the trouble with you earth people

Contents

(Scanner's Note: The story "The Carnivore" was not listed in the ToC of my DT copy, but the story was there. The article "About the Author" was similarly not listed in the ToC. I've corrected those omissions in the e-copy you have)

"Katherine MacLean has been in the vanguard of those SF writers trying to apply to the soft (psychological) sciences the machinery of the hard (technological sciences) ...KM was one of the earlier women writers, but ...in a notoriously chauvinist field she competed on equal terms, not restricting herself to "feminine" themes or protagonists. The admiration accorded her work has nothing to do with tokenism."

The Science Fiction Encyclopedia.

"This century is increasingly exciting, dangerous, and involved in threats to the entire planet, like a very wild early science fiction plot. Perhaps I should write realistic contemporary novels to try to deal with it, but the respectable literary realism usually deals totally with characters, rather than the big

background picture. To me science fiction makes alternative histories the hero of the story and the great events are characterized. I've always liked it that way."

Katherine MacLean in
Contemporary Science Fiction Authors.

THE TROUBLE WITH YOU EARTH PEOPLE
Short Story Collection by Katherine MacLean

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
MacLean, Katherine
The trouble with you earth people.
(Starblaze editions)
I. Science fiction, American I. Title
PZ4.M1253TR. [PS3563.A26125] 813'.5'4 79-15246 ISBN 0-915442-95-7
Printed in the United States of America

THE TROUBLE WITH YOU EARTH PEOPLE

The tape isn't clear. When you said the two civilizations could economically exchange their byproducts, which words did you use to the nice human scientist?" Tima poised her pen over her notes, her doggy face earnest and studious. "Did you say, Interchange, exchange, trade, mutually-consume, mutually-eat or ingest *or* input*? And did you say* byproducts, reject products, surplus, waste, excretion, excrement *or* shit*?"*

Her husband, hanging upside down from the exercise bar, shrugged. "I don't remember. Some word for harmonic mutual aid or intercourse. Scientists focus on concepts. It doesn't matter what words I used."

"It matters," she kissed the air in his direction. "You did a perfect study of the culture, your diplomacy was wonderful. This report must be complete in every detail. I want you to get the credit you deserve." She resumed her note taking, listening through earphones to their recordings of their strangely unsuccessful attempt to open an embassy on the planet Earth, in which they almost lost their lives.

This is what happened—

"I can't wait to meet Sir Harrington face to face and tell him that we are brothers, one soul. All anthropologists are brothers. I wonder what they will tell him to ask me." Working off nervous energy, Rem Sh'baar did a running somersault and landed back on his feet.

His favorite wife, Tima, lying on the padded floor, said nothing. She pushed a button that turned the page of the book projected on the ceiling.

"They might ask me to explain anything. I wish I could just tell them what they need." Rem Sh'baar climbed on the relaxing bars, hooked his legs over a bar and hung upside down with his arms folded in a dignified manner. "'Humans,' I would say, 'If you would just organize your pecking order so the old are given license to'...`Um—They don't say things like that. Perhaps I'd say, 'If you put the food out of reach of the children in puzzle boxes…"

"Rem, darling, you mustn't hang upside down when inter-viewing the questioner. Humans don't do it."

He wrinkled his nose in annoyance. "Human astronauts hang upside down when they announce cartoons on their morn-ing TV shows."

"Astronauts only do that on the children's TV shows, Rem. It is to amuse the children," said the musical voice of his best beloved. She was an anthropology student and a grade higher in credits. She lay on the resilient floor with her arms folded behind her head while she studied the page projected on the ceiling. "You don't want to speak from a posture that implies the listener is a child. He might be insulted."

Rem turned rightside up and hung by his hands, looking sheepish. "I didn't know those cartoons were for children. They seemed very cynical, full of cowardice and betrayal, much too depraved for children. But you're right. In interview shows the grownups always sit still in those uncomfortable chair things and blow smoke."

They glanced at the television set fastened to the wall. It was a handrigged imitation of an ordinary Earth-made television set, and for several months of study it had been providing Rem with a safe substitute for going down on the ground and studying the natives of Earth up close where they could reach him. At the moment they looked at it, a lithe young woman was pointing at a weather map, tracing its lines. Her mouth moved silently.

