majesty King Khufu the blessed is guilty of a falsehood, slave!"

Hall put his hands on his hips. "A falsehood! Why you've been lying your head off."

He would have said more if tears hadn't come into her golden brown eyes. Turning, she pointed toward the doorway. "Beyond that portal thou wilt find another, slave," she said, "and beyond the second portal, yet another. Then thou wilt find thyself in the passage that leads to the portico. Go!"

Hall went.

The Pyramid Project

AS he left the room, it occurred to him that he had forgotten to ask her how he happened to be inside the pyramid in the first place. It was just as well. She would only have told him another fib.

How did he happen to be inside it then?

Probably, after his sphinx hallucination, he had crawled the rest of the distance to his objective and the girl had found him and taken him in tow. For all he knew, she could very well have saved his life. He wished now that he hadn't been quite so rude to her.

As nearly as he could ascertain, the room that adjoined the one he had just left was a living room. It contained elaborately upholstered settees and chairs, and there were cushions scattered over the thickly carpeted floor. The next room was unquestionably a cooking room. Floor-to-ceiling shelves were lined with earthenware pots, and there was a brick oven large enough to roast an elephant in. In addition to the oven, there was a brazier-like affair on which less pachydermatous dishes could be prepared.

Passing through the third doorway, he found himself, not in the passage which the girl had mentioned, but in a spacious court. Stone columns gave the illusion of supporting the ceiling, and at the top of each, just beneath the capital, was the bas relief of a cow-like face. Elaborate horns rising from the stone foreheads blended with the capitals and supplied their motifs. It finally dawned on Hall who this cow-like being was. It was Hathor, the Egyptian goddess of love.

He crossed the court without further delay and stepped through a wide doorway into a long corridor. At the end of the corridor, a dark, star-spangled rectangle showed. He made track for it, rejoicing in the cool night air that presently reached his nostrils. Obviously he had been unconscious longer than he had

thought.

He could hardly wait to see the stars. He knew perfectly well that he couldn't possibly be in ancient Egypt, that there was another, far more practical, explanation for the presence of the Sphinx and the pyramids and the olive-skinned girl, but just the same it would be good to know for sure. The stars would tell him. Stars did not lie.

Stepping out of the passage, he looked up at them. The structure behind him and the roof of the portico had half of the heavens, but the half that was visible contained not a single familiar constellation. He gave a sigh of relief. A moment later, he wondered why. Wouldn't he be better off if he *were* in ancient Egypt? There, at least, he would have a chance to live out the rest of his natural life. Here, he would be dead before morning.

The portico was wide and lofty. Four columns, larger but similar in all other respects to the columns he had seen in the court, stood in a row along the marble apron, supporting the roof. Between the two center ones a short flight of wide marble steps descended to the ground. He crossed the apron and went down them.

ALL was silence. Above his head, a constellation suggestive of a huge crocodile sprawled across the heavens. The white sands of the tableland caught the starlight and shattered it into infinitesimal particles, and the particles glistened softly for miles around, seeming to emit a radiance of their own. Behind him, the Great Pyramid—he still thought of it as the "Great Pyramid" even though he knew that it wasn't—rose geometrically up into an apex that was nearly 500 feet above the ground. To his left, the lesser pyramids stood, and to his right crouched the Sphinx.

Despite himself, he was struck by her beauty—awed, almost. She had a silvery cast in the starlight. Her flanks rose up like smooth escarpments to the magnificent ridge of her back. Her noble head hid half a hundred stars. The cliff of her classic profile was a splendid silhouette against the sky.

Hall walked toward her in the starlight. He had been impressed by the Great Sphinx of the Gizeh Necropolis. Even in its state of disrepair there was a mysterious quality about it that he had found appealing, a massive grace that had intrigued him. But compared to his sphinx the one of the Gizeh Necropolis was nothing more than a crudely sculptured rocky promontory reinforced with masonry. Stone was all it had ever been and stone was all it could ever be. This sphinx was art apotheosized. No wonder in his dazed and weakened state of a few hours ago he had invested her with life. Even now, thinking clearly again, he felt that at any moment she would rise and walk beneath the stars.

What had happened to the race of people who had sculptured her? Hall wondered. To the race of people who had built the three pyramids over which she was standing guard? Did that same race of people have something to do with the building of the Egyptian pyramids? Did—

Nothing happened to the race of people who built the pyramids, Daniel Hall. And nothing is going to happen to them if they can help it.

As the words formed themselves in his mind, he saw that the Brobdingnagian head was turning toward him. Simultaneously he realized that, far from being inanimate, the massive leonine body was rampant with life. At length, the mysterious eyes met his and regarded him like a pair of intelligent golden suns. He stood stark still in the starlight, a statue now himself.

