

# Amazon Planet

## Mack Reynolds

1966-1967 (Analog)

1975 (Ace)

### I

There is something about a passenger freighter that is unchanging, down through the centuries. Be it a Phoenecian galley that sets bravely forth from Tyre with stops at Malta, Carthage, Tingis and Cadiz on the way to far Cornwall. Be it a motorship originating in Sydney and stopping off in Madras, Ceylon, Aden and Port Said on its way to Genoa. Or be it a spacecraft, burning off from Earth and orbiting in turn, Avalon, Kropotkin, Shangri-La and Amazonia as touching points en route to Phyrigia, man's furthest frontier in his reaching toward the center of his galaxy.

Unlike on a liner, the freighter passenger is an afterthought. The cargo is the thing, the occasional traveler a secondary matter and a method of realizing a bit more on the trip, but nothing special. His needs can be met when more pressing matters have been disposed of.

He comes hesitantly aboard, often carrying his own luggage. A harried steward, with a thousand duties before departure, hustles him to his drab quarters, mumbles something about the location of the mess, the hour of the first meal aboard, and is gone.

There is the sinking feel of dismay. Is this to be home for the following long weeks? Is it too late to change plans? Couldn't the budget be stretched to acquire more comfortable passage? Couldn't...? But no, the die has been cast.

It is with a certain trepidation that he first sets foot into the dining-salon to meet his

fellows and the officers of the craft that carries him.

Guy Thomas, thirty-odd of years, medium of height, average of weight, less than handsome of face and with a vulnerable quality in his brown eyes, hesitated at the entry of the SS *Schirra's* salon.

A lackluster steward, on the young side for a spaceman, Guy thought, was setting up. He shot the passenger a glance from the side of his eyes, grunted, and went on with his work.

Guy said, "I didn't understand just when it was that..." He let the sentence dribble away.

The steward grunted.

Guy said, "I suppose I'm in the way. Is there any place I can locate some reading tapes, or..." He let that sentence fade too.

"You're supposed to bring your own entertainment things," the steward said. "You think this is some molly passenger ship, huh?"

Guy looked at him. "Sorry," he said.

"Maybe some of the officers got some stuff you can borrow. They got lots of time on their hands. Nothing to do but sit in front of all them dials a few hours a day. You don't see me with time to sit around reading. I shoulda gone in for deck candidate school."

Guy said, "Is it too late?" The other was a weasel-like type, in a month of Tuesdays the traveler couldn't have pictured him as an officer, a leader of men.

The steward finished with the table and stood erect. He scowled at the newcomer, possibly wondering if there was a crack intended in that last question.

"I wouldn't want to be no molly officer," he sneered. Neither of them had noticed the newcomer who said now, from the door. "A what kind of officer, Happy?"

The steward's eyes darted, but relief came into them immediately. He said grudgingly, "Yes, sir. I was just telling this here passenger, maybe he could get some reading tapes from some of you officers."

"Happy," the other announced pleasantly, "you're not only the laziest cloddy aboard but a lying funkier in the bargain." The ship's officer, two gold stripes on his sleeve, grinned at Guy Thomas. "That reading tape thing applies only to deck officers. Engineers can't read."

He was cheerfully outgoing, about Guy's own age though some forty pounds his senior and already tending to a bit of German goiter around the waist, a heaviness about the jowls.

Guy said, "My name's Thomas. Guy Thomas. I'm one of the passengers."

The deck officer shook easily. "That makes you fifty percent of the list then. There's only one other." He hauled a heavy envelope from a pocket. "I might as well get this over with. Sit down and we'll twist Happy's arm until he brings us some coffee. I'm the second on the *Schirra* and one of the duties they shuffle off on the second is the paper work involved in passengers. No purser on a kettle the size of the *Schirra*"

He had plopped himself down at a table even as he spoke. "My name's Rex. Rex Ravelle. I'm an easy going slob. Even cloddies like Happy, here, haven't any respect for me. If all the officers were like old Rex, the ship'd go to pot, eh Happy? Holy Jumping Zen, how about that coffee, fella?"

Happy grunted sourness and left.

Rex Ravelle looked up from the papers he was drawing from the folder and looked after the little steward for a moment, shaking his head. "What is it about the eternal yoke?" he said.

Guy had taken a chair to one side of the ship's officer. He said, "Do you mean to tell me there's only two passengers aboard?"

"That's right," Ravelle said. "And I hate to be blunt, fella, but the other one's better looking than you are." He scanned one of the papers. "Let's see. Her name's Patricia O'Gara and she's going to...well, well...Amazonia, huh. Doesn't look the type. Well, let's see. What's your own destination? Have you taken care of whatever landing technicalities apply? Visas? Shots? What citizenship do you carry?"

Guy said, "I'm going to Amazonia, too. I'm from Earth. Citizen of United Planets. All papers in order."

But Rex Ravelle was staring at him. Amazonia! Are you driv-el-happy?" His eyes rapidly scanned the other's ticket. "Zen, you are!"

Guy said, "What's the matter?"

"The *matter*? No *man* ever sets down on Amazonia." He was goggling at the passenger as though dumbfounded.

Another officer, a one striper, entered the small salon. "How about some coffee?" he said. "Where's Happy?"

He couldn't have been more than in his early twenties, and had a freshness about his open face that hinted he needed to shave but once or twice a week.

Ravelle said, "Hey, Jerry, Citizen Thomas, here, guess where he thinks he's going? Amazonia."

Jerry looked from one of them to the other. "Amazonia? The old man wouldn't let him land there; He wouldn't have the heart."

Guy said, in growing perplexity. "What do you mean, I *think* I'm going? You've got my ticket. It's in order. You put in at Amazonia, don't you?"

"We orbit the planet," Ravelle told him earnestly. "We don't set down. If there's any cargo being dropped, they send up lighters for it. No, sir, we don't set down on Amazonia and neither does any other spaceship."

Happy came in with the coffee, grumbling still, but passed it around to the three of them.

Jerry took a seat next to Rex and across from the passenger. "Nobody lands on Amazonia." He dropped a pellet of sweetener in his beverage and stirred as though in agitation at the very idea.

There was an element of mild irritation in the voice of Guy Thomas. "Look," he said. "You just told me the other passenger was going there too."

"But that's a *girl*, or at least a woman," the second officer said, as though that explained everything.

Guy looked from one of them to the other. "What in the name of the Holy Ultimate are you talking about?"

They leaned forward, ignoring their coffee in their earnestness. Both began to speak, but the senior officer took the conversation, overriding the one striper.

"Listen, that planet's a matriarchy. Women run the place."

"Well, I know that, of course. What's it got to do with me? I'm a resident of Earth. A citizen of United Planets."

"Sure, fella, but the moment you set foot on Amazonia you come under the jurisdiction of old Hippolyte and her government, or Myrine and hers, and then, fella, you've had it."

He pecked at the table top with his forefinger for emphasis. "Under Articles One and Two of the United Planet Charter neither Earth, as the planet of your birth, nor even UP itself, can interfere with the internal affairs of Amazonia. And once you land of your own free will, you're under their jurisdiction."

Guy was completely flabbergasted now. "But what could they do? I'm going there on a strictly business deal."

"What could they *do*?" Terry interjected, as flabbergasted as Guy himself. "Suppose one of those brawny mopsies took a shine to you? You'd wind up in a harem and spend the rest of your life there."

"Harem?" Guy said blankly.

"Harem," Rex echoed. "You know what a harem is, don't you?"

"I thought I did. Under polygamy, it's a man's collection of wives. Well, I guess it included the children and his women relatives too."

Rex said sarcastically, "Well, under polyandry it's the same thing, only different."

"You mean..."

Jerry said, "Yes."

"Oh, don't be ridiculous."

There was a silence during which he stared at them.

Rex Ravelle said finally, "I wouldn't want to see even an engineer set down on Amazonia. Zen, I wouldn't wish it on Happy, here."

"All right, all right," Happy whined. "Very funny." He snorted and looked at Guy Thomas. "But the seconds right. Haven't you never heard of Amazonia? A man's got no rights there."

Rex said, "It was settled by a bunch of women crackpots two or three centuries ago."

"Feminists," Guy said. "I know about that, of course."

The second officer leered. "No men at all."

Happy said, "But they had to have *some* men."

Rex Ravelle said, "Artificial insemination. They took frozen sperm along. Of course, about half the kids were born male, but the old biddies were ready for them. By the time they grew to adulthood, they had reins around their necks. Education, customs, even religion, I guess, had them all prepared to be the weaker sex."

"Weaker sex?" Guy Thomas said – weakly. "Listen, how come more of this information isn't available in the literature I read up on back on Earth?"

The second officer spread his hands. "It's the most secretive world in United Planets. They don't give out much information. And they don't want any thing to do with the other worlds.

"Well...what else do they do?"

"Look, what's the most restrictive government you ever heard about? Back in history, or in existence now, or whenever?"

"Why, off hand, I don't know." The dismayed passenger ran his hand back through his hair.

"Well, whatever it was, it's worse on Amazonia, at least for men. You're not allowed to own property. Only women can. You have no vote. You have no rights before the law, except through your wife."

"Suppose you're not married?"

"You haven't got any rights at all, until you're married. You've got to be married, as soon as you're not a child any more. You've got to be under the wing of some female or other."

"This is getting ridiculous. I'm going there for business. I'll just be there for a short time. They want this business deal as much as my clients do. They're not interested in throwing me into some harem. I think you're feeding me a lot of jetsam."

Rex Ravelle came to his feet, finished the coffee, which by this time had grown cold, and shrugged. "Don't say I didn't warn you, fella. For your own good, I hope the skipper doesn't let you land." He had checked the passengers papers even as they had talked, now he handed them back to the other.

He was turning to go when a new voice snapped, "Just a moment, Ravelle!"

The three of the ships company and the now bewildered passenger turned.

She was standing in the entry, her eyes flashing. Since grammar school days, Guy Thomas had read on the fiction tapes of persons whose eyes were flashing. He had always wondered what flashing eyes looked like. Now he knew. Her eyes were flashing.

If it hadn't been for her odd, ultra-conservative dress, he would have snap-decided that she was as attractive a young curve as he had seen for many a day. Well, not as young as all that. She must be at least in her mid-twenties. It wasn't only her dress, either. She was innocent of cosmetic, even a smidgeon of lipstick, and her hair, unfashionably long, by Earth standards, was done up in a pile at the back of her neck. Attractive, he grudgingly admitted, but, well, all but prehistoric so far as style went. It was a good face, though, you had to admit that. Angry and aggressive now, and handsome rather than pretty – wide mouth, a well shaped nose to go with it, wide apart and sparking blue eyes.

The second officer, taken aback, blinked at her. "Ah, Miss O'Gara."

"And don't call me *Miss* I object to the term in both meanings of the word. The word mistress, from which the term Miss is derived, is the feminine of master, and I want to be no one's master any more than I want anyone to be mine. And so far as the other definition is concerned, I am no man's mistress and will never be, nor his wife either. I hope that's clear."

"Say that again?" Jerry muttered, only a hint of derision in the background.

She spun on him. "Sarcasm doesn't particularly become anyone who's been uttering the blithering jetsam you have, whatever-your-name-is."

Jerry came to exaggerated attention. "Gerald Muirhead, Third Deck Officer, S.S. *Schirra*, at your orders, ah, Citizeness – is it all right to call you Citizeness, ah, Citizeness O'Gara?"

She snorted and turned back to Rex and Guy.

She demanded of the second officer, "What in the name of Zen is your purpose in filling this poor cloddy..."

"Hey," Guy protested mildly.

"...full of your masculine prejudices against Amazonia? Hasn't there been enough

snide propaganda promulgated against the sole member planet of all United Planets with a rational government?"

"Zen!" Jerry said, "Promulgated, yet. I'd love to sit in on this, but I'm going on watch. Gentlemen, I leave you to Miss, uh, that is, Citizeness O'Gara's mercies."

He left, leaving behind Guy and Rex, and an apprehensive looking Happy, who had retired into the furthest background, to face the indignant feminine passenger.

Rex Ravelle said, in a weak attempt at placation, "Uh, sorry if I've offended you, Citizeness. I was only repeating to Citizen Thomas what is commonly known throughout the system."

Her eyes were still sparking, and then she put her hands on her hips in a stance of indignation so stereotyped that the most tyro of Tri-Di performers would never have dared it.

"Commonly known, eh?" she snapped. "What jetsam hasn't been blathered behind that aegis down through the centuries, eh? Jews controlled practically all the wealth. Negroes were less intelligent than whites because they have thicker skulls. Amerinds couldn't be allowed to drink because they couldn't hold their firewater. Scandinavians were slow-minded and Japanese were good at copying but weren't inventive. Englishmen had no sense of humor, the French were sex mad and the Americans would sell their mother to make a fast buck."

Guy looked from one of them to the other. The girl metamorphosed from handsome to beautiful when in the flush of argument. He held his own peace.

Rex Ravelle was not of the temperment to remain under attack without rising to the fray.

"Aw, now look," he protested, holding a hand up in attempt to stem her tirade. "I'm not as flat as all that. I've been around. I've met people who've been on Amazonia. I've met, oh, a dozen or more of these Amazons."

She simmered down a fraction. "Have you ever landed there yourself?"

"Well, no, but I've met port officials, customs officers, and also the pilots, crews and longshoremen who crew the lighters."

"But you're still spreading cheap rumors about male harems and such jetsam!"

Rex turned to Happy, still performing make-work in the background while he gaped in fascination at the war of words going on between officer and passenger. Oh, they'd love this down in the crew's mess later on. For once, Happy Harrison would hold the center of the stage.

"Happy," Rex called, "bring us some more coffee, eh?" Then, "Citizeness, let's sit down and go at this more reasonably. You're headed for Amazonia yourself, aren't you? Do you mind my asking why?"

She glared at him still, for a moment, then quickly took the nearest chair. Guy, who

had stood, upon her arrival, sat himself again as well.

Patricia O'Gara snapped, "I'm an anthropologist. Well, an ethnologist, really," as though that explained all. She looked at Guy Thomas. "These men have been joshing you with this fling. Amazonia is the most advanced planet in the confederation."

"By what standards?" Ravelle said sarcastically.

She turned her wrath on him again. "By any intelligent ones! The only true matriarchy in United Planets."

It occurred suddenly to Guy Thomas that the S.S. *Schirra* was spaceborne. So engrossed had he become in the debate that he had failed to notice the low throb that denoted engines at strain.

"Zen!" he said. "We're on our way. You know, it's my first time in space."

The second officer looked at him sourly. "And if you land on Amazonia, it might well be your last. You'll be lucky to get off again." He turned to Patricia O'Gara before she could say anything to that. "And if you disagree, I speak from experience. Never in the ten years I've been on this run have I ever known of a case of a man leaving the planet for elsewhere."

She scowled unhappily at him, but managed to retort. "Are you sure that isn't because the citizens of Amazonia don't want to leave, that they'd rather remain on their own world, which they find more desirable than any alternative?"

Ravelle leaned back in his chair as the steward served them with the fresh coffee he'd requested. "I didn't say I'd never seen a citizen of Amazonia leave the planet, I said I hadn't seen any men leave it. On several occasions we've picked up women headed back to Earth as embassy personnel, or even to some other planet on rare trade missions." He spoke the next sentence more slowly. "But I've never seen, or heard of, a man who was allowed to...escape."

She took several deep breaths, half opened her mouth as though to respond, but closed it again. But she hadn't given up the battle. Guy Thomas could see that. She was simply building up steam.

The *Schirra's* second officer bored in. "You still haven't mentioned why you're going to Amazonia, Citizeness."

"I've told you I was an ethnologist. All my life I've studied the origins of man, societies and cultures and particularly political and socioeconomic institutions from the most primitive, up to and including the most recent."

"What's that got to do with Amazonia?"

"Just this. When I decided to escape the planet of my birth..."

Ravelle looked down at the papers before him. "Victoria," he said.

"...I took plenty of time deciding what alternative world I would choose to make



my home. Amazonia stood head and shoulders above all others."

Guy Thomas frowned and spoke for practically the first time since she had entered. "Victoria," he said. "I've heard of that planet. One of the first hundred or so colonized."

She looked at him scornfully. "Victoria. Named after some silly queen back in the old days on Earth. A period when man's domination over woman had reached a particularly ridiculous height. Man was the brains, man was the head of the family, man was the breadwinner. Only the exceptional woman was thought to have enough sense to be worth educating at all, beyond simple reading and writing. No, her place was in the home, in the kitchen, in the nursery. She was supposedly a child that had to be taken care of by her husband, her lord."

"Victoria," Ravelle murmured. "Don't think I've been there."

"Lucky you," she snapped. "The colonists fled Earth because the institutions they favored were being thrown into the wastebasket. Women were beginning to recover some of the ground they had lost. This was simply unbearable to the Victorians. Their only answer was to migrate to some new world where they could continue their antiquated customs. Victoria! where any new ideas, where the slightest of changes, are anathema."

Guy said, "Well, you seem to have risen above it. I thought you said they discouraged women obtaining an education." The girl and her strong opinions fascinated him. On the surface, at least, he wouldn't have seemed to be one to hold overly hard to his own beliefs. The impression he gave was of one who would flow with the current, and the swifter it flowed, the more readily. Not for him to contradict, or insert his own mild opinions when the controversy grew hot.

She took him in, again, as though wondering if it was worthwhile answering. Then, "Even in the so-called Victorian period, back on Earth, with all its crushing of feminine initiative, some were strong enough to rise above its restrictions. Scientists such as Curie, novelists such as Sand, Austen and the Brontes, medical pioneers such as Nightingale, politicians such as Victoria herself, rebels such as Carrie Nation."

"You seem to be up on the period," Rex Ravelle said wryly.

"Why not I took the same stand myself. Against parents, relatives, friends..." she hesitated only briefly, "...against any men of my acquaintance who might ordinarily have been potential husbands." Her voice was bitter now. "In the eyes of all, I desexed myself by refusing to become a chattel in some man's kitchen."

Quiet Guy Thomas might be, without imagination he was not. Into his mind flashed the long years this less than hefty girl must have put in bucking the tides of her native culture. The rejection of the femininities, the aggressive effort to hold her own in a world made for men.

Rex Ravelle said, "So now you think you're fleeing to Utopia. You're swinging the pendulum to the other extreme, eh? Amazonia where no men dominate and men are the weaker sex. Well, at least it's admittedly different. On one world or the other, in United

Planets, they're trying every political theory, every socioeconomic system, even every religion ever dreamed up by man." He shrugged as he shuffled the papers before him, as though indicating that she was free to choose her own poison, if she would.

But Pat O'Gara's voice was snappish again. "You sound as though the Amazonian ideal is a new one, as though a matriarchy is a brand new idea dreamed up by some offbeat yokes."

Her answer had been to Rex Ravelle, but Guy said mildly, "I understand that there's various mention in early myths of the Amazons, but, well, it's not exactly historical, is it? It was all back before Homer's day, along with centaurs and the Golden Fleece, the Trojan War, and all."

He winced, in anticipation, as she drew in her breath to blast.

But it was Rex Ravelle who spoke next. He had been fussing over the ship's papers pertaining to Guy Thomas and Patricia O'Gara, the sole passengers. Guy's matter had already been finished with, her papers were in the second officer's hands.

He rapped in interruption, "Miss O'Gara! You have no exit visa from your home planet, Victoria!"

She flushed, but not exactly in anger, this time. She said, "I told you I was a refugee from the world on which I was born."

"But that's not the worst. Do you realize that you have no visa to land on Amazonia?"

## II

Guy Thomas seemed to adapt easily to the routine of life aboard a spaceborne passenger freighter – the Guy Thomases of life drift easily along the buoy marked way, not for them to venture this way or that into unpathed waters.

Had any of the ship's officers or crew been called upon to make a snap judgement of Guy Thomas, to be expressed in one word, surely it would have been *average*. For Guy was all but unbelievably average; in height, in weight, in countenance, in color of hair and eyes, in clothing. It was necessary to meet Guy Thomas a half dozen times before one could remember the man.

Following Earth Basic Time, he arose as late as possible in the morning still able to have his breakfast. He spent the next few hours either reading borrowed fiction tapes of the most bland variety, or taking in the Tri-Di shows they had brought along. After lunch he often idled around the ship, making a nuisance of himself, staring at officers and crew at their duties, managing from time to time to get into compartments off bounds to passengers, so that he had to be ordered away wearily – albeit respectfully, since he was a paying passenger – by engineer or signalman, ship's cook or navigator.

Largely, he seemed impressed by these men of space. For all but a few, such as Happy Harrison, it was far more than a job. It was a sharing in the big dream that man was currently embarked upon. The big dream of achieving his destiny, his explosion into the stars, his releasing of the bounds that had for so long tied him to Mother Earth. Out here were the stars, and the officers and crew of the Spaceship *Schirra* were participating in their conquest.

Colorless, perhaps innocuous would be better, though he might be, he *was* company, and on more than one occasion he sat in the copilot's acceleration chair with the deck officer who was standing easy watch. Easy, since there is so very little to do when a vessel is in underspace. Guy Thomas proved a good listener and a means to break the boredom of a watch when no watch is truly needed in this era of automation.

He sat and listened to it all, dropping occasionally only the affirmations, questions or answers, that were needed to keep the conversation flowing, indicating that his attention was focused on the other's biographical discourse, romances, opinion of United Planet's affairs, bigoted beliefs, off-color jokes, wistful descriptions of family at home, or spaceman's, dreams.

They told him of far planets with offbeat cultures that would make even Amazonia pale by comparison. They commented upon the fact that nowhere in all his explorations had man found other intelligent life. They told of shipwrecks and of rescues, and of shipwrecks without rescue. And always he listened, as though fascinated by every word.

He didn't exactly avoid the firey Pat O'Gara, but in the presence of that aggressive feminist, usually let others bounce the ball of argumentation. Seldom did he get in a word, on either side of the almost continual controversy that Citizeness O'Gara managed to keep astir. But seldom, obviously, did he wish to add his own small supply of fuel to the source of heat.

Once or twice he was unable to avoid participation at the salon table, or afterwards during the evening's leisure hours, when Pat and Rex Ravelle, her usual opponent, had it out. He suspected, as would have anyone, that the second officer was debating more out of amusement than sincere conviction; only his opponent was so blinded by her own earnest belief as not to realize her leg was being pulled.

Over coffee, following dinner one evening, Rex had typically slipped her the needle.

"All right, suppose I concede women are just as competent to handle government, although I'll be a funkier if I can think of any historic —"

She let him get no further than that. "I assume you've never heard of Elizabeth the First, of Cleopatra, of Zenobia, of Catherine the Great!"

"Touché," Guy murmured.

Rex grinned. "Okay, I'll take that. There've been exceptions. But that's not the point. Suppose we'd admit women are potentially as competent to handle state affairs as men. But why should we think they can handle them any better? There's no proof, and no

reason to believe it would develop that way."

Pat O'Gara said testily, her face pinking as usual in verbal combat, "It's unfortunate, Ravelle, that you're so uninformed on the subject. Otherwise, we'd be able to discuss the matter on a higher level."

The ship's officer continued to smile mockingly, "Aw, you can't get by with that, you know."

"The fact is," she said contemptuously, "that such government as existed during the overwhelmingly greater period of man's existence was predominantly in the hands of the women. It has only been in comparative recent history that man usurped the female position of control of society."

"Hey, wait a minute," Jerry Muirhead, the third deck officer protested. "I got lost somewhere. What's all this about women running the shooting match for most of history?"

"What do they teach you in the Space Academy when it comes to primitive society and anthropology?" she scoffed.

Guy Thomas said apologetically, "As a matter of fact, Jerry, it seems to me that I have read that earliest man did trace his descent through the matrilineal line. But..."

"What is that supposed to mean?" Rex said. He grinned around at the other deck and engine officers seated in the salon cum messhall. "I think we've got a traitor among us, men."

Guy said quietly, "It means that the children of a relationship between a man and woman took the woman's name."

Pat snorted her superiority again. "Which means, in turn, that women dominated the family. That in case of a 'divorce' the children remained in her clan, not that of the father's. That property, such as there was in those days, was inherited by her relatives, remaining in her clan and that of her children on death or split-up of a relationship."

Jerry twisted his youthful face. "Well, I don't know about that, but whether or not kids were named after their mothers or fathers, it was the men who really ran the tribe."

"If you mean they did the hunting and the fighting, largely you may be right," Pat said overbearingly. "Although even in those fields the women had a great deal more to say about nomination of chiefs and the deposing of them. You should read Bachofen's *Das Mutterrecht*."

"Das what?" Rex scowled.

"It's been translated into Earth Basic," Pat said. "*The Motherright*. It's possibly the first serious work on gyneocracy."

They looked at her.

She said, smugly, "Or would you rather, gynarchy? They mean approximately the

same thing. Rule by women. Why even as recently in time as the Iroquois Confederation, women were the great power among the clans and didn't hesitate when occasion required to 'knock off the horns' as it was technically called, from the head of a chief and send him back to the ranks of the warriors. The original nomination of the chiefs also rested with them."

Rex Ravelle said, "It's not quite the picture of braves and squaws that I've been familiar with, Pat, my dear."

Patricia said firmly, "Then you're the victim of a false picture that male propagandists and pseudo-historians have painted. There was, admittedly, division of labor among the primitives and ancients. Men made superior hunters and warriors. The women did the just as important agricultural work, raised the children and maintained the long houses or the adobe community houses. But they also dominated in such government of the tribe as was necessary."

Rex said impatiently, "All right, suppose we take that. But what it amounts to is you're admitting that back when women ran tribal affairs the race was nothing but a bunch of savages. It wasn't until man took over that we started getting anywhere."

"Hear, hear," the chief engineer called from another table. "Well put, for a deck man."

"It's according to what you mean by getting anywhere," Pat said, with unwonted mildness. "I wouldn't deny that when descent and government changed, institutions changed." She pursed her generous mouth. "For instance, war became one of the new institutions."

Guy Thomas cleared his throat at that one. "I was of the opinion that war we have always had with us."

She turned on him. "Then you are mistaken. War, as we still know it on some of the more backward member planets of UP, is a comparatively modern development and didn't evolve until man's domination of government."

Captain Dave Buchwald seldom entered into the discussion. He was a taciturn man, heavy, straight of eye, and long used to command. So used, perhaps, that he seldom found need to issue orders. He expected his officers and men to handle the workings of the *Schirra* with such competence that his presence and decisions were seldom needed for the smooth operation of the ship.

But he said now, voice low and courteous, "Without disrespect of your scholarly attainments, Citizeness, I would like to ask how far back in man's history we must go to find this rule of the gentler sex. I confess, I too have been of the opinion that we have always had conflict with us."

"Conflict, yes," Pat said quickly. "But war, in the modern sense, no. I understand, for instance, that in the past the bull gorilla would defend his little patch of ground which he and his family needed for sustenance against the encroachments of other gorillas or other animals in general. In such defense he might engage in combat, but I would hardly call this war. Any more than I would call two stag deer fighting for a doe's affections,

warfare."

Rex chortled, "Okay, define your terms as that old time comedian was always saying in the Tri-Di comedy we watched after lunch today."

Pat O'Gara reserved her sharpest tone for the second officer. "Raids, semi-organized skirmishes between tribes disputing over hunting grounds or whatever, personal feuds, and such, have certainly existed, even under matriarchal society, but war in the modern sense, no."

"Some examples, Citizeness?" the Captain rumbled.

"Well, take the impact of the Spanish upon the Mexicans. To the very end, the Aztecs never quite figured out what it was the Conquistadors *wanted*. They had no concept of war as their European contemporaries knew it, and they were the most militaristically inclined of the New World tribes. When they fought, they dashed valiantly forth as individuals and it was considered much more valorous to capture an enemy than to kill one. Their conflicts were conducted for the purpose of securing victims for sacrifices to their gods, or for simple loot. So far as war was concerned, they never got to the point of waging it for the purpose of acquiring some other tribe's territory and enslaving its people. It just never occurred to them. Confused Spanish historians to the contrary, there was never any such thing as an Aztec empire, they never even completely dominated the valley of Mexico, an area about the size of the old state of Rhode Island."

She went on wryly, "In a way, it was pathetic, this conflict between the civilized white men and the Amerinds. Why, as late as the battle of the Little Big Horn, some of the Sioux of Crazy Horse and Gall rode into the fire of repeating rifles armed solely with *coup* sticks, since it was a far greater honor in the tribes to count *coup* on a man by touching him without harming him, than it was to kill. The so-called wars the Indians waged from King Philip to Geronimo were actually no more than raids. They had no concept of war as the white man saw it."

Guy Thomas said uncomfortably, "This isn't my field, but do you count the Trojan War as one of these, uh, raids, or was it a full scale military expedition? And, where does it fit in on your time scale? Had the men taken over as yet?"

"That was a period of transition," she said. "Some peoples were still matrilineal, some patrilineal. But read your Homer well, and you'll see that the Trojan War was a sad example of warfare by any modern standard. The heroes, the champions, would spend most of their time standing around yelling boasts and insults at each other. Occasionally a couple would dash out before their respective hosts and fight man to man, as often throwing huge stones at each other as using weapons. And when one or the other was killed or injured, then the big wrestling match was brought on by each side trying to seize the corpse for its armor. Troy was never really under siege. It was just suffering a ten year series of raids against itself and its neighboring towns and allied cities. Siege weapons such as catapults and battering rams were as unknown as fighting in ranks. Later the Mycenaean Greeks were to learn, when the Doric tribes came in from the north with their patriarchal society and its institutions."

The captain grunted non-committally.

But Pat O'Gara was in full voice. She concentrated on Guy Thomas. "So far as this war-we-have-always-had-with-us bit is concerned, that's one of the inevitable stances of the misinformed – they think that institutions with which they are familiar are unchangeable, have always been and will always be. Actually, nothing is so prone to change as institutions, socioeconomic, cultural, religious, or whatever.

Jerry entered into the fray.

"I don't know about that. Some have been under observation for a long time. Take the Judeo-Christian religion. It can be traced back without unreasonable change for thousands of years."

She overrode him. "Oh, can it? Or has it been changed over and over again down through the centuries to suit the current situation? Take the Laws of Moses, supposedly the direct word of Jehova to humanity. Who among your Jews or Christians have followed them for centuries past? Who could? Time after time, the religious books of the great religions are edited, to update them. Sometimes a fragment remains which must puzzle the less than scholarly. For instance, let me remember, yes, *1 Kings XV.12* and *2 Kings XXI 11.7* of the Old Testament. Over the years it must have proved somewhat puzzling for the faithful to read of the expulsion of the sodomistic priests from the Temple in Jerusalem. *What* sodomistic priests? they must have wondered, not knowing that the worship of the pagan goddess Cybele was widespread among the supposedly monotheistic Hebrews up until just before the Exile. Cybele's worship was one of the most gruesome of the ancient world. Her male devotees tried to achieve ecstatic union with her by emasculating themselves and dressing like women. All this, of course, has been edited out of the holy book now perused by the followers of this faith."

Guy Thomas was looking at her in some surprise. She was the only woman aboard, but that restrained her not at all when it came to argumentation dealing with her beliefs.

She pressed after Jerry. "Unchanging? Jesus, as a Jew, celebrated the Sabbath on Saturday, as did Mary, Joseph and all the disciples and early saints. His followers don't; they celebrate Sunday, the Day of the Sun, of the pagans. Why? Or take Jesus' supposed birthday. Early Christians considered January 6th the date of the Nativity, but about the beginning of the 4th Century, December 25th was adopted. By coincidence it was also the winter solstice which people were used to observing, and the birthday of the rival god Mithra, who at the time was racing neck and neck with the Christians to secure dominance of the Roman Empire."

The fact was, Pat O'Gara seldom lost an argument, if only because she was willing to stick it out, hours on end, if need be, until her opponent wearied of the debate, or had to stand his watch.

Evidently, she wasn't overly worried about her lack of visas. And, ordinarily, she would have been right. The visa was a permission to land, seldom required on most of the member worlds of the United Planets. And even less often was an exit visa needed for a citizen of one world to leave that planet for another. Most usually, only the more backward, the more reactionary of governments required the bureaucratic red tape

involved in the issuing of visas, or even the possession of a UP passport. Only a minority of worlds were afraid that their institutions would be subverted, their sometimes extreme religious beliefs held up to scorn or their sociopolitical system threatened, if outsiders were allowed to come among them.