They looked away.

"Maybe I should learn to blow smoke," said Rem Sh'baar. He swung upside down again, then spun himself upright, sitting on top of the bar. They were both tall, slender, and graceful, with rather doglike faces which could have won beauty prizes only at a pet show.

"They don't all blow smoke," said his slender wife. She pushed a button and the pictured page on the ceiling turned into a diagram.

"But they all sit on chairs," Rem decided. "I'll ask them to put two chair things inside the airlock for the interview. Look! There we are again!"

With great interest they both turned to watch the TV screen. The television showed a picture of their spaceship landing. For the thirtieth time in thirty hours it showed a gigantic black and silver beachball descending through clouds, with swarms of planes circling it like gnats. The early morning news commentator came on, babbling without sound and moving his hands in reassuring gestures.

Rem leaped foward and turned up the sound.

"—to keep the world informed of every new development of this startling story."

The picture changed to a distant view of orderly crowds and people on a platform speaking, and swooped in for a closeup of a slender man in a silver spacesuit shaking hands with a stiff looking human in a dark business suit. The solemn voice of the news commentator explained: "Yesterday the visitor from outer space was officially greeted and welcomed by the Vice President of the United States and the Secretary General of the United Nations."

The camera moved in on the scene, enlarging the head of the spacesuited figure. The spacesuit had a clear plastic helmet in a bubble shape, giving a partial view of Rem's face as he turned and began descending the stairs. The film stopped and froze in a still photograph which showed his profile clearly, as obviously dif-ferent from the humans.

"You look very handsome, surrounded by all those flatfaced monsters," Tima said.

"I always photograph well," Rem murmured.

A famous announcer suddenly appeared standing before a background picture of the giant spaceship parked on the ground in the middle of a great green park, with the capitol dome shining and the Spaceman's Memorial Pylon showing its spike in the distance.

The announcer spoke in his well-known tones of fatherly reassurance. "Here we are in the second day of contact between civilizations. Today will be the big day for scientists. They have been requesting permission to interview the visitor from space since he first made contact. Yesterday, the alien being, whose name is Lord Rem Sh'baar, explained that he had been given permission for a short visit to Earth to collect anthropological data. He said he had a short time, but he was prepared to answer a limited number of questions on scientific subjects, if they were put on a short list. He said he had learned English from watching and listening to television science lectures, and he had admired the anthropology lectures of Sir Charles Harrington-Smith, and therefore would like to have the list of questions given to Sir Charles, so that Sir Charles would explain them to him if there were any difficulty with the language.

"The interview is scheduled for nine o'clock this morning." The announcer turned and made a solemn gesture at the distant spaceship. "There may be the secrets of the ages locked within that silver sphere. There may be unguessable wonders of science. We can only wait and hope."

A commercial began, showing a mound of dirty clothes flying into an oversized washing machine. Bending forward from the bars, Rem reached forward and turned off the sound. Six tiny humans climbed out of the washing machine and did a jig on the lid, then with great effort heaved up a big soap box, tilted it, and poured a stream of soap into the washing machine. The words biodegradable zoomed up from the interior of the machine, expanded, and vanished. The commercial was over, so a cowboy on a horse appeared, his horse ambling slowly up the slope of an Arizona desert. An unseen blow sent his hat flying ahead of him. He looked behind, registered alarm, and sent his horse into a gallop.

"Why do cowboys shoot at strangers? Their reasons seem to be excuses. And why do people in towns occasionally form groups to hang someone?"

"We've worked out reasons. We've watched a lot of tele-vision, and the rules of attack seem to be almost the same in each story." Tima rolled over and began to draw a copy of the diagram from memory.

"But now I am not sure we are right. The little humans dancing on the and the magic shows ....There is much lying, much imagination in these television shows. What if it does not represent what they really do?" Rem dropped to the soft floor and sat watching his wife. "Tima, must you study? I am nervous about the interview."