In the final analysis there was no reason why a sphinx couldn't be alive. Statues were sculptured of men, too, but this did not mean that men were made of stone.

Even the poor Egyptian child who dressed your wound in the Temple of Hathor is less anthropocentric than you are, Daniel Hall. She realized I was alive the moment she saw me. And yet you allowed yourself to know resentment simply because her thought world ruled out the possibility of your being her equal, thereby forcing her to think of you as a slave. For shame, Daniel Hall!

"And now what happens?" Hall asked, half in cynicism, half in fear. "Are you going to devour me?"

There, your anthropocentric nature is influencing you again! You think that merely because a being is larger than you are, it must be evil. And the larger it is, the more evil it becomes in your

mind, and the more partial to human flesh. No, I'm not going to devour you, Daniel Hall—it is you and your kind who are going to devour me and my sisters. That is, you would be going to devour us if we hadn't taken the necessary steps to prevent you from doing so, although the possibility exists that you may still succeed. You are on the verge of devouring us, not because you want to at the moment, but because you haven't bothered to find out whether or not we exist.

"THAT'S not true!" Hall objected. "I was sent here myself to find out!"

And so was one of the members of the Uvelian forces. But even if either or both of you were able to report your respective findings to your respective headquarters the battle would still take place, and you know it. Incidentally, it's unnecessary for you to speak, to say nothing of shout. I can receive thoughts as well as send them.

It was you who seized our controls then—who—who caused us to crash.

It was I who seized your controls and caused you to crash, Daniel Hall. My sister in the neighboring demesne took care of your opponent. If our project is successful, we will need both of you. However, although I caused you to crash, Daniel Hall, I had no intention of causing you bodily injury. Small details are beyond the scope of our telekinesis. But I see that thanks to the skillful ministrations of Ahura, you've fully recovered.

Ahura?

The little Egyptian princess whom you were so rude to a few minutes ago in the Temple of Hathor.

She's no more of an Egyptian princess than you are! Hall "said." Egypt was consolidated with the Union of Terran States over a hundred years ago when the capital was built at Kafr el Haram, and couldn't recognize a princess even if she wanted to. Egyptian princesses were out of style long before that time anyway.

But millennia ago, they were not. Ahura wasn't lying to you—she really is Cheops' daughter.

But don't you see?—that's more incredible yet! Cheops' daughter has been dead for over five thousand years!

No, said the Sphinx, Cheops' daughter is very much alive. However, until yesterday she had been unaware of the fact for quite some time. Not long after I arrived on your planet some fifty-two hundred of your years ago and instituted the project my sisters and I had agreed upon, it came to my attention that in his zeal to see his sepulcher erected Cheops had placed her in the stews. Since I had told him that if he would put all of the resources of his kingdom at my disposal the first pyramid would be his, I felt responsible for his action; and, as I had intended to take back someone like Ahura anyway, I stole her from the stews, placed her in suspended animation, built a special capsule for her, and had one of my sisters come and get her. She was then entombed in a special vault on Pornos-NRGC 984-D to you, Daniel Hall—until such time as I should have need of her. Two days ago I brought her here, dressed her in clothing similar to what she was accustomed to, placed her in the Temple of Hathor, and revived her. Ahura is not her real name, incidentally. She thinks of her ordeal in the stews as having happened only a few days ago and has unconsciously taken the first step toward creating a new identity. I interceded in time, but the experience left its mark just the same.

DROWNING, Hall grabbed for the first straw he saw. *But according to Herodotus, she stayed in the stews for a long time, and also according to Herodotus, she made each of the patrons pay off with a building block for a small pyramid which she later built in front of her father's.*

Come now, Daniel Hall, you aren't even convinced of that yourself. You simultaneously think of Herodotus as the "Father of History" and as the "Father of Lies." However, as his Egyptian history can't possibly be anything more than recorded hearsay, he can't have been deliberately lying in this case. Probably he merely repeated the myths which the generations that followed the fourth dynasty dreamed up to supplement their knowledge of Cheops, Chephren, and Mykerinos.

In any event, what he wrote about Ahura is untrue.

Hall had already forgotten Ahura. *You said you arrived on Earth fifty-two hundred years ago. That means you're over five thousand years old!*

Right, said the Sphinx. Even older if you count my incubation period, which you really should in view of the fact that members of my race mature before they even see the light of day. Altogether, we have a longevity of some fifteen thousand years—your years, that is. So you see, I've still got quite a few to go—or will have if the preventive measures my sisters and I have taken succeed in averting the Armageddon which the Terran and Uvelian space navies are so determined to bring off in our skies. Her golden eyes traversed the heavens, returned to Hall. No Pleiades yet, I see. Well, there will be soon. Incidentally, I stole the expression from your mind, Daniel Hall.