But Amazonia? Pat O'Gara simply couldn't believe that the world of her dreams could possibly be serious about the requirement for a landing visa for visitors from any other UP planet.

The captain, when the matter had been brought before him by Rex Ravelle, had shrugged and had had a few words to say to his second officer on his not having checked the passengers' passports before burn off of the *Schirra*. He was not going to upset his schedule to return Citizeness O'Gara to Earth, but if the Amazonian immigration authorities prevented her landing, he was going to have no alternative but to continue with her until they reached far Phrygia and then returned to Earth. If such was necessary, Citizeness O'Gara was going to be held responsible for the full fare.

She tossed her head at that. "I have no funds, Captain Buchwald. I told you I was a refugee from my home planet. I used my last credit to exchange for my ticket to Amazonia."

He looked at her in bafflement. Captain Buchwald was not used to being baffled, his life was so organized as to avoid such upsets.

"But what did you plan to do, if they refused to allow you to land, Citizeness O'Gara?" he asked in bewilderment.

"I planned to argue with them," she said defiantly.

Rex Ravelle chortled in the background.

They arrived off Amazonia during the sleeping hours and went into orbit around the destination of the passengers while those two were asleep, not having been informed by the ship's officers that their goal was so near. It was not deliberate. Each had assumed that someone else had notified the travelers.

They awoke, then, to find the ship's personnel hurrying through an abbreviated breakfast so as to be ready to receive port officials.

Guy had come into the salon first, looking over his shoulder at Jerry Muirhead who had brushed hurriedly past him, a piece of toast still in hand.

"What's the emergency?" Guy said to the steward.

Happy Harrison shifted his little eyes about. For the present the lounge was empty. He sneered, "These deck officers – nothing to do with themselves, week on end – when something comes up they gotta charge around showing how-important-like, they are. I shoulda gone in for deck, instead of this nardy steward department."

"What's up?" Guy repeated.



"Them big mopsies are coming alongside. What'd'ya think? Customs and immigration and all that curd."

Rex Ravelle came bearing in, grabbed up a cup of coffee, took a deep swallow, popped his eyes as though he was about to spit it all out again. He got the coffee down and glared at the steward.

"Harrison, damn your cloddy soul. As long as we're in space the coffee is too cold to drink. But come up with a hurry and it's so boiling hot you'd crisp yourself drinking it."

"Always complaints on this kettle," Happy whined. "I don't know why I'ze ever so flat as to sign up on the *Schirra*"

Guy said to Rex Ravelle, "When are they coming aboard? These are the Amazonian authorities, eh?"

"Right as rain, fella," Rex told him, blowing on his coffee. He cocked his head to one side as though he had heard a sound that hadn't come through to the other. "That's contact. They'll be here in a couple of minutes. Happy, Holy Jumping Zen, get a move on. Get some refreshments on the table. Some *guzzle*, some sandwich things."

"Guzzle," the steward said indignantly. "You know there ain't supposed to be no alcohol in space, Second."

"Knock it, we're not legally in space. We're in planet orbit. These mopsies are two-fisted bottle babies. Get some guzzle on the table. You got to butter these curves up. It's not like most planets. Amazonians don't *want* you to be coming around. Doing business here'd like to drive you drivel-happy."

Happy, grumbling, got about it.

A few minutes later the second officer set down his coffee and faced the entry.

"Ah, welcome aboard, Major."

Guy Thomas did a double take.

Through the entry strode a figure straight out of the historical fiction Tri-Di shows. It took a fraction of a second for him to realize that it was a woman.

Not that...well, not that it didn't look like a woman. It was a woman, all right. It was just that...

She was probably about five foot ten. It was the high boots, which had an effect of looking like greaves, that gave her the added inch or two of height, and then the helmet, which wasn't really gold, on quick second scrutiny, also exaggerated her size. Nor was she as brawny as first impression gave out. That was attained by the cuirass she wore, and partly by the heavy military cloak that hung from her shoulders almost to her ankles. Strictly out of a Tri-Di historical, Guy Thomas decided all over again, and so were the others who pressed behind her, somewhat less ostentatiously dressed, but in

the same tradition.

"Morning," she snapped to Rex Ravelle. Her eyes went around the small salon, touched on Happy Harrison, who had shrunk back into his pantry corner, touched on Guy Thomas, and went on.

There were four of them in all. The major, as Rex had ranked her, alone was weaponless. Her three assistants bore quick draw holsters on one hip, a decorative short sword, or possibly heavy dagger would be the better term, on the other. Their helmets were a pseudo-silver, rather than gold. They looked remarkably efficient. All, including the major, wore their hair short in what would have been called page-boy bobs in an earlier age, and all wore a type of heavy shorts, reminiscent of the pedal-pushers of the past.

Rex said hospitably, "The skipper suggested you might like a bit of refreshment before coming up to his office for business."

One of the younger women caught up a bottle of pseudo-whiskey from the table where Harrison had laid it out along with sandwich meats, cheese and other cold table spread.

"Artimis!" she chuckled. "Earthsides guzzle!" She stuck the bottle to her mouth and gurgled.

Happy Harrison's face expressed pain.

The major gruffed, half humorously, "Easy, Lysippe, you wouldn't want to get drenched on this nice men's ship!"

The other two Amazons crowded up to get at the food and drink. "The Goddess forbid!" one roared, rather than spoke. "Lysippe's a mean drunk if there ever was one." However, she too took up a full bottle, rather than bothering with the time-consuming amenity of a glass.

Guy Thomas was sitting a bit beyond at a smaller table.

One of the girls, busy building a king-size sandwich, looked over at him and winked. "Hi, Cutey," she said. "That's a pretty little suit you're wearing."

Guy Thomas blinked.

Rex said, "Dig in, ladies."

"Ladies!" the one called Lysippe guffawed. "That's a good one. Hey, Minythyia, did ya hear that?" She took another hefty swig from her bottle.

The major was working a cork from a champagne bottle. She said to Rex, who was standing back a few feet, watching them, a half twist on his mouth, "What's this about a passenger?"

He nodded. "Yes, I have the papers here." He half lifted a hand which held his heavy envelope. "In fact, there's two. This is one of them. From Earth. Citizen Guy Thomas." He

motioned toward Guy with the envelope.

"*Guy* Thomas!" the major blurted. "*Guy* Thomas! We've issued no entry visa for a Guy Thomas."

Guy came to his feet. "But...but there must be some mistake."

"Minythyia! Hand me that damned directive! Minythyia, the slightest in build and evidently the youngest of the four, dropped her imbibbing and enthusiastic eating long enough to deliver a paper from the heavy leather wallet she had slung over one shoulder.

The major ripped it from her hand and glared at it. "We have records to show only one passenger, and the entry visa was issued to *Gay* Thomas, not Guy Thomas."

### III

The Earthling was uncomprehending. He stared at the domineering port official. "But...it's obviously some minor mistake in transmission. I...I secured my visa from the Amazonian Embassy in Greater Washington. They were most cooperative and..." He let the sentence dribble away.

The Amazon major threw the paper to the table top and slapped it with the back of her hand.

"It says *Gay* Thomas! What in the name of the Goddess did you say your name was?"

"Guy. G-u-y. Don't you see? A mistake. Only one letter wrong." He seemed bewildered.

"One letter wrong! You blithering flat! You're a man!"

He looked at her. There didn't seem to be any answer to that.

"Cute, too," the assistant they called Minythyia said. Of the four port officials, she alone had gone to the nicety of pouring her drink into a glass.

"Quiet!" the major rasped.

Unfazed, Minythyia said easily, "All I meant was, if he lands, I saw him first." She winked at Guy. He stared at her in dismay. She wasn't quite so awesome as the others, not so large, but she managed to project the same swagger.

The major spun back to Rex Ravelle. "What's this curd about another passenger?"

Pat O'Gara came through the entry at that exact moment. For once, the fiery feminist was spellbound. She took in the four Amazonians, her eyes slowly going rounder.

Rex Ravelle chortled. "Major, may I introduce Citizeness Patricia O'Gara, refugee

from the planet Victoria."

"Refugee!" The one named Lysippe took her bottle away from her mouth long enough to say, "Why you poor kid."

"Shut up!" the major roared.

Rex Ravelle looked at her strangely, as though there seemed more of a hassle here than he had expected. He said, placatingly, "Don't let it worry you, Major. The skipper has already stated he would take Citizeness O'Gara on with us, and finally back to Earth, if you forbade her setting down here. It's no problem." He added, absently, "Even though she hasn't any exchange – Earth type, Victorian type, or Amazonian, whatever that is."

The Amazonian officer glared at him but for the moment seemed speechless.

Pat said weakly, "I...I thought..." Then she took a cue from the Guy Thomas conversation book. She let the sentence fade away.

The eyes of the four Amazonians were on the girl. She seemed to shrink a few inches in stature.

Minythyia said gruffly, "What're you a refugee from?"

Rex Ravelle laughed. "A planet that's as strongly male dominated as Amazonia is female, evidently."

Lysippe had put her bottle down on the table. She said, lowly, "I think I've heard of this Victoria. They've got the sexes all mixed up even worse than usual. The men are *really* on top. It must be gruesome."

The major said, her voice for once without dominating inflection, "What'd they do to you, kid?" Then her eyes came up and suddenly swept Ravelle, Guy and even Happy Harrison contemptuously. "No, don't try to tell us now."

She turned to Pat again and looked at her for a long moment. She said finally, sharply, "You're not a deviate, are you? We don't go for that sort of abnormality on Amazonia."

"Deviate?" Pat said blankly. Rex Ravelle began to chuckle softly. The major glared at him, then turned her eyes back to Pat. "How come you're in drag?"

"Drag?"

Guy Thomas cleared his throat, apologetically. "Uh, Major, there's nothing out of line in Citizeness O'Gara's clothing. I understand it's the usual garb on Victoria. I've seen similar dresses on historic tapes of the Earth Victorian period."

The four uniformed women looked unbelievably at Pat O'Gara for awhile until she flushed, and they turned their eyes away quickly.

The major snapped at Rex, "What are you laughing at you overfed yoke? Look at the

clothes they put on this poor kid. It's enough to give her an inferiority complex."

But Rex Ravelle wasn't that easily squelched. "Aw, come on, Major. You've probably never been over-space, but you should realize that what's the top of style in clothes on one planet can be a laughingstock on another. How do you think your own outfits would react on people on, say, on New Delos, or Earth, for that matter, although they're used to just about anything on Earth."

The major's voice was dangerously gentle. "And what's wrong with our uniforms?"

Rex backpedalled only slightly. "Well, for one thing, there's a lot of anachronism. For instance, those little swords. They're obviously just for pretty. What in the world good would an overgrown cheeseknife do in combat? You'd..."

The major's manner was still deceptively gentle. She took one step to the table, laden with its cold buffet and took up an uncut red cheese, about the size of a small grapefruit. She looked in Ravelle's eyes as she hefted it once or twice.

She snapped suddenly, "Clete!" and tossed it into the air.

In a blur of motion, one of her three aides flicked her supposed for-pretty knife from its scabbard and without swinging back, let fly. There was a *whoosh* as the weapon penetrated the rind of the cheese, the whole blade passing through until halted by the guard. Cheese and knife clattered to the metal decking.

The warrior called Clete reclaimed her weapon, grumbling as she inspected the nick that had been acquired. She tossed the cheese to the *Schirra's* second officer for his inspection. It was hardly necessary, it was obvious that the hit had been a bull's eye.

The major hadn't bothered to watch developments after she had tossed the target. She had returned to Pat, thoughtfully. She said, "I'll check back with my superiors, kid. Don't worry about it. We're not as tough as we're supposed to be on this planet."

"Oh, I know it," Pat gushed suddenly. "It's been man's rule that's caused all the hurt, down through the centuries."

The major looked at her thoughtfully some more and grunted.

Lysippe chuckled.

The major turned back to Guy Thomas. "Now, you're another thing. You probably think you're pretty stute, getting an entry visa under false pretenses. Letting them think you were a woman."

"But it wasn't that at all."

"What do you want to land on Amazonia for?" the girl Clete said in all honesty. "Are you driv-el-happy?"

"Shut up, Clete," the major said. But she looked at Guy. "Well?"

Guy held his hands up, in the ages-old gesture of weary submission. "I'm from the

Department of Interplanetary Trade of United Planets. Our job is to expedite trade between the member planets."

"Why?"

Guy said patiently, "The whole purpose of UP is to keep peace between the member planets. To keep peace and encourage progress. We sponsor trade as one way of achieving those goals. Very well, some time ago the member planet Avalon, through her UP embassy on Earth, revealed her interest in acquiring rather large quantities of titanium. For a time, Statistics was stymied, the metal is unusually scarce, or, at least, difficult to extract from most of the ores that bear it. Then through one of your own embassy officials, I don't know which, it was dropped at a reception that Amazonia was long on titanium but short on Niobium. Perhaps you call it columbium on your planet."

The major was scowling. "You mean that Avalon has a surplus of columbium?"

"Not Avalon herself, but her sister planet of Catalina. They'll work out a deal between them. They can supply your industries with an almost unlimited quantity of either niobite ore or ingots of columbium."

"I don't know anything about titanium or columbium."

Guy said reasonably, "No one would expect you to. I suggest you allow me to land, in spite of the minor error on my visa, and consult with your engineers. Your earthside embassy issued me a visa. You don't think they're a bunch of flats, do you?"

The major made a quick decision. "Minythyia, get back to the boat and report all this to headquarters. Get instructions."

Minythyia left. The major turned back to Rex Ravelle. She gestured with a thumb at Guy. "Get all this cloddy's gear out and let's take a look at it."

"The Captain is waiting up—"

"I'll go talk to the Captain. Clete and Lysippe can check his things. I don't like this. Something smells like curd about it."

Rex said, "Happy, take the major to the skipper's quarters. On the way, tell a couple of the boys to bring all Citizen Thomas' things to the salon here."

"Practically all of it's in my cabin," Guy said unhappily. "I've got only one footlocker in the luggage hold."

"All of it," the major rasped. "No matter what instructions I get from the port, nothing leaves this ship we haven't checked. And I mean *checked*." She glared at her two underlings, who had meanwhile returned to the food and drinks. Earthside food, Guy had decided, must be a treat for them. They ate like troopers. Well, he supposed they were troopers, in a way.

The major began to follow Happy Harrison. She said over her shoulder to Pat, "Go on back to your quarters. We'll let you know."

The check of Guy Thomas' possessions was as thorough as it could possibly have been. Indeed it was carried to the point of the ludicrous. Aside from going over every article of clothing, through every book and pamphlet, toilet articles, personal items of jewelry and such, Lysippe and Clete seemed to have several types of detectors unknown to either Guy or Rex Ravelle. When a bag or trunk was empty, they slowly went over it with their gadgets, seeking out, the two men supposed, secret compartments, hidden devices, or whatever.

While the two Amazonians searched, Rex looked at Guy questioningly. "About this stage of the game, I'd call it quits," he said. "What're you so keen to go to Amazonia for? After they'd given me this amount of gruff, I'd stick right on this old kettle and return to Earth."

Guy closed his eyes in anguish, as Clete shuffled through his once neatly packed shirts.

"I can't go back," he said plaintively. "I've got to pull this assignment off. It's the first time I've been able to swing an interplanetary job. You think you spacemen are the only ones with the dream? The rest of us, back on Earth, are just as keen as you are to participate in the big explosion out to the stars. Nine men out of ten would give their right arms for an interspace job."

"Yeah, I know," Rex nodded, his voice gruff. Although he was talking to Guy, he was eyeing the Amazon Lysippe with appreciation. These girls improved in appearance considerably as you grew used to them. This Lysippe, for example, had a figure beneath her uniform that any mopsie back on Earth would have been proud to display in one of those new bottomless bathing suits, out on the beach.

Guy was saying, "This is my chance. If I pull this off, I'll get other over-space assignments. I've just got to make good."

Clete looked up from her search and growled to Guy, "What's this?"

Guy said, "My tool kit."

"Jetsam! You think I'm a flat?"

"What's the matter?" Guy said plaintively. He and Rex approached.

The girl warrior had opened the kit. She gestured. "That's a shooter. What does a mining engineer, or whatever you're supposed to be, need with a shooter?"

"What's a shooter?" Guy complained. "That?" He pulled it from the case. "Just because it's got a pistol grip? That's a combination drill and cutter."

He flicked a stud and took an edge off the corner of one of the messhall tables. The invisible beam cut through the metal like cheese.

"Hey!" Rex protested. "Next you'll be drilling a hole through the hull."

"All right, all right," Clete growled. "Put it back. What's this?"

Guy said plaintively, "Would you know if I told you? Are you up on the tools we use in assaying and..."

"Don't be so stute," she snapped at him. "These look like explosive charges."

He groaned. "I keep telling you. I'm here to check the possibilities of exchanging ores or ingots of titanium for columbium. I have to assay. How do you extract ores on this planet, with eyebrow tweezers?"

She looked at him coldly.

He went on. "These are mini-chargers, for sample blasting, yes. I doubt if I'll have need of them. Confiscate them if you want. How about my pocket knife? You want that too?"

"You looking for trouble, Sweetie?" Her eyes were level on his.

"Oh, leave him alone," Lysippe grumbled. "The poor boy's got to have tools, doesn't he? Imagine using a man for a mining engineer." She looked at Guy in honest inquiry. "Doesn't it upset you to get your nice soft hands all dirty?"

Rex chuckled.

"No," Guy said. "Besides, I'm not a mining engineer. I'm an expediter. I...oh, Zen. Forget about it. I'll explain when I meet your people down on Amazonia."

Lysippe said interestedly, "You really figure on landing, do you?"

"Of course."

Clete chuckled, as she continued the minute search of his effects. "You better look out for Minythia," she grinned.

"What's Minythia?" Guy said.

"Not what, who," the girl who had demonstrated her knife throwing prowess laughed. "Our buddy who went back to the pilot boat to report and ask for instructions on you and that Pat O'Gara kid. She hasn't any husband."

Lysippe took Guy in again. "I might take you on myself, Honeybun."

"You've got a couple of men," Clete said.

"Ummm. But I kind of like these effeminate types."

"Effeminate!" Guy bleated.

Rex had still been eyeing Lysippe. It came to him that he'd been in space a long time.

He put out a hand experimentally, and ran it along the girl's arm which was bare from shortly below her shoulder where her leather-like jerkin terminated in a short sleeve, to a trio of heavy golden bracelets on her wrist.



"Just how effeminate do you have to be to..." he began.

But her response had been instantaneous. Those heavy bracelets were not mere decoration. In fact, they turned out to be a rare combination of brass knuckles and blackjack when competently used.

She backhanded him, sending him asprawl. She stepped closer, as he tried to stagger to his feet and cut loose with her right hand, the fingers gathered and pointed so as to be spearlike, toward his solar plexus.

"Artemis!" Clete yelled at her. "Easy! You'll hurt the poor boy."

Lysippe pulled her punch, albeit growling.

"Listen," she snapped. "If there's any pawing done around here, I'll do it, understand?"

Rex Ravelle shook his head, for clarity, and slumped into a chair. "Holy Jumping Zen," he complained. "What hit me?"

"What in the name of the Goddess is going on here?" the major said from the entry. Behind her was Captain Buchwald.

"Aw, nothing," Lysippe grumbled. "Sweetie, here, got a little unmanly and I had to tap him."

The major said, "Effeminate cloddy."

Guy cleared his throat. "Uh, Major, I think I've got a solution. This problem of my landing on Amazonia and being subjected to Amazonian law."

"That you would be, Sonny, and you're of marriageable age, too."

"Don't you ever make exceptions to these laws of yours?"

"No," the major said flatly. "Laws you make exceptions to, don't remain laws very long. We don't have many laws, but those we have are not only laws but also religious beliefs, unchanging custom, never to be broken except to be punishable with greatest severity. In that manner our laws are observed."

"But look. Why can't I simply base myself at the UP Embassy? Traditionally, an embassy is the soil of the planet being represented. So if I was there, I would be subject to United Planets law, rather than Amazonian."

The major looked at him sourly. "Just one short coming to that, Sonny. There is no UP Embassy on Amazonia."

Guy said, "But there has to be. You're a member of United Planets. You have an embassy on Earth. UP must have one here."

"I didn't say we didn't have a UP Embassy, I said there wasn't one on our planet. We make no exceptions to our laws. If UP personnel landed on Amazonia, the men would

be subject to our marriage laws. The women, between the ages of eighteen and thirty, would be subject to our military draft. Consequently, it was necessary that the UP Embassy be placed on an artificial satellite orbiting our planet. The personnel seldom, if ever, comes down to the surface. We conduct all business by our representatives ferrying up to them."

She looked at Guy thoughtfully. "Could you handle your business from a satellite orbiting Amazonia?"

"I don't think so," he said weakly. "I'm afraid I might have to be seeing your mines, your smelting facilities, that sort of thing."

Minythyia entered, scowling.

The major said, "Well?"

"Could I speak to you alone, Madam?"

"Come out here into the companionway."

As they left, Minythyia tipped Guy Thomas a wink. The trade expediter groaned softly.

The Captain looked at him. "How'd you get yourself into this mess?"

"I volunteered." He looked very unhappy.

Rex Ravelle, who had finally recovered from his brief bout with Lysippe, growled, "You'd think those flats back on Earth would have known better than to send a man. Don't they have any curves they could have given the assignment? You heard what she said. Just like Jerry told you. Go down there and you'll wind up in some muscle bound mopsy's harem and she'll most likely get drunk every Saturday night and come home and beat the bejazzus out of you."

"Very funny, Mister Ravelle," the captain said.

"You think I was kidding?" Rex muttered, rubbing the side of his swollen face.

Clete said, "What's the matter with you boys, don't you believe in marriage? I thought a boy didn't really feel fulfilled until a warrior took him under her wing."

Guy Thomas looked at her in agony.

"Easy, Clete," Lysippe said compassionately. "You've embarrassed the poor fella."

The major came in, Minythyia trailing behind looking resentful.

"All right," the Amazon officer said. "This is the way it will be. From, your papers, Guy Thomas, you're a single man well into marriageable age. By Paphlagonian law you are subject to be chosen by any citizen whose gynaeceum includes less than three husbands."

"You mean I don't have anything to say about it?"

"Of course you have something to say, Cutey," Minythyia told him soothingly. "If some old drunken brawler chooses you and you don't like her, you can always appeal to any other warrior of your choice to take you into her gynaeceum. That is, of course, if she has fewer than three husbands." She added, smiling encouragingly at him. "I haven't any at all. Can you kiss the way they do on the Tri-Di shows made on Earth, Cutey?"

"Shut up, Minythyia," the major rapped. "I'll explain this."

"I won't land!" Guy blurted. He shut his mouth stubbornly.

The Amazon officer sighed. "We've got it all figured out," she said. "Obviously, if your job is going to be done, you've not only got to land in Themiscyra but travel about Paphlagonia. And the you've got to return to Avalon and Earth to complete the barter deal. We're not any more interested in your being married by some semi-pervert sex bitch who likes off-beat men such as effeminate types from other planets, than you are."

"Stop calling me effeminate! Why not just pass a rule that I'm unmarriageable?" Guy demanded desperately.

"I told you. On Amazonia, a law is a law and there are no exceptions. The Goddess Artemis would frown on any attempt to subvert her holy marriage laws. But this is what we'll do. We'll seclude you. Clete and Lysippe will guard you."

"How about me?" Minythyia said.

"Shut up," the major rapped. "I don't trust you. I don't think your patriotism would stand up under the provocation of being in constant proximity to a cute trick like Guy, here—no matter how badly Paphlagonia needs columbium."

Minythyia's face was petulant. "I'm just as human as the next warrior."

Clete chuckled. "That's pretty damn human, since I'm standing next to you. But I've got two men, and they'd probably scratch Guy's eyes out if I brought him home. Besides, he's too feminine for me. I like my men soft and willing." She leered at the Earthling.

"Knock it, you two," the major said. She looked back at Guy Thomas. "We'll hide you and we'll guard you. We'll keep you away from predatory men-seekers to the extent we can. You want to take the chance?"

Guy Thomas swallowed.

Rex Ravelle chuckled idiotically. The captain glowered at him.

Guy choked out, "I've got to. It's my big chance."

"All right," the major snapped decisively. "Remember, stay away from warriors. Stick to the company of the men we'll quarter you with. Don't ever go out unless Lysippe and Clete are along to run interference. Themiscyra is man-short since a Lybian raid we had six months ago; half the newly emerged warriors are on the prowl, looking for somebody to keep up their homes."

Guy Thomas said, an element of plaint in his voice. "I'm missing some things here."

What're Themiscyra and Paphlagonia, and what are Lybians?"

Clete grunted disgust. "Don't you know anything about Amazonian affairs back on Earth?"

The major summed it up briefly. "Amazonia is divided into two major continents, Pahlagonia and Lybia. Our capital city is Themiscyra, theirs is Chersonesus." She shrugged under her heavy cloak. "We're often at peace, but just recently relations are, uh, strained due to the raids they've been pulling to capture men."

Rex said, "Don't they have their own men?"

The major looked at him as though the question was too silly to bother answering, but then said, "The Goddess allows each warrior three husbands."

Clete chuckled and said, "The idea is, you have one to take care of the house, one to raise the children, and one —"

"Shut up, Clete," the major rapped, "you'll have these boys blushing."

It was two full twenty-four hour periods before Guy Thomas was allowed to land. They had explained to him that they would have to make arrangements for his secretive entry into the land of the Amazons. The government had evidently quickly brushed aside the fact that he was male, although they had been surprised. They wanted Niobium and they wanted it both quickly and badly.

Pat O'Gara had returned with the four Amazons on the first trip, saying goodbye to the officers and such crew members as she had come in contact with during the trip, rather briefly. She had an air of confusion about her.

"Not quite what you expected, eh?" Rex Ravelle grinned.

"Exactly what I expected," she snapped.

Rex, even as he was shaking hands goodbye with the girl, looked over at Guy Thomas who was sitting, hunched over a cup of coffee, staring blankly before him.

"Hey, Guy," Rex called. "If worse comes to worse, and some old mopsy tries to get her hooks into you, you can always look up Pat. Throw yourself on her mercy. Maybe she'll take you into her, what'd'ya call 'em?" The last was directed at Clete, who was standing to one side, waiting for Pat O'Gara to finish her farewells.

"Gynaecum," Clete said.

Guy Thomas, as though in spite of himself, said, "What's a gynaecum?"

Rex leered. "I never heard the word before, but ten'll get you only one it's the equivalent of a harem."

"What's a harem?" Clete demanded.

Rex turned his grin to her. "Back on Earth, in the old days, where a man kept his several wives and his kids in seclusion."

"Don't be disgusting," Clete rapped. Her face was dark and involuntarily her hand dropped to her knife hilt.

Pat O'Gara had flushed. "I'm sure you've all got this situation very much confused."

Guy groaned.

Rex said, "You weren't around when they gave us the word, Pat, old girl. From what I understand, shortly, you'll be running up and down the streets yourself, trying to nail any unattached yoke not stute enough to keep himself hidden." He had to laugh at his own attempt at humor.

Nobody else did.

After Patricia O'Gara and the Amazons had left, the *Schirra* remained in orbit, suffering lighters from the planet below to come up and laboriously unload the cargo destined for the rival Amazonian nations. For although Guy Thomas had professed unawareness of the nature of the political situation on the woman dominated world, Captain Buchwald's manifests had included shipments for both Lybia and Paphlagonia. The lighters came up separately, never conflicting. Evidently, there was some sort of truce which applied in space.

It made sense, Guy Thomas decided. Obviously, there were some commodities Amazonia needed to import. It wouldn't have done for them to have fouled up interplanetary trade, with their off again, on again, hostilities.

On the third day the major's customs launch reappeared bearing not only that officer but Clete and Lysippe as well. They had brought some clothing along with them.

Guy stared at it when they laid it out on the table of the lounge.

The major said, "Wipe that look off your face. You can't wear those over-space clothes. Anybody who spotted you would know you were from off planet."

"Maybe they'd think I was already married," Guy said hopefully. "How do you know I'm not already married?"

Lysippe looked at him interestedly. "Are there temples on Earth where a warrior and boy can get married?" She looked at Clete. "I didn't know Artemis was worshipped over-space."

Guy said, "She isn't. But there are other places to be married besides a temple to your Mother Goddess."

"Don't be blasphemous," the major rapped. "We recognize no marriage except those performed before a priestess of Artemis."

Guy said, "You mean, even though I was married back on Earth one of your women could still grab me?" There went his last alibi, if worse got to worse, down below.

He took the new clothing back to his quarters and changed into them, rejecting Clete's leering offer to help. The material was soft and flowing and surprisingly attractive. The styling was another thing. He was reminded somewhat of Scottish kilts, somewhat of the tunic of the ancient Greeks. It wasn't exactly uncomfortable. In fact, he had to admit, it wasn't uncomfortable at all. It was just that, well, it was just that he was used to *trousers*.

The footwear consisted of a sandal-like arrangement, the straps of which were obviously meant to encircle his leg, up beyond the ankle.

He looked at himself in the mirror his small cabin refresher provided and winced. He hesitated for a long moment, then shrugged in resignation and made his way back to the salon lounge.

Rex Ravelle had entered while he was dressing. As all turned to face him, the irrepressible second officer gave a long low whistle.

"That will be all, Mister Ravelle," the captain said. He turned to Guy. "You're sure of this step, Citizen Thomas? You realize, of course, that if you have any doubts you can remain on board. Frankly, in all the years I have been calling at Amazonia, both as a junior officer and finally as master of my own spaceship, I have never known a man to set down on the planet."

Guy Thomas closed his eyes for a brief moment. He said finally, "I've got to. It's my big opportunity. I've got to make this one good."

"Very well, Citizen. Good luck. I am afraid you will need it." The skipper of the *Schirra* turned on his heel and left.

"Okay, Sweetie," let's go," Clete growled. "You'd think from these cloddies you were heading for a fate worse than death."

She glowered uncomprehendingly as Rex Ravelle burst into raucous laughter.

## IV

Somewhat to Guy's surprise, the little space launch which dropped them to the surface of Amazonia was piloted by a man. He was business-like, efficient, and either shy or intimidated by the uniformed women. He had nodded to the Earthling when the other had slipped through the *Schirra's* small boat hatch, and had run his eyes up and down Guy's clothes, quickly, and evidently in disappointment. For all purposes, they were identical to his own.

They had disconnected from the over-space freighter and swooped away, the major and her two assistants too blasé to bother looking at the viewing screens. However, Guy stared. Obviously, he had no background in landing in such wise on a new planet.

He said, "Why...it's not too different from Earth."

The major was busy with her thoughts and said nothing.

Clete said, "So I understand, Sweetie. Two main land masses, a few large islands, quite a few small ones. What do you call the two land masses on Earth?."

"Well, actually, we think of seven continents."

Lysippe grunted. "Three of them are joined, aren't they, and two of the others only overgrown islands?" Her voice, as their voices usually were when talking to a man, was domineering.

"Why...why, I suppose so," Guy said. "Actually, we have the Western Hemisphere, the Americas. And then Europe, Asia and Africa, the Eastern Hemisphere."

"Two continents," Clete grunted. "Like us."

Guy held his peace and continued to stare at the view-screen. Actually, the two continents of Amazonia were almost identical in size. Then he remembered that there was conflict between them and wondered of what nature it might be. Here they were using spacecraft, if only to ferry back and forth to interplanetary freighters. Besides that, they seemed to conduct considerable trade, in spite of the fact that the landing of freight had to be done by lighter. That meant there was no reason to believe the more sophisticated nuclear weapons might not be available to these belligerent female warriors.

They had chosen to land him at night.

The space launch zipped in to come to a halt on the far edge of what was obviously a gigantic airport, sometimes utilized for at least minor spacecraft. It came to a halt but nobody made motion to disembark. The administration buildings were at least three miles away.

Guy Thomas looked at the major.

She said, "You're coming in incognito, obviously. There'll be a hovercar out shortly."

A hovercar. Guy Thomas had to bring himself up sharply. Why not? They had this modern space launch, didn't they? Why shouldn't they use hovercars? It was just that their uniforms simulated the armor of antiquity to such a point that he wouldn't have really been surprised had they got about on the surface in chariots. But, of course, that was silly.

Shortly, they could make out the landcraft gliding toward them at a breakneck speed. It came to a halt, settled to the ground. There was no driver. He realized he was continuing to be a flat about his anticipations. Obviously, automation was no mystery to Amazonia. Why should it be?