She turned off the book projector and sat up. "If I don't study I might panic. I don't understand them either. You've planned this well, Rem; you studied for it hard. You will get scholar's credits for it."

"If I'm alive," he said.

On the television screen a grim group of humans on horse-back galloped along a trail, carrying rifles and a rope.

"Sir Charles Harrington-Smith on BBC says that the anthro-pologists think that a ground ape was their ancestor. Ground apes are pack animals. They guard each other in packs and have an instinct for mass attack on animals they don't recognize."

She reached forward and stroked his hair. "You were safe yesterday, so you must be doing the right things, when you follow their rules. Just avoid the rules of attack."

He thought. "Yesterday I did not insult anyone or make anyone step aside. I let everyone walk before me. I ceased to speak when they spoke. I told the important officials that I admired their city and their planet. I touched nothing without permission and handed back everything they gave me. I did not steal. I did not refuse to drink with them, for they did not offer me any liquids. I wore the right clothing they expect from a man from space." He felt his muzzle ruefully. "I can't help looking strange."

On the television the horses were stretched in a wild gallop, the cowboys leaning forward shooting grimly at a fleeing figure far ahead.

They both averted their eyes from the television scene.

In a low voice she said, "Rem, yesterday you were an ambas-sador. What are the rules for attack on

ambassadors?"

"Only to start a war," he replied in a low voice, looking away from the television. "They must think and talk among themselves for a long time before deciding to start a war." He put his head in her lap. "What is your thought now?"

She stroked his hair. "Today you will be answering science questions. That makes you a scientist. What are their rules for attacking scientists?"

He thought, and put an arm across his eyes to think better. "I'm sorry," he confessed apologetically. "I like the lectures and the stories too much. The scientists seemed to be very important, treated with much support and trust and liking. I only learned language from those shows. I forgot to think about sociology." He sat up suddenly.

She leaped to her feet and went to the television set, pulled a reel of tape from the file box and dropped it into the slot on top of the television. The cowboys on the screen were busy throwing a noose over a tree branch. They vanished as the recorded signal took hold. Coiled glass tubing and twisted bottles appeared. The slender female turned the sound loud, and mad cackling laughter rolled from the set. She held her ears and watched.

A giant hand holding a tiny test tube appeared on the screen. "Just a minute kiddies," said a gleeful voice with giant echoes. "I'll drink some of this secret liquid and shrink down to where you can see me." Glugging sounds followed.

Rem crossed his legs and laughed. "Not Mad Scientists, Tima. Those must be wizard and magician myths for children. In adult stories the scientist usually appears in a plot about spying and scientific secrets. I put all the best stories on a reel labeled Scientific Secrets."

A small man peered, leering, from the screen. He wore a scientist's white smock. He pulled at a bushy black beard and waggled thick black eyebrows up and down as he talked. Tima dropped in another tape and the mad scientist vanished. "SCIENTIFIC SECRETS I" said the screen.

The two students far away from home sat together on the cushioned floor and held hands and watched while the television set of the strange civilization of Earth showed how scientists were treated.

On the television screen an inoffensive quiet man in a white laboratory coat worked, standing at a tall table with meters and moving graphs. He checked the figures on the meters against his calculations and made notes, and became excited and ran a test three times, checking the figures each time.

His audience of two excitable young persons watched while the scientist tried to call in other scientists to see, and found the lights out, the building dark and deserted, for he had worked long into the night. He called his home from the office phone and explained his discovery excitedly to his wife, while a spy who usually listened in on calls from the research building became excited and made other calls with his other hand while listening intently. The scientist went down to the street, accepted a lift from a too-convenient taxi and was kidnapped by agents in the taxi, taken to a lonely building, and beaten and tortured, while the torturers whispered demands that he reveal the details of his discovery.

An agent of his own country, sent by the scientist's worried wife to check on his safety, located the place of torture by careful following of clues, killed a guard outside the building, climbed vines up a wall, slid through a narrowly opened window into a hall, and silently killed two men he encountered in the hall.

Tima shrank closer to Rem, and he put an arm around her.