"Pleiades" was the term used by ground observers to describe a space fleet in planetary orbit. But at the moment Hall was concerned with more important matters than Terran war terminology. *You and your sisters— you're parthenogenetic, aren't you?* he said.

Right again, Daniel Hall

And does each of your sisters have a set of pyramids like these?

Not all of them, no—only those who have need for them at the moment.

Who built them for you?

We built them ourselves—not as a team, but as individuals. I myself built the set at Gizeh.

Come off it! Hall said. How could you build a pyramid.

I have spread my left forefoot. Look at it, Daniel Hall, and tell me what you see.

Hall looked. *I—I see, he said a long time later, a set of five powerful appendages. Two of them—the ones which correspond to my thumb and forefinger—appear to be some manner of gripping tools. The next one appears to be a stone-cutting tool, and the last two appear to be tools that can be adapted for almost any kind of work.*

Good. Basically, my sisters and I are equipped for quarrying and building, but through the ages our race extended its abilities to encompass innumerable other fields. The stone used in the set of pyramids behind you, I quarried in the mountains that form the western boundary of my dhen—or demesne; hence, transportation was no problem. Owing to the distribution of our dhens, it rarely is on our planet. However, the stone used in the Gizeh pyramids in many instances had to be quarried in neighboring countries; hence, transportation was a problem, and I had to enlist the aid of the reigning pharaohs. It's doubtful whether I could have succeeded without their co-operation in any case. The job took almost one hundred and fifty of their years—practically the whole of the fourth dynasty. It needn't have taken that long, but the timing had to be perfect, and besides, I wanted it to look as though mankind alone were responsible for it. The first pyramid became Cheops', the next, Chephren's, and the last, Mykerinos'.

But why did you build them on Earth?

My sisters and I have the ability to look into the future. It's a limited ability and functions only when we're enjoying complete freedom from fear and worry, but when we do foresee, we foresee quite well. Some fifty-two hundred of your years ago, Daniel Hall, one of my sisters foresaw the converging of the Terran and Uvelian fleets of Pornos and realized that our planet couldn't possibly survive the side effects of the battle that was bound to take place. She also foresaw the appearance of your scout ship and the almost simultaneous appearance of the Uvelian's. In keeping with our custom she convened an emergency council, and the situation was examined in detail. Finally the only possible solution was arrived at, and two of us were chosen, one to go to Earth and one to go to Uvel, there to take the necessary steps to save our civilization. I was the one who was chosen to go to Earth, and my sister in the neighboring dhen was the one who was chosen to go to Uvel. The strategic location of our dhens with respect to the predicted appearance

of you and the Uvelian scout was partially responsible for the decision.

Well you certainly put a stop to our hostilities in a hurry. How about the battle between the two fleets? Won't that come off either?

We hope it won't. In any case, all that could have been done to avert it has been done—short of stooping to genocide and short of prematurely interfering with the natural evolution of two civilizations.

But surely if this sister of yours could look fifty-two hundred years ahead one of the rest of you ought to have been able to look a little beyond that point and have found out whether or not you're going to succeed!

I told you, Daniel Hall, that we're capable of prescience only when we're enjoying complete freedom from fear and worry. We haven't been free from either for those same fifty-two hundred years.

Hall was "silent" for some time. Then, I'll overlook for the moment how a being of your size without any apparent means of space-travel could have journeyed from here to Earth, he said, and I'll also overlook for the moment how your presence on our planet escaped being recorded in our history other than in legend form. But will you please explain to me how you expected to avert a battle in the vicinity of your own planet by building pyramids on another planet thousands of years before the battle was to begin?

Two other planets, Daniel Hall. While I was building the set on Earth, my sister in the neighboring dhen was building a corresponding set on Uvel.

All fright, two other planets then. But that still doesn't answer my question. Does the shape and the size and the location of the Gizeh pyramids have any thing to do with it? I mean, could they possibly be a focal point for some kind of fourth-dimensional weapon?