But he stirred unhappily. The technical progress of this world certainly didn't seem to jibe with its social institutions. He thought about it uncomfortably. Or did it? Was he so chauvinistic, as a male, that he identified an advanced economy with man's

domination of the sexes? Why should Amazonia be backward, just because women were in the saddle? He had no reason to so expect. But he still felt uncomfortably unhappy.

"Come along, Sweetie," Clete said. They left the launch's pilot behind to take care of his craft. The four of them got into the hovercar, a large limousine affair, and the major immediately turned a knob. The windows went opaque. She fingered controls and the vehicle rose and got under way.

Guy said, "Can't we even see out the windows?" The major said, "We don't want anyone to spot you, even though you are in men's clothes now."

Lysippe said, as though unthinking, "Turn it over to polar."

The major looked at her. Lysippe said, "Well, why not?"

"Shut up," the major said.

Guy said, "You can switch the screen so we can look out but no one can look in?"

The major started to say something, shut her mouth sourly and turned the knob again. They were passing the administration buildings of the transportation complex and heading out onto what was obviously a major roadway. It was all as modern as anything Guy Thomas could remember having seen.

Nor, for that matter, were the streets of Themiscyra as different as all that from Greater Washington or any of the other larger Earthside cities such as New Copenhagen, Peking or Lagos. Largely, that was due to the fact that for the past half century Earth architecture had been going through an antiquity revival phase which involved exteriors, at least, looking like the buildings of ages past. To Guy's taste, it was all on the far-out side, what with a Florentine palace standing cheek to jowl with a Babylonian temple, next in its turn to a Zuni adobe pueblo. A phase, undoubtedly, but the quicker it passed the better, so far as he was concerned.

Actually, he had to admit he preferred Themiscyra. Situated on both banks of a winding river, something like Nouvelle Paris, architecture was based on ancient Greek. Or, at least, a modernized ancient Greek, if that made sense. It occurred to Guy Thomas that present day man knew precious little about Greek architecture save for a few temples and theatres that had come down through the ages. The Parthenon and Theseum in Athens and the even better preserved Greek temples in Magna Graecia of Southern Italy, and on Sicily. But what had the ancient Greeks themselves lived in? What sort of house did Pericles or Aristotle call home? He didn't know, and he rather doubted than anyone else did.

Which hadn't prevented the Amazonians from using their imagination. And their imagination was tasteful—give them that. The city was a planned dream. Wide boulevards, spacious parks and plazas. An unbelievable number of fountains, monuments and statuary. Marble and stone predominated as building materials, especially on the grand boulevards.

It was well into the night and the streets were comparatively free of pedestrians and of motor vehicles. However, Guy, staring in obvious fascination, could make out a few



of the citizenry, in spite of the speed at which the major was hurrying them through to their destination. She was obviously pushing to get him under wraps, soonest. Well, considering the circumstances, that was understandable to Guy Thomas.

Those pedestrians he did see, set him back somewhat. He had gained the impression from the major, Clete, Minythyia and Lysippe that all Amazons, or nearly all, were warriors and hence probably garbed in much the same manner as were his guards. To the contrary, he spied no uniforms whatsoever on the streets, save what were probably some form of police involved with traffic. But what surprised him even more was that at the speed they were traveling, and due partially without doubt to the darkness, he couldn't distinguish woman from man. There didn't seem to be enough difference in dress to differentiate. Every pedestrian he saw in the half light could have been either man or woman, so far as clothing was concerned.

But then he brought himself up abruptly as a new thought occurred. Possibly all of these citizens he was seeing were women. Was the institution of the gynaecum so strong that men, particularly married men, were not allowed on the streets at all? Or could it be that they simply were not allowed out after dark? Some of the things he had read about the Arabian harem, the Turkish seraglio, came back to him. Could a person really be forced to spend his adult lifetime in the confined quarters of a few rooms? What difference between that and prison?

He got the impression that the major was trying to direct them down back streets. But whether or not that was true and for whatever reason, they eventually pulled up before a two-story building of some magnitude which reminded Guy vaguely of the reconstructed Agora in Athens.

"Where are we?" he said.

The major was opening the hovercar's hatch. "One of the bachelor sanctuaries," she said.

He didn't ask what that meant. For one thing, it seemed self-explanatory; for another, he realized he'd soon find out.

"Come along, Sweetie," Clete said.

They hurried him up a walk, through a rather elaborate garden which surrounded the building, and to a door. There were neither doorman nor guards. Somehow, he had expected a guard. Some burly wench, possibly, to keep off the predatory warriors bent on acquiring a husband or two.

Lysippe threw open the door and held it for them. Guy went on through, the major following.

The major looked back over her shoulder and said, "What in the name of the Goddess is the matter with you two?"

Lysippe was embarrassed. "I've never been in one of these places."

"Me either," Clete said.

"It'd be like going into a beauty parlor," Lysippe said. She squirmed her shoulders under her military cloak.

The major said in disgust. "All right, you two flats. Stay out here. I won't be long. There's nothing to be done tonight." She slammed the door shut behind her. However, Guy Thomas got the impression that she wasn't any too happy about this atmosphere herself.

He looked about him. The place wasn't as offbeat as all that. It looked like an apartment hotel, minus much in the way of public rooms. Perhaps the public rooms, lounges, reading rooms, restaurant, card rooms and such were tucked away here and there in other parts of the building.

"Where's my luggage?" he demanded. They had taken that down the first day, and he hadn't seen it since.

"Already in your room," the major said. "Where in the name of Artemis is that confounded cloddy?"

A figure came hurrying toward them.

A wrist fluttered. "Oh dear, I am so very sorry, my sweets. I didn't truly, not *truly*, expect you for another half hour or so. Please forgive me, Major. And you, my *dear* boy, I'm sure you're simply exhausted."

Guy Thomas closed his eyes in pain.

He shouldn't have. He opened them again just in time to avoid getting himself kissed on the cheek.

"Zen!" he said, taking a half-step backward.

The major bit out, "Citizen Guy Thomas, of Earth; Bachelor Podner Bates." She looked at Guy. "Bachelor Bates is in charge of this sanctuary. He'll take care of you. Clete and Lysippe are stationed in quarters across the street. Their number is on the vizo-phone table in your room. So is mine. In any emergency, the smallest beginning of emergency, call either or both numbers. Don't leave this building alone under any circumstances, understand? The Hippolyte and her council will interview you tomorrow. They wouldn't be at all happy if something happened so that you were unable to complete your mission. Evidently, this need for columbium is much more pressing than I had thought. Frankly, I don't know much about mineral matters."

"Oh, it's so lovely to meet you," Podner Bates gushed.

Guy Thomas winced perceptibly again. The other, although approximately of Guy's own weight and build, and, for that matter, dressed almost identically, projected an effeminacy that would have passed for slapstick comedy in a Greater Washington floorshow. His obviously artificially curled hair alone was enough.

"Thanks," Guy got out. He looked at the major. "Who's the Hippolyte?"

"Who's the Hippolyte! Are you being funny?"

"I wasn't trying to be."

"Don't you cloddies back on Earth know anything at *all* about Amazonia?"

He was embarrassed. "Frankly, you don't encourage much intercourse. I know as little about your institutions as you seem to know about ours."

She glowered at him. "The Hippolyte is the living reincarnation of the Hippolyte!" She spun, so that her cloak billowed out, and snapped over her shoulder. "I'll be here in the morning. Keep your windows barred." She was gone, slamming the door behind her.

Guy looked at Podner Bates.

Podner giggled. "Isn't she *handsome*?" He sighed. "If I could just land one like *that*, goodness!" He fluttered a wrist. "But I suppose I'm getting along now, they're not so gallant anymore." He added archly, "You'd never know that a few years ago I was the beau of Themiscyra. Before those filthy Lybians killed my wife, of course."

Guy Thomas said, "Uh, look, uh, Bachelor Bates —"

"Oh, darling, just call me Podner."

Guy scowled at him. "I don't believe I've ever heard that name before."

Podner giggled. "It was my sainted father. Ordinarily, he was very masculine, but he did love to watch the old, old historical Tri-Di tapes, from Earth. The wild, wild West." Bates fluttered a hand. "He did so love a Western. Podner was one of the most popular names used in those old days. So nothing would do but he must name me Podner."

Guy looked at him bitterly.

"You're lucky he didn't call you Stranger," he muttered.

"I beg your pardon, darling?"

Guy said, "What's the chance of showing me my room?"

"Your *suite*, you mean. Oh, you're quite the honored guest, you know." Podner began to trip along, leading the way. "Oh, dear, it must be so impossibly exciting to have come from far, far Earth. Imagine! I have simply never met a person, not a *single* person, who has ever been over-space."

Guy fell in step beside the other. He said, "I understand a few of your people get to Earth as diplomatic personnel, and a few more go out on trade missions."

"Oh yes, but that's women's work, of course. Goodness, I wouldn't dream of being so effeminate as to forget my place and..."

Guy looked at him.

"What's the matter, darling?" Podner said. They had reached a door in the hallway on the second floor. The Amazonian bachelor began to push it open.

When they got into the small living room, before looking around, Guy said, "Look. I'll make this brief, but I'd like to try to make it stick. The next person, man, woman or child that makes another crack suggesting I'm effeminate, I'm going to award a very fat lip!"

His guide was taken aback. "A very fat lip?" he wavered.

"A bust in the mouth."

"Oh, dear, you're so unmanly."

Guy Thomas closed his eyes. "I give up," he muttered.

He looked about the room. It was furnished approximately as he would have expected an apartment hotel for bachelor women to be furnished back on Earth. Comfortable enough, but by no stretch of earthside imagination could it have been called a man's quarters. He shrugged resignation, and walked into the bedroom, which was even more in the way of frills and lace, and then stuck his head into the refresher room.

"How do you like it?" Podner gushed. "I'm truly sorry we couldn't have done better, but the sanctuary is literally overflowing. It's all a boy can do to be out on the streets these days. I do hope that the new raids on the Lybians will release some of the pressure on we bachelor types." He giggled. "It is sort of fun, though. You know what I mean, being so much in..." he giggled again "...*demand*."

"It's fine," Guy said. "The suite, I mean, not being pursued by bands of panting women. And now, if you don't mind, I have to see the Hippolyte tomorrow, whoever the Hippolyte is. Which reminds me. Who, or what, is an Hippolyte?"

"But the major told you, darling."

Guy looked at him.

Podner said, "Oh, you know. I'm not really superstitious myself, but I do think all these old traditions and all are really very sweet, don't you?"

"What's the Hippolyte?"

"My dear boy, Hippolyte of the Golden Girdle of Ares. Hippolyte of the famous battle axe. The queen of the Amazons, who was betrayed by Heracles."

Some of it vaguely came back to Guy Thomas from high school mythology. "What's all that got to do with here and now?"

"Oh now, really, darling. Is it different on other planets? So many of the traditions of antiquity are called upon today, simply for the sake of, why, oh dear, I don't know. It's always been so. Remember how in your own Earth history that the name of Caesar and the title of Emperor was used for a thousand and more years after Julius himself died? The German Kaiser, the Russian Czar, the British Emperor Rex."

Guy said, "So the present government of, uh, Paphlagonia has a queen they call

Hippolyte. And she's supposed to be a reincarnation of the last Hippolyte, and she of the one before. And, I suppose, all the way back to the mythological Hippolyte who had her belt swiped by Heracles as one of his twelve labors."

Podner giggled. "You make it sound so silly." He fluttered a hand. "But I suppose that's about it. Actually, of course, when the Hippolyte dies, a new one is elected by representatives from each of the families."

"Families?"

Podner looked at him archly. "Oh, not families in the usual sense. From the clans, darling. The *genos*, as the Greeks called them, or the Roman *gens*."

Guy Thomas was out of his depth. "All right," he said. "So tomorrow I'm to meet the chief of state and her council."

"Good heavens, how exciting. Men so seldom have the opportunity to even see the Hippolyte, not to speak of *talking* with her. She's impatient of masculine chatter, so I'm told. Won't you just be terrified, dear?"

"I hope not," Guy muttered. "But look, I've got to go to bed. Is there anything else?"

"Oh dear no," Podner fluttered. "Do forgive me for keeping you up so long. When you wish breakfast, just switch on the orderbox and call for it. And now, do get your beauty sleep."

"Goodnight," Guy said.

When the other was gone, he stood for a long moment in the center of the living room, in thought. He let his eyes go around the apartment. After a time he went to the door and threw the lock. It looked adequate.

He went to the window then, opened it and looked out. It faced on the garden, which completely surrounded the building. He could see down the boulevard, toward the center of town. There was a statue in a plaza not two blocks away. They hadn't passed it in the hovercar on the way in from the spaceport. A woman, what seemed to be a quiver of arrows on her back, her hand resting on some sort of animal. A dog? No, it looked more like a deer. It came to him. A colossal statue of Diana the Huntress. He sought through his memory and nodded. He knew where he was in the city of Themiscyra.

He closed the window. There was a knob to polarize the window glass. He turned it.

He stood in the center of the room again, looking about. Finally he pulled the ring from his finger, took it in his left hand and with the nail of his little finger, activated it by flicking an all but microscopic stud.

He started at the orderbox and the vizo-phone on the table near the bed, passing the ring over and about, slowly, carefully. There was no reaction. Slowly then, he went about the rest of the room, over each piece of furniture, over each decorative device, up and down the walls. And then into the refresher room.

It took him a full half hour. Finally he nodded. The room was either not bugged, or if it was, the device was so sophisticated that his equipment couldn't detect it. He deactivated his sweeper ring, put it back on his finger, and took up the tool kit which Clete had examined so thoroughly on the *Schirra*. He opened it on the center table of the small living room.

He pulled out the cutter drill and twisted it expertly. It fell apart into three separate pieces. He laid the pistol grip to one side and picked up another of the tools. This twisted apart as well, this time into two units. He took one of them and attached it to the pistol grip. Still a third tool divided under his fingers. He added a part of it to the pistol grip which was metamorphosing into an entirely different device from that which it had started out.

He looked at it thoughtfully, reached down into the kit and came up with a medium sized capsule. He slugged it home into the butt, threw the charge lever and then the safety. He stuck the gun into his tunic and under the belt which held his flowing garment together.

He looked around the room again, as though checking, shook his head and returned the various tools which he had strewn about the table to the tool kit and put it into a closet. He turned the lights out and stepped to the windows and threw them open.

The nearest light of any brilliance at all was over on the boulevard. Occasionally a hovercar passed, but there were no pedestrians in sight for the moment. It was getting late.

He swung a leg over the window ledge, lowered himself carefully. His toes, mountain-climber educated, sought protuberances and found them. He had noted earlier that the decorative motif of the building allowed ample scope for the educated climber. He slowly worked his way down the wall to the garden.

He stood there for a long moment, listening. There was nothing.

He made his way over to the boulevard and openly strode along it. He walked the better part of a kilometer, stopped for awhile, scowling, at a crossroad, then decided and turned right. The street was narrower here. Narrower and darker. Evidently, the Amazonians had no particular reason to over-illuminate their capital city during the night hours.

He walked somewhat more rapidly now. He had not wanted to attract what little traffic there had been on the boulevard by a hurried pace. This was different.

Twenty minutes later, he paused again, then turned to his left, down a way that could have been described more as an alley than a street. It was darker still, but his eyes were used to the dim now.

It came as an utter surprise when bright light flashed from ahead and to one side of him, and a beam reached out, searchingly, missing him by but a fraction. He could hear brick chipping away on the wall behind him.

He flung himself to the side and down, the gun instantly in his hand.

Guy Thomas had been partially blinded, for a moment, by the flash from the other's weapon, a type of arm he had never come up against before.

He heard a shuffling in the dark before him. His opponent was evidently shifting position before resuming the attack, obviously avoiding a return of fire in the direction from whence the destructive beam had come.

"Holy Jumping Zen," the Earthman muttered under his breath. "*This* wasn't in the script!" He thumbed off the safety stud on his gun.

## V

Happily, Guy Thomas was in a shadowy area, even darker than the balance of the alley-street. It had been pure luck, when he rolled away from the other's line of fire, that had put him there. He doubted, unless his attacker was using infrared, that the other could make out his position. Guy took his time, studying the layout.

He decided that a stone doorway, possibly thirty feet up the passage, must be the other's ambush. The light which had accompanied the beam, must have come from approximately there. Guy brought his left hand up and made his grip on the gun a double one, for greater stability. He tightened the trigger slowly, not quite squeezing off.

As he stared at the doorway his eyes slowly became more accustomed to the shadows. And, yes, unless vision played him false, he could see the barest suggestion of a figure there. Not enough of a target to expect a hit. He continued to hold his fire.

His opponent moved slightly. It came to Guy that his foe couldn't be sure if he had hit his victim or not. The beam had lashed out, Guy had fallen to the street; since then, he had made no motion. Certainly the other was playing it cautious.

He saw the figure move again, revealing a bit more of itself. Unless he was mistaken, that was a head, half exposed, trying to seek out Guy's position.

There was no doubt in Guy's mind whatsoever. The attack had been an attempt at murder. Not just mugging, not just an attempt at robbery. Was it a case of mistaken identity? There would seem to be no other alternative that made sense. But mistaken identity or not, the assassin was interested in murder and nothing short of that. Guy Thomas' lips were already dry, now they thinned back over his teeth inadvertently.

The figure moved again. A full half of a human form was revealed. Guy tightened on the trigger, ever so slightly. The silenced, recoilless handweapon coughed.

There was a scream from up the alley, high pitched at first then trailing off in an attempt at repression. A figure staggered from the doorway, brought itself up sharp, then scurried away in the direction of greater dark. Something clattered to the pavement.

For a brief moment, Guy, now on one knee, leveled the gun again. But then he shook his head and held fire. The other was winged. His death would avail the Earthling nothing, and might possibly lead to complications

Guy stood erect and walked toward the recess in which the assassin had stood in hiding. There on the ground was the gun the unknown had utilized. Guy picked it up and scowled at it, thrusting his own weapon into his belt again. He had never seen this type of gun but he supposed there was no particular reason why he should have been expected to be acquainted with weapons that had evolved on this world. With three thousand planets in UP, even a full-time expert could hardly be knowledgeable about all the means evolved of dealing out death throughout the worlds.

He stuck the second weapon in his belt as well, and continued on his way.

He was nearing his destination now, and began checking the street names, inlaid attractively in mosaic at every crossing, in the pavement itself. He found his narrow street, found his number.

Guy Thomas hesitated before the stone arch and the door behind it. It was late, indeed. Perhaps he should have waited for another occasion. But he shrugged that off. What other occasion? For all he knew, there might not be any. He had to take what opportunity offered.

He thumped on the door as gently as was consistent with arousing those within. He waited and then put his hand up again to thump once more.

But the door opened inward. He peered, to be confronted with darkness.

"Don't tread on me," he said softly, self-consciously.

"The Sons of Liberty Arise," a voice whispered back. "Come in."

He moved forward. The door closed behind. And then there was light and a burly figure staring at him.

"Who in Zen are you?" the other rasped.

"I'm from Earth," Guy said.

"Sarpedon got through!"

"Yes."

"Good, good. Where is he? Still on Earth?"

"He's probably dead."

The other stared anew at the newcomer. "Dead?" he was blankly.

Guy said, "He disappeared. It's impossible to disappear on Earth. Or all but impossible. Under the circumstances, we assumed he was dead."

"Oh, the bitches," the big man groaned.



"We have no evidence who was responsible."

"I don't need evidence. Here, come on in. Follow me."

Guy followed him down a stone corridor, along the edge of a patio garden in the middle of which a, small fountain tinkled. These houses were well done. He looked sharply left and right, as he went. Across the patio, two men were talking, their voices low; on their hips they carried quick-draw holsters. They passed a room, door open; five men sat around a table, playing cards. Guy noted two rifles leaning against the wall.

He followed the other into another room which was comparatively nude of furniture in spite of its size. A large table dominated its center and there were possibly a score of straight chairs, some about the table, some against the walls. The table was piled with a confusion of papers, pamphlets and books. And there was another man seated at it.

The one who had given Guy entrance said, "I'm Zeke. We don't use second names in our outfit. This is Teucer."

"My name's Thomas. Guy Thomas."

Teucer was a slight, strained man, a hungry look about him. His voice was just this side of being shrill. He said, "Don't tread on me."

Guy Thomas said to them both. "Don't misunderstand my position. I'm here to investigate. I don't necessarily back the stand you Sons of Liberty people are taking. I'm here to gather information."

"You're a *man*, aren't you?" Zeke said belligerently.

Guy eyed him.

Zeke said sourly, "Sit down. Did they only send one? We were hoping for a full landing of Space Marines."

Guy took the proffered chair. "Don't be ridiculous."

"It doesn't sound ridiculous to us," Teucer said. "Maybe it wouldn't be ridiculous to you, if you was a third-rate citizen on a world run by half-crazy mopsies."

Zeke said, "Let me tell this, Tuecer. We haven't got much time now. It'll be dawn, before too long and Zen knows when we can get together with Damon and the others and have a real meeting."

"Who's Damon?" Guy said.

"The headman in the Sons of Liberty."

"All right, obviously I'll have to see him sooner or later. Before we go any further; somebody took a shot at me on my way over here. I think I winged him."

Both Zeke and Teucer gawked at him. Though both wore the evidently universal tunic which came down, kilt-like, to approximately the knees, in other respect they

could hardly have been much different. Zeke was a dark man, gruff and unhappy. Teucer was overly thin, pale of face, quick in nervous movement. They wouldn't have impressed one as being a team.

Guy waited for their comment.

Zeke came to his feet, his face unbelieving, crossed to a niche set into the stone wall and brought forth a flask and three glasses. He brought the things back and set them on the table. He poured three drinks.

"Wine," he said. He took his up. "Who could it have been?"

"I haven't the slightest idea," Guy said reasonably. "A footpad? A common stickup man? But the thing is, he tried to kill me, not just roll me for my money."

Teucer was shaking his head. "I've read about how things are on Earth, but there's not what you'd call stickup men here in Themiscyra. For all practical purposes, there's no crime. It's all one big crime, maybe, but—"

Zeke cut in. "The thing is," he told Guy, "that there's no money. Not like you know it. So it's not much use being a footpad, or whatever it was you called him. All he could get from cringing you would be your watch, your ring. It's not worth it."

Guy didn't like this. It added a factor that simply shouldn't have been here. It worried him. He said, "How many knew I was coming?"

Zeke scowled at him. "How do you mean? Nobody knew you were coming. How could we know you were coming?" Sarpedon had no way of getting a message back to us."

Guy said, "Look. Let's start at beginnings. Tell me, briefly, your position. I say briefly, because, of course, I heard your Sarpedon's story." He took up his glass and took a swallow. The wine was excellent, clean and fruity and similar to a Soave from that area of Earth once known as Italy.

Zeke took a deep draught of his own wine, wiped his mouth with the back of a beefy paw and said, "All right. Here we go. It's got to the point on Amazonia where we can't stand it any longer, understand? Men I mean. You get to the point finally where you can't stand it any longer, right?"

Guy said, "Go on."

"All right. A guy here, a guy there, began talking, began studying up on history, especially the history of revolts, revolutions, armed rebellions. The mopsies can't hide it all. If they want to be educated themselves, they've got to run the chance of us getting educated too. It's too hard to hide books and reading tapes. Anyway, it started with a single man here and there and began to grow. The message began to spread. Then, suddenly, almost overnight, we found ourselves with an organization, and underground, the Sons of Liberty. It's spread. It's spread all over, not only in Paphlagonia but Lybia. The men over there are as fed up as we are here."

"And how's the movement going?" Guy said carefully.

"It's all set to blow. There's only one thing. Precious few men ever get the chance to work out with weapons, guns, explosives, that sort of thing."

Guy Thomas thought of Podner Bates and nodded understanding.

"The moment our underground stuck its head up, it'd be a bloodbath. Well, I guess that part of it's already obvious to you. At any rate, we decided to send a representative to United Planets. It wasn't easy. It's practically impossible for a man to leave Amazonia."

"So I understand," Guy nodded, sipping at the wine again.

Teucer filled all three of the glasses again. He began to say something but Zeke held up a hand.

"Sarpedon was one of our best. He was, well, one of the top male athletes in Paphlagonia – they let us participate in some sports." He grunted disgust. "At any rate, he was tops. He and Damon were kind of like brothers. I knew him myself. He was our best." He paused momentarily and bit out, "The bitches, oh the bitches!"

"Go ahead," Guy said.

"Well, the way we did it, we smuggled him out to the artificial satellite where the United Planets embassy is. We plotted it thoroughly, taking lots of time, and we finally made it. Hippolyte's gang never found out."

"You're lucky," Guy said evenly, "the embassy didn't turn him back to the authorities."

"Why should they? That satellite embassy is United Planets territory. He demanded political refuge."

"It's not ordinarily the sort of thing you can claim from UP," Guy said. "Amazonia is a member planet herself. It's not as though Sarpedon was claiming political refuge from Avalon or some other sovereign world. But go on."

Zeke snorted. "Most of the personnel on that satellite are *men*. They have an idea of what we go through down here. At any rate, they took Sarpedon in, gave him a great welcome, didn't let old Hippolyte's government hear a word about it. At the first chance they sent him back to Earth to have his say to the United Planets Assembly. Well, from what you report, he made it. The only thing surprises me, you're here all alone. Where's the rest?"

Guy Thomas was shaking his head. "He didn't make his destination. The United Planets Assembly, which, of course, is composed of delegates from every member planet, never heard his plaint."

Teucer, indignant, shrilled, "How come?"

Guy looked at him. "Sarpedon appeared at the Octagon in Greater Washington. He

was turned over to the Interplanetary Department of Justice which listened to his story and decided against letting him speak before the Assembly. He gave us your passwords, and where we could make contact with you. He turned over charts and city plans of Themiscyra. Of course, when I was given this assignment, I memorized them. We located him in an apartment, with the intention of keeping him in Greater Washington until we could look further into his complaint. Frankly, he was a hot potato. A few days later, he disappeared, leaving most of his effects, even personal ones, in the apartment. Needless to say, we suspected the worst. There is no possible way to exist on Earth as it is today, without such things as credit cards. Even the credit card we had issued him had been left behind."

"What I don't get," Zeke said lowly, "is the Octagon and this Department of Interplanetary Justice getting in his way to speaking his piece in front of the Assembly. That would've given us a chance."

Guy looked at him in silence for a long moment, his mouth pursed in perplexity, as though wondering how to phrase what he had next to say.

Finally, "Zeke, Teucer, don't read more into the United Planets than is there. It's a very loosely knit organization and practically powerless. It isn't and was never meant to be a super-government. If it attempted to be, the member planets would drop away until for all practical purposes Earth would stand alone as a member."

They were frowning unhappily at his words, unhappily and half unbelievably.

He shook his head. "In actuality, most planets join the organization to be assured of *not* being interfered with. They want protection against their neighboring worlds which have possibly different political, socioeconomic or religious institutions than their own. Aren't you familiar with Articles One and Two of the UP Charter?"

They were uncomprehending.

Guy sighed. "I thought every schoolkid learned them by heart. They go like this. Article One: *The United Planets organization shall take no steps to interfere with the internal political, socioeconomic, or religious institutions of its member planets.* Article Two: *No member planet of United Planets shall interfere with the internal political, socioeconomic or religious institutions of any other member planet.*"

"You mean," Teucer accused, "you're not allowed to help us?"

Guy shook his head. "Not by United Planets law. What happens on Amazonia is strictly the business of Amazonia and nobody else's. If we employees of UP began to stick noses in the affairs of the Hippolyte, she'd simply drop out of the organization and if we continued to interfere it would mean war. And, I assure you, a thousand other member planets who don't wish their internal affairs to be pried into, would take a very dim view of the UP Space Forces being aggressors against a planet which has shown no hostility to any other worlds."

Zeke blurted hotly, "Then what do you do? What good is the nardy organization?"

Guy Thomas waited for him to cool off before going on. "We explore and patrol

space. We try to promote trade and foster progress. If the medical researchers of one planet discover an improved cure for cancer, or whatever, we make every effort to spread the new discovery, avoiding, of necessity, such planets as Eddy, which was colonized by Christian Scientists. If some planet seems about to interfere with the affairs of some other, then we take the most aggressive step in our power. We send the fleet, in all its might, to go into protective orbit about the threatened world. Never has actual combat ensued, the warning is sufficient. The UP fleet, needless to say, could blow the strongest planet into nothingness within split seconds. It has never had occasion to, obviously."

Teucer glared at him. "Why'd you bother to come, then? You aren't willing to help us! You'll stand by and let a billion men and more be treated like slaves, like zombies, like..."

Guy said mildly, "I haven't been on Amazonia very long, admittedly, but from what I've seen you have a surprisingly advanced technology. This is by no means one of the have-not worlds."

"Yes!" Teucer snarled. "And why? Because we men produce it. We slave our lives away and don't even have a voice in the nardy government that shoves us around like we were children. You don't know what it's like, Thomas! Why'd you bother to come?"

"I'll answer that," Guy said cautiously. "First of all, realize that although the UP Charter ties the hands of the Octagon when an appeal like yours comes through—there have been others, the United Planets is not composed exclusively of Utopias. Though our hands are legally tied, we are not insensitive to your situation. I am, of course, incognito. I landed in the guise of an expediter from the Department of Interplanetary Trade, to arrange a deal between Amazonia and Avalon. My real job is to locate you people and get the full story."

"But what good can it possibly do us?"

Guy Thomas said very carefully, "You never know. Just out of curiosity, what is it you need to promote your cause? Money? I never heard of a revolutionary organization that didn't need money."

"Money?" Teucer grunted bitterly. "We don't use money here."

"That's right, one of you mentioned that. How do you carry on exchange? There's always some equivalent to money."

"Not on Amazonia. There is no exchange. We keep telling you, this is the most far-out dictatorship you ever ran into in all your United Planets."

Guy was frowning puzzlement at him. He said, "On anarchist planets, such as Kropotkin, yes. I can understand no medium of exchange. They utilize simple barter. But an advanced world such as Amazonia?"

The scarecrow of a man wrenched a wallet from a purselike affair that hung from his belt. He pulled a plastic card forth and shook it at the agent from Earth. "I work, see? Every hour I put in is credited to me in the computers. Every time I spend something, I

put this card up against the credit screen and the amount is deducted."

"What amount?" Guy said. "You said you didn't have money."

Suppose I want to buy a camera. They've figured out just how long it took to produce that camera, the number of hours to extract the aluminum in its body, the time to grind the lenses, everything. The total number of hours involved. Say it's two hours. Then it costs me two hours of my time—I work in sewage disposal—to buy the camera. The computers keep track of the whole thing."

Guy said, "Well, suppose you wanted to buy a hovercar, something like that which would take hundreds of hours to produce?"

"What do you think? The computers won't let me buy it until I've saved up that number of hours."

Guy was frowning. "You say you work in the sanitary system. But suppose another man was a...well, research chemist, a highly trained scientist. How would he be awarded these hour credits?"

"Exactly the same," Zeke said in disgust. "The smartest man in the country doesn't get anything more for his time, than the dumbest moron. In fact, he gets less, if you want to look at it that way. The moron gets taken care of for free, the big brain has to work if he wants to eat."

Guy thought about it for awhile. "There's no way for you to get ahead, really, eh? What's your initiative? Why bother to try at all?"

"Initiative!" Zeke said, still bitterly. "Our initiative is that we like to eat."

A window was beginning to gray with the first of dawn.

Guy, shaking his head, finished his wine and said, "There's a lot still to go over but I suppose it'll have to wait until I meet this Damon of yours. How can we get in touch with each other?"

"Where are you staying?" Zeke said.

Guy told him.

"One of those semi-prisons for single men," Teucer sneered.

"Thus far," Guy told him, "it's been quite comfortable."

"Jails can be comfortable, but they're still jails."

Zeke said, "All right, all right, Teucer. We can't convert him all at once. Listen, Guy, I don't know if we can contact you there or not. I don't know what kind of guard they've got over you. We'll find out; we've got spies everywhere. But you can always reach us here. This is one of our drops. If anything happens to this place, here's the address of another." He handed Guy a paper. "Memorize it, and destroy it. We take every precaution we can, but I guess you can be trusted. I guess you're more up on these

things than we are."

Guy said, "Why do you guess that?"