On the screen the agent heard moans and went into the room where the scientist lay tied. He killed the torturer and two other men, all almost without noise, then imitated a voice on the intercom to the people in the rest of the building and warned that the police were coming, and commanded them to get into their cars and escape, but to leave one car idling and empty before the door. The agent waited until he heard motors leaving, carried the scientist down to the door, saw an idling empty car, looked around and saw no opposition, put the scientist in the front seat beside him and drove away.

Clutching each other's hands the watching couple let out a sigh as the car reached safety, and the scientist was carried into a friendly and attentive hospital.

"It does not seem to be for children or for a joke," Tima said. "Those agents and spies are dangerous to scientists from outside countries."

"We are from an outside country."

"Far outside."

"They might substitute an agent for Sir Harrington." "But we know what he looks like."

The screen said "SCIENTIFIC SECRETS II."

Another story began, clipped from another television show. On the screen another scientist, pot-bellied and older, and more hesitant in his manner, let himself into a pleasant apartment and shut the door with a relaxing sigh. Music came soothingly from the kitchen.

"Maria, I'm home. Good news!" he called. The scientist dropped his coat on a chair and walked into the kitchen. "Naval Research has accepted my—" The kitchen was empty. Still smil-ing he wandered on to a balcony and looked at the sky. The phone rang. He went in to answer it.

Rem and Tina reached for each other's hands as ominous music began. Still smiling the scientist held the phone to his ear.

A cold voice with an accent said, "Doctor Obarth? We have your daughter. She will not be harmed if you obey our orders."

He gripped the telephone in both hands as if about to throw it, but pressed it more tightly to his ear. "I don't believe you," he whispered. "She has only just gone out to the store. You are lying."

"We will prove we have her," said the cold voice on the phone. "Listen and you will hear her speak to you."

The aging man breathed heavily into the phone for a moment of hesitation and fear. "I don't believe you," he whispered. No one was listening to him. The scene on the screen divided, and the other side showed a dark basement room with the windows covered. Two men held a girl by the arms, and a third man held a phone before her face. She shook her head. The man holding the phone spoke to the other two, and they did something to the girl's arms.

The girl screamed.

With a bound Rem Sh'baar turned off the television set. The screams faded, and the picture went dark. Trembling he stood pounding his fist softly down on the top of the TV set, looking at Tima. They were both tall and slender, delicate by Earthly standards.

"I won't let them have you," he said, his teeth showing. "All their friendliness and crowding around might be just waiting for an opening. Tima, what have I said about you? Have I said anything that would let them know you are in the spaceship too?"

She thought. "They don't know I exist."

"Good. They will not kidnap you to force me. Or kidnap me to force you. I will tell them I am sick. They will be afraid to beat me."

He stopped and pounded his fist silently on the top of the television box and then continued. "The role is wrong. It is not safe to have them think of me as a scientist. I said this would be a short visit, so I am not bound to them by any promise to stay. We'll leave as soon as we see any move toward kidnapping."

Rem contacted the human officials and asked for chairs in the airlock.

They turned the television back to the hourly shows to wait for the news and worked off energy in a bowling target game, occasionally glancing at the television.

The scene was a panel show, but the puzzle contestants had abandoned their game and were discussing the news.

"What secret of science would you ask our visitor from the stars, Miss Saint Clair?" asked the moderator.

The camera shifted to a close-up of a rather wattled and skinny ex-movie queen. She toyed with an earring and looked coy. "Well, I do hope the dear man will tell us something about wrinkles. I'm still in my teens of course—" The audience laughed politely. "But I do hope for the sake of all the other girls that he will give us one teensey cure for wrinkles."

The mellow smile and raised hand of the MC interrupted the audience's sympathetic laughter. "Now we'll hear from Ralph Rock, currently starring in that musical hit, The Bluebells. What secret would you like the stranger from space to tell you, Ralph?"

A clanging and booming began in the outer airlock of the big spaceship as human TV technicians

dragged in chairs, television equipment and camera, setting them up for the important inter-view.

"I will wear an airsuit and look like an astronaut again. Maybe they will not think of me so much as a scientist to squeeze for secrets." Rem Sh'baar zipped his coverall on and pulled the bubble helmet over his head. "If they have no bad intentions it is only the language which can make trouble. But I think I can explain the science in their language without breaking taboos and angering them."