THE Sphinx laughed thunderously. *The shape and the size and the location of the pyramids have a great deal to do with it, Daniel Hall—but not in the way you suggest. The riddle will become clear to you before the night is over, I'm sure. The other two items that puzzle you may not, however, so I will clear them up for you now.*

My sisters and I navigate space by teleporting ourselves through it. We do this by utilizing a paraspatial energy-source which can be employed only when interstellar distances are involved. However, we can't teleport ourselves from point A to point B unless the cosmic variables pertinent to the two points are in appropriate relationship, and this severely limits our activities. And when the need arises, as it did in the case in question, for one of us to teleport herself from point A to point B and another of us to teleport herself from point A to point C within a single teleportative period, the cosmic variables are doubly limiting. Fifty-two hundred of your years ago, the cosmic variables with respect to Pornos-Earth and Pornos-Uvel limited us to a period of three hundred years. Following this three-hundred year teleportative period was a twelve-hundred year non-teleportative period, which in turn was followed by another three-hundred year teleportative period, and so on. Ideally, one of the three-hundred year teleportative periods should have partially coincided with the three centuries immediately preceding the battle we wished to avert; practically, however, none of them did, and as a result we had to pursue an indirect course in averting our planet's accidental annihilation. Fortunately, the first three-hundred year teleportative period proved feasible for the plan which we presently devised.

With respect to the second point that puzzles you, Daniel Hall, the reason my presence on your planet failed to find an authentic place for itself in your history books was that I took the necessary action to make sure that it didn't. My sisters and I simply couldn't allow you to know enough about us to take us seriously because if you had, you might have guessed our secret, and that would have meant the end of our plan—not to mention the end of us. So before I left your planet, I wiped all memory of my activities from the minds of men. This automatically gave Cheops, Chephren, and Mykerinos exclusive credit for the building of the three pyramids at

Gizeh. However, memory eradication is only ninety-five percent effective, and while the pharaohs and the priests and the slaves and everybody else forgot about my activities, they didn't quite forget about me. I suspected as much but I wasn't sure until this afternoon when I read your mind while I was carrying you to Ahura. Fortunately, their memory of me was ambiguous at best, and although they associated me with the Gizeh pyramids, it simply didn't occur to them that I might have built them. So they adapted me to their religious needs of the moment and sculptured a statue of me in the Gizeh Necropolis, identifying me with the Harmachis version of their sun-god, Amen-Ra. Their other "sphinxes," as you call them, can undoubtedly be traced to me also, and the non-Gizeh pyramids with which Egypt abounds were undoubtedly modeled after mine, although before the reign of Cheops an architect named Imhotep had devised a "step pyramid" that may very well have resulted in similar structures. As for the non-Egyptian pyramids and "sphinxes" which are scattered over your planet, some of them can be traced to me also, but I daresay that in most cases they have religio-socio backgrounds of their own. In any event, the only pyramids I built on Earth are the ones on the Gizeh plateau. My sister, you see, foresaw not only the Terran-Uvelian Armageddon but also the future sites of the Terran and Uvelian capitals.

And your other sister, Hall said. The one who went to Uvel when you went to Earth. You say she built a set of pyramids too?

Exactly like my Gizeh set. In addition to looking and acting alike, Terrans and Uvelians have almost parallel pasts. In a general sense of course.

THE Sphinx had turned her head and was looking at a region of the heavens just above the eastern horizon. Following her gaze, Hall saw the first group of Pleiades rising into the sky. The distance was such that only the dreadnoughts attained the status of "stars." The thousands of smaller craft were invisible.

He counted six bright points of light, but the number told him nothing. Both the Terran and Uvelian fleets had six major vessels. Facing west, he was not surprised to see the second six climbing slowly above the mountains. *Looks like we're going to get a good view of the proceedings anyway, he said. Just the same, I wish they were meeting above the dayside. That way, we might stand a chance.*

Not enough of a one to worry about . . . You don't even know which fleet is yours, do you, Daniel Hall?

I'm better off not knowing.

Yes, I suppose you are. The Sphinx was "silent" for a moment. Then, Don't you think it would be a good idea if you went to Ahura and lent her one of your broad shoulders to lean on? she asked. She's going to need it. There's no terror that can compare to the fear of the unknown.

Hall was annoyed. Surely you could have briefed her on what's coming off!

Again, the Sphinx laughed. Tell me, Daniel Hall, how do you explain a battle between two huge space navies to a child who visualizes the creation of the universe as a trio of anthropomorphic deities in the midst of a fantastic hand-balancing act? As Shu the air supporting his sister, Nut the sky, with their brother, Keb the Earth, lying beneath them. I did well in the little time I had since reviving her to supplant her native tongue with yours.

I see your point, Hall said. Nevertheless, it can be done.

And it will be done. But not in hours, Daniel Hall, nor in days nor weeks nor months, and not by me, but by you. Ahura has an excellent mind, and given time she can learn all you can teach her, and then some. And with the aid of the special textbooks and other teaching aids contained in the first step of the smallest pyramid there's no limit to what you can teach her—nor to what you can teach yourself

Wait a minute, Hall objected. Even assuming I decide to cooperate in this project of yours, how am I going to make use of textbooks I can't read and that are probably too big for me to open?