Zeke looked at him. "I get the impression this isn't the first assignment of this type you've been on."

Guy said nothing to that.

Zeke said, "The first impression you give is kind of ineffectual, but if you look below the surface..."

Guy Thomas shrugged and came to his feet. "You can trust me," he said. "I'd better be getting back."

"You've got a shooter, eh? You said you winged whoever it was tried to crisp you."

"Yes," I'm armed."

"How'd you ever get it past those custom mopsies? They've got a reputation."

"We've got ways," Guy said shortly.

Zeke saw him to the door.

Before leaving, Guy said, "How many men do you have in your organization, Zeke?"

The other hesitated. "Active? Thousands, tens of thousands. I mean real members of the Sons of Liberty. But inactive sympathizers who'll rally round when the time comes? At least half the population. Half the men, that is."

Guy said slowly, "How many of them are like Teucer?"

Zeke scowled, uncomprehending. "What's the matter with Teucer?"

Guy said, "He's not the most educated type in the world, and he's on the emotional side. I've seen revolutionary organizations before, Zeke. In the clutch, you want..."

"Aw, Teucer's all right. You got to get used to him."

"How many have you got like Teucer?" Guy repeated. Zeke rubbed the bottom of his chin with a beefy paw. "Too many," he growled. He opened the door for the Octagon operative. "He's from Lybia," he added. "On the run from the police over there. We're hiding him out temporarily, till we can figure where to use him."

As a safety measure, Guy took a different route home, and covered the distance considerably more cautiously than he had in coming.

His gun was handy to his fingers, and he stopped at each street crossing, looking both ways. He wanted no repetition of the ambush of a couple of hours earlier. Pure

luck had saved him there and pure luck seldom blesses you twice running.

The slower pace he had to take, to eliminate any further chance of attempted assassination, conflicted with his need to get back to his quarters before full dawn. He agonized, but there was nothing for it.

By the time he reached the sanctuary, it was too light to attempt to scale the wall to his window. Too great a chance that he would be spotted.

He marched deliberately up to the door through which the major had ushered him, some hours earlier, grasped the knob and pushed his way through. Again he was surprised at the lack of guard, or even lock. To hear the major and the others, a man wasn't safe in the vicinity of a warrior who had less than three husbands in her home. How did this jibe with the fact that this building full of bachelors was so easily entered?

He started up the stairway to the second floor where his small suite was located.

A voice tittered, "Oh, good heavens! Where have you been, darling?" It was Podner Bates, coming down.

Guy said, making his voice grumpy, "I couldn't sleep. I decided to take a walk."

"A walk! Artemis! Dear boy, don't you realize your freedom isn't worth a nicker, not a flicker, out on those streets? Suppose some young warrior had spotted you?"

They'd met half way down the stairs.

Guy said, "Search me. What would have happened?"

Podner flicked his wrist, flabbergasted. "My dear, haven't you been informed at all? Any warrior whosoever who spots you and decides she likes you, can simply place her hand on your shoulder and say, *I thee take*. Your only recourse, if you object to being taken under her wing, is to throw yourself on the mercy of some warrior you like better. If she refuses you, for whatever reason, darling, then you must..." Podner arched his eyebrows "...give yourself to the one who claimed you."

Guy said, "I was just walking along the street, trying to think, getting a breath of air. How'd one of these warriors know I wasn't already married?"

Podner fluttered, even as he turned to accompany Guy back to his suite. "Darling, you're so naive. You see how my tunic tucks up over my shoulder here? That proclaims, me a widower. I am eligible for the taking, of course, but..." he cleared his throat delicately "...of course, it's virgins that are always in demand."

"Virgins?" Guy said blankly.

He looked at the shoulder of his own tunic.

"Your garb," Podner tittered, "proclaims you to one and all a virgin."

Guy Thomas closed his eyes in pain.



## VI

Podner Bates saw him to his suite, gossiping along as they went.

Guy felt a coldness in his stomach. Along the way, had he run into any man-seeking Amazon, it would have either been a matter of shooting her, or submitting to the damndest marriage custom he had ever heard of.

*I thee take*, yet! How informal could you get? And didn't the man, or even the man's parents, have anything to say about it? In all his readings on far-out societies, and they had some dillies in United Planets, Guy Thomas had never run into one quite this cavalier.

"How come?" he blurted to Podner, in protest.

"I beg your pardon, darling?" They were nearly to his door.

"Why's it so easy for a...a warrior to latch onto any man who comes along? Isn't there any way of avoiding being up for grabs?"

"Oh dear," Podner sighed. "It's so hard to realize you aren't familiar with our ways. It seems so natural to me. Well, let me think. I *have* heard that wooing is somewhat different on your unnatural planets."

"Unnatural?"

"Where..." Podner giggled delicately "...where we boys dominate. It's so hard to believe, isn't it? Anyway, I understand the Goddess Artemis first revealed her desires pertaining to a warrior taking a mate, when the early colony ships set down on Amazonia. She saw in her infinite wisdom that the need was to be..." Podner coughed gently "...fertile and populate the land. Girls were proclaimed warriors at the age of fourteen, and everything facilitated to hurry them into a relationship. If the medicos permitted, the first child was on its way at not later than fifteen." Podner giggled. "As you can imagine, obstetrics was quite our foremost science. It has progressed to the point where a warrior is inconvenienced for but a week or so."

Guy shook his head, his hand on the doorknob of his suite. "Thanks for the information. I'll know, next time, to be more careful. I'd appreciate it if you didn't tell the major about my little jaunt. She had already told me to stay put."

Podner fluttered a hand. "Oh, don't you worry. I'm no tattletale. We boys have to stick together."

Guy Thomas closed the door behind him and looked warily in the direction of his still unrumpled bed. But then he did a quick double-take. His eyes were suddenly wide, sleep forgotten.

The room was a shambles. His things had been ransacked, and no effort made to

disguise the fact. He stood rooted, his mind whirling. This made no sense at all. It made no more sense than his being shot at on his way to contact the Sons of Liberty. There was no reason for him to be an assassin's target. There was no need to ransack his belongings.

He began gathering them together. He had had no time, earlier, to properly unpack, and his clothes and personal belongings had remained in his luggage. Now they were scattered about the bed, on the table, on chairs. Some of them thrown to the floor.

His tool kit had been emptied, helter skelter, on the table top where he himself had assembled his gun, earlier, from its disguised component parts. He went over each item he had brought with him from Earth, in careful memory. For a time, he could find nothing missing, but then a cold fear went through him. He sought frantically.

His communicator. It wasn't actually gone. He found it, or rather its remains. Someone had obviously crushed it under heel and then kicked it under the bed, deliberately, as though in contempt.

His communicator.

He had lost his only method of contact with either the UP Embassy on its artificial satellite, or with Earth itself. He was stranded on the planet Amazonia, from which no man had ever been known to escape, save the revolutionist Sarpedon, in the memory of any living person.

Guy Thomas was baffled. But who? It made no sense. No sense at all. Podner Bates came to his mind. The only person who knew he was here, save the major and her underlings. The major? But why? They had searched his things with painful care on the ship. There was hardly reason to search them again. Besides, who could possibly have known he wasn't in his room? Who could have expected to come burgling without resistance on his part?

Burgling? No. Nothing was gone, nothing bothered, save his communicator. The only thing that made sense at all was that someone had known he wasn't in his rooms and had entered deliberately to find and destroy his communicator.

And there was just one hole in that theory. The sophisticated communication device was not even known to exist outside the bounds of his own department, and his department was a close-knit, dedicated outfit, far beyond all others in UP.

Guy Thomas had had too much tossed at him in the past twenty-four hours. He threw himself, face down, on his bed. He was asleep in moments.

He awoke surprisingly rejuvenated, at half-past eight. He made his way into the elaborate refresher room, shedding his slept-in clothing as he went and was fully under the spray before allowing himself to dwell on the past and the future.

The past twenty-four hours bewildered him, and after only a quick mental review, he refused to dwell further on what had developed. He had too much to consider in the

future.

When he had allowed the refresher to bathe, shave, trim his hair and massage him to glowing pinkness, he issued forth and began opening closets and drawers in search of fresh local raiment. He assumed that they had outfitted him with a supply and found he was correct.

In slipping into a tunic, he tried for a time to adjust the shoulder in the manner that Podner Bates had his. It didn't work. The tuck was built in. He was going to have to remain a potential prey to any Amazon on the prowl.

Dressed, he went over to the orderbox which sat on the table next to his bed and flicked on the switch. He noted that the instrument was almost identical to those on Earth or on any of the other most advanced worlds. The Amazonians, obviously, kept up with developments. He was again impressed.

He said into it, "My breakfast, please, and if Bachelor Bates is available, could he come to my room?" And then he added, "Are there newspapers?"

"No, Bachelor Thomas."

"Well, how do I tune on newscasts? What's the drill for getting the news?"

"I do not understand what you mean by news, Bachelor Thomas," the orderbox said. The voice was feminine, he noticed. Or what passed for feminine on this forsaken planet.

"New, *news*," he said, surprised. "The day's developments on Amazonia and throughout United Planets, for that matter. Political events, scientific developments, sports results, fires, wrecks, air and spacecraft crackups if any, criminal cases, that sort of thing. News."

There was a pause. After a moment, the orderbox said, "We are sorry, there is no such service on Amazonia, Bachelor Thomas. Such material is issued in weekly magazines and submitted to those involved." The voice faded away, leaving him taken aback.

In all his career, he had never even heard of a planet which had no method of dispensing fresh news. He shook his head. Could the Amazonians be so self-satisfied with themselves and their way of life that they had no interest in interplanetary affairs? But even so, they'd certainly want to know of the developments on their own world. It was just one more for the book, from a culture that had already surprised him beginning at chapter one.

Podner Bates arrived with the breakfast, which was pushed into the room on a small cart powered by a youth of perhaps eighteen. A youth who giggled. Evidently, he found Guy Thomas almost unbearably amusing. The hell with it, Guy decided. He waited until the giggler left.

Podner said archly, "Well, darling, did we spend a restful night, finally?"

Guy, even as he shot a disdainful glare at the other, sat down to his food. Bachelor

Bates was the prime suspect, so far as the burgling of his room was concerned. If it hadn't been for the mystery of the earlier assassination attempt, which he didn't think Bates could have possibly pulled off, and which he suspected was connected with the robbery, he would have accused him outright.

"Have some coffee," he said. "That is coffee, isn't it?"

"Oh yes, but I never touch it, darling. I've heard its simply terrible for the complexion, and a boy my age has to watch himself, you know."

Guy grunted. There was enough food on the table for a squad of men his size. What was undoubtedly a citrus fruit drink, eggs, sausages, enormous slices of bacon, bread, toast, rolls, various jellies, coffee and cream. Evidently, he decided, the early colonists of Amazonia hadn't depended on local flora and fauna but had brought both animals and plants from Earth. There had been some adapting to the new world, but the food was still highly recognizable. There was an extremely delicate, nutty taste to the bacon. Gourmets would have drooled over it back on Earth.

Guy downed a sizeable glass of citrus juice and began to load his plate. After yesterday's activity, he was famished. He said to Podner, who was eyeing him tolerantly, "I don't know when the major's going to turn up but until she does, I'd appreciate it if you'd brief me on the workings of Amazonia."

"But, I'd love to, darling. Just what would you like to know?"

"Just about everything, damn it. The longer I'm here, the less I seem to understand. I tried to study up on your world before I left Earth but just about everything I could find now seems worthless."

"Dear boy, I'd gladly tell you everything, but I simply wouldn't know where to start."

"Start with history," Guy said around a bite of eggs. He wondered if they were hen eggs, decided they probably were. Man had taken the hen with him, as he had the pig and cow, to just about every world that would support his life form. A luxury, but one invariably indulged in.

Podner shifted in his easy chair, delicately. "Well, dear, I suppose a history of Amazonia begins on Earth as does the ultimate history of any settled planet."

Guy said, trying the sausage, "Lets hurry along, the major might be here any time."

"Of course, darling," Podner fluttered a hand. "I'm such an old ditherer. Well, as you undoubtedly know, the Amazon story is part history, part legend, party myth."

"I thought it was all myth."

"Then you were mistaken," the other said primly. "The Greek legends and myths are based on the existence of arms-bearing priestesses of the Moon Goddess, the White Goddess, along the southern coast of the Black Sea. They continued far into the period when the Doric Greeks had swept the Goddess worshipping Pelasgians from Greece

proper and had instituted patrilineal descent and rule by men. These tribes were at their most powerful along the Thermodon river where Queen Lysippe built the city Themiscyra."

"Lysippe?" Guy interrupted, "that's the name of one of my guards."

"Of course, dear boy. All the warriors and most men take their names from antiquity. Myth tells us that the Amazons established a considerable empire in Asia Minor and up into the Caucasians and beyond, north of the Black Sea." Podner made a moue. "However, the truth probably is that this is myth alone. By the time Homer and the other bards came on the scene, the tradition of the arms-bearing priestesses was confused with heroic tales of warrior women who seared off one breast so they could shoot their bows better, and who supposedly invented the use of cavalry in battle. Actually, you know, the name Amazon is derived from *a* and *mazon* meaning without breasts. Silly, of course."

"Ummm," Guy said, pouring more coffee.

"The stories that come down to us are largely nonsense. Heracles being sent by Eurystheus to fetch the golden girdle of Hippolyte, the queen of the Amazons. Among other things, of course, the institution of queens and kings was unknown at that time. Society hadn't developed to that point. War chiefs, head priests and other tribal officials were evolving, but the conception of a king or queen had yet to show itself."

Guy took in the other. Podner Bates didn't sound quite as flighty as first impression might have indicated. He wondered again how deep the other's waters ran. And what purpose he might possibly have had in searching Guy's rooms for his communicator – a device the Amazonians supposedly didn't even know existed – and destroying it.

"The stories are confusing," Podner sighed. "Some say that Hippolyte gave the brute Heracles her girdle and war ax, after falling in love with him. Some say that Heracles killed her and took the girdle and then had to fight off her followers. Still others claim that Theseus captured Hippolyte and gave the belt to Heracles."

Guy said impatiently, "All this isn't very important. Lets get down to modern times."

"Just one other thing. In antiquity," Podner said, fluttering a hand, "there were two groups of Amazons, you know. One based on the Black Sea, the other in Lybia. The Lybians were also based on history, the actuality of arms-bearing priestesses of the Moon Goddess, Artemis. Their most famous queen was Myrine who fought the Atlantis soldiery near Lake Tritonis in northern Africa, which was, of course, considerably more fertile in those days. She beat them and built up a considerable empire in Africa, Asia Minor and even some of the Aegean Sea islands. All nonsense, of course.

"However, there is one interesting bit that has come down to us. The Phrygian blessing, which was originally given in Myrine's name, involved finger magic, and calling upon the three Idaean Dactyls, or fingers, who supposedly dispensed doom. One Dactyl represented the middle finger, Heracles was the thumb and the third Dactyl was the index finger. These three raised, while the fourth and little finger are turned down, made the Phrygian blessing. One of the Christian sects still use it in the name of the

Christian Trinity."

"What's all this got to do with here and now?" Guy said.

"Oh dear, I'm so sorry. I do dither, so. I was just trying to give you the background for present day Amazonia. We have the two continents, Paphlagonia, with this, or capital city, on the river Thermodon, which carries on the traditions of the old Hippolyte's realm, and the continent Lybia, with its capital Chersonesus, which carries on those of Myrine."

"Why all the jetsam?" Guy was wiping his mouth with his napkin.

Podner Bates made a gesture with his limp hand. "Oh, you know how it is with social movements. When the founders of this colony were recruiting the woman necessary to populate the new world, they needed all sorts of slogans and symbols. Since they were so staunchly feminists, what better symbols could they have used than the ancient Amazons? Frankly, darling, I think they've done remarkably well at this sort of thing. It's really quite inspiring, all the pomp and parade and all. The youngsters just eat it up. Traditions are very necessary, I've always said, the very backbone of a culture."

Guy looked at him wryly, "How about the boys? Do they eat it up too? All these traditions of women warriors and a women-dominated society?"

The other's eyes were wide. "But of course. I'll never forget sitting at my father's knee, thrilling to his account of the warriors of the past and the desperate battles the heroines fought against the treacherous Greeks who came to destroy society as the Moon Goddess had so long directed it, and change women into slaves."

Guy Thomas began to open his mouth, but shook his head and held his peace. The hell with it.

He said suddenly, instead, "Look, don't the men ever react against this situation? Hasn't there ever been revolt? You know, the men trying to establish the same sort of setup that exists on Earth and most, if not all, the other planets the human race inhabits."

"Good heavens," Podner gasped. "You mustn't say such things."

"Why not? I'm just asking for information. Isn't there any sort of masculine underground? Some sort of revolutionary organization that would like to turn society upside down and make men, if not superior, at least equal to women?"

Podner made a motion as though to hold his hands over his ears. "Oh, dear boy, you don't know what you're saying. The Goddess would never permit such a sacrilege. Women are the natural superiors of man. It says so in the holy books."

"I'll bet it does," Guy said grimly. "I never heard of a holy book that didn't support the powers that be. But you didn't answer my question."

"Well," Podner said primly, "you can just be sure there is no such organization. We men, here on Amazonia, know our place." He added, archly, "Whether or not they do on *other* worlds, where the natural nature of things has been subverted..."

Of a sudden, Guy Thomas had a surfeit of the other. "Aw curd," he growled. "Get out, will you? I've got to get ready for the major."

Podner was on his feet, his lips a thin white line. "My dear boy..."

"And stop calling me a boy! You make me sound like a molly."

"Well...*well*...!"

In a huff, Podner Bates swept out of the room.

Guy rubbed a hand over his mouth. "I shouldn't have done that," he muttered aloud. "Poor cloddy."

He brought his two guns from beneath the bed's pillows and considered them. There was no reason to believe he was going to be allowed into the presence of the Hippolyte armed, and he didn't dare leave the weapons here. For all he knew, the suite would be shaken down again, the moment he left.

He brought his tool kit out once more, took his original gun apart and disposed of it by reuniting the four parts with pseudo-tools,, as they had originally been.

He then went to the window, opened it and looked out with care. He could see no one near enough to make any difference. He tossed the weapon he had captured the night before into a heavy bush in the garden below.

He closed the window again and returned to the table to see if there was a final cup of coffee. He needed time to think, and doubted if he was going to get it.

He didn't. The major's face was on his door screen within minutes.

She was brisk. She hurried through the usual amenities of bidding him good morning and asking after his rest, and then indicated that time was wasting.

"Will I need my tool kit?"

She scowled down at it. "I wouldn't think so. You're going to meet the Hippolyte and her advisers."

He followed her out of the suite and down the stairs to the entry. It occurred to him that thus far he had seen none of the inhabitants of this bachelor's sanctuary save Podner Bates and the boy who had wheeled in the breakfast tray this morning. That had strange aspects, there were a good many apartments in the place. Was he being kept secluded?

Clete and Lysippe were awaiting them on the sidewalk before the sanctuary, both gave him a leering grin.

Clete said, "Morning, Sweetie. You know, I think you looked prettier in that over-space men's suit you wore on the *Schirra*."

"Knock it," Guy muttered at her.

"My," Lysippe said, "our boy's in a nasty temper today. And he seemed like such a

nice inoffensive tad, up there on the ship, He must've been on his party manners."

"Shut up," the major rapped, "and let's get going."

There was a sudden shuffling noise and all turned.

Around the corner of the sanctuary darted a figure. It was obviously a woman, although she held her military cloak up about her face.

She came running hard, full at them.

Instinctively, Guy Thomas' hand darted for his belt. There was nothing there. His gun was upstairs!

His three guards had gone on beyond him, opening the doors of the hovercar, the major beginning to slip into the seat. He was nearest to the newcomer.

She began to shout, "*I thee...*"

"Holy Jumping Zen!" Guy blurted. He took off like a shot, around the car, the woman pounding after him.

"Hey!" Clete yelled

"Hands off, you cloddy!" Lysippe shouted. She tore for her gun, and managed to foul it in its holster in her attempt at speed.

The major, half in, half out, of the hovercar, stood paralyzed, her eyes goggling.

Guy completely rounded the car and headed desperately for the garden where he began dodging in and around rose bushes, the Amazon warrior immediately behind.

He had been the better part of a month on the *Schirra*, a month in which he had gotten precious little exercise. Besides that, the air seemed just a bit thinner on this world than he was used to on his home planet. He didn't seem to be achieving the speed of which he should have been capable.

Lysippe was bringing up the rear, trying to catch the newcomer before that desperate female was able to lay hand on her charge.

In the background the major was shouting in wrath.

From the side of his eyes, even as he darted, Guy Thomas could see Clete, holding her sides and leaning up against the sanctuary wall, screaming laughter.

Some joke!

He scooted around a bush, headed back for the entrance of the building. He didn't know exactly what the word sanctuary added up to, in this case, but there was a good chance it meant warriors, husband bent, weren't allowed to enter. Perhaps all marriage rules were off where Podner Bates and his fellow bachelors resided.

He slid on the gravel and went asprawl. And didn't bother to attempt to recover. He



closed his eyes in surrender. He'd had it. He waited for the hand on shoulder, the dreaded *I thee take!*

More shouting and more uncontrolled laughter. That last from Clete, of course. Some guard!

He opened his eyes carefully to take in developments. Lysippe had evidently grasped the newcomer around the waist and was holding her, whilst the major came storming up, massacre in eye.

She faced Lysippe and her prisoner, hands dangerously on hips.

"Minythyia!" she blurted, enraged.

Lysippe released her grip and Minythyia shrugged her cloak back around her shoulders.

"You can't blame a warrior for trying," she said defiantly. He's the cutest trick I've ever seen."

"Is this your idea of a joke!" the major snapped dangerously.

"Joke?"

"You know how important it is that this funkier of a man clear the way for interplanetary trade with Avalon!"

Minythyia twisted her full mouth stubbornly. Under other circumstances, far different circumstances, Guy Thomas would have thought of her as a far from unattractive girl, and certainly most suitable to take out on a freewheeling date with intentions of making such headway as was possible. But the very thought made him groan now.

She was saying, "Oh, he could finish all that jetsam right here on Amazonia. He wouldn't have to leave. He could handle our end of it here, and we could send a representative to Avalon to take care of the other end."

The major said coldly, "That isn't the way the Hippolyte and her advisers have decided to do it."

Minythyia growled, still stubbornly, "You know nardy well as soon as he gets into that slew of sex maniacs that hang out at the palace, he won't last minutes before one claims him. And even Hippolyte can't interfere with the marriage laws of Artimis."

Guy groaned despair as he came to his feet, brushing a skinned knee.

Clete hustled him into the car, still chuckling, whilst the major and Lysippe, taking no chances, stood between him and the deep breathing Minythyia who still eyed him, half desperately, half wistfully.

## VII

Underway in the hovercar, the major, seated next to Guy in the front seat, turned around to face Clete and Lysippe. "Were you two in on that?"

They were both wide-eyed in innocence. "Artimes!" Clete said. "Of course not. We're the poor boy's guards.

Lysippe said, "Didn't you see me grab her?"

The major snorted but turned back.

Guy was finally regaining his breath. "That was close," he muttered.

"Minythyia's too slow on her feet," Clete explained to him. "You're lucky it wasn't one of those sixteen-year-olds. They're the worst." She added thoughtfully, "In more ways than one. They don't really know what to expect from a boy."

"Shut up," the major growled.

Clete chuckled.

The drive was a fairly long one, especially through Themiscyra pre-noon traffic. Not that Guy saw any of the latter. The major had turned the windows opaque and growled a surly negative when he requested the polarized view.

He said eventually, out of a clear sky, "All men aren't like Podner Bates, are they?"

The major scowled at him. "How do you mean? What's wrong with Bachelor Bates? I've always thought him a charming little fellow."

"But he's not exactly an average Amazonian male. At first I thought he was."

"Podner's more or less like all other men," the major said. "What brought that up?"

Come to think of it, except for the space launch pilot and the boy who'd brought breakfast, Podner was the only man he was supposed to have met thus far, Guy realized.

"Nothing," he said. He thought about it some more. Podner was certainly similar to neither Zeke nor Teucer. But, then, they were revolutionists and so offbeat.

The major said, "Is there any chance of finishing your business today?"

He turned and looked at her, his eyebrows high. "I hadn't thought of that," he said. "It doesn't seem very likely."

"Why not?" the major rapped. "You'll be meeting our technicians shortly. If you can finish your business and get the final approval from the Hippolyte, we could run you out to the UP Embassy. You'd be safe then."

"Aw," Clete said, "he's safe with us guarding him. Minythyia won't get him."

Guy said, his voice worried, "I was thinking in terms of seeing your mines, your smelters, your extracting system. From which minerals do you extract titanium, ilmenite, rutile...?"

"How in the name of the Goddess would I know?" the major said, bringing her cloak up tighter about her neck. "All I know is you seem to be on the philosophical side about getting nabbed by one of these man-short cloddies."

"It's like I said. A boy doesn't really feel fulfilled until a warrior's taken him under her wing," Clete told them.

Guy grunted disgust at that opinion. "I've got my work to accomplish," he said. "When that's done, I'll depart Amazonia so fast..." He let the sentence fade off.

"This must be it," Lysippe said. "Sweety, you stick as close to Clete and me as you can. We'll take care of you." She glared at the other guard. "If Clete doesn't go into another laughing fit."

They were obviously going up a lengthy driveway. The major turned the window knob, allowing them to see out. Guy was impressed. It was an imposing layout, all very Grecian public buildings. Was the largest the palace?

If it was, they didn't immediately head for there. The hovercar whooshed them, instead, to a comparatively sober-looking building faced with stone rather than marble. They came up before it, the car stopped and Clete and Lysippe issued forth, looking up and down with care before opening the front door for Guy.

"*Now* you start being careful," he said bitterly as he came forth. "After that dizzy curve almost got to me back there."

Clete snorted. "You're in more danger here than you were there, Sweety. For one thing, Minythyia isn't so bad."

He didn't ask her to elaborate on that.

The major led the way up the wide stone stairway. Guy followed, with Clete and Lysippe on each side and slightly to the rear.

At the door, two sentries sprang to the salute. Guy Thomas took in the short, stubby scrambler guns they carried and winced. It was the most deadly handweapon he knew of in the whole UP confederation. Either of these Amazons could have leveled everything within half a mile's radius. What in the name of the Holy Ultimate did sentries need with a scrambler?

The major marched on through, Guy and his guards right behind. Inside, as on Earth, the antiquity motif dropped rather sharply away. The interior of the building was quite as ultramodern as a business establishment on Earth or Avalon.

The major marched up to a reception desk behind which was seated a bright looking young man done up as usual in the tunic garb of the Amazonian male. Guy and his

guards were still to the rear.

"Yes, Madam?" the receptionist said.

"Major Oreithyia with the Earth representative, Guy Thomas," she said with military snap.

The receptionist took a moment to scan Guy top to bottom in curiosity. He said kindly, "Welcome to Themiscyra, darling."

"Thanks," Guy grunted. He was getting tired of these endearments between men. At least the underground didn't seem to use them.

The other smiled tolerantly at the major and the two Amazon warriors. "Goodness, it's like we've heard. They're rather unmanly on the other worlds, aren't they?"

Nobody bothered to answer. He said, a bit miffed, "You're being awaited in the conference chambers, down at the end of that corridor, Major." And then he blinked, as though he had noted the style of Guy's tunic for the first time. "Goodness me," he said. "A virgin."

Guy began to growl something at him, decided the hell with it, and gave up.

They marched down the indicated corridor, the major again ahead, the two warriors bringing up the rear. They reached a door.

Clete said, "Just a minute." He hand on her gun, she opened up and looked in. Evidently satisfied, she opened it wider and stood to one side.

Guy Thomas followed the major inside.

It was a conference room that would have been duplicated, ten thousand times, in Greater Washington, or, for that matter, on practically any of the advanced planets. A long table, obviously of wood, Guy Thomas noted, was equipped with all the latest taping and other recording devices. Around the table were heavy, comfortable chairs, about twenty in all although there weren't that many persons present. Otherwise, there was little furniture.

There were six persons present and already seated at the table. Somewhat to Guy's surprise, half of them were men. They were the first middle-aged males he had seen on the planet – in fact, one must have been at least in his sixties. The three women were in the same age group. The women were dressed, somewhat uncomfortably it seemed to him for some reason, in much the same garb as the major and her warriors, albeit a bit more conservatively and without weapons. The men wore what he assumed were standard garments for more elderly males, something like a Roman toga. They didn't seem to be particularly used to the dress; possibly it was only worn under special circumstances, and they anticipated being presented to the Hippolyte later on.

The major barked, "Citizen Guy Thomas, of the planet Earth, representative of the Department of Interplanetary Trade of United Planets."

One of the women, who sat at the table's head, took Guy in from top to bottom. "You

look on the young and flat side to be holding down an important mission."

Guy said evenly, "I'm old enough and have the necessary background to handle the job." The old biddy looked like a warhorse. He would have hated to have worked under her.

"Just what *is* your job?" one of the men said. "We don't seem to be clear on just how far your authority goes, just how binding your decisions can be considered."

The old biddy said, "My name's Lampado. Take a chair, Citizen Thomas." She indicated and introduced the remaining five, giving some of them titles meaningless to Guy, but obviously indicating some technical rank or position involving imports and exports.

Guy sat down, the major took a position against the wall where she could scan the entire room, and each of the girls stationed themselves at one of the two doors.

Guy looked at the man who had asked the question. He had been introduced as Aeasus. Evidently, second names were seldom used on Amazonia. Bates, Podner's family name, was the only one he could recall having heard.

Guy said, "As I've explained before, I'm a United Planets expediter. Eventually, UP will step out of the picture altogether. I have no power to finalize a deal between Amazonia and Avalon, all I can do is gather preliminary information."

"All right," Lampado gruffed. "The Hippolyte has named us the committee to handle the initial conference. If you don't mind, first a few questions."

"Of course," Guy said. He had to watch himself now. He could spill the beans without hardly trying. These people were obviously trained technicians.

Lampado said, "Thasius?"

A keen-eyed, overly heavy man who seemed even more uncomfortable in his toga than the others leaned forward. "We understand that this planet Avalon has a surplus of columbium. Frankly, Amazonia is largely lacking in this element and we had about decided to find an alternative. Our steel industry has utilized it in the preparation of stainless steel to prevent corrosion at high temperatures and to permit fabrication without added heat treatment."

Guy nodded thoughtfully.

Thasius said, "Do we understand that this Avalon has extensive deposits of niobite, the ore from which columbium is extracted?"

"Extensive," Guy repeated. "Far beyond her own needs."

"Very well," Lampado gruffed. "And we understand her own need is for titanium."

Guy nodded. "Correct. Although titanium, of course, is one of the most common elements there are comparatively few, especially on Avalon, ores bearing it that are worth the extraction. Could you inform me which you have, here on Amazonia?"

Thasius said, "We have ilmenite, rutile, arizonite and particularly perovskite. Titanite, too, but not in particularly large quantities."

Guy said, "It's not part of my assignment to explain Avalon's need of titanium, but aside from its more usual uses, she has been turning out gem stones from it in remarkable quality and quantity and has been trading them throughout the confederation."

Lampado said, "Well, there seems little doubt here. We can supply an almost unlimited amount of titanium, in ingots, of course, and can take as much columbium as Avalon is likely to be able to export. What else is there to discuss, Citizen Thomas?"

Guy cleared his throat. "Possibly the most important facet of all. The basis of exchange. How are we to evaluate your titanium as compared to Avalon's columbium? I might suggest you put it all in the hands of the planet Geneva, which specializes in just this sort of clearinghouse problem. Her medium of exchange is gold. It would be up to the Geneva experts to work this out in detail with you both, but I understand that what it amounts to is that, on paper, she buys your titanium for gold, at the going interplanetary rate, and Avalon's columbium. She then sells you Avalon's columbium for gold, and sells Avalon your titanium for the same medium. Actually, of course, it is mostly paperwork. The gold never leaves the vaults of the planet Geneva."

They were staring at him.

Lampado blurted, "Why?"

Guy said, "I beg your pardon."

She demanded, "What does this parasite of a planet, this Geneva, get out of the deal?"

"Oh," Guy said. "Well, I understand it's based on volume. In this case, I doubt if they would require more than one percent"

Lampado rumbled in disgust, "Aeasus?"