The two chairs he had ordered were in the middle of the airlock. He entered and saw three television cameras along the walls, crowding the small metal room, pointing meancingly to-ward him like machine guns. Their heavy cables trailed away from them and out the door like thick-bodied snakes, and their presence held the door open so it could not be slammed shut for a quick takeoff.

Rem Sh'baar looked at the door wedged open, wondering if it were part of a plan, then he inspected the chairs, touching them suspiciously. He lowered himself into a chair. The arm rests surprised him by nudging against his elbows. He lowered his arms on to them and gripped them firmly, and sat very still, bringing everything-he knew of English into readiness.

His posture was stiff and very still. To the panel of viewing scientists viewing the tape as it was made, watching somewhere in a government building in Washington, he looked like an Egyptian stone statue of an animal-headed god seated on a throne to judge the dead.

There was a sound of a polite knock by one of the television technicians. "Are you ready for Sir Charles, Sir?"

Rem turned his head stiffly toward the half-open door. "You may enter, Sir Harrington. I will be glad to greet you."

"Thank you, Lord Sh'baar. I am glad to greet you also."

A tall lean Englishman with buck teeth and the expression of an amiable horse pushed the door a little wider and stepped in carefully. Every move was taken with the caution of an old man, aware that old bones are brittle. He sat down, crossed his legs, and arranged himself in the relaxed and reassuring pose of a practiced interviewer, a man capable of interviewing natives in strange jungles or shy artists in their studios.

He glanced at the camera and slightly changed the angle of his head. "Thank you, Lord Sh'baar, for asking for me to interview you. It is an honor."

Rem Sh'baar glanced also at the cameras and spoke slowly with careful clarity. "It is an honor also to meet you, Lord Harrington. We—I have admired you on television. Stories you told of struggle to be understood by native tribes and misunder-standings, such adventures have happened to us also. We—I am a student of races and civilizations also. I enjoy differences and seek them, as you enjoy them and seek them. What will be the questions they gave you?"

The human world was waiting, hoping that their man would be able to extract important and wonderful information from the stranger.

The famous old anthropologist inclined his head. "Lord Sh'-baar, if you will permit a preliminary question before the impor-tant and difficult ones—Are our races on the same evolutionary level?"

The person from another planet fidgeted, thinking. He unzipped his bubble helmet, rubbed his muzzle in puzzlement and stroked the four short bristles on his cheeks. Finally he asked, "What is Evolutionary Level?"

"Evolutionary Level means—" Sir Charles hesitated, and looked at the muzzle and pointed ears of the visitor. "Well, perhaps it means nothing. We will forget that one. Tell me, do you find humans as intelligent and sensitive as your own people?"

"Yes, you have much inner struggle between carnivore and herd instincts, very like my own people. It makes for divided dreams of kill and love, impossible in action."

"If we are like you, then we are intelligent enough to learn all of your science, are we not?"

It was a loaded question, a crucial question. Sir Charles Harrington-Smith asked it casually, without emphasis, but Rem Sh'baar recognized it. The child's answer to only three wishes. The first wish shall be for a hundred more wishes. If the monster gives three answers, ask for a way to find out everything else.

"Would you repeat the question please?" He hoped that would not be it. His answer might offend them. He wondered if they dueled when offended.

"Can we humans learn all of your science?" the old anthro-pologist repeated patiently. "Do we have the intelligence?"

"No. Yes. Yes, intelligence. No, for you must learn our lan-guage. Science is thought, thought in language. Our children learn basic science when they learn basic language. Children have great speed in blotting up touch, sound, sight. They need only the help of words to make true connections. Yours is taboo culture, taboos basic words."

The lanky old Englishman shifted position, and crossed his legs again the opposite way carefully. "Thank you, Lord Sh'baar. Could you inform me a little more clearly perhaps. We need to know if our scientists could learn your science from your science books and records. We would like to ask permission to photo-graph your books."

It was the question, again. This time he had said it openly.