The textbooks are printed in APE and are no larger than those you are accustomed to. My sisters and I have had thousands of years to prepare for this crucial point in our history, Daniel

Hall, and we've prepared for it well. However, at this juncture it's futile to discuss what you are or aren't going to do. The battle hasn't been averted yet, and there's a good chance that it may not be. If it is averted, come to me afterward. In the meantime, go to Ahura. You can take shelter in the Temple of Hathor if you wish, but I guess you know as well as I do that without a system of deflectors to protect you, the death rays of either fleet can reach you regardless of where you are.

Hall looked up into the mysterious golden eyes. Was there sadness there? Concern? He could not tell. *And if the battle isn't averted?*

Then this is good-bye. I have enjoyed knowing you, Daniel Hall. Basically, your race and mine are very much alike. Certainly, we share the same major character trait, and moreover we share it in common with the Uvelians. It's only in the matter of terminology that we differ. My sisters and I call the trait "selfishness," and your race and the Uvelian call it "patriotism." It's right for a man to love his country, but he should never forget that his country is only an extension of himself and that the intensity of his love for it is an infallible index of the intensity of his love for himself. We can't change the way we are, but it helps the cause of reason if we face the truth. Go now, Daniel Hall—Ahura awaits you.

Ahura's Tale

AHURA was sitting on the bottom portico step. Hall sat down beside her. "Behold, I am here," he said.

She said, "Behold, I am aware of it."

Her almond eyes were fixed on the eastern Pleiades, which by now were quite high above the horizon. In the starlight, her classic face had a statuesque quality about it. At length, she lowered her gaze to his face. "I will prepare thee food if thou wish."

"Later on—I'm not hungry right now."

"I did not make thee the offer out of my heart. I made it because She-who-builds-sepulchers desired me to do this for you."

"That's all right," Hall said easily. "You probably can't even boil water anyway."

She looked at him. "Thou speakest in riddles, slave."

"The name is 'Daniel'," Hall said, "and you'll do well to call me by it. A cog in one of the wheels of the Terran war machine I may be, but a slave I am not."

"Dan'el?"

"That's pretty close."

"I am `Ahura'—as no doubt She-who-builds-sepulchers hath told thee."

"Among other things. Incidentally, I've got a hunch she's tuned in on us now."

"She-who-builds-sepulchers is all-knowing," Ahura said. And then, "With thy strange garments and thy uncouth ways, from what far land dost thou come, Dan'el?"

"From a land you've never heard of, so the less said about it, the better." Noting that she had returned her gaze to the eastern Pleiades, he pointed to the sky above the mountains. "There's another swarm of them over there," he said.

She nodded. "I know. But the sky hath donned a strange dress. It is even stranger than the dress she wore last night."

Ahura raised her eyes to the crocodile constellation within whose confines, if the present trajectories of the two fleets remained unchanged, the encounter would take place. "Behold, Sebek hath left the river bottom and now rules the world. All is not well, Dan'el."

Hall remembered then that the ancient Egyptians had numbered a crocodile god among their many deities. Lowering his eyes, he saw that the girl's hands were tightly clasped together on her lap, and he realized that despite her deceptively calm demeanor she was terrified. Apparently in her primitive way she knew as well as he did that the hand of death was in the sky.

He tried to reassure her. "Sebek will be gone before morning, and Amen-Ra will rise in his glory."

Relax, Ahura."

She shook her head. "All is not well, Dan'el," she repeated. "It is not the presence of Sebek alone from which I know this. All day, a tale about a prince which was told to me as a child hath been on my mind, and I cannot drive it away, and from this, too, I know that all is not well."

"The best way to get something off your mind is to tell it to someone, so why not tell the tale to me?"

SHE looked at him solemnly, as though trying to make up her mind. It dawned on him all of a sudden that in a way he had never quite figured on, she was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen. "Very well," she said presently, "I will tell thee. There was once a king to whom no son was born; and his heart was grieved, and he prayed for himself unto the gods around him for a child. They decreed that one should be born to him. And his wife, after her time was fulfilled, brought forth a son. Then came the Hathors to decree for him a destiny; they said, 'His death is to be by the crocodile, or by the serpent, or by the dog.' Then his Majesty's heart sickened very greatly. And his Majesty caused a house to be built upon the desert; it was furnished with people and with all good things of the royal house, that the child should not go abroad. And when the child was grown, he went up upon the roof, and he saw a dog; it was following a man who was walking on the road. He spoke to his page, who was with him, 'What is this that walks behind the man?' The page answered him, 'This is a dog.' The child said to him, 'Let there be brought to me one like it.' The page went to repeat it to his Majesty. And his Majesty said, 'Let there be brought to him a little pet dog, lest his heart be sad.' And behold they brought him a dog."