Aeasus was rubbing the side of his face as though in confusion. He said, "See here. Why don't we trade with Avalon, even-stein? What is the need for this intermediary?"

Guy looked at him blankly. "You've got to have some exchange medium in common. Avalon's is based on platinum. One of the few in the system. I confess, I don't quite understand your own, but I assume it conflicts. What do you mean even-stein? Columbium is considerably more valuable than titanium. You certainly wouldn't expect to trade a ton of your titanium for a ton of columbium. The Avalonians aren't drivel-happy."

"Of course not," Aeasus said reasonably. "Our medium of exchange is the hour. Actually, so is their's ultimately,. Their platinum is actually valued, as an exchange commodity, according to the number of hours it takes to produce a given amount."

Oh, oh. He had run into this before. Who from? Teucer, the refugee revolutionist

from Lybia. Guy scowled.

Aeasus said, "We propose to exchange with Avalon, hour for hour. The amount of man hours it takes to produce a ton of titanium will be traded for the amount of columbium that can be produced in that time."

Guy gave a quick shake to his head. "Look," he said. "Suppose they have a higher degree of automation than you. Suppose in their niobium reducing plants only half a dozen men are required. In a hundred hours they could reduce one hell of a lot of columbium, but by your way of figuring it would be worth much. Suppose on the other hand, a lot of your mining and smelting is manual. Can't you see, it wouldn't be fair?"

"Not at all," Aeasus said, still reasonably. "The time expended in inventing, designing and building their automated plants would, obviously, be considered in the number of hours involved. Depreciation of plant is obviously a very important part in adding up the hours necessary to produce a given amount of columbium, or any other commodity. If our extraction of titanium was done by the primitive methods you suggest, then little plant would be involved, but actually, we too have automation."

Guy was trying to assimilate it.

Aeasus pressed on. "The exchange value of any commodity is determined by the socially necessary number of hours required to produce it."

Guy said, "Look, just about everybody else seems to think the exchange value of a commodity is determined by supply and demand."

Aeasus shook his head, as did all the others around the table.

"If that were so, what would happen when supply and demand equalled each other? Would the value simply disappear? Obviously not. Supply and demand can effect temporarily the price of a commodity, but not its real exchange value. And its price tends to average out at its real value."

Lampado put in with a snort, "Can't you see? If exchange value depended only on arbitrary prices set artificially, what you would continually win as a seller, you would lose as a buyer. We'd have a picture of two persons in the bottom of a well, selling hats to each other and both getting rich."

Guy said suspiciously, "Something is coming back to me. The so-called Law of Value. Wasn't it originally dreamed up by Karl Marx, a long time ago?"

"Marx?" Aeasus said frowning. "Oh you mean the 19th Century economist? No, actually the theory was first developed in 1721 by a young man named Benjamin Franklin in his first essay entitled, *A Modest Enquiry into the Nature and Necessity of a Paper Currency*. He used wheat and gold as examples, pointing out that if the same number of hours of work were involved in producing a quarter of wheat and an ounce of gold, then they were equal in value. A good many of those who came after Marx gave him credit for, or blamed him for, various teachings that never originated with the man. In fact, there are few scholars in history whose teachings have been so completely distorted – especially by his supposed followers."

"All right," Guy said. "Let's leave that for a time. How about this? How can you simply add all the hours together in a lump? Take your titanium production. Out in the mines you've got a man..." he cleared his throat "...or woman. A big brawny type. Bucking a drill. Back at the plant you've got a chemist who's running tests on the final product. This chemist spent ten years in school after the brawny yoke dropped out. He's *trained*. He's spent the better part of his youth getting that training. He's of more value to society than the drill bucker!" His voice had gone slightly high.

Actually, of course, the whole thing meant little to Guy Thomas and his real assignment. The Avalonians actually did wish to trade titanium for their surplus columbium but this expediter nonsense was a front. However, the argument was getting to him, adding to the frustration he was finding everywhere on this madhouse planet.

Aeasus said, "But obviously when the yoke, as you call him, dropped out of school, he went into his chosen field, mining in this case, being paid the number of hours he expended. Your chemist continued in school for as long as he wished, so long as he could pass the examinations. When he finally finished his education, he too went to work in the titanium industry."

"There!" Guy blurted. "He was a flat to spend all those years in school if he doesn't get paid any more than the unskilled driller."

Lampado leaned forward again. She said, unbelievably, "Don't they pay students on Earth to go to school?"

Guy Thomas closed his eyes for a moment's communion with higher powers. "No," he said. Then, "How much do you pay a student, such as our hypothetical chemist, to go to school?"

"The same as anybody else," she retorted, as though the question couldn't have been sillier. "For every hour he puts in as a student, he accrues one hour. By attending school he is adding to his value to society. He is thus contributing to the common store of value."

"Look," Guy demanded. "Suppose he's *really* stute, see? He keeps on going to school. Every time they throw an exam at him, he gets top marks. Okay, he likes school. He keeps going and going, taking more and more courses. Finally he's sixty years old, or whatever. How old do you have to be to retire on Amazonia? Don't you see, if he spent his whole life studying and getting paid as much as anybody, he'd have never put in a lick of useful work in his life!"

The Amazonians, including the major and her two warriors, began to laugh.

Aeasus, chuckling, said, "Actually, of course, graduate students in our upper schools participate in both teaching and in research in their respective fields. I am afraid, Citizen Thomas, that it would be quite difficult for your scholar not to enrich our culture as a result of his learning. Much of it, I am afraid, would rub off, willy-nilly."

Guy brushed that aspect aside. "All right, now look. According to you, each hour of time expended is worth just as much as any other hour."



Thasius interrupted here. "What could be more fair? It is the one thing in which all men and women are equal, without exception. We all, no matter of what sex, no matter the age, how intelligent or stupid, how quick of reaction or slow, have exactly twenty-four Earth basic hours a day. Surely nothing is more just than to realize that each person's time is as valuable to her, as any other person's. It is the ultimate substance of existence. What a crime is perpetuated if one person steals another's, by whatever means."

Guy Thomas took a deep breath. "All right, let's make this simple. Suppose you have a man making shoes. His reactions are quick, he's ambitious, he's diligent. He can make, say, four pairs of shoes in a work day. All right. Next to him is another fella. He's slow and strictly a cloddy. Even if he tries, and possibly he doesn't, he can't make more than two pair of shoes a day. You think the hours the stute man puts in should equal the hours the cloddy does?"

They all laughed again, to his irritation.

Aeasus said, "You make it too simple. In the very old days, when shoes were manufactured as you describe, then truly the first man's time was worth more than that of the second. But long ago that situation changed. It was found that six men working together – three of them, perhaps, cutting leather, another two sewing it together, another hammering on the heels – could perhaps produce seventy-two pair of shoes. Three times as many, per man, than if they had been working as individuals. Division of labor multiplies man's efforts. Of this six-man team, one was the fastest, one the slowest, the others inbetween, but their combined efforts brought their average up to three times the production of the fastest."

"All right," Guy muttered, "I'll take that. "Still, the fastest –"

"Just a moment, I haven't finished. Shoes are no longer produced by teams of six men, bent over a cobbler's bench. Instead, a highly trained technician watches gauges and dials and the reports of computers, while the automated factory in which he devotes his hours, pours out shoes at the rate of tens of thousands a day. This fabulous productivity of his is the accumulated legacy of the race. It does not belong to one person or group of persons, no matter how intelligent, quick or ambitious. That automated plant can operate only because half a million years ago one of our common ancestors first hit upon the use of fire. Only because twenty thousand years ago, perhaps, another ancestor devised the first wheel. Only because some long-forgotten Hittites stumbled upon the smelting of iron. And so on. A hundred, a thousand, a million of our more inventive ancestors had to live their lives to give us this legacy.

"Can this technician who prowls the gauges and dials of the automated shoe factory claim to be turning out thousands of shoes per hour through only his own time? Obviously not. It is the whole human race, down through the centuries, which is producing them. For him to be so vainglorious as to demand more for the hours he puts in than a slightly less intelligent or less agile man is presumptuous. That legacy of the ages belongs to the less stute as well as our most fortunately endowed."

They were interrupted by a knock on the door which Clete guarded. She stiffed,

opened it and peered out. She grunted and opened wide.

A young man entered and nodded his head respectfully to Lampado. "Madam, the Hippolyte will be ready to receive the representative from United Planets in ten minutes."

"Very well," the committee chairman told him. "That's all."

The messenger left, after sweeping Guy Thomas with inquisitive eyes. At least he didn't giggle, Guy conceded sourly.

Lampado said, "We've spent too much time on nonessentials. But to sum it up, Citizen Thomas, Amazonia is as desirous as Avalon to exchange columbium for titanium. We suggest that the trade be based on the number of hours expended to produce the respective products. If this is unacceptable to Avalon, we welcome their further opinions on the subject."

"That's the message you wish me to take to Avalon?" Guy said.

The major, silent all this time, said, "Always subject, of course, to the approval of the Hippolyte."

Lampado gruffed, "Of course."

The committee members began to come to their feet, stretching and smoothing out their togas and warrior's cloaks.

Guy stood too and approached the major. "Look," he said. "Brief me a little on this setup. The more I hear about the workings of your society, the less clear I seem to be. Do I understand that the Hippolyte is queen of this continent?"

Aeasus had overheard him. "Don't be silly," he snorted. "How could you have an institution as out of date as a feudalistic nobility in a culture as advanced as Amazonia? Even as figureheads kings and queens had largely disappeared before the first landing on Luna."

The major glowered at him. "Let me handle this."

The elderly scientist looked contrite. "Sorry, Major," he said. "Out of my field, of course."

She turned her eyes back to Guy Thomas. "The term *queen* is antiquated. The Hippolyte is the elected head of the four *phylons* or tribes of the Paphlagonian Amazons. The office is held for life unless the electorate deposes her."

Guy said, "Who composes the electorate?"

"The four heads of the *phylons*," the major told him as though nothing was more obvious.

He cleared his throat. "All right. How do they get to be heads of the, uh, phylons?"

"Each *phylon* is composed of ten *phratras*. The elected heads of the ten *phratras* elect the chief of their respective *phylon*."

Guy looked at her. "I know I'll get to the bottom sooner or later," he muttered. "Who elects the heads of the *phratras*?"

"Each *phratra* is composed of ten *genos*. The elected head of each *genos* votes for the chief of the *phratra* to which he belongs."

"And..." Guy said patiently.

The major wound it up. "The *genos* is the basic unit of our society. Its membership has a common name, going back to a supposed common ancestor. All members of the *genos* have certain rights and duties toward their fellow members."

"Kind of a great big, happy family, eh?" Guy said.

"Exactly. It is a type of family, but composed of thousands of persons."

"And each adult member has the right to vote for the person who represents the *genos*, eh?"

The major became slightly huffy. "Don't be ridiculous. Not the men, of course."

"Oh," Guy said sarcastically. "Of course not." The major said, "Today the Senate which is composed of the heads of each *genos* is not in session. You will be received by only the Hippolyte, flanked by her council which consists of the four *phylon* chiefs. When you are presented, you will bow and remain silent until addressed." She added, "I'll stand next to you. The Hippolyte seldom bothers with men, of course. Try not to make a flat of yourself."

Guy said in a sarcastic tone, "I'll do my best."

Her eyes turned bleak. "Don't be cute with me, boy. I'm handing this job because I was ordered to. But I don't like uppity men, understand?"

"I suspected it all along, Major," Guy got out. "Let's go."

Out in the corridors again, they fell into their old pattern of precedence. The major led, followed by the Earthling, followed in turn by Clete and Lysippe.

It would seem this building connected to the palace, or wherever it was that the Hippolyte held audience, by an underground passage. At any rate, they stepped into what Guy at first assumed was an elevator, but it turned out to be an elevator with ramifications. It sank, that feeling he could recognize, but at what he would have assumed to be the bottom of the shaft, no door opened. Instead, they began to move swiftly sideways. This continued for several minutes until they stopped, shunted this way, shunted that for a short distance, then began to mount again.

"What is this?" Guy growled. "An amusement park ride?"

"Shut up," the major rapped.

"Shut up yourself," he snapped back.

The three of them stared at him.

Finally Clete laughed. "Sweetie," she said, "you're the most effeminate man I ever saw in my life. Damned if I know what Minythyia sees in you. She'd have to spend the first year teaching you your place."

"That'd be fun," Guy muttered. He was getting fed up with this chaotic relationship between the sexes. On top of everything else, that description he'd just had of the workings of the Paphlagonia government made about as much sense as anything else on this crackpot world. What were the duties of these layers upon layers of elected officials? Who profited by what? Who was the dog catcher, and who the Minister of War?"

The car he had mistaken for a simple elevator stopped and the door opened quietly.

His eyes widened in shocked disbelief.

They stepped into the biggest, gaudiest hall he had ever seen in his life. It made the surviving cathedrals of antiquity on Earth, at Rome, Seville, Rheims and Istanbul look like peasants' huts in comparison. He closed his eyes momentarily to cut the glare and to suffer in silence.

"What's the matter?" the major growled at him.

He shook his head. "Nothing. I've simply never seen anything like this layout on any planet in the whole system, and we've got some dillies."

Clete looked at him questioningly. "I thought you had never been over-space before."

Guy Thomas covered. "I've seen a good many Tri-Di travelogues."

The major said, "Come along."

They left Clete and Lysippe at the entry and together began to march down the extended hall, eyes supposedly front, although, all along the way, Guy couldn't resist shooting unbelieving glances left and right.

Could those pillars actually be solid gold? No, of course not. Ridiculous. They were probably simply covered with gold leaf.

Those lines of warriors. Holy Jumping Zen, all armed with scrambler rifles. There was enough fire power present to blow down the city.

Those mosaics over on the wall, the scenes of Amazons and what he assumed were Greek warriors, fighting in chariots. He didn't like the way the mosaics gleamed reflected light. Oh, *no*. The mosaics, the tiny colored pieces which composed the mural, simply couldn't be gems!

The hall could easily have accomodated an Earth-side football game. There was a

self-conscious element in marching down its length. He had read once on one of the historical tapes, about the Italian dictator Mussolini who had an enormous office completely unfurnished except for the dictator's desk at the far corner. A visitor had to walk the full length of the office, becoming more self-conscious every step, to approach the other. It had been deliberate, and so, Guy Thomas decided, must this be.

All right, so he was impressed by the pomp and wealth of the Amazon Hippolyte.

At long last, they came to a halt.

On a dias sat a tall, distinguished-looking woman in her late middle years. Her throne, a heavy wooden chair in which she sat, was simple. The only simple article of furniture or decoration in the whole layout, Guy realized. She was flanked, two to each side, by four other women in her same age group, though none quite so patrician. Their cuirasses were evidently of silver and richly embossed and inlaid with gems, one emeralds, one rubies, one diamonds, one sapphires. Probably, Guy decided, each Amazonian *phylon* had a symbolic color, a symbolic jewel. The Hippolyte's own cuirass was of simple gold without embellishments.

They stood there for a long moment, Guy thinking, *it's your ball, start bouncing it.*

The Hippolyte finally spoke, her rich, full voice in complete compatibility with her distinguished appearance.

"Present the Earthling," she said.

The major barked, "Citizen Guy Thomas, of Earth, representing the Department of Interplanetary Trade of the United Planets."

Guy bowed, moderately but sufficiently.

The Hippolyte said, "We understand you have come to our world to –"

"Just a minute," the Phylon chief to her immediate right said.

The Hippolyte turned to her, eyebrows up. "Yes, Marpesia? You have reason to interrupt me?"

The Pylon chief nodded, without looking at her superior. Her eyes were narrow and on Guy Thomas.

"Only last year, when I was Amazonian Ambassador to to the United Planets, he was pointed out to me at an Octagon reception. His name isn't Guy Thomas and he is not connected with the Department of Interplanetary Trade. His name is Ronald Bronston and he is top trigger-man for Sidney Jakes of the Notorious Section G of the Bureau of Investigation."

## VIII

There must have been some sort of signal. Warriors, who had been standing far to the side, were approaching on the double.

Guy Thomas didn't bother to look for a possible way out. The legendary Houdini couldn't have escaped from this monstrous reception hall, throne room, or call it what you will. There must have been a thousand uniformed and armed women present.

He stood, unchanging, looking straight ahead.

The Hippolyte held her silence for a long moment. In less than that time, Guy and the major were flanked with a double score of young, efficient-looking guards. The major, he noted, was glaring at him, speechlessly.

The Hippolyte said finally, "You have heard Marpesia's accusation. What is your answer. Earthling?"

Guy took a breath and said, "I am a citizen of United Planets and a resident of the planet Earth. I demand to be turned over to the UP Embassy."

The Hippolyte said, "Put him to the question."

He had a warrior at each arm. Less than gently, he was about-faced and marched back to the entrance through which he had come only ten minutes or so earlier.

At the entry to the elevator, Clete and Lysippe stared at him but didn't move to join his retinue which consisted of Major Oreithyia and all the guards who could squeeze into the compartment.

He had no way of knowing what methods they had of interrogating him. Simple torture? He assumed that he could bear as much as the next man. But was their torture simple? There had been no hint in the Hippolyte's words to suggest of just what his interrogation would consist.

Would he have a chance to suicide?

Unlikely.

He cursed himself for not having had the foresight to provide himself with a capsule of cyanide. He cursed Sid Jakes for not having thought of it.

The elevator compartment sank and then, as before, shunted to the right, stopped, shunted left, stopped, seemed to twist and then moved forward at a clip.

No one, not even the major, said a word.

His mind raced, but there was nowhere for it to go. Everything was out of his control. There merest movement and the hands on his arms tightened. Without doubt, some of them bore some type of stun gun. He had enough problems without being muffled by a tuned-down stun gun.

The moving compartment halted, shunted about again and then zoomed upward at a knee bending velocity. It came to a halt and the door opened.

They marched him down a corridor which had the odors and atmosphere of a hospital, rather than of a prison or military building.

They hustled him into a room which continued the hospital motif, up to and including an operating table.

"Wait a minute," he blurted inadvertently, even as two of his warrior guards reached down and grabbed him by the ankles. The two at his arms acted in unison and he found himself tossed up onto the table and held firmly.

He didn't see who it was that put the clamps on arms, legs and head. He was unable to move.

Someone blatted orders and all except a few seemed to leave the room. He stared at the ceiling, not bothering to turn his eyes in attempt to see who was entering, who leaving.

He knew what was coming. There was to be no torture.

Shortly his suspicions were fulfilled. He felt a sudden prick in his arm. He clenched his teeth, knowing even as he did how meaningless the gesture was. There was another injection.

He might have known. In all other respects, the Amazonians had proven themselves to be as advanced as any of the member worlds of United Planets. There was no reason to believe they weren't thoroughly familiar with Scop, or its equivalent. He had no illusions. He had just received a shot of Scop and of some other drug as well.

There was a period of possibly five minutes in which various mutterings and shuffling went on in the background. He didn't bother to try to look. He kept his eyes on the ceiling.

Finally a voice said, "What is your name?"

Deep within him his soul screamed.

He said, "Ronald Bronston."

"What is your official position?"

"I am an operative of supervisor grade of Section G, of the Bureau of Investigation, Department of Justice, Commissariat of Interplanetary Affairs, of United Planets."

"Under whose orders are you working?"

"Sidney Jakes."

"What is his position?"

"Assistant to Ross Metaxa."

"Who is Ross Metaxa?"

"Commissioner of Section G."

"From whom does he take orders?"

"I do not know."

There was a pause for a moment and some whispering in the background.

Finally the voice came again. "What are you doing on Amazonia?"

"An Amazonian refugee requested aid of the Octagon. I was sent to investigate the situation on this planet."

"What was her name?"

Ronny Bronston remained silent. Within him there was ultimate despair but it was meaningless. He was fully conscious. He was in control of mind and body, save this one thing. Save this one thing.

In the background muttering and an air of disbelief.

A different voice said, "What was *his* name?"

"Sarpedon."

"What was his *genos* name?"

"I do not know."

"What do you mean, a refugee?"

"He fled Amazonia to request political asylum and to secure aid."

"What sort of aid?"

"Aid to overthrow the politico-economic system of Amazonia."

There was an unbelieving intake of breath in the background.

"What would take its place?"

"I do not know."

"Do you know anything about this projected new politico-economic system?"

"Yes, it would include men in the administration of the planet."

There was another short silence.

Finally a voice said, "Would it include women as well?"

"I do not know."

"Where is this Sarpedon now?"



"I do not know."

"Has he returned to Amazonia?"

"I do not know."

"Is he still on Earth?"

"I do not know."

"Do you know anything else about Sarpedon?"

"Yes, he is thought to be dead."

"Why?"

"He disappeared from the apartment which Section G had assigned him."

There was a long pause again. Finally still another voice said, "Does this Section G believe the Amazonian Embassy on Earth is guilty of Sarpedon's death?"

"Yes."

"How did Sarpedon get to Earth?"

"He was smuggled onto the artificial satellite that houses the UP Embassy, and from there returned by regular spaceship."

"Who smuggled him aboard the satellite?"

"The Sons of Liberty."

"The Sons of Liberty! Who in the name of the Goddess are the Sons of Liberty?"

"An underground organization of men."

"An underground organization of men! Don't be ridiculous."

That last had come from the background somewhere. It was not a voice Ronny had heard before.

"Quiet," an authoritative speaker said.

The questioning continued. "What is the purpose of this underground organization?"

"To overthrow the present government."

"How?"

"I do not know."

"Do you know the names of any of the members?"

"Yes. Sarpedon, Zeke, Teucer, Damon."

"What are their *genos* names?"

"I do not know."

"Who is Zeke?"

Ronny Broston remained silent.

"Where did you learn Zeke's name?"

"At the underground drop at Number 35 Heliopolis Street."

"How did you know this address?"

"It was given to me by Sarpedon."

"Did he give you any other addresses here on Amazonia?"

"No."

"When were you at the underground drop on Heliopolis Street?"

"Last night."

He could hear the major's voice in the background. "Artimis! He was under guard and in bed."

Somebody else snapped, "I assume you were the guard, Major Oreithyia? You realize it's impossible for him to lie."

"Silence," the authoritative voice rapped.

"Who else did you meet at the underground drop?"

"Teucer."

"Who is Teucer?"

"A Lybian refugee."

"Lybian refugee! What do you mean by Lybian refugee?"

"A man who fled Lybia and sought sanctuary in Paphlagonia."

'Sanctuary? Sanctuary with whom?"

"With the Paphlagonian Sons of Liberty."

Someone blurted, "Is there a Lybian Sons of Liberty?"

"Yes."

There was another lengthy silence and muttering in the further parts of the room.

Finally, "Who else did you meet at the Heliopolis address?"

"Nobody."

"Where did you meet Damon?"

He remained silent.

"How did you learn Damon's name?"

"Zeke told it to me."

"What did Zeke tell you about Damon?"

"He is the head of the Sons of Liberty."

"How many followers are there of this fantastic organization?"

"Tens of thousands of members and half the male population as inactive sympathizers."

"Ridiculous!" said the voice from the background which had been shushed before.

"Confound it, shut up, Penthesileia," the authoritative voice said. "Go back to this Section G organization, Hippo."

The original inquisitor's voice said, "What is Section G?"

"A department of the Bureau of Investigation of the Department of Justice."

"But what is its purpose?"

"To help overthrow the politico-economic systems of planets on which progress is being held up by restrictive governments."

There was a shocked hush. Someone muttered, "The rumors we heard were correct."

"But that is in direct conflict with Articles One and Two of the United Planets Charter."

Ronny Bronston said nothing.

"Were you sent to Amazonia to help the Sons of Liberty overthrow the present socioeconomic system."

"No."

"Why were you sent to Amazonia?"

"To investigate the situation and discover if the present socioeconomic system was holding up progress."

"Have you come to any conclusion?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"That the present socioeconomic system is holding up progress by preventing half the population from utilizing its full abilities."

"If you made this report, would Section G then take measures to subvert our government?"

"It is most probable."

"Are there any other Section G operatives on Amazonia?"

"It is improbable. If there were, I would most likely have been informed."

They squabbled some more in the background.

Finally the demanding voice came again. "Why does the Department of Justice concern itself with the internal affairs of member planets of United Planets?"

"It wishes to institute socioeconomic systems which will lead to the fastest progress of which the planet is capable."

"Progress in which sense?"

"Scientific progress, industrial progress, progress in education, in freeing the individual from any restriction that prevents him from realizing his abilities."

The voice had an impatient edge. "Why does the Department of Justice think it its business to force its version of progress upon sovereign member planets of UP?"

"It believes such progress is necessary to prepare the human race for its eventual confrontation with the aliens."

"What aliens?"

"The intelligent aliens first discovered by the Space Forces over a century ago."

"Discovered *where*?"

"A space scout came upon a derelict which had obviously been crisped in an interplanetary fight. Its pilot was small but obviously intelligent. The craft was more sophisticated than any we are capable of building."

"Why were not the member planets immediately informed of this?"

"The UP heads decided that the human race must go into all-out preparation for the eventual confrontation with the aliens. Even though the aliens may be peaceful, the stronger the human race the better bargaining position it will be in, whatever the issues that arise upon our two life forms meeting."

The authoritative voice which had, thus far, done none of the questioning, said, "But why were the member planets not informed so that they could unite more strongly in the face of the mutual danger and thus progress together?"

"It was decided by the UP that a common danger does not necessarily unite the

human race. The member planets include almost every race and color, socioeconomic system, religion and political governmental form that man has developed over the ages. Many of these, if not all, would reject progress if it threatened their institutions. For instance, a planet with a feudalistic social system would reject any attempts to have a system of free enterprise foisted upon it, no matter what such a change might mean in the way of progress. Another example is the early days of nuclear weapons on Earth. The whole world was faced with destruction, but that did not stop the rush toward war on the part of conflicting socioeconomic systems. Both sides would rather have pulled the whole race down, rather than give up its institutions. Better dead than red, was the slogan on one side, and the opposing side had slogans as strong or stronger. Mutual danger does not necessarily unite the race."

The voice said musingly, "Then the Department of Justice and its cloak-and-dagger arm, Section G, does not believe that Amazonia would necessarily give up its own institutions in the face of a common danger to the race."

It was not exactly a question. Ronny Bronston said nothing.

Somebody said, "We've already got more information than we need to bring this to the immediate attention of the Hippolyte."

The authoritative voice rapped, "Put this man under tight guard. Everyone present in this room is to consider herself bound by top priority security. Under no circumstances can anything revealed here be spread. Is that clear?"

There were murmurs of earnest assent.

Ronny felt himself being lifted, mattress, arm, leg and head clamps and all from the table onto a hospital operating room cart. He still stared at the ceiling, uncaringly.

He felt himself pushed through the door into the corridor. He could sense the warriors about him, but didn't care their number or where they were taking him.

They were taking him to what seemed a very ordinary hospital room. He was lifted from the cart and placed on a bed.

"Should we undress him and put him under the sheets?" one of the guards said.

"Why?" another said impatiently. "This boy isn't going to do any sleeping for a good long while. If you ask me, the Hippolyte, the full council and half the scientists in Paphlagonia will be ripping over here within the half hour. Then they'll have our boy here stuck like a pin cushion with more Scop and Come-Along. He'll be lucky if they take time out in the next forty-eight hours to give him some nourishment."

"We shouldn't be talking in front of him."

"Why not?"

"Well, we shouldn't."

"He's not going to repeat anything to anybody."

"How do you know? Did you hear what Marpesia called him? The triggerman of Sidney Jakes. Maybe he doesn't look like much, but that Section G sounds like a rugged outfit and he's evidently one of their top trouble-shooters."

"So what?"

"So we shouldn't talk in front of him. Some day he might get away from us, or be freed for one reason or the other."

The other snorted contempt of that opinion.

"Well, let's go out in the hall and talk. I'm bursting with all this. I've got to discuss it with somebody."

"Leave him here alone?"

"In the name of Artemis, what could possibly happen to him? He's got clamps an elephant couldn't break. Besides that, he's full of Come-Along and Scop, and neither will wear off for hours, He'll obey anybody's orders until the stuff wears off."

A face bent over him.

"Ronald Bronston, don't you move from this bed, understand?"

"Yes."

He heard the door open and close and assumed he was alone. He had spilled enough of the inner workings of Section G and the ultimate purpose of United Planets to tear down the work of tens of thousands of dedicated men.

There was small comfort in the fact that as yet they hadn't quite drained him of the secrets his mind held. For one thing, they'd got an inadequate picture of the threat of the aliens. They hadn't asked enough questions to bring out all the ramifications. However, there was no reason to believe that in the immediate future he wouldn't spill every bean.

He had no doubts whatsoever that within days Amazonia would broadcast his revelations. Then every member planet in the confederation which feared interference with its institutions would drop away from United Planets. The work of centuries would be ended within within weeks. And all because of Ronald Bronston.

He cursed the fact that he had ever attended that Octagon reception. They should have known better. It was a tradition of Section G to avoid the public eye.

He heard a door open. Evidently, one of his guards returning, just to check. What was there to check? He couldn't move a muscle and even had he been able to, he had been given orders to remain in this bed, and it was impossible to disobey.

He heard footsteps approaching him across the room, and frowned that they seemed to be stealthy.

A face looked down into his. A face that was grinning amusement.

She spoke in whisper. "Cutey, I hear you've got yourself into some sort of trouble."

It was Minythia. How had she ever gotten into the room?

She began fussing with his bonds, muttering, "How'd you get into this mess?"

"One of the Hippolyte's council recognized me," Ronny said.

She looked up and shot a puzzled glance at him, even as she worked, as though wondering at the Zombie-like inflection of his voice.

"You're under Scop, aren't you?"

Yes."

"Oh, oh. I'm probably getting myself into trouble. Clete didn't know what it was you had supposedly done. You got anything else in you? Or do you know?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"Come-Along."

"So! Well, that makes things easier. Get up out of that bed, Cutey."

Her order countermanded the one the guard had given him. He arose and looked at her.

Minythia said, "You look awful with that stuff in you. We've got to get out of here. Follow me."

He followed her, noting that there were two doors to the room. He assumed that through one his guards had passed into the hospital corridor. In fact, he could indistinctly hear their voices.

He followed her through the other door. There was another hospital room, this one empty, on the other side. She hurried through this, he immediately behind. She grasped the knob of the door on the far side of the room and opened it. The room beyond was occupied by an elderly person, in bed.

Minythia said apologetically, "Sorry to bother you again. That nardy door is still locked and this is the only way to get through."

The patient in the bed murmured something indistinctly.

They passed through the door beyond of that room too and Ronny Bronston found himself, still following the Amazon warrior, in a corridor. It came to him for the first time that his rescuer, if that was her role, was for the first time he had seen her, not garbed in her usual regular uniform. In fact, her dress differed little from his own. A flowing, tunic-like affair that presented her admittedly curvaceous body to much better effect than had the military outfit which tended to suppress breast and hips.

They hurried along the deserted corridor which opened in turn to still another. It was larger and Minythyia slowed her pace, as must needs he as well since her order had been to *follow me*.

They passed various persons, undoubtedly hospital personnel and a few who were obviously either patients or visitors. Ronny and his rescuer passed unnoticed.

They left the building through a side entrance and again increased their pace. Minythyia hustled down a stone walk to a sports model hovercar parked in a forbidden zone, going by the signs imbedded in the street.

She vaulted over the side into the driver's seat, snapping, "Get in! Artemis! Hurry!"

He climbed in on the passenger's side, hardly in time to avoid being thrown aside by the vehicle's surge forward. They were down an alley, out onto a monstrously large curving driveway, then out into a broad boulevard to be absorbed by the traffic.

Ronny noted that she was driving manually and realized why. Had she switched to the less dangerous auto, the traffic computers handling the car would have been able to pinpoint her. He didn't know exactly what was happening, but if it was known, or came out, that Minythyia was his kidnapper from authority, then the hunt would be on in earnest.

She shot a grin over at him. "Clete didn't know what sort of romp you tried to pull off. Only that you were marched away for questioning. Something really criminal?"

"No," he said.

She chuckled abruptly. "It occurs to me that I'll never have another chance like this. Listen, boy, do you think I'm attractive?"

"Yes."

"Back on Earth. Would you have gone for someone like me?"

"Yes."

She laughed, a trifle wryly. "Would you...would you have wanted to...marry me?"

"No."

"Ummmm. That puts me in my place." She laughed again. "And how do you like our fair city?"

"I like it."

They were hurrying down a main artery. Traffic was heavy, though not as badly so as many another capital city Ronny had been in in his time. As he had noted when seeking out Zeke and the Sons of Liberty, the public buildings, squares, fountains and monuments were unrivaled.

Minythyia seemed to be on something like a talking jag, brought about possibly by



nervousness. Perhaps it was just coming home to her just how serious a matter her romp was.

She said, "See that building there? Apartment for bachelor girls. That's where your pal Patricia O'Gara has been put up." She chuckled. "She's had to go back to school. She *thought* she knew all about Amazonia, but she didn't."

She pulled off onto a side street and cut speed somewhat through necessity. The little sporthover responded to her faintest touch on the joystick like a dream of delicacy.

She swung it hard to the right again and dropped her brake lever.

"Here we are!" she chuckled. "Come on, boy."

She vaulted from the car, bustled around to his side as though to open the door for him, but by the time she had arrived he was standing on the walk. She led the way toward a large, heavy wooden door, beautifully carved. It opened before her and they hurried through.

"We're on the third floor," she said. "No elevator. Elevators are masculine. Exercise is good for you. Come on, Cutey."

They ascended the marble stairs.

At the top, she utilized a key and they passed into a moderately large apartment. Ronny looked around. It was surprisingly well done, the taste excellent. For once, the decorative motif had nothing to do with Amazons or Greeks. The murals and paintings were based on nature studies. The main room, in which they stood, was large and comfortably done with chairs, coffee tables and couches. There was what must be a small bar at one end of the room. It looked to Ronny Bronston considerably more like a bachelor's apartment than the one that had been assigned to him in the sanctuary.

He stood in the middle of the room, waiting further instructions. Without instructions, he knew, he was free to act on his own, however, he had little doubt but that Minythyia was going to keep him well in hand so long as the Come-Along and Scop controlled him.

She approached him now, grinning mockingly. "So," she said. "At long last. I don't know what there is about you, Cutey, possibly the romantic aspects of you being from over-space."

Her smile turned more mocking still and she put her right hand on his shoulder.

"I thee take," she said softly.

## IX

Even under the influence of the powerful drugs, there must have been something in his

eyes. Minythyia laughed at him. But in the laughter there was a wry element.

"Of course," she told him, "It's not really finalized until we go before Artemis during the summer solstice, with all the others, to gain her blessing. But unless you wish to throw yourself on the mercies of some other warrior – if she'll take you – you're mine. Do you understand?"

"Yes."

"Do you wish to get in touch with some other warrior?"

His mind was free to race, in spite of its enslavement. Here, for the moment, he was moderately safe. Safe, he could hope, until the drugs wore off and he would be free to operate. If he contacted someone else – and who was there to contact? – his location would become known. Even here, when she learned the true nature of his conflict with the authorities, he doubted if her infatuation would stand up against patriotism. He was astonished that she had gone this far.

"No," he said, in answer to her question.

Her eyes were mocking once more. "Then you're willing to remain here with me...Cutey?"

"Yes."

She laughed enjoyment.

"All right, here is the arrangement. This is not my apartment. It belongs to a friend. She is away and isn't due back for almost a month. I don't believe Clete or Lysippe or any of the others know I have access. We're safe, especially if we never allow you to be seen on the streets. I'll bring in what supplies we can't get over the auto. In a month's time, things will settle down. Things always settle down, given time. By then, we'll be able to size up the situation and plan what to do. Married to me, you have the rights of a male Amazonian citizen. You'll be under the protection of my *genos* and through it my *phratra* and ultimately *phylon*. Like I said, I don't know what kind of romp you tried to pull off, but there'll be some way to fix it." She twisted her pert face. "I've got some high connections."

She looked at him calculatingly for a moment. "Are you hungry?"

"No."

"If you get hungry, or thirsty, you can dial on the auto. It's tuned to my hour account. Do you know how to do that?"

"Yes."

"All right. Make yourself at home, here. Don't leave the apartment, understand? Don't leave the apartment under any circumstances."

"Yes."

"I've got several things to do. I've got to look up Lysippe and Clete and establish an alibi. I've got to ditch that car. It could be traced." She winked at him. "Besides, it's not mine. I *borrowed* it. When I come back, I'll explain a lot of things to you.

"Good heavens, sit down. Don't wait for me to tell you everything. No, just a moment. Kiss me. The way they do on the occasional Tri-Di show tapes we get from Earth."

He kissed her, neither the Scop nor the Come-Along influenced that.

She stood back, her eyes shining. "Well," she said. "What would I call you on the Tri-Di? A cad? But then, we're married, aren't we?" Her lips were mocking again. "Amazonian style, that is."

She was suddenly gone from the apartment.

Ronny Bronston sat down. Except for her direct order to remain in the apartment, he was free to act.

His eyes went about the room desperately. There must be something he could do. Surely she would be gone for at least an hour. Perhaps not. Perhaps within that time she would discover the magnitude of his troubles and be back on the double with Clete and Lysippe, or some other Amazonian warriors, to apprehend him and return him to the questioning.

He went from one room to another. A bedroom, a refresher, an eating alcove with an auto in it. Back to the livingroom.

His eyes hit upon the small bar. By the looks of the whole apartment, Minythia's friend must be quiet a hedonist. The bar, the decor, some of the murals, all pointed in that direction. He wondered what the equivalent of an orgy, here on Amazonia, might be.

His eyes swung quickly back to the bar and something came to him.

Come-Along. It didn't react favorably with alcohol. You couldn't give it to a drunk. It did no more than to make him terribly ill. It was even comparatively ineffective if you dosed someone who had just a couple of belts. To give it to someone in an alcoholic state, was just wasting your time, which was quite a deterrent to both espionage agents and Romeos.

He made his way to the bar. It was a bar all right. Two shelves below held bottles, glasses, ice tongs, swizzle sticks, all the universal paraphernalia of the home bar, be it on Earth, Avalon, New Delos...or Amazonia.

Ronny Bronston picked up the handiest bottle and scowled at the label. It meant nothing to him. He wrenched the top off and applied it to his lips. Sickeningly sweet! He couldn't put away much of that. He took up another bottle. Another damned cordial!

He grasped a third bottle. It contained a colorless fluid, something resembling gin or vodka. He tried it and sputtered, shooting a fine spray from his mouth. He looked at the

label in respectful wonder. It told him nothing.

Ronny Bronston, though not habitually a heavy drinker, had done his share of nipping in his time. But never on anything as potent as this. He couldn't take it straight. He poured a hefty belt into a tall glass and went into the refresher room for water.

There was a faint taste of anis in the far background of the spirit, not too unpleasant. He got the first glass down, feeling the stuff already beginning to warm his belly, and quickly poured another.

He hadn't eaten since breakfast. How long ago was that? It seemed ages. The drink was getting to him quickly. He put down still more and the room began to go hazy. He shook his head, bear-like, and decided to make his try.

His orders had been quite definite: *Don't leave the apartment under any circumstances.*

Ronny shook his head again in attempt to achieve temporary clarity and walked with deliberation toward the door. He took the knob in his hand. And couldn't twist it. He stared down, his eyes bleary. Was it locked? No, it wasn't that. He simply *couldn't* turn it.

*Don't leave the apartment under any circumstances.*

He shook his head still again and went back to the bottle. He eyed it, finding difficulty in focusing. He closed one eye. That was considerably better. Hell, he wasn't any molly when it came to guzzle. He could put it down with anybody. Even with his ultimate superior, Ross Metaxa, with that Denebian tequila of his in the stone bottle.

He'd show 'em who could drink like a gennulman. Hold his guzzle like a trooper. He took up the bottle with a flourish of braggadocio and applied it to his lips.

He got down three or four full gulps before it hit him. He dropped the bottle to the floor, unknowingly. His eyes were glazed now. He had never passed out from drink in his life, but this was preciously near it. He tried to achieve clarity by slapping his cheek hard with his right hand.

He staggered toward the door, grasped the knob just in time to prevent falling. There was something he was supposed to remember, he knew. Something about that girl. What was her name? Miny...Minythy...something or other. Something she told him. He couldn't remember.

He swayed and his hand on the knob turned in his effort to keep himself erect. The knob turned and the door pushed open and he staggered into the hall beyond in effort to keep his balance.

He held onto the ironwork banister at the stairs' head, breathing deeply. Zen, but he was drenched. You had to admit that, all right. He was drenched.

He had better get out and get some fresh air. Either that or go back into the apartment and climb into bed. Yes, that was it, go back into the apartment and get some sleep. He had to wait for Miny...whatever her name was.

But then he turned sly, even as he wavered, holding onto the banister. Now he remembered. She'd hooked him. Amazon style. Tha's why he hadda get outta this house.

He started down the stairs, as only a drunk can navigate stairs.

He chortled, "Thas what *she* thinks. She thinks I'm easy. Thas what she thinks. Nice fella like me. I wanta church wedding, thas what I want. With flowers, and dressed in white an all..."

Unbelievably, he made it down the three flights and then to the street. As he left the building, he was singing to himself, "Somethin old, somethin new, somethin borrowed, somethin blue."

On the street, the fresh air had a small effect on him. Besides that, the change of scene forced him to think anew. He had someplace to go, or he'd better have some place to go. If not, he might as well try to get back up the stairs to the apartment. For a reason he couldn't put his finger on, he didn't want to go back to that apartment. Though, come to think of it, that Miny girl wasn't so bad. She'd got him out of some kind of trouble once, hadn't she? He knew damn well she had, but it was kind of hazy.

He took a deep breath and started down the street, in the opposite direction from which he had originally approached with Minythyia.

Just as he reached the corner, he heard a hovercar coming up behind him. Oh, oh. He didn't turn, even when he heard it come to a quick stop before the building. He did a commendable left face, with all a drunk's cunning, and went down the side street.

Fifty feet further on there was an opening to the left again. A snort of mews, British style. A courtyard at the end with a water fountain. For reason unbeknownst to himself, he headed toward it.

Only half way there the nausea hit him and he was deathly ill. He emptied his insulted stomach into a doorway, feeling like a pig, but still not caring...not caring about anything. When the retching was over, he resumed his way toward the fountain, somewhat steadier. There was something nagging him from within, don't...leave...the...apartment...under...any...circumstances. But it didn't seem to make much sense.

There were children playing in the little courtyard. He ignored them, stumbled to the water and plunged his head into it. He came up for air. Zen! it was cold and good. He plunged his head back in.

The children were standing around watching him, wide-eyed.

He glowered at them. There were, he realized, both boys and girls. All of them wore either shorts or kilts, nor did the attire seem to be based on sex. Some boys wore shorts, some kilts, so did the girls.

He scooped up water with his hand and drank it. It hit his stomach with a chill and for a moment he was afraid he was going to be sick again.

No, that passed. He decided he'd have to get out of here, but quick. Before one of the kids went running to a parent, or teacher, or whatever, and somebody turned up to investigate him.

By the moment, his true situation was coming back to him. He was still drunk, sodden drunk, but his mind was clearing slowly. He couldn't allow himself to be picked up. He had to do something, he couldn't quite remember what.

He retraced his way to the street and turned left on it. What was it he had to do? It came to him in stages. He had to warn somebody about something.

He came to a crossing and paused for a moment, scowling. Two pedestrians passed him, a man and a woman. Once again, their garb was so similar as to be almost identical.

This crossing. He had been here once before. But he couldn't have been. He shook his head, to clear it further of fumes.

Then it came to him. He had been this way when seeking out the Sons of Liberty.

That was it! He had to warn Zeke and the others. He had babbled their address to his Amazon inquisitors. He had to warn them. Unless it was too late. It probably was too late. The Hippolyte's warriors had probably descended on the hapless revolutionaries like a flow of lava.

But he had to see. In spite of his own danger, he owed it to the others to make the attempt. He screwed up his face in memory. He wasn't so very far from the spot where the unknown assassin had shot at him. Yes, it was down this way.

As he walked, his lucidity returned, though he still felt nausea from the wringer through which he had put his body. He had drunk an unbelievable amount of alcohol, in far too short a time. Happily, he had vomited much of it up before it had gotten fully into his bloodstream.

He went down this street, up that, his appearance no longer attracting the attention of others. In his garb he resembled his fellow pedestrians. It had only been his gait, before, that had singled him out. He looked down at his clothing to see if he had messed it at the height of his illness. No, it was reasonably clean and unwrinkled.

This was where the shooting match had taken place. It looked considerably different in the light of day. He went more slowly. And this was Heliopolis Street. It was to his surprise that he saw no vehicles before Number 35. No vehicles, nor could he spot any of the Hippolyte's guards. If they were in the vicinity, they would probably be hidden, he realized. But there was nothing he could do about that. He was weaponless and still shaky, but he had to make the attempt.

He pounded on the door, and leaned against it. He was tired from the exercise of his walk, and the drinking had robbed him of considerable strength. He could hear no movement beyond. He pounded again and again.

In exasperation, he tried the knob. The door pushed open.

He went on through. Had the Amazon warriors already been here, and captured the Sons of Liberty on the premises? Were they hidden inside, waiting for more unsuspecting men of the underground to show up? He could readily believe it.

Frowning in memory, he retraced the way Zeke had taken him the night before. They had come along this patio garden. There was still no sound in the building. It gave the place an eerie quality. There was the fountain, it was the fountain, it was less attractive in the full light of day. The house had an unkempt quality. Well, it was a secret underground base, not fundamentally a home.

Here was the sparsely furnished room Zeke had taken him to. He entered, his eyes going around. The bottle of wine and three glasses were still there on the table.

And in a corner, bound, lay the excitable, emotional Lybian Zeke had introduced as Teucer. He was bound and gagged, and his eyes were wide at Ronny's entrance. He blinked energetically, as though in warning.

Ronny was about to turn, his reflexes still slow, when his assailant hit him from behind.

Even as he fell automatically into a defensive position, he knew the attack was lacking in sophistication. It was the vigorous but unscientific attack of one who had never studied hand-to-hand combat. He ducked and spun right in instinctive counterattack and snagged a section of the other's garment. He felt a blow against his upper back and ignored it.

Still holding onto the other's tunic, he spun again, twisting the garment in such a way that one of the enemy's arms was immobilized. He felt another couple of meaningless blows; the other had a sap, or possibly was using the butt of a shooter, but he was pathetically inept.

It was over almost immediately. Ronny bent and swung, throwing the other heavily against the wall. He heard air escape agonizingly from his opponent's lungs.

Ronny looked at him shakily for a moment. His eyes still weren't completely used to the gloom of the unlit room, after coming in from the bright Amazonian sunlight. It was just a kid, a youngster of possibly seventeen or eighteen, and none too large for his age. No wonder he had been so easy to take. His small club, which looked as though it had been improvised from a broom handle, had fallen to the floor. The youngster was unconscious, which wasn't surprising. Ronny would have been more gentle had he known the other's age and size.

He looked back to Teucer, still attempting to blink signals to him. "All right," he growled. He knelt before the other and began to untie him. As a preliminary, he pulled the gag from the slight man's mouth. "What in Zen's happened?"

"Get me out of these nardy ropes," Teucer rasped. "How do I know what happened? This young cloddy must have got behind me and slugged me one. When I woke up, I was tied like this."

"Where's Zeke?"

"He's gone to keep an appointment with Damon and some of the others. Listen — "

"Just a minute. Leaving you alone?" The other was about free.

Teucer came to his feet rubbing his wrists. He bent and rubbed his ankles. "Yes. Listen, I've got a lot of questions to ask you, but we've got to get out of here."

"I'll say we do. The Hippolyte is onto this place. Is there a back entrance?"

Teucer stared at him. "How?" he blurted.

"Scop. They put me on Scop and I slipped everything."

Teucer groaned. "Come on. Yes, there's a back way. Hurry, we've got to get somewhere we can talk." He sped toward the rear of the house, evidently assuming Ronny was immediately behind.

But there was something about this Ronny Bronston didn't like. He looked down at the unconscious boy. He bent over him and began to search his belt wallet, finding precious little except an hours card. He thought about it, and pocketed the plastic. The other's name was Tanais, and he belonged to the Terpsichore *genos*. All of which told Ronny nothing. Wasn't Terpsichore the goddess of song, or the dance or something?

There was a banging at the front door.

They'd come at last. Ronny came hurriedly erect. As he started for the door, he looked down at the boy. He shook his head. Even had there been reason, he wasn't up to escaping burdened with the kid. And there was no reason.

He turned and hurried after Teucer, and even as he ran he realized that something had been wrong about Teucer. He had been more collected, less emotional and shrill than the night before. In view of the circumstances, it would have been more reasonable had it been the other way.

He was about to leave the patio garden through the exit which Teucer had taken when he heard the front door bang open. A voice yelled, "Hey! Wait? Holy Jumping Zen, what goes on here?"

It was a male voice.

Ronny came to a halt and turned. It was the burly Zeke, rumbling in, bear-like, a large handgun in one overgrown paw.

Zeke took him in, snorted, and disappeared from sight into the room where Teucer had been bound. Ronny returned, shooting a glance at the door to the street. Zeke had slammed it shut upon his entrance, and thrown a bar.

The Sons of Liberty leader was staring at the still unconscious boy and at the ropes which had once held Teucer.

"Zen," he groaned. "The funkier escaped." He bent over the youngster. "Out cold!"



Ronny was in the doorway, his face in puzzlement. "I don't understand."

"When did you get here?"

"A few minutes ago." He shook his head. There was still nausea in his stomach and his muscles were like water, particularly after the exertion of the brief struggle. "Teucer was tied up."

"Tied up, is right?" The funkier is a traitor, a spy! What happened? What happened to Tanais, here?"

The effects of the Come-Along were evidently completely gone but the Scop was still on him. Ronny couldn't have lied had he wished. He said, "The door was open. I came in to warn you. Teucer was tied up. The boy, here, jumped on my back. I knocked him out before I realized he was just a kid. Teucer told me some cock-and-bull story, evidently, and took off through the back."

Zeke was on one knee at the side of Tanais, his gun at the half-ready, as though not knowing what to expect. He said, "Tanais came from Lybia a few days ago as an exchange student. This morning he contacted us. Teucer had told us that was where he was from and we accepted him. But we *know* Tanais is from Lybia, his father is top man in the organization there and when he didn't recognize Teucer it was obvious we had a spy from the Hippolyte in our ranks. I went to check with Damon..."

But Ronny was shaking his head. "Teucer's no spy from the Hippolyte."

Zeke glared at him, coming to his feet. "What are you talking about? Of course he's a spy."

"No. I came to warn you, and we'd better get out of here quickly. The Hippolyte's people had me put under Scop this morning. I spilled practically everything I knew about my mission, those who sent me, and the Sons of Liberty and their program."

"What!"

Ronny held up a hand. "But the thing is, they had never heard of your organization before. So they could hardly have sent Teucer in as a spy."

"They were lying!"

Ronny shook his head. "No they weren't. They were flabbergasted when the drug brought the fact from me that you existed."

Zeke was breathing deeply. "You gave them this address, you flat?"

Ronny said evenly, "I was under Scop. I think I still am, at least partially."

Zeke's small eyes narrowed further. "Oh, you are, eh? Listen, is the Octagon going to send help to us?"

"I don't know," Ronny said. He tried to keep control of himself but his voice was slipping into the Zombie-inflection.

"Is it most likely they will?"

"Yes."

"How soon?"

"Probably as soon as a report from me gets back."

"How were you to transmit your report?"

"Through my Section G communicator."

"Have you sent any report at all, thus far?"

"No." Ronny Bronston could feel the blisters of cold sweat on his face as he tried to fight the truth serum, but it was useless. He could have tried rushing the other, but Zeke was armed and strong, and the Section G operative was still not fully recovered from his bout with his alcohol antidote.

"Why not?" Zeke pressed.

"My communicator was broken, when someone searched my room."

Zeke thought about it for a moment, even as he muttered, "I got to get out of here." He said, "When you report, who is it to?"

"Sid Jakes."

Zeke's face worked in thought, and his breathing came deeper. He nudged the boy at his feet with a toe and the other stirred. "Wake up, damn it!"

He looked back at Ronny again, something obviously suddenly occurring to him. "Holy Zen! they had you. How'd you get away?"

"I was in a hospital. They had taken me there to question me. After half an hour, they decided it was necessary to inform the Hippolyte of what they'd learned. So they left me under guard in a room. The guards stood outside. However, there was another door. A girl named Minythyia came through it."

"Minythyia! Are you sure of that name?"

"Yes. She came out to the *Schirra* with the customs officials launch as one of the assistants. Later, she attempted to...select me as one of her husbands."

"Minythyia!"

"Yes," Ronny said, still zombie-like.

"All right, what happened?"

"She got me out of the hospital and drove me to the apartment of a friend. Then she left me there, under orders not to leave. She went to secure an alibi."

"Do you know who Minythyia is?"

"She is one of the warriors who — "

"Do you know who else she is?"

"No."

"She's the drivel-happy daughter of the Hippolyte, you cloddy!"

There were sounds from the street. Zeke shot his eyes in that direction, then down at the boy who was now beginning to come to his feet.

"Get moving, Tanais. There's a back way out."

Tanais began stumbling toward the back. There was a pounding at the front door, as though of more than one fist.

Zeke took after the boy, his eyes looking over his shoulder, glowering desperately at the source of the noise.

Ronny began to follow.

Thick lips pulled back over the revolutionist's stained teeth. The shooter came up. "You stay here, my stute friend. You stay here."

Ronny came to a halt, staring. He motioned with his head. "But that'll be the Hippolyte's police."

Zeke was at the back door through which Teucer had disappeared some ten minutes before. They could hear a splintering sound from the front.

Zeke's gun came up slowly, his teeth were still bared. He said, snarl in his voice, "That's right. We couldn't let you fall into their hands again, could we, fella?"

Ronny spun in desperation, the charge from the other's gun missing him infinitesimally, crumbling the stone of the doorway in which he had been standing.

He was out of range of the other's fire, back again in the room where he had found Teucer. Zeke was going to have to come and get him if he wanted another shot, and Zeke didn't have the time. The front door came down with a crash.

In fact, Zeke was already most likely gone. If he wasn't then Ronny's next move was sudden death.

Because he came charging out again, into the patio from which he had just stepped in retreat, ten seconds earlier.

His gamble had paid off. Zeke and Tanais were gone.

Ronny sped for the door through which the two Sons of Liberty had just passed. He had danger before and danger behind, and why he chose the first he had no idea.

## X

Had it not been for the sounds of Zeke and his young companion before him, he probably would never have found the way of retreat. The building was a meandering one, something in the nature of a Spanish or Mexican habitation of early times. The wall on Heliopolis Street had been blank, save for the door. From the outside, there was little to indicate what lay within.

Within was surprisingly extensive. There were three small patios in all, with numerous rooms of varying size leading off. It had been a sumptuous house, in its time; now it was run down.

In a way, it was a labyrinth and a person unfamiliar with the windings of its halls and walks could have become temporarily lost.

Ronny pounded after the faint sounds of Zeke and Tanais, running as softly, himself, as he could. He didn't know whether the girl warriors behind him had actually seen him or not. But in any case they would spread through this building in brief moments. He had to get out.

Suddenly he could hear Zeke no longer.

The other had either paused, waiting for Ronny and for another shot at him, or he had passed out of the house and made his escape.

The only alternative Ronny could accept was the latter. He continued to run in the direction he had last heard the Sons of Liberty head who had so strangely and murderously turned on him. He came abruptly to a narrow door and instinctively knew that beyond lay the street. In fact, he could hear the sounds of a hovercar lifting and then zooming ahead. Ronny prayed to whatever gods might be listening that it was Zeke making his getaway. He grabbed the door latch and flung it open, half expecting a blast from the big man's shooter.

There was no blast. There was no sign of Zeke or Tanais in the alleyway beyond. They had already made good their escape.

He wished that he had time to think about Teucer and Minythyia, and about Zeke, for that matter. Why in the name of the Holy Ultimate had the man tried to finish Ronny off?

He sped down the alley, hoping he was taking a direction that would place him as far as possible from the Amazons behind in as short a period of time.

He came out on a side-street, puffing, and brought on himself the stares of various pedestrians in the vicinity.

He slowed down to a walk, grinning inanely, as though ashamed of being caught running.

"Beautiful day, eh?" he said to the world in general.

Somebody snorted. All turned to look away from him.

He walked as rapidly as was compatible with his desire to remain inconspicuous. His sickness had given way now to more simple symptoms of hangover. He had a crushing headache and was still up to less than his full strength, but at least he felt his mind was clear.

As he walked, he tried to think it out.

Most things he could think of added up to very little sense. First, why wasn't this whole" area saturated with Hippolyte's police, warriors, guards—call them what you would? He had been on various police-state planets during his years with Section G. If there was one thing they had in common, it was a plentitude of armed, competent secret police. He couldn't imagine that house on Heliopolis Street not having been overrun with Hippolyte's people within a matter of a quarter hour after he had revealed the situation of the underground hideaway.

And Zeke! Why had the revolutionary attempted to kill him? Was Zeke, rather than Teucer, the traitor to the Sons of Liberty? Had Teucer found out something about the big man? Why had Zeke been, well, indignant, at the suggestion that the Hippolyte's people had never heard of the underground?

And Minythia! How could it possibly make sense that the daughter of the Hippolyte was serving as an ordinary police private, or whatever she was? How could such people as the major and Clete treat her, address her, as though she was a nobody? The splendor of the throne room of Hippolyte's palace gave lie to any theory that there was a comradeship between these women warriors that would allow the daughter of the supreme ruler to be treated as an equal by low ranking officials.

And Teucer! How did Teucer fit into it all? What was it the other was so anxious to talk over with him! And if he wasn't a refugee from Lybia, what was he?

He called it all quits for the time and looked about. He was at a large square. Before him was a park with four colossal statues dominating its center. He concentrated, in spite of the headache, recalling the maps supplied by Sarpedon in the Octagon. The maps of Themiscyra.

Yes, he thought he knew where he was. The river, the Thermodon, would be over that way about four blocks. In that direction, to his right, was the sanctuary. Perhaps a mile away. He dare not go there. If anything seemed likely at all, it was that the Amazon police were going through his things with fine-toothed combs. He wondered with wry humor what poor Podner Bates was making of it all. He hoped the little man wasn't in trouble for befriending Ronny Bronston.

The police were after him, his only contact with the Sons of Liberty, Zeke, had tried to kill him. He had no way of communicating with his superiors, nowhere to go and no funds...

Wait a minute. There were no funds, here on Amazonia.

He stuck a hand into the belt pouch of his outfit and fished forth the plastic card he had taken from Tanais when he had searched the boy there on the floor.

He stopped long enough to scrutinize the thing more carefully than he had before. It revealed little. His name and *genos* name. His address and, yes, the fact that he was a student. Thank the Holy Ultimate that students were paid to attend school in this fantastic economy. Tanais would have a supply of hours to his credit. The card, without doubt was valid.

If it wasn't, he, Ronny Bronston, would soon find out.

In his walking, he had passed several of what he assumed were taxi stands. Empty hovercars waiting for fares. There was a stand located alongside the park.

Taking his chances, he opened the door of a cab and slid inside, behind the driver's joystick. He looked over the controls, noted the fare box screen and figured out its workings. He had driven twice with the major in limousines, once with Minythyia in a sports vehicle. Beyond that, he had driven hovercars, of slightly different design, on a dozen different worlds. On most, the wheel was used, but he had operated cars directed by sticks before. If anything, they provided a more delicate control.

He began experimenting. You dropped this lever. No, first you dropped the brake. Then you lifted clear of the street with this.

A voice said, "You have forgotten to put your hours card on the screen, Madam."

He jerked his head around, inadvertently.

The voice was some sort of built-in recording. He brought his purloined card out and put it on the screen, and started all over again.

He was going to have to operate it manually. He had no idea of how to set the coordinates on the auto controls. He would have had to have a more complete knowledge of the city for that.

He got under way without much difficulty and concentrated on his destination. He was going to have to experiment, he wasn't quite sure of the location.

However, he made it with little difficulty, cruising up and down the streets until he spotted the place. There were hovercars before it, but none that looked particularly as though they were police or military.

He stopped, removed the stolen hours card from the screen and climbed from the vehicle, half expecting it to say something further. It didn't, and the moment he was out, took off into the traffic, evidently heading for some taxi park. He looked after it. Give credit where due. It was an efficiently handled service.

He looked up at the building. A fairly large number of persons were coming and going through the elaborate entrance. Most of them were women, but there were a few males. He continued to have difficulty telling them apart. Civilian clothes were all but identical. This was a continuing surprise. His first impression, picked up on the ship,

and later in his audience with the Hippolyte, was that practically all women wore the armor-like uniform of the Amazon warrior. But here there were no such outfits in sight.

It was a minor puzzle, and he had major ones to solve. He mounted the steps and entered the building. Now his problem had only begun. He was afraid to ask questions. Just as surely as he did, he would stand out like a walrus in a goldfish bowl.

He doubted that his destination was on the first floor, although it might have been. He mounted, instead, to the second, and prowled up and down, hopefully.

Ronny Bronston's luck continued to hold. There were name plates on the doors. He found what he was looking for twenty minutes later on the third floor: *Patricia O'Gara*

There was a door eye and he activated it.

In less than a minute the door opened and she was there, smiling at him.

This was the crux, now. If she showed any indication that she was aware of the morning's developments, he was going to have to overpower her. She said "Why, Guy! Guy Thomas!"

He grinned at her. "Can I come in?"

She stepped back. "Of course. So you managed to land all right. How in the name of Artemis did you know where I was?"

"Minythyia pointed the building out." The questions didn't bother him. At long last the Scop had worn off.

He followed her into a small living room. Evidently, she had been assigned a fairly comfortable apartment by the powers that be. She had been on the planet a couple of days before he landed.

"Minythyia?" she said, even while gesturing toward a seat for him. "I'll bet this will come as a surprise to you. Do you know who that madcap Mynythyia is?"

"You mean the daughter of the Hippolyte?" He sank into the chair with relief. "Ummm, somebody mentioned it. Imagine her acting as a lowly customs officer."

Pat said primly, "Everybody works on Amazonia. There are no parasites. Only children and the retired are without positions."

"Great," Ronny said, "but you expect a bit of nepotism even in the feminine Utopia. Look, I'm famished. You haven't got anything to eat around here, have you? And some pain killer? I've got a headache."

"Why, of course," she said. "The auto's in here. Order anything you wish. Oh, I forgot. Do you have an hours card?"

"Well, no." He was going to have to take it easy with the card of Tanais. He had no way of knowing whether or not, or when, the student might report the loss of that valuable document. He couldn't afford to have the computers on the lookout for it.

She said, "You can use mine. You'd be amazed at the efficiency here. Within hours after I was off the *Schirra*, they'd assigned me this apartment, enrolled me in a school where I have special tutors to give me a foundation in the Amazonia culture, and began crediting me with hours for the time I put into my studies. I'm already a citizen. Isn't that wonderful?"

"I suppose so," he told her, following her into the small dining alcove.

She put her card on the payment screen and he stared down at the extensive menu set into the auto-table. After taking the headache-relieving pill, he dialed more food than he could reasonably have eaten.

"You *are* hungry," she said. "There is no nepotism on Amazonia."

The change of subject had stopped him for a moment. "Oh," he said finally, watching the food begin to emerge. "Why not? It's a natural development, you'd think."

"Not if you understand the workings of an advanced society," she told him righteously. "Since there is no profit to be gained by being, say, an admiral, rather than an ordinary seaman, there's no motive in attempting to push your offspring into positions she can't competently occupy."

He was eating hungrily. "That's right, everybody gets paid exactly one hour for putting in one hour's time, don't they? But there are other things than, uh, crass material payment. An admiral has power, position, honors, that sort of jetsam."

"And how stupid they are unless you've earned them. Back on my home planet, Victoria, we have universities that grant so-called honorary degrees. Politicians, soldiers and what not, who can hardly read the sport sections of newstapes, or write more than their own names, are given doctor's degrees. All it does, actually, is water down the deserved acknowledgement of the accomplishments of the scholars who have really earned such degrees."

He was still forcing food into his mouth as though starved. He could hardly know when he would be able to eat again.

However, he couldn't help bite away at the hand that was feeding him. "Sure, great. A real feminine Utopia. However —"

"Amazonia isn't a Utopia, Guy," she said. "Utopia is a dream world, a perfect world. We Amazonians realize that there is always another rung up the ladder of progress. Utopia can never be reached, but even if it could be, we would not wish it. The satisfaction is to be found in the common effort upward."