"You see the significance there don't you?" Hall interrupted. "By being indulgent in the seemingly most harmless aspect of his son's destiny, the father made him all the more vulnerable to the other two."

There was wonderment in Ahura's golden brown eyes as they touched his. "Thou art wise, Dan'el," she said. "I am sorry I called thee a slave. When the child became grown in all his limbs," she went on, "he sent a message to his father saying, 'Come, wherefore am I kept here? Inasmuch as I am fated to three evil fates, let me follow my desire.' They agreed to all he said, and gave him all sorts of arms, and also his dog to follow him, and they took him to the east country, and said to him, 'Behold, go thou whither thou wilt.' His dog was with him, and he went northward, following his heart in the desert, while he lived on all the best of the game of the desert. He went to the chief of Naharaina.

"And behold there had not been any born to the chief of Naharaina, except one daughter. Behold, there had been built for her a house; its seventy windows were seventy cubits from the ground. And the chief had caused to be brought all the sons of the chiefs of the land, and had said to them, 'He who reaches the window of my daughter, she shall be to him for a wife.'

"Seeing the youths climbing for the window, the young prince asked, 'What is it that ye do here?' They told him, and another day the sons of the chief came to climb, and the youth came to climb with them. He climbed, and he reached the window of the daughter of the chief of Naharaina. She kissed him, she embraced him in all his limbs "

AHURA'S eyes had strayed to the sky again—to the western Pleiades this time. Their "rise" was slightly slower than that of the eastern Pleiades, owing perhaps to the fact that the former's course coincided with NRG 984-D's rotational direction, or perhaps to their commander's disinclination to rush matters. Nevertheless, it was evident that the forthcoming battle would take place in the center of NRG 984-D's heavens—"in" the constellation of the crocodile.

Which were the good guys and which were the bad? Hall wondered. Certainly, their ideological differences weren't apparent at this distance. Would the differences be apparent to an objective observer such as the Sphinx from *any* distance?

Hall grinned wryly. Ahura was twining and untwining her fingers on her lap, and a barely perceptible quivering was going on in her lower lip. He moved a little closer to her, wanting to put his arm around her but not quite daring to. "Get on with your story," he said. "You left me hanging on a cliff seventy cubits high."

Her bewilderment would have been comical under less trying conditions. "Thou speakest in riddles,

Dan'el. In many ways thou art like She-who-builds-sepulchers. But I will tell thee the rest of the tale.

"When the chief of Naharaina saw that the young prince had indeed reached the window of his daughter, he gave to him his daughter to wife; he gave also to him a house, and serfs, and fields, also cattle and all manner of good things. And after the days of these things were passed, the youth said to his wife, 'I am doomed to three fates—a crocodile, a serpent, and a dog.' She said to him, 'Let one kill the dog which belongs to thee.' He replied to her, 'I am not going to kill my dog, which I have brought up from when it was small.' And she feared greatly for her husband, and would not let him go alone abroad.

"And one went with the youth toward the land of Egypt, to travel in that country, and with him also went his dog. Behold the crocodile of the river, he came out by the town in which the youth was. And in that town was a mighty man. And the mighty man would not suffer the crocodile to escape. And when the crocodile was bound, the mighty man went out and walked abroad. And when the sun rose the mighty man went back to the house; and he did so every day, during two months of days.

"Now when the days passed after this, the youth sat making a good day in his house. And when the evening came, he lay down on his bed, sleep seized upon his limbs; and his wife filled a bowl of milk, and placed it by his side. Behold the dog, it entereth into the house, and behind it came a serpent to bite the youth; behold his wife sitting by him, she lay not down. Thereupon the servants gave milk to the serpent, and he drank, and was drunk, and lay upside down. Then his wife made it to perish with the blows of her dagger. And they woke her husband, who was astonished; and she said unto him: 'Behold thy God has given one of thy dooms into thy hand; he will also give thee the others.' And he sacrificed to God, adoring him, and praising his spirits from day to day.

"And when the days were passed after these things, the youth went to walk in the fields of his domain. He went not alone, behold his dog was following him. And his dog ran aside after the wild game, and he followed the dog. He came to the river, and entered the river behind his dog. Then—"

ABRUPTLY Ahura paused as a beam of blinding light leaped from the eastern to the western Pleiades, glanced from a deflector screen and lanced through NRG 984-D's atmosphere, narrowly missing the mountains that formed the western boundary of the Sphinx's demesne. The Sphinx, silhouetted darkly against the eastern heavens, did not move.

Trembling, the girl raised her hands and pressed them tightly against her mouth. "It's all right," Hall said, "scream if you want to. No one ever had a better right to."

Another blinding beam—this one from the western Pleiades—speared the heavens, ricocheted from an enemy deflector, and arrowed off into deep space. The law of averages made it an even bet that the next one would strike NRG 984-D dead center, gouge a crater two thousand miles deep, and precipitate a tectonic revolution. It was also an even bet that the tectonic revolution would give birth to a series of others and that the accompanying seismic and volcanic activity would alter every fact of NRG 984-D's surface features and in the process destroy every living being on the planet.

"The object of the game," Hall went on, momentarily forgetting that his audience hailed from the twenty-ninth century B.C., "is for one fleet to penetrate the deflector screens of the other. This isn't as impossible as it sounds. Deflector screens utilize a rhythmic frequency, and the trick is to hit them on the offbeat. Vulnerable as they are, though, they provide considerable protection, and I'd give my eyeteeth to have one over us right now. Well no, I'll qualify that: I'd give my eyeteeth to have one over us right now if it weren't for the fact that they won't function except in a vacuum."

Ahura's hands were still pressed tightly against her mouth, and she was rocking gently back and forth. "I do not understand thee, Dan'el," she moaned. "I understand only that Sebek is greatly displeased and that Keb the Earth is in danger."

"You understand far more than that, Ahura. As a matter of fact, in your own way you know as much about what is happening as I do. You know that mankind is about to destroy himself because of his

dog—his selfishness. That's why you can't get the story of the doomed prince out of your mind. The doomed prince is mankind, Ahura, only he isn't quite doomed. There's still hope for him. There's still hope for you and me—and She-who-builds-sepulchers. Tell me the rest of it, Ahura."

She had stopped rocking back and forth, and now she returned her hands to her lap. "There is but little left to tell thee, Dan'el. After the prince entered the river behind his dog there came out the crocodile, and took him to the place where the mighty man was. And the crocodile said to the prince, 'I am thy doom, following after thee.'* (*Ahura's tale is an adaption of the Egyptian story, "The Doomed Prince".) And there endeth the tale."

"So actually," Hall said, "we don't know for certain whether the crocodile got him or not. He may very well have escaped it in the end."

"Yes, but there is still the dog, Dan'el."

"There will always be the dog. But maybe by recognizing it for what it really is we can curtail its activities." He looked at the sky, gasped. "Ahura, look! they're going away!"

She, too, was staring at the Pleiades. They were rapidly fading from sight, one set of them into the eastern reaches of the heavens, the other set into the western reaches. Abruptly, one set winked out as its hyperdrives went into effect. A moment later, the other followed suit. "Did—did we escape the crocodile, Dan'el?"

Hall hugged her. "We sure did and all of a sudden I'm as hungry as a horse. Does that offer you made a little while ago still stand?"

She slipped free from his arms, not haughtily, but hesitantly, as though she weren't quite sure whether she wanted to be free or not. "I will prepare thee a feast fit for a king," she said. "Come."

The Ambassadors

Well, said the Sphinx, it looks as though you two are going to live happily together ever after, after all, as they say in your planet's folklore. Where's Ahura now? I broke contact with you after you went into the Temple of Love.

She's tidying up the kitchen, Hall answered gazing up into the starlit Brobdingnagian face. Incidentally, I was right when I told her that she probably could not even boil water. Would you believe it?— I had to show her how!

But she learned readily enough, did she not? You'll find her equally as receptive when you begin teaching her full time.

Who said I was going to teach her at all? And while we're on the subject, just what am I supposed to teach her, and why?

Everything you can. As to why, it would be rather impractical for you not to, don't you think, in view of the fact that you and she are going to be representing my sisters and myself on Earth in the negotiating of a million-year peace treaty between Pornos, Earth, and Uvel? Meanwhile, the Uvellian scout whom my sister in the neighboring dhen captured will be similarly engaged on Uvel.

Hall was thunderstruck. So that's what you've got up your sleeve! But whatever gave you the idea that I'd make a good ambassador?

It was a gamble, Daniel Hall, but it paid off You haven't a great deal of diplomacy, but I can teach you diplomacy. The really important attributes, you already have. You have intelligence, and you are brave. Underneath your flippant exterior you are kind and gentle, but you can be firm wizen the occasion demands. Most important of all, you have motivation. Ever since you played a part in the destruction of the Deimos Dissenters you've hated war and everything it stands for. With someone like Ahura working at your side, there's no limit to what you can accomplish in the cause of peace, Daniel Hall. As man and wife, the two of you will—

"Wait a minute!" Hall interrupted. "You're carrying this thing too far!"