"Very inspiring," Ronny said sarcastically. "It'll be a great day when in the course of this progress they get around to examining their marriage laws."

She scowled at him, a hint of color beginning to come to her cheeks. He couldn't help but remember the endless run-ins she'd had with Rex Ravelle on the *Schirra*.

"Marriage laws?" she said. "There is no marriage on Amazonia. They passed beyond



that institution a century and more ago."

He had been about to devour a chunk of some vegetable he had found in his stew, a vegetable he had never come upon elsewhere. Now he put down his fork and stared at her.

"Are you completely drivell-happy?" he demanded. "No marriage on Amazonia! I've never seen so damn much marriage in my life. And such an easy way of getting into it!"

It was her turn to stare. "Why, why, you've simply been misinformed," she said definitely.

"Look," he said. "This tutoring you've been taking; hasn't anybody mentioned the fact that any Amazonia warrior can have three husbands?"

"Oh, don't be a cloddy. Of course they can have three husbands, though that's hardly what you'd call them. And a man can have three 'wives' for that matter, if he wished. Amazonians don't believe in restricting personal relationships with too many laws. Actually, though, useage frowns on promiscuity and having close relations with even two or three persons at a time is considered rather far-out. However, some people are just built that way. They're not one-man women, or one-woman men. You've had the problem down through the ages. On your own planet, Earth, don't you have people who are continually getting married and getting divorced? And on my planet, Victoria, it isn't at all unknown for a man to be supposedly happily married, but on the side be maintaining one or more mistresses."

"Now wait a minute," Ronny said accusingly, pointing at her with his fork. "I'm not talking about exceptional people having affairs, or getting too many divorces. I'm talking about the basic family. The way I understand it, an Amazonian warrior can have three husbands and she keeps them cooped up in what amounts to a harem."

She rolled her eyes upward as though in plea to heaven. "See here. In the first place, that term warrior is nonsense. It means no more than calling every woman a *lady* on Earth or Victoria. The original meaning of lady was a titled woman, a gentlewoman, but eventually the term became a gentilism, and you called any female a lady, even if she was an alcoholic thief. The same on Amazonia. Some people like to draw on mythology, continuously, just for fun. Have you noticed how much of the art is based on Amazonian myth? But to hear you talk, you'd think every woman on the planet was a swaggering soldier."

"All right, so I'll admit that I've been surprised there aren't more women in uniform. That's besides the immediate point."

"I was getting to the fact that you've been confused by some of the terminology. Far from the family on Amazonia consisting of a bully of a female warrior, dominating a harem full of men, there is no family at all."

Ronny pushed the rest of his food away.

"Zen!" he said. "That brings up a picture. No family at all. I suppose they find their children under cabbage leaves in the garden."

She had to laugh, in spite of the fact that her face was already characteristically flushed in the debate.

"Don't be drivel-happy," she said. "This goes back to one of the arguments we had on the *Schirra*, the fact that nothing is so changing as human institutions. And among these is the family. Down through the ages we have seen evolve every type family imaginable, and we have seen, as well, periods when there was no family at all."

"When?" he demanded. "I'll admit we've had different types of family, under special conditions. Polygamy under the Arabs, because so many of the men were killed off in battle that there was a surplus of women; and polyandry, up in Tibet, before the advent of modern medicine. There was a surplus of men because so many women died in childbirth at that high altitude. But when was there no family at all? You've got to have some sort of family."

"To begin with," she said, "that example of yours of the Tibetans is probably wrong. Inadequate reporters of Tibetan society were probably describing a form of family that was one of the very oldest. All the men of the clan were married to all the women, all the children belonged to everybody. Your prejudiced reporter, his modern sensibilities shocked upon seeing such a society, might well report that the women had more than one husband. Of course they did, and the men more than one wife."

Ronny was eyeing her in disbelief.

She went on. "That was a pretty primitive family if you ask me. In fact, I would call it no family at all. As man evolved, he hit upon a taboo, here and there, which prevented such relationships as those between parents and children. You can imagine the advantage this soon led to between those groups who had such a taboo, and those who didn't – genetically speaking. Later on, some groups adopted a taboo against brother and sister relationships and again, those tribes which followed such a custom outstripped the ones who held onto the other type 'family'.

"All this, of course, is oversimplifying. But eventually, out of these successful taboos, grew gentile society, in which each tribe was divided into *genos* as the Greeks had it, or *gens* as the Latins called them. It was forbidden to marry within your own gens. You had to take a husband or wife from some other gens, either within your own tribe, or from some other. All children from the relationship became members of the woman's gens, when descent was in the female line. Later this was changed to descent in the male line and you took the name of your father's gens. Very well, what it amounted to was that the gens was one enormous 'family.' All the children were the collective responsibility of the whole gens. All the adults were the mothers and fathers of all the children.

"However, this system fell of with the advent of civilization, the growth of herds and, with agriculture, the ownership of land. A man wanted his own children, who worked with him in the herds or in the fields, to inherit his property. He didn't want it to go to the gens of his wife, as was the old system, or even his own gens. Slowly the family became monogamous, consisting only of a man, his wife, and his children."

"Now wait a minute," Ronny said. He was already tiring of both the subject and the

lecture, but there was no easy way to break it off. "You mean not until comparatively recent times have we had a one-man-married-to-one-woman deal?"

"No, I don't mean that. I think that as soon as our race had evolved much further than the outright animal, it began to tend toward a pairing relationship. That is, one man and one woman. This, I think, is eventually the *normal* relationship toward which we are trending and have always been. Even under gentile society, the usual thing was for one man and one woman to have a relationship. In those days it was easily broken and both could go their way, both were equal, neither had ties on the other. Man and woman complement each other. They act as a team and, instinctively you might say, the pairing family is the natural one."

She plowed on. "But, yes, what we know as marriage and the family today, is comparatively recent. The marriage laws which developed, the marriage ceremonies, the religious teachings, the cultural taboos we came to think of as natural and normal, are new developments historically speaking. With the advent of the monogamous family, several needs had to be met. The man, wishing his children to inherit, had to make sure he was the father. Thus women were segregated, kept virtual prisoners in the gynaecea of the Greeks, the harem of the Arabs, the seraglio of the Turks. The laws and mores were such that a woman must be a virgin at marriage, but that was winked at in the man's case. In fact, under the Code Napoleon, for example, the law conceded the right of the man to be unfaithful. A woman who was caught in adultery was punished with death, in some societies. There were other angles to these new marriage laws, however. In this new type family, with the man controlling all the wealth, the woman and children had to be protected from his being a complete brute. The laws forced him to remain with her during her pregnancy and while the children were young. He was obligated to support them."

Ronny said impatiently, "Look, I don't have time to take a complete course in the history of marriage and the family. Bring it down to here and now. What's all this about there being no family and no marriage on Amazonia?"

She flushed. "I'm sorry, I didn't want to bore you."

"You're not boring me, confound it," he growled. "I'm just trying to make heads and tails of what goes on in this drivel-happy country."

"Very well. Times have changed again. In a truly affluent society, the woman is no longer dependent upon the man, nor he on her. Nor, are the children dependent upon either. As in the days of the gens, society as a whole sees that nothing harms the child."

"You mean," he said accusingly, "parents don't raise their own kids on this crazy planet?"

"It's not the way I'd put it, but at the risk of shocking your conservative beliefs, Guy Thomas —"

"Call me Ronny," he said wearily, "everybody else does."

"A nickname? With a name like Guy, I wouldn't think you needed a nickname. You

know, you certainly seem different than you were on the *Schirra*. It's as though you were playing a part then."

"Go on about raising the kids," he said.

"Actually, for the past couple of millennia during which parents were in a position to be complete dictators over their children, no matter how unfitted they were for the position—"

"Hey, now wait a minute!"

"Why? Take an example. A silly little slob in her mid-teens goes out with a juvenile delinquent on a drunken party. In the back of the vehicle in which they've been speeding up and down the roads, threatening the lives of others, she fails to take certain precautions. The slob who was her companion, is forced to marry her. Nine months later, the child is born, and, hocus-pocus, a miracle takes place. She is a sainted mother. They're parents! And ipso facto, capable of raising, training, educating the child. Artemis, Ronny! You don't subscribe to this, do you?"

"It's a rather extreme example," he said wryly.

"Not as extreme as all that. How many parents had the time, the training, the intelligence level, sometimes even the desire, to raise healthy, balanced children? One set of parents in ten? I doubt if it was any more."

"So in Amazonia the State raises the children."

"There is no State in Amazonia."

He closed his eyes in pain. "Here we go again," he said. He opened them and glared at her. "But before we go into that, I don't want to miss something we passed over. In all this gobbledygook about family and marriage, you seem to have left out the consideration of one very basic item, in your coldblooded scientific approach."

"What other approach can science have?" she scoffed. "In science you deal with facts, not romanticism."

"That's the point I wanted to bring up. In everything you've said about the relationship between man and woman, and between parents and children, you haven't even had a nod in passing at the word love."

She looked at him scornfully. "So?"

"So the very basis of these relationships are just that. Love. And that remains unchanging down through the centuries, though it may sound like a lot of jetsam to an ethnologist such as yourself."

She sighed in exasperation. "Ronny, you keep insisting on believing that the institutions with which you are familiar are unchanging and have always been. Actually, that term love, as you're using it, is a comparatively modern invention. Romantic love first came on the scene during the Middle Ages—back when so many of the aristocracy were off on crusade, when romantic verse and song were being developed by the

troubadours and those fair knights who were smart enough to stay at home from the wars, and when adultery was the full time occupation of a considerable portion of the gentry who had nothing else to do."

"Cynicism doesn't become you, Pat," Ronny said.

She sighed again. "Down through the ages there has always been passion, and there's always been lust, and, of course, above all there has always been the sexual instinct. But romantic love, I repeat, is a fairly new invention. If you will read the mythology of the Greeks, the doings of the Gods, you'll see that they had lust aplenty, but can you point out one myth that portrays true romantic love, with its self sacrifice and so forth? Or get into the historic period. Can you find in all the writings of the Romans, a real love affair? Did the wives of any of the Emperors love them? Compared to the later timeless romances such as that between Disraeli and his wife, Lord Nelson and Lady Hamilton, President Madison and his Dolly, or even the Duke of Windsor and the woman he loved?"

She snorted at him. "Here on Amazonia, for possibly the first time, we can contemplate a true love between the sexes. No longer does one economically dominate the other. No longer is one at the mercy of the other, because of unfair laws. Both are equal, and –"

"Oh, now, *really*..." he began, overriding her voice.

And it was then that the door hummed.

Pat looked at the screen. "I wasn't expecting anybody," she frowned.

The frown turned into a scowl. "It must be broken. There's no one on the screen."

Ronny swiveled, quickly. The screen set in the door showed blank. Pat O'Gara reached toward the release button set into the control arm of her chair.

He said, "Wait a minute, Pat!"

But she had already pressed.

The door opened and Minythyia, clothed in her Amazon uniform, a quick draw holster on her right hip, was revealed, leaning on the door jam.

She grinned at them mockingly. "So," she said, "leave you for half an hour and you dash off to some other women. I can see we're going to have some words in our family, Cutey."

Pat said, "Minythyia!"

The Amazon said to Ronny, "Come along, boy. We've got a date with my mother. She evidently has a few questions she'd like to ask you."

Minythia followed him down to the street silently. The overcar she'd had earlier was parked near the curb, once again, he noted, in a zone marked prohibited. He was somewhat surprised that she had no other guards with her.

"How'd you know where I was?" he said.

She chuckled, as though fondly, at him. "Where else could you be? You had no place else to go. I forgot it at first but then, after I left mother and the others, I recalled pointing Pat O'Gara's building out to you."

"I was a flat to come here," he muttered. "You realize, obviously, that Citizeness O'Gara had nothing to do with it. I intruded on her. She knows nothing about me, nor why I'm on Amazonia."

"Of course, Cutey," Minythia yawned. She banged at the control levers of the little vehicle, brought them off the street and zoomed forward, pressing him back into the seat.

He was disgusted with himself. He had spent the last precious half hour batting his gums about non-essentials when he should have been desperately trying to figure out some manner in which he could have escaped this insane planet. Some manner in which he could have appropriated a space launch and got himself out to the UP Embassy.

Instead, here he was, recaptured by a slip of a girl—or so she appeared, when not in uniform. He looked over at her. It was the confounded uniform that made these women look so aggressive and truculent.

He said in nasty irritation, "Where'd you people ever come up with the idea that women made superior warriors to men?"

She looked at him from the side of her eyes, mockingly, as usual. "My dear husband, whoever contended that women make better warriors than men? Didn't Heracles and Theseus and their Greeks clobber the original Hippolyte and her warriors? And Achilles, when he fought Penthesileia before the walls of Troy, did he have any trouble defeating her?" she leered. "And you know what the legends tell us he did to her afterwards. But anyway, no. I'd never claim that women made better warriors than men. Now soldiers are another thing."

"What are you talking about?" he grumbled. They were driving into an area he hadn't been in before. Probably to the palace, he decided. He wondered how far it was. He could vaguely remember this part of town from the map he had been shown, but he couldn't remember where the palace was located. Confound it, where had the palace been on the chart that Sarpedon had shown them at the Octagon?

She was going on, even as she zipped up one street, down another, in a heart sinking display of a racing driver's art.

"Back in the old days, the good old days, I suppose you'd call them, admittedly a man could take a woman. A 120 pound man, in a fight with a 120 pound woman, could

mop the floor with her assuming equal, normal physical development and training. Man is capable of a peak power output about four times that of a woman his size. However...there's an however, you must realize."

"However," he muttered disgustedly. He had few illusions of what was going to happen to him, once they had him under Scop again. They'd drain every bit of information he had in his brain, from childhood on. Every detail of the workings of Section G with which he was familiar, would be theirs to utilize. They'd get as complete a list of agents, and their secret whereabouts, that he, Ronny Bronston, could provide.

"However, a woman can endure a continuing strain longer than a man. How many men could bear up under a difficult childbirth? At any rate, back when warriors fought with swords, men had the ascendancy. But it began to taper off, dear husband, when weapons began to change, when even the bayonet became antiquated, since you never got near enough to the enemy to use a sticker. Even back in the so-called First World War, women were beginning to show up in combat, especially among the Russians. By the Second World War they were in full swing. Literally millions of women used every type of weapon, once again especially among the Russians. There were women flying aces, women commanders of warships, women artilleryists, and especially women infantry. And it wasn't the Russians alone. The British discovered that the female anti-aircraft crews ran up at least as high scores as the male ones. You see, women have more patience, more stolidity. But possibly the real proof was seen in the Israeli-Arab wars. It was soon found that a 120 pound girl could buck a Bren gun just as efficiently as a man, and was less apt to wind up with a galloping case of battle fatigue, if the fight went on too long, or if the shelling got a bit too heavy. Oh yes, women might make poorer warriors, but, believe me, husband dear, it has finally developed that they make better soldiers."

She was evidently taking short cuts by going down less traffic ridden main arteries. For the moment, they were on an empty street.

Ronny growled, "I seem to be going from one lecture to another today. But at least, I think I've got something from this one."

She looked at him from the side of her eyes, slowing down for a sharp turn. "Oh...?"

He snapped, "Yes." His hand snaked out and switched the engine off. "The fact that man is admittedly better, hand to hand."

She tried to whip her gun from its holster, but his hand was before hers. Open, it slammed the gun deeply down into the holster. And he kept his left hand over the weapon, even as he reached out with his right.

Her eyes wide, she began to shrill something, squirming to escape him.

Ronny chopped her expertly behind the ear, and didn't even wait to watch her slump. He brought the vehicle to a bucking halt, awkward as he was with the controls in this position.

His eyes went quickly up and down the street. There were some pedestrians, more

than a block away. And several hovercars in the distance. No one, seemingly, had seen the fray.

He heard a yell from above him, darted his eyes up. He had thought himself unobserved too soon. On the third floor of the building before which they had come to a stop, a man was leaning from, a window, shouting as though demented.

"Traitor," Ronny muttered. He hurried out of the car and around to her side. He opened the door that she customarily vaulted, and dragged her forth. He carried her, noting, somewhat to his surprise, that she wasn't nearly as heavy as he would have expected, and unsuspectedly soft in his arms. He set her down bodily against the wall of the building. The apartment occupant above continued to shout blue murder. Another head popped from another window, this time in a building across the way. A scream, sounding ludicrously feminine in this land of Amazons, reached for the skies.

He whipped the gun from Minythyia's holster, stuck it in his belt, dashed back to the car, and slid into the seat she had forcibly been hauled from.

He banged the controls, for a moment ineffectually.

She had come awake. "Ronny!" she yelled at him. "Come back...!"

"Oh great," he muttered sarcastically. He had the sporthover underway now, and realized why she had driven like a racing zealot. This souped-up vehicle took the bit in its teeth. He blasted down the street as though all demons were, after him.

"You don't understand...!" her voice faded after him.

He grunted at that with sour humor. He didn't understand was right, but he understood enough to keep away from that gang of hefty inquisitors, and those armed to the teeth bully-girls in the Hippolyte's palace. This was one honeymoon Minythyia could count him out of.

He sped down the narrow way, took a quick right turn into the first street that appealed to him. Sped some more, and turned again. It would take a time, now, for them to find him.

However, he knew he was going to have to go to ground. He couldn't indefinitely prowl the streets of Themiscyra in this sporthover and expect to keep away from the Hippolyte's people forever. He had seen too many examples of Amazonian efficiency to doubt that once they set their nets it was just a matter of time until he was fished in.

But where could he go?

He had emerged into a broader avenue, one of the main arteries, and he slowed to keep attention from falling upon his speeding two seater. He hadn't been on this particular boulevard before, but it checked out in impressive beauty with the others. Public buildings, libraries, he assumed, fountains, monuments, parks, plazas, theatres...

He was passing a theatre now. It was more or less of a replica of the Pantheon, Roman, rather than Greek. Very beautiful...



He jammed the brake down suddenly and goggled.

After a long moment, he brought the little hovercar over to the curb and left it to walk to the display advertising the show within. There were various posters in the old-fashioned style. Basically photographs, he decided, but then touched up with an artist's imagination. It was evidently some sort of variety show, a vaudeville sort of thing, beloved of all centuries. But it was the poster's subject that had caused him to come to a halt, for there stood Clete in a gaudy costume. In her left hand she held half a dozen throwing knives by their points. In her right hand she had a single knife, ready for a cast. Beyond her stood what was obviously an assistant, an apple on the top of his head. The old but ageless William Tell bit.

But that wasn't all.

In one of the other posters he recognized still another face. A face that made it too utterly much.

He walked back to the hovercar in thought. Some of the pieces, just some of them, were beginning to fit into place.

When he got back into the hovercar, he sat for a moment, ignoring anyone who might have been looking at him. His mouth worked, and he rubbed it thoughtfully, roughly with the knuckles of his left hand, so roughly that it stung.

A woman was coming up the street and was due to pass within a few feet of him.

He said to her suddenly. "I beg your pardon. I'm from out of town. Could you tell me where I can get a newspaper?"

She smiled at him. "Right up the street there at the entrance to the pneumatics. Don't you have a screen in your car? You'd get exactly the same thing by dialing NEWS."

"Thanks," he told her, without inflection.

When she was gone, he sat and concentrated some more. Finally he took the shooter he had appropriated from Minythyia and holding it low, between his knees, inspected it. He had never seen the model before, but he was experienced enough with handguns to figure out its working. It was evidently constructed to throw some sort of projectile, probably a small bullet, with or without either an explosive or a gas cartridge. A somewhat primitive weapon, by the standards of the more militaristically inclined planets of UP, but one that had its uses under circumstances.

The difficulty was, there was no clip in the butt.

It was useless.

He looked at it and grunted. Some warrior Minythyia had turned out to be.

He tossed the shooter to the floor at his feet and started up the car again. He brought back, before memory's eye, the map of the city and directed the speedy little vehicle at a definite destination this time. However, he drove more slowly than he had before. There was still quite a bit to think about.

He passed the bachelor sanctuary, as the major had called it, drove around to its rear and parked the car.

He stood there for a moment, looking at the building, and figuring out where his quarters had been. Then he found a path that wandered through the garden and made his way to the area beneath the windows of that suite. Looking up now, he was mildly surprised that he had been able to climb down the wall with such ease. The handholds and footholds didn't look as promising as all that.

He found the gun he had ditched only that morning, in the bush where he had thrown it.

He couldn't afford to be spotted with it in his hand, and tucked it into his belt, without further examination. He had checked it this morning, knew it was charged, knew how it was operated. He doubted if he'd be overly accurate with the weapon at any range at all, at first, but, then, he doubted that he would be using it at any great distance.

He walked around the building and into the entrance he had used before. Inside, he walked up one of the halls aimlessly until he met an inhabitant.

The other was hurrying to some destination or other, but Ronny asked him, "Could you tell me what apartment Podner has?"

"Podner Bates? He's in forty, isn't he?" The man hustled on.

Ronny Bronston figured out the numbering system of the apartments and finally found forty.

He pulled the same trick that Minythyia had at Pat O'Gara's place. He put his hand over the door's eye before activating it. Inside, Podner, if he was at home, would see nothing but black on his screen.

The door opened and Podner was there, blinking.

Ronny pushed his way past him. He looked about the room. It was far from the frilly affair he had been given the night before. It was a man's apartment—comfortable, scuffed-up furniture that had seen many a shoe rested upon it, a bar with a goodly selection of liquor. Paintings on the wall that would appeal to the masculine taste whether it be on Earth, New Delos, Victoria, or, Ronny Bronston was beginning to understand, Amazonia.

Ronny looked at the other. "You've forgotten your curly wig."

Podner fluttered a hand at him. "Oh, darling, you know how it is. A boy simply has to get out of his frills once in awhile. Don't you just hate girdles?"

Ronny looked at him wryly, "I never had one on," he said. "And I doubt if you have either."

He held a moment's silence and then said, "You're an actor."

Podner blinked at him. He looked disgusted. "Damn it," he said, "What'd I do wrong?"

"Nothing," Ronny said. "Come along. I've got to talk with you, and I don't think I'm safe here."

"Why should I come with you?" Podner said sourly. "Damn it, I thought I was doing fine in that part. Minythia is going to be furious with me."

Ronny put his tunic back a few inches so that the gun in his belt was revealed. He tapped it two or three times with his forefinger. "Let's go," he said, his voice cold.

The other stared at the gun. "Holy Ultimate," he said, all the astonishment in the galaxy in his voice. "You mean it. You're threatening me with violence."

They marched out of the building and toward the car.

Ronny said, "What happened to my luggage?"

"Major Oreithia and some others came and got it a couple of hours ago."

Ronny grunted disgust, but he couldn't have expected anything else. They climbed into the car, and he looked at the other man, remembering his own attack upon Minythia shortly before. He said, "Look, Podner, don't try anything. I realize that sissy act of yours was laid on and that you're no molly, however, in this sort of thing, I'm a pro."

"I'm sure you are," Podner muttered unhappily. "I'm not resisting. I'm not a hero."

Ronny got under way. He looked from the side of his eyes at the other, trying to dope him out. "What are you? Obviously, you support the Amazonian government."

"Of course," the other said strongly. "Why not?" It's the best government I've ever heard or read about, and I'm interested in the subject."

Ronny said evenly, "Oh? My own ideas would lead a little nearer to democracy. You're like a dog licking the hand of the master that has just clobbered him."

"Democracy!" Podner snorted in scorn. "We've gone far beyond democracy on Amazonia."

"Oh, you have, eh? And just what do you find beyond democracy?"

"In the first place, I doubt if you know what the word means," the actor said in high scorn. "Where are we going?"

"You'll find out. So I don't know what democracy means. Please enlighten me."

"Very well. As you possibly know, ancient man's governmental institutions were based on the *gens*, or *genos*, as the Greeks called them."

Ronny continued to tool the speedster down the boulevard. "So everybody's been telling me," he complained.

"Very well, when city states began to form and new institutions take the place of old, the former ways needed change. A council of chiefs was inadequate to handle municipal affairs. The first attempt to handle the problem is credited in legend to Theuseus, but that's undoubtedly nonsense. It wasn't until Solon, about 549 B.C. that they took the first big step to end gentile society and begin a new form of representation based on geographic factors and on property, rather than on family. In Athens, by the time of Cleisthenes in 509 B.C. the changes were culminated. Instead of being represented in government from the *genos* into which you were born, you were represented from the *deme*, or city ward, in which you lived and according to the amount of property you controlled. Democracy, then, actually means *rule of the city wards*."

"Great," Ronny said sarcastically. "However, the word has come to mean rule of the people."

"Then seldom, if ever, did the reality live up to definition. Take a look down through history. The Athenians with their supposed democracy, in which only the citizens were allowed to vote and the overwhelming majority of the people, the slaves, were not. Florence and Venice and the other Italian republics. Who voted besides the wealthy merchants, the propertied elements? Bring it down to more modern times. Did you labor under the illusion that the soldiers who followed Washington at Valley Forge were allowed the vote after the revolution was won? Comparatively few of them, I'm afraid. Property requirements were stiff before you could vote in the early United States."

"They loosened up later," Ronny said.

"Yes, but by then they had new restrictions, some of them not so obvious. By the middle of the 20th Century, they had the so-called two party system. You could vote for the candidates of either one or the other. The trouble was they both stood for the same thing and represented the same elements. Laws were passed that made it all but impossible for a third party with conflicting principles to get on the ballot. Rule by the people? Take the election of 1960 during which Kennedy, one of the most popular political figures of the century, became president. He had some thirty-four million votes cast for him. The population at the time was one hundred and eighty million, so that you can figure that a bit more than one American out of six voted for him. The others either voted against, didn't vote at all though eligible because of cynicism or whatever reason, weren't allowed to vote because of restrictions based on race or education, or weren't allowed to vote due to insufficient age. One out of six. This is rule by the people?"

"All right," Ronny said. "So you've gone beyond democracy."

"Yes. Actually, rule by the people is only valid under certain circumstances. For instance, would you be willing to abide by the vote of the Roman mob such as it had become in the early centuries of the Empire?"

"So what are the conditions under which it becomes valid?" Some other parts of Ronny Bronston's puzzle were beginning to fall into place. He continued to needle the actor, getting a crumb of information here, another there.

"Only when the electorate is composed of peers. To use a simple illustration, suppose five men are shipwrecked upon an island. If they average out in intelligence, experience and ability, then the only sensible method of deciding who should fish, who should collect coconuts, who should haul water and who should build huts, is the vote. But suppose only two of these men fit that description and one of the others is a moron, another a homicidal maniac and the other in a condition of shock due to the experiences of the shipwreck. The vote then becomes silly."

"All right," Ronny said passively. "Under what conditions are men peers so that they're competent to vote for their governmental officials?"

Podner's tone had long since taken on a superior, professorial tone. "My dear Guy, man has come up with but three schemes of representation down through the centuries. The first based on the family, kinship; the second based on geographical lines and property."

"And the third?"

"Based on your work, your profession, where you hold down your job."

"There we're peers, eh?"

"Yes. If a man is knowledgeable at all, he's knowledgeable when he talks shop. He may not know the duties of a senator as compared to those of a bishop, he may be tempted to vote for a president because the man projects well on a TriDi, or one with an excellent staff of speechwriters. He might be an absolute flat when it comes to politics—I suspect most people are—but on the job he's knowledgeable, whether he works at digging ditches or in a laboratory.

"Let's picture an industry here on Amazonia. Say the hat-making industry. In one of the hat planets there is a gang of eight men who must vote for one of their number to be foreman. Since they work each day with each other, they are in the best position to know who among them is best suited to hold down the job. It is to their interest to elect the best man, since a good foreman can so coordinate their efforts as to make the job easier for all. Very well. The dozen or so foremen in that particular section of the plant work together each day on the problems involved in being a foreman. They elect from their number a section supervisor. The section supervisors of the plant, who also work together each day, select from their number a factory manager. All the factory managers of the hat industry of all Paphlagonia send representatives to an industry-wide conference of the clothing industry, which meets periodically, and in turn sends representatives to the central congress of the nation. There, of course, are the delegates from each field of endeavor, not only manufacturing, but from the professions and from the arts as well. At this congress is planned the production of the nation."

"Syndicalism," Ronny muttered. "They messed around with the idea in the 19th century in Europe."

"I beg your pardon?" Podner said.

Ronny could begin to anticipate more of his puzzle pieces falling into position.

He said, drawing the other out with argument. "Ummm. I see your idea. But look. That's a pretty limited democracy. Your gang of unskilled laborers on the bottom can vote for their foreman, but that's all. Suppose the overwhelming majority in the plant are opposed to the, say, manager? There's no way of getting rid of him. Only the section supervisors have anything to say about him."

Podner nodded. "It's an interesting question, and highly debated. In fact, over in Lybia, they're trying another system. There, the foremen can only nominate a section supervisor, and he must be confirmed by a majority vote of all the men who are to work under him. In turn, the supervisors can only nominate from their number a manager of the factory, and all employees of the plant must vote to confirm him in office. And so up, all the way to the central congress."

Another piece had dropped into place. The puzzle was beginning to show final form. It wasn't complete by any means, but it was shaping up.

Ronny, still searching, said, as though half in sympathy, "Ummm. That sounds very fine. Another form of democracy, perhaps. But how does the Hippolyte come into this, and those heads of the *pylons*, and women's domination of the planet?"

"Oh, that's not important. That's *civil* government."

Ronny darted a sharp glance at him. "How do you mean...?"

But suddenly the other's mouth clamped shut. "I talk too much," he muttered.

Ronny said quickly, "I thought the Hippolyte was the supreme head of Paphlagonia. The chief of state."

"She is," Podner said lowly.

"Well, how does that fit in with the central congress bit?"

"I've said enough," Podner muttered, unhappily. "Where are we going, anyway?"

"Here," Ronny told him, swinging into the curb. "I suspect it's one place nobody will be searching for me."

Podner Bates looked up at the building, showing no signs that he had ever seen it before.

He said, "You realize, of course, that this amounts to kidnapping? I'm accompanying you under duress."

Ronny had to laugh, even as he left the hovercar. "*You're* complaining? You should've been through what I have in the past twenty-four hours or so. Amazonia, ha!"

He had the actor precede him to the entrance and then up the stairs.

Ronny said, in half explanation, "I was here just a short time ago. I doubt if anyone would expect me to return. We can talk it out further, and there's someone else here that might help out with a few matters."

The door of Patricia O'Gara's apartment was ajar. Ronny scowled at that. Instead of activating the eye, he pushed his way through, saying over his shoulder, "Don't try to buzz off. A beam in the leg doesn't look good, fella."

Podner grunted.

Ronny Bronston came to an abrupt halt, his right hand flicked to the gun in his belt. On the floor, partly obscured to his view, lay a girl. Over her, back turned, bent a figure, a gun in one hand.

Ronny snapped, "Drop the shooter!"

The figure stiffened, held the pose for a moment, then let the gun go. The head turned. The man came slowly erect.

Ronny said, "Teucer!"

The other looked at him warily, his hands held wide from his body, palms forward, showing he was taking no action.

Ronny Bronston said, "Get over there by the window. Quick!"

Teucer said, "She's dying."

Minythyia, her face contorted in pain, opened her eyes and stared up at the Section G operative.

Ronny said, even as he sank to his knees beside her, "What happened? This doesn't make sense. This doesn't fit in!"

"It fits in," Teucer growled from his position near the window. There was no belligerence in him.

"Artemis!" Podner Bates ejaculated. "It's the Hippolyte's daughter! She's been hurt. We've got to get help."

"Shut up!" Teucer said wearily.

Minythyia looked up at Ronny Bronston. Pain racked her again. She whispered, "Cutey...kiss me the way they do in the Tri-Di shows from Earth..."

His face agonized, he bent toward her.

But she was dead.

## XII

Ronny Bronston came up, Arctic cold. The gun was steady in his hand. He looked at Teucer.

"Who killed her?"

Teucer took a deep breath. "Evidently, you did."

"Make more sense, and fast. You're right on the edge. On the very edge."

"Look at the shooter."

Ronny stared down at it. It was an H-Gun. It was his own H-Gun, last seen, dismantled, in his supposed tool kit.

Teucer said, "Tuned to your coordinates, and controlled from the Octagon. Nobody else in the system can use it without blowing themselves up. Except possibly some other Section G agent, fully acquainted with the gismo."

Ronny looked at him for a long moment. "Who are you working under?" he said finally.

"Supervisor Lee Chang Ghu. And you?"

"Sid Jakes."

Teucer said, "I thought I made you, there at Heliopolis Street, but I didn't have time for identification. What happened to you there? I thought you were following me."

"I got hung up. I didn't have much of an idea of what was going on at that time."

"I could see you didn't," Teucer said.

"Have you got your badge?"

The slightly built man reached into his belt and brought forth a wallet. He flicked it open. There was a badge inside that gleamed silver when he touched it with his finger, and read simply, *Matt Halloday, Section G, Bureau of Investigation*.

"Where's yours?" Teucer said.

"I didn't dare bring it," Ronny said. "We knew how thoroughly I'd be searched when they found it was a man wanting to land on Amazonia, rather than the girl the visa was issued to. My name's Bronston."

"I've heard about the work you did on Phrygia," Matt Halloday nodded.

Podner Bates had gone into the bedroom and returned now with a sheet which he draped over the dead girl. He looked at the others. "What are you two talking about?"

They ignored him.

Ronny said, "What's this about me killing...my wife?"

"Your *wife*!" the other Section G operative blurted, but then went on. "When I got here, on the off-chance I might find you with this Patricia O'Gara, Minythya was like that. A few minutes to live. I've seen H-Gun wounds before...so have you. The gun was



on the floor beside her. What happens when she's found and the hippolytes' people come in? You'll get the credit."

"But why...!"

Halloday looked around the small apartment. "I wish there was a drink around this place."

"I'll go round up a bottle," Podner Bates said.

Ronny looked at him. "Like curd, you will. You stay here with us. We're going to need some answers, and quickly."

The actor looked him in the eye. "I'm on your side, gentlemen. I was a friend of Minythia's. It was she who brought me into this game, this masquerade. I know neither of you killed her. I don't know who possibly could have. There is no crime on Amazonia. This is unprecedented."

"No crime!" Ronny blurted his rage.

Podner looked at him, shaking his head. "Unless you count crime deeds performed by mentally upset persons. We deal with such, of course, in our hospitals. We have no police, no criminal courts, no jails." He added bitterly. "And no need of them save when we are invaded by strangers from over-space."

Ronny turned to Matt Halloday. "I'm surprised we didn't know about each other's presence here on Amazonia. What's your assignment?"

"To track down a defector. A Section G operative who decided to leave the service."

"What's wrong with that?"

"He didn't bother to go through the usual process of submitting to memorywash, and to turn in such items as his Model H shooter, his badge and his communicator."

Ronny Bronston waited for more.

Halloday said, "He'd been stationed on Palermo. He must have gotten together with some of the old Maffeo outfit, remnants of the administration we *were* instrumental in overthrowing."

"I worked on that," Ronny nodded.

"I know you did. At any rate, the boys evidently struck upon the biggest attempted romp in the history of crime. They weren't interested in anything short of taking over a whole planet, an advanced one at that. Why, next to these stutes, Ghengis Khan, Tamerlane and Alexander were all cloddies."

He went on. "You see, somehow or other they'd hit upon the true nature of this planet, Amazonia. They must have decided it was a plum just waiting for the picking. A whole world...all but defenseless."

Ronny had some questions, then and there, but he didn't interrupt.

"The Maffeo gang couldn't have swung it themselves, but with the aid of Damon Kane —"

"Who?"

"Our Section G turncoat. With his help they figured it all out. They had a small spacescout, hidden away from the days when they dominated Palermo. That enabled them to transfer their forces from Palermo to Amazonia. Later on, it was also used to bring Alfredo Verrocchio back from Earth, where you had met him."

"Alfredo Verrocchio?" Ronny scowled.

"You knew him as Sarpedon. Supposedly a citizen of Amazonia. You and Zeke talked about him."

"Sarpedon! He disappeared."

The other Section G operative nodded. "That was all part of the plot they were building up against Amazonia's government, in the eyes of the Bureau of Investigation. It looked as though the Amazonian Embassy to United Planets must have done away with him. Actually, he was simply picked up by their spacescout and brought back here again."

Ronny said slowly, "His fling had been that all males were being exploited here, and that United Planets should intervene."

Podner Bates laughed sourly at that.

Halloday went on. "I'm not sure of details, of course. The part that interested me was getting Damon Kane before he could spill too much of the inside workings of Section G. I was far too late, of course. The very essence of their scheme involved such secrets."

"I still don't quite get it," Ronny said.

"Damon and Alfredo Verrocchio and their gang were working on the old saying that there is as much wealth to be made in the collapse of a civilization as there is in the building. And they were working on Kane's knowledge that when Section G comes upon a world that is supposedly being held back by some restrictive governmental, religious or socioeconomic system, it takes secret steps to overthrow such a government. Once again, I don't know all the details, but their basic plan was to organize their outfit which they dubbed the Sons of Liberty, and project it as a farflung, militant organization, capable and desirous of taking over the reins of government once the Hippolyte on Paphlagonia and the Myrine in Lybia had been overthrown. Actually, they really had only a handful of malcontents, romantics and crackpots."

Ronny said, "How many members are there in this supposed revolutionary movement?"

"I don't know. But I doubt if there's more than a couple of thousand on both continents."

Podner said in puzzlement, "This is all new to me. I've never even heard of the Sons of Liberty."

Matt Halloday looked at him. "I doubt if many have. They wouldn't even approach someone, unless they already knew he was a misfit who couldn't have made the grade under any sane social system. But you would have heard of them, all right, if, through the workings of Section G, they had taken over all news media, the Tri-Di, vi-ziophone and all other methods of communication. How much of a fight could Hippolyte's outfit have put up against such a coup?"

The actor shook his head. "None. Practically none. I told you we haven't any police – except, of course, traffic officials, that sort of thing."

Ronny said, "How many are there of this Maffeo gang which Damon Kane leads?"

"I've met about five of them, I think. They try to blend in with the Amazonian Sons of Liberty, pretend to be Amazonians themselves, but you can tell the difference if you're looking."

"Zeke's one, eh?"

"Of course."

Ronny said, "Something just cleared up. There was an attempt to kill me on the way to that Heliopolis Street hideout. They must have known I was coming. Possibly they have someone planted in the Hippolyte's offices. They tried to kill me."

Matt Halloday scowled. "I don't know if that makes sense."

"Oh, yes it does," Ronny mused. "They also searched my room and broke my communicator so I couldn't get in touch with Sid Jakes to make a report. They were afraid of me making a report. It might not completely bear out what Sarpedon had reported. I was better dead than alive. Damon could have told them that Section G looks after it's own. Something like the old days when a criminal killed a cop. All police dropped everything, until the cop-killer was caught. That *had* to be the rule, if crooks were to be taught that they just couldn't afford to kill policemen. Kill hold-up victims in the line of work, even kill bank presidents during a stick-up, but don't kill a cop, or you've had it.

"What do you think would have happened, if word had got back to the Bureau of Investigation that supervisor Ronald Bronston had been shot down on the streets of Themiscyra? Hippolyte's government would have immediately been given credit, and, probably with precious little further investigation of the true situation, Section G would have landed on her like a ton of bricks. The present government would have been tossed into the wastebin. Leaving who? Leaving our Damon and his gang. Once Section G pulls a romp, they fade out quickly, leaving the scene to the locals. They don't want to be conspicuous. Some of the other restrictive governments of other worlds might smell a rat."

Podner looked down at the sheet covered girl. "But why Minythia?" he wailed. "What possible reason did they have for killing her?"

Ronny shook his head, as miserable as the actor. "She must have walked in on them when they were kidnapping Pat O'Gara. They killed two birds with one stone. They finished off the witness, and then, by leaving my Model H shooter, placed the blame on me. That in turn should have infuriated the Hippolyte against the Bureau of Investigation and made more likely some overt move on her part which would sooner or later bring the weight of the Bureau against her."

Halloday looked at him, thoughtfully. "Why snatch Miss O'Gara?"

"She's a citizen of Victoria. If something happens to her, on Amazonia, then Article Two of the UP Charter has been brought into effect..." He broke off and snapped suddenly, "Zen! What are we standing around and jabbering about here? They're going to kill the girl. Nothing else makes sense. They're getting desperate. Zeke tried to shoot me again, after I untied you. They must be afraid the fat's in the fire, that I might be getting on to them, not to speak of you. Let's get going!"

"Going *where*?" Matt growled. "That Heliopolis address was the only one I knew. I wasn't with them long enough to find out where Damon and Sarpedon make their central headquarters. Zeke suspected I wasn't one of the usual Amazonian crackpots who joined the Sons of Liberty, no matter how I tried to act the part."

Ronny rapped, "He gave me another address. Come on. He'll remember they did, and possibly they'll evacuate the place." He rammed his gun into his waistband.

Podner said, "How about me?"

They both looked at him, impatiently. "Can you handle a shooter?" Halloday rasped.

"I...I know the theory."

"That you're supposed to point it, and pull the trigger, eh?" Halloday shot a look at Ronny.

Ronny pulled the gun he had rescued from the bushes and tossed it to the actor. "All right, anybody's better than nothing. Zen knows how many of them might be there."

They hurried down the stairs and to the two-seater hovercar.

Ronny rapped. "Podner'll have to sit on your lap."

"That'll make us nice and conspicuous," Matt growled.

"Why should we mind being conspicuous?" Podner demanded. "From now on we'll all on the side of the authorities."

"He's got a point," Ronny said. "All bets are down, now. Let's go!"

The hovercar lifted, only slightly sluggish under the unusual weight, and hummed forward.

"I think I can remember this," Ronny growled. "It's over on the edge of the river."

They found the house which wasn't overly dissimilar to the underground retreat on Heliopolis. They drove past and completely around the edge of the block. The back faced the river. There were small craft tied up there.

Ronny came to a halt and cased the situation. "Any ideas?" he muttered to Matt.

Matt looked at him sourly. "You're supervisor rank. I'm just a full operative. You figure it out. Those Maffeo stutes are just as good with a shooter as we are."

Ronny grunted. "Zeke missed me twice."

"Third time is lucky," Matt said dryly.

Ronny said, "All right, Podner. I'm glad we brought you. Get yourself into a boat. One of those tied up behind the houses either to the right or left of our place. If anybody comes out carrying a shooter, except Matt or me, unlimber that artillery I gave you and keep blasting away. It plies a beam that knocks chunks out of anything it touches."

He turned to Matt. "You've got your own Model H?"

"Yes. Happily, I'd hidden my shooter, badge and communicator, Zeke didn't find them when he overpowered me. He had gone to check with Damon, to find out what to do with me. You let me loose, and when I saw you weren't following me, I figured you had been nabbed and went on to get my equipment. It wasn't until later I figured out that if you'd escaped you might go to Patricia O'Gara.'s I made my way over there and came on the scene a few minutes later."

"All right, just so you have it. Let's go!"

They rounded the corner again. As they walked, Ronny said tightly, "Our only chance is complete surprise. One of us will go over the roofs and down. All these houses evidently have patio gardens inside. The other will burn the front door down and go in that way. One thing. They're not going to think in terms of taking prisoners. We can't either."

Matt looked at him questioningly.

Ronny growled, "Every one of this Maffeo gang know the real workings of Section G. We can't afford to allow any of them to babble, later on."

Matt nodded, uncomfortably.

Ronny said, "Any choice? Over the roof, or through the door?"

The other said, "You can go over the roof."

Ronny snorted. They were approaching their destination, walking rapidly, on the off chance a lookout would spot them. At the door next to the hideout, Ronny said, "Give me a few minutes, then come in shooting."

Matt said nothing.

Ronny flicked his gun from his belt, blasted the door of the neighboring house, cutting a complete ring about the knob. It felt inward and he pushed his way inside.

There was a hall beyond, and a man hurrying down it, wide-eyed, toward him.

Ronny striding quickly snapped, "Interplanetary police. There's a criminal next door. I'm going over the roof to get him. Where's the stairs?"

The other bug-eyed him.

"The stairs!" Ronny roared, making a gesture with the gun.

"That...that way. What do you mean, Interplanetary Police?"

Ronny ignored him. He took the stairs three at a time. There was a second story, devoted evidently largely to sleeping quarters and refresher rooms, and then a narrower stairway leading up again. The roof, he decided, was probably utilized for sunbathing, contemplation of sunsets, and probably for teenagers necking on a starlit night.

He came out onto the roof.

Across from him, a man — it was Zeke! — was peering over the roof's edge, down into the street, and bringing up a short-barrelled scrambler.

Ronny burned a hole in him through which he could have rammed his arm. Zeke tumbled forward, and a moment later the sound of his body, thudding on the street below, came back. And with it, a crash of splintered wood. Evidently, Matt was on his way in.

Ronny grunted, even as he vaulted the low parapet which separated the two houses. He hurried over to the patio edge and looked down. For the moment, he could see no one below. But even as he began to look up, to locate the stairway, two figures came running from a side-room, dragging at handguns holstered at their sides.

He brought his own weapon up to eye level and squeezed off with care. They toppled over, all but cut in two.

The stairs were in approximately the same position as they had been in the house he had just come through. He scurried over to them, instinctively bent low, as men run when under fire.

He burst the door open and started down.

Half way up the stairs an unknown, seemingly weaponless, his eyes wide in fear, shot a terrified look up at him. Ronny didn't lose pace. The other toppled over backward when he shot the right side of his head completely away. He was on the second floor now. He ran completely around it, spotting nothing. The doors were all closed. He could hear the sounds of Matt Halloday's activities going on below.

Flinging his shoulder against the last door, Ronny let his momentum take him far

into the center of the room. He spun, his gun sweeping. There was nobody present.

Back into the hall, still at full pace. He took the next room, duplicated his maneuver. The room was empty, but there was a refresher connected with it. He kicked the door open. A man stood in the auto-shower, evidently unaware of the noises in the building, due to the sound of pressured water. At sight of Ronny, he attempted to scramble in the direction of his clothes. Ronny cut him down mercilessly, turned and was gone before the nude bather hit the floor.

Back into the hall, still running.

He bashed down the next door. On the bed, bound and gagged, was Pat O'Gara. He didn't even take the time to grin at her. He was out in the hall again.

This time the next door but one flew open and two men, guns in hand, came running out.

He used the Model H weapon as though it was a hose. He had seen them first.

He kicked in the remaining door on that floor. The room was empty. He headed for the stairs again. Below, there was a shambles. He nearly tripped over one body as he headed for the patio.

There he found Matt Halloday, struggling to keep on his feet. With his left hand, the Section G operative was holding the stump of his right arm, severed near the elbow.

"Two of them, one of them Sarpedon, heading for the back. They'll finish that poor Podner yoke."

Ronny shot an agonized look at his colleague, even as he dashed by. Matt was fated to bleed to death in minutes.

There were sounds ahead of him, offering the direction of his way. Gun at the ready, he sped toward them. He met the two returning, their guns held ready too.

Ronny Bronston dropped flat, gun hand extended, trigger tight back. The hallway flew apart.

He stumbled to his feet again, pressed ahead, stumbling through gore, his legs wet with blood. He burst out onto the boat landing.

There were no boats there. Over to his right, Podner Bates was wavering a gun at him.

"It's me!" Ronny barked. "Did any get away?"

"No," Podner yelled shrilly, his voice on the edge of cracking.

"Where're the boats?"

"I...I sank them all with the gun when I heard all the noise."

Ronny shook his head at him, in admiration. "All right, come on. I'm afraid Matt's

had it." Without waiting for the actor, he turned and headed back, already feeling the trembling that invariably hit him after extreme action. He mustn't let the nausea hit him. Matt had to be taken care of – if it wasn't too late.

The other Section G operative was sprawled in the garden, ludicrously crushing a bed of the largest pansies Ronny Bronston had ever seen. Ronny dropped his gun and fell to his knees before the wounded man. He rolled him over roughly. To his relief, the severed arm was partially cauterized and bleeding comparative little. He wondered as he worked, what sort of weapon had hit the other.

He heard Podner Bates coming up behind and called over his shoulder, "Something I can make a tourniquet from. Quick, you damned cloddy!"

Bates scrambled around, and returned in seconds with a torn piece of cloth and a stick.

Ronny worked over the fallen man desperately. Podner came back again, a large piece of torn tunic in his hands, part of the cloth bloody.

"Here," he said, a bandage.

Ronny utilized it, then sat back on his heels. He pulled in a double lungful of air. He said finally, "Pat O'Gara's up in that room, one door from the left. Top of the stairs. You better go get her, she's probably scared to death." There was no response and he looked up.

The actor was looking greenish about the gills. There were three bodies, in various stages of disintegration, strewn about the patio. The sickening stench of warm blood and flesh was everywhere.

Ronny said, "All right, I'll go. Watch Matt."

This time his progress up the stairs was slow. His feet dragged. Why had he bothered to worry about Podner's delicacy? He was as near complete collapse himself. Day was coming to an end. The last twenty-four hours had been the most filled in his life.

He pushed the door open and made his way to her bed. He sat down on the edge of it and laboriously began to untie her. He took the gag out last.

Her eyes had been wide on him, taking in the blood on his legs, splattered on his tunic. He felt like an unskilled laborer in a slaughterhouse – and evidently looked and smelled like one. He was too tired to care.

She began to blurt something.

"Shut up," he muttered. "You're all right. You're safe." He stood again and stumbled toward the room's refresher.

The door opened before he reached it and a man stepped out. There was a Model H gun in his hand and it was leveled at Ronny's stomach. There was a sardonic smile on the other's face.



"Supervisor Bronston, I assume. The fair-haired boy of Sid Jakes and Ross Metaxa."

Ronny's own gun was out in the garden where he had dropped it while attending Matt.

He licked dry lips and said wearily, "Damon Kane."

"That's right. Like the Northwest Mounties of legend, you seem to have fouled everything up in the nick of time, you fucker."

Ronny looked at him and shook his head, wearily. Even this emergency couldn't get through his accumulated weariness. He had been going practically all last night and all today into dust, at the top peak of his resources. He hadn't even completely recovered from his hangover of this morning. He was through.

"Why not get it over?" he said.

"Why not?" the Section G renegade snarled. "You've flunked this, Bronston. I don't know how many of my Palermo men you've finished off –"

"All of them," Ronny grunted. "Get it over with, Kane."

"...but I've still got all the nucleus I need among the Amazonians. I'll make a report over my communicator to Sid Jakes, in your name, that'll have Section G here with in weeks. And when they pull down this phoney socioeconomic system, don't think I won't build a new one to my own specifications. We'll take this planet like Grant took..." As he talked, his finger tightened on the trigger.

And suddenly the gun exploded, blasting his chest and lower face into nothingness, sending him reeling back into the refresher room from which he had emerged.

Ronny shook his head.

"He evidently didn't know that when Matt Halloday finally realized what was going on, that he simply got in touch with Section G, on his communicator, and had the gun assigned to Damon Kane's coordinates changed. Anybody trying to fire it, without the correct coordinates just blows the booby trap."

He turned to say something to Pat O'Gara, who was sitting upright in bed now, a fist to her mouth, her face ghost-like. But then he felt the mists roll in, and fell to the floor himself.

Ronny Bronston awakened in bed.

It was a clean, light room, and he felt unbelievably clean himself. A woman – who must have been a doctor, she looked like a doctor – said, "You're awake."

"Not very," he said. "Go away." And went back to sleep.

When he awoke again, nothing had changed, save that two persons sat next to his

bed and several more stood behind, none of whom he immediately recognized save Major Oreithyia, who for the first time he had seen her, was not in uniform. No, he did recognize the others now. They were members of the committee who had questioned him before he had been taken in to meet the Hippolyte.

Of the two seated women, one was the Hippolyte herself. However, she wasn't garbed now in the regal outfit of the palace throne room. She still bore her strength of character in her face, but the air of supreme command was gone. He didn't recognize the woman seated next to her and it must have shown in his eyes.

The Hippolyte said, "This is the Myrine of Lybia."

Ronny nodded, he had guessed, even as she spoke. The Hippolyte said, "Are you strong enough to talk? The doctor says your wound is doing nicely."

He hadn't even known he had been wounded. He wondered which of the enemy had managed to hit him. It didn't surprise him. In the heat of combat you often copped one without feeling it until later.

"I'm all right," he said.

The Hippolyte said, "The *Schirra* is still in orbit. Evidently, the satellite which houses the UP Embassy has some personnel which wishes to transfer back to Earth. Do you think you can undertake the reembark and return to Earth with a message from Amazonia to the Department of Interplanetary Justice and whatever other officials are involved in this sweeping scheme to prod all man-settled planets into progress?"

Ronny looked at the two of them warily. He shook his head. "I don't think I have a clear enough picture as yet, to give a comprehensive report."

The Hippolyte nodded. "You will have. In actuality, it's all very simple. Ask us what you will. We'll cooperate. The Myrine has come all the way from Lybia to join in my final discussion with you."

Ronny looked at the Lybian Amazon head. She held the same dignity as did the Hippolyte, but was evidently prone to hold her peace.

He said. "It was all show, wasn't it?"

"Largely."

"Podner mentioned that you have no police. You have no armies either, have you? Neither one of you?"

"That is correct," the Hippolyte said. "We haven't had for almost two centuries."

Ronny shook his head, again. "When I was given this assignment, I went to the Octagon library. I checked everything it had on Amazonia, which was precious little. A great deal of it dealt with the founding of your organization, its original principles, the things you did on Earth to recruit members. It held all the bylaws of your organization, all the plans you expected to put through once you landed on your colony planet. All the pamphlets and books dealing with the Amazon movement, and why it was rebelling

against man's domination."

Myrine opened her mouth for the first time, coming forth with nothing more than a chuckle.

"That was over two centuries ago," the Hippolyte said. "I think we'll save time, Ronald Bronston, if I take over. You see, at first I imagine we were something like the Mormons who settled Utah back in the old times. We had a multitude of ideas, principles, beliefs, and a great deal of faith in what, as we look back at it today, was obviously extremism. But we were no incompetents. And like the Mormons we quickly became pragmatic. Just as they gave up their polygamy when it proved impractical, we gave up the domination of one sex over the other. Not so quickly, perhaps, but step by step."

The Myrine twisted her face in humor and it suddenly came to Ronny Bronston that she was an extremely handsome woman and must have been a beauty in her youth. She said, "We still have a few signs of it about, especially here in Paphlagonia."

The Hippolyte nodded. "More symbols than anything else, even here. At any rate, once again, similar to the Mormons, when our first colony ships landed all property was community owned, save, of course, personal things. Our original ideas of a female-dominated socioeconomic commonwealth proved nonsense within the year. The smallest unit of a life form is that unit which can reproduce itself. In the case of the human race, a woman and a man..."

The Amazon leader of Lybia twisted her face again.

"Or, as Citizen Bronston would undoubtedly put it, a man and a woman."

Ronny grinned at her suddenly. He would have liked to have known this person better, and doubted that he would ever have the opportunity.

"At any rate," the Hippolyte went on, "our experiments revealed that only as a partnership can the relationship reach its ultimates. And so we adapted. We had various advantages over many other Earth colonies, I am sure. In spite of our initial enthusiasms, we were not fools. Our colonists were composed of survival types. Nor were we inadequately equipped. A great many of our society back on the home planet who weren't able to come, gave their full support of our attempt. We must have been one of the richest colonizations that ever burnt off into the stars. In short, we had the wherewithal to experiment, and the good luck to have one of the richest planets man has yet discovered.

"And so we prospered. We experimented here, we experimented there. Now you see the result we have thus far attained."

"When did you stop having a military?" Ronny asked curiously.

"From the beginning. We're women, remember."

Ronny said dryly, "I seem to remember such women in history as Elizabeth the First, Catherine the Great and Zenobia who didn't exactly avoid war."

Hippolyte nodded. "But they were women living in a man's world, and having to adopt men's methods in order to realize their ambitions. Ours was a woman's world. One of our original revolts was against the incessant armed conflict that has persisted since the early days of man's dominance."

He said, "Why the big masquerade? Why let those stories go around about the Amazons on this planet, the harems of men?"

The small group standing behind the two seated Amazon leaders stirred in suppressed laughter.

"Why encourage all this nonsense by such things as sending as delegates to the UP on Earth, big strapping muscular type women, all done up in uniforms that look straight out of the Trojan War?"

The Hippolyte chuckled wryly. "I thought anyone as astute as yourself, Ronald Bronston, would have figured that out by this time. We were defenseless. We neither had, nor wanted a military. But we knew we stood alone, a matriarchy in a confederation of two or three thousand planets dominated by men. Frankly, we were afraid. We were afraid man's instinct would be to pull us down. So it was we put up our false front. So it was we let rumors spread that we would give any man pause before he landed on our world. Of recent decades, our spies have brought rumors back to us that intensified our fears. We heard that the institutions of some of the member planets of UP were being subverted. That governments were being overthrown through the connivance of certain UP agencies." She nodded. "What you told us under Scop made us realize our fears were well grounded."

Ronny avoided that and went back. "If there isn't any real conflict between your two major continents, why don't you have world government?"

One of the standees, a man Ronny vaguely recalled as Aesus, interrupted for the first time.. Ronny had pegged him before as some sort of economist.

He said, "Don't you see? We act as controls upon each other. If we attempt some new theory, and there seems to be an alternative, we let one continent try this system, the other that." He added, sourly, "Sometimes both are wrong."

Ronny was nodding in memory. "Podner Bates was telling me about your method of voting. In Lybia, you seem to have a variation on popular democracy – through industrial representation, of course – and in Paphalagonia, more nearly a representative one."

Someone said from behind, "That's correct."

Ronny said, "But what's all this about you being the Myrine and you the Hippolyte, and the *pylons* and the *genos* and such?"

The Hippolyte sighed wryly. "You probably read some of it in those early papers you scanned at the Octagon library. At first we tried to go back to gentile society, based on descent in the matrilineal line, and with women only given the vote. Some of the symbols of this we still retain, such as descent in the female line, which obviously is at

least as sensible as descent in the male line. But, bit by bit, real government control was taken away from this organization and handed over to the central production congress until at long last our body was in charge only of civil matters."

The Myrine said here, "I beg our pardon, my dear. Even that applies only here in Paphlagonia. In Lybia we are experimenting with universal suffrage even in civil matters, and making it an 'industry' involving men as well as women and with representation in our central congress."

"What do you mean, civil matters?" Ronny said.

"Matters pertaining not to production and such problems, but to every day civic life. Traffic problems, planning of a city's supply of water and disposal of sewage, organization of festivals, judging of disputes between citizens. In the old days, before we had eliminated crime for all practical purposes, police, courts, prisons, that sort of thing."

Ronny said, "Just one other matter. This system of paying in hours. Where'd you come up with that silly idea that all time is worth exactly the same?"

Aeasus blurted, "What's silly about it, you flat!"

The Myrine laughed heartily.

She bent a friendly eye on Ronny and said, "You're quite right. In Lybia, we have varying values for an hour. A highly trained man's time can be worth several times as many hours as an unskilled man. We still count by hours, but we have different scales."

The Hippolyte grumbled, "It's an experiment we haven't concluded as yet. We're not sure if Lybia's right or not."

She changed the subject. "Purely to satisfy my own curiosity, how did you see through the elaborate show we put on for you? Frankly, when Oreithyia told us you were a man, we were in a tizzy. We wanted the columbia very badly, but we didn't want you to come in contact with our world as it is. My..." her face showed quick pain "...my daughter helped out, planning an extensive masquerade in which she seemed to take considerable pleasure. She always was fascinated by Earth, which is why she liked to meet the incoming spaceships as one of the customs officers." She hesitated. "Perhaps that is why she became attracted to you, personally."

Ronny said softly, "At the end, I assure you, the attraction was reciprocated. I don't know what it was that first made me smell a rat. Many things, I suppose. One of the matters that confused me considerably, though, was your throne room and all those hundreds of guards and attendants, playing court to you. It bore out everything I'd ever heard about Amazonia. Why, it was like a gigantic Tri-Di historical spectacular show."

The Hippolyte said dryly, "That's exactly what it was. We took you to a Tri-Di set. Our people love this sort of show and our entertainment industry produces a good many of them. To impress you, Minythyia simply made arrangements to take the set over, bag and baggage. Those soliders and attendants were all actors and extras. There is no such thing as a palace or throne room here in Themiscyra."

Ronny took a deep breath and puffed out his cheeks. "Well, several things gave me hints. For instance, Podner Bates was presented to me as though he was a typical Amazonian male, but no other males I met seemed to be like him. I was given the impression that all women were warriors, but then never saw anyone in uniform except those I came officially in contact with. But the payoff was when I saw Clete, and Podner, on a theater billboard. Clete had done that little act of hers, showing what efficient warriors Amazonians were, by making a bullseye throwing her short sword. But the billboard told me she was a professional knife thrower. Quite a coincidence. No, the whole thing didn't hold together. I was told there were no newspapers or broadcasts. I can see why, now. If I had seen one, the beans would have been spilled. Another thing that didn't fit was the fact that Tanais was an exchange student from Lybia. How could you have exchange students if you were continually at war?"

He looked at the Hippolyte quizzically. "What's all this about *I thee wed* and the three husbands and all?"

All of the assembled Amazonians joined him in smiling.

The Hippolyte said, "Minythyia dredged that up from the very early years of the new colony, as one of the bits of business to frighten you into hurrying up and concluding our transactions as soon as possible. Actually, of course, we have a pairing arrangement between the sexes. Both marriage and divorce are very simple, but we Amazonians go two-by-two. Any more questions?"

He thought about it and shook his head.

She said, "We have considered what you revealed under Scop and the Myrine and I, as symbol chiefs of state, wish to put ourselves on record as supporting United Planets in that organization's efforts to promote progress on the member planets. Our opinion, of course, is subject to the approval of the congresses of Paphlagonia and Lybia but I have little doubt but that they will concur."

Ronny said slowly, "There is more to this matter of the intelligent aliens than I disclosed, however, I'm sure that the Octagon will be sending you representatives to go into it in detail. It's not up to me."

The Hippolyte and Myrine nodded, and the former said, "We can then expect you to rejoin the *Schirra* and inform your superiors of our stand, and of our desire to remain under our cloak of secrecy? I am afraid your colleague, Citizen Halloday, will have to return by the next spacecraft that comes through. Our physicians are grafting a new lower arm."

Ronny shrugged. "Right. United Planets doesn't contend that there is only one road to progress. In fact, it's most anxious to push experimentation, not only in the sciences and production techniques, but in socioeconomic fields as well."

## EPILOGUE

Rex Ravelle came into the *Schirra's* lounge and shook hands energetically.

"I heard you were back, Guy. Congratulations. Three days! How did you ever do it?"

"It wasn't easy," Guy Thomas said with an air of self deprecation.

Happy Harrison came in with the coffee the passenger had requested. He took in the conversation, wide-eyed. Oh, Happy was going to be the center of conversation at the crew's mess tonight.

The second officer said, fascinated, "Listen, did any of them try to grab you for a husband?"

Guy nodded.

'Well, how'd you escape?"

"I had an armed guard."

Rex Ravelle made a whistling sound. "Had to fight 'em off, eh? Listen, did you see this Hippolyte mopsy?"

Guy Thomas' voice went confidential. "You'll never believe this. I didn't myself, but I was taken to see her in a throne room as big as a football stadium. The pillars were gold and the mosaics were made of jewels. There must have been two thousand armed guards and attendants."

"All women, hey?" Happy Harrison said, eyes bugging still.

"Of course," Guy told him. "I was the only man there. They let me know the Hippolyte didn't like men around, always giggling and chattering."

Rex shook his head. "The men must be really something."

Guy said, "You should have met one named Podner Bates."

Rex Ravelle said, half as though in envy, "Imagine all that happening to a quiet little guy like you."

Captain Buchwald had come in behind his second officer. He said, "We'll be underway in half an hour. Tell me, Citizen Thomas, how did Patricia O'Gara make out? I have been somewhat worried about that idealistic young lady."

"Oh, she loves it there," Guy said, very sincerely. "The last time I saw her, she was having a run-in with a whole group of men."

The Captain shook his head ruefully. "I suppose it is the environment. She seemed such a nice girl."

MNQ/2008.03.25

55,200 words

Quite simply, this was the worst dead tree typesetting that I've ever seen. If there's any satisfaction at all to be derived from this release it's that for the first time in at least 40 years, this book has been thoroughly proofread and corrected. Enjoy.