Come now, Daniel Hall, you're half in love with her already, and you know it. And you might as well know, too, that she's already half in love with you. I not only "heard" everything both of

you said, I also experienced everything both of you felt. My sister in the next demesne "tells" me that her scout and her princess hit it off well, too.

Her princess?

She brought a princess back from Uvel just as I brought one back from Earth. We're going to arrange a double wedding ceremony that will comply with the customs of the four different religions which will be represented. I myself have been chosen to do the officiating. This will in no way conflict with the religions of the two princesses, and I'm sure that both you and the Uvelian scout are sufficiently sophisticated in such matters not to raise any objections. I've already built you and Ahura a love nest in my largest pyramid—not altogether authentic as regards her background, but authentic enough to satisfy her—and modern enough to satisfy you, as you will see presently when Ahura's education permits her to take such "miracles" as electricity and hot and cold-running water in her stride.

HALL threw up his hands. *All right, we'll let all that pass for the moment. Right now, suppose you drop that deep and mysterious mien of yours and break down and tell me how you managed to put a stop to the greatest space battle ever contemplated and to put two of the mightiest space armadas ever assembled to rout?*

The Sphinx laughed, softly this time. *You already know part of the answer, Daniel Hall. You know that we're parthenogenetic. You know that we build pyramids—or what you think of as pyramids. And you know that some of your legends depict us with wings. How do you account for that, Daniel Hall? Why should we be depicted with wings when we don't have any and never did?*

The truth dawned on Hall then. "You lay eggs!" he gasped.

We do indeed. And we incubate them in inviolable capsules that lend the illusion of invisibility. These capsules are placed just beneath the apexes of the structures that you call "pyramids" but which we call "nests." Originally, we did this out of instinct alone; now, we do it out of knowledge as well. Owing to the length of the incubation period—some fifty-two hundred of your years—nests of this kind are ideal for the survival of our species. They provide protection, they provide warmth, they—

But no egg could possibly contain enough nutrients to nourish an embryo for fifty-two hundred years! Hall objected.

Of course it couldn't. My race obtains ninety-five percent of its nutrition from the sun, Daniel Hall, and your sun is an even better provider than ours is. I may seem to consist of flesh and blood, but I don't—at least not in the sense that you do.

And do you always build three nests of three different sizes?

Always. Our eggs are three in number and our offspring vary in size. Not very much, but enough to necessitate larger or smaller incubation areas. Now that the eggs which I incubated on the Gizeh plateau have hatched, I'm due to procreate again; consequently, I've built three new nests. When the time arrives, I'll remove the as-yet-unsealed apexes, place the eggs in the capsules, which are already in position, and seal the apexes over them.

I can anticipate your next question, Daniel Hall, so there's no need for you to ask it. Incubation time never varies, and can be computed to the second, and the main reason I and my sister in the neighboring dhen were chosen for the job was that our procreation times were compatible with the Terran and Uvelian time periods that had to be used. At the end of the incubation period an adult rather than a child emerges from the nest. Physically, she's only partially grown, but mentally, she's completely mature, having inherited the parent's knowledge and abilities, plus a sizeable quantity of the parent's judgment. As a result, she's perfectly capable of carrying out whatever commands the parent may have implanted in her embryo-mind at the beginning of incubation. In the case of my Gizeh offspring, the commands which I implanted were three in number: Take over the Terran capital of Kafr el Haran, establish immediate contact with the Terran Space Navy and order all of its units to return to base at once; then retain control of the Terran

government until otherwise advised. *The commands which my sister implanted in her offspring were basically the same, and her three offspring carried out the Uvel end of the operation at roughly the same time mine were carrying out the Terran end of it. Consequently, both governments are now under the dominion of Pornos, and moreover they will remain under the dominion of Pornos until such time as the million-year peace treaty is signed. Since my sister just notified me that her scout has already agreed to co-operate, the fate of the long-range aspect of our plan is now in your hands, Daniel Hall.*

Hall sighed. *Oh, I'll go along with you, I suppose—I'd be pretty much of a heel if I didn't. But before we get down to brass tacks how about relieving my mind on a certain little matter? Granted, I'm half in love with Ahura, and maybe she's half in love with me as you say, but there has to be more to it than that for marriage to work. Now that the crisis is past, how about taking a peek a little ways into the future and finding out whether Ahura and I are going to hit it off the way a married couple should?*

I'll try, Daniel Hall, said the Sphinx. She looked straight ahead, and Hall could tell from the serious expression on her face that she was concentrating with all her might. A few minutes passed. Then the Sphinx turned to him and winked.

THE END