The alien licked his lips nervously, feeling very alien. "Your people cannot learn science, not even from your own science books and records. Your civilization is a word-taboo culture. Taboos words, not actions. Children learn to not-say, by learning to not-think. Taboo-type cultures are very difficult to learn, take all learning power to learn not-think. Average person when grown has learned not-think and how to tell bad jokes to think a little. He cannot learn science."

Sir Charles shifted his weight and recrossed his legs, and scratched his upper lip as though looking for a mustache to rub. "You have learned English wonderfully well from listening to my lectures, Lord Sh'baar. It is almost like listening to myself lecture on taboos of tribal cultures." He cleared his throat as though caught in a lie. "Ah, barring a little more grammar of course. The question is not whether our children can learn our own science, but can our scientists, our intelligent people learn science from reading your books and records?"

Rem had given a good answer, and yet Sir Charles had not understood the answer. He moved to put a hand over his eyes to think. But no human in an interview on television had ever put his hands over his eyes. It could be a tabooed action. Rem dropped his hand before it reached his face, licked his lips and glanced around at the cameras, trying to find words that would reach even the most stupid members of the human audience, and yet not offend.

"Sir, I could teach you to read our books, but you could not read our books. You could not make science mind-models from our words. Suck, eat, digest, sleep, defecate, kill, love, procreate. Strong experiences make strong words, make strong thoughts. Our science words are strong words. Science is about reality. Reality is yours from skin experience, from pleasure of instinct. But you taboo skin and instinct words."

"But we could learn your language, could we not?" Sir Charles leaned forward, urging gently as he had so many times on television. Rem had admired his technique and had learned from it. Yet now Sir Charles was wrong, was blind, was angling a hook before a log instead of a fish. "And then we could read your books. If you would allow us to photograph and read your books...."

"How can they learn our words if they will not allow the ideas the words mean?"

"They could learn like children I suppose," said Sir Charles. "Every child starts by hearing the words without knowing the ideas. Every child learns the ideas somehow. If you could loan us an encyclopedia of your science with pictures, and some of the books you use to teach your children, and let us photograph them, I'm sure our bright young scientists could work out their meaning somehow."

"It is too late for adults, they have passed their learning time!" Rem's voice was shrill. He flung an arm out sideways in a desperate gesture.

"Well, perhaps some of our scientists' children in their own homes, could see photographic copies of your books. If you merely let us photograph them...." Again no understanding. Again the impossible request.

"Your children have work learning your culture. Infants learn to digest, no words for triumph, no praise or notice of it. Learn to reject bad food, don't do that, bad child. Learn to defecate and withhold. Good child, but never mention it, the words are taboo, unspeakable words. Everything important and alive in the life of the child is unspeakable. They love and see love. Shh, do not mention it. They learn to talk, do not shout, do not make funny noises, do not say taboo words, do not mention anything

impor-tant. Shh. So they learn to not-talk by not-thinking. Very difficult to not-think. Adult has learned taboo pattern well, must learn to speak past taboo-pattern by jokes and hints, to act past taboo-pattern or die. Cannot learn more. No room left in head for learning more. Only children can learn."

Sir Charles looked patient. He gestured a hand out sideways, a carefully neutral gesture of tossing something away which carried no menace in any animal or human gesture code. "If your books were around, our next generation of children could learn them then. I'm sure your books would be valuable."

Rem moved again to put his hands over his eyes to think and remembered that this was not done on television. He dropped his hands and looked around at the three staring television cameras. They gave no clue as to how to phrase the answer to get through a taboo-blocked mind. "I would not want to interfere with a child learning his own parents' don'ts. No parent would want that. A child who learns and speaks tabooed ideas is a tabooed child," said the desperate alien. "An outcast. I use only your words, your words from your lectures. Children in a native culture meeting older wiser people from western European civilization learn new strong ideas from outside. They learn outsiders laugh at their taboos. They speak before their elders and are punished, and find that the ideas they have learned are called insane, evil, unclean, dirty, unspeakable, taboo by their elders. The children think their elders are enemies of knowledge and of growth. The children think the secret of all success to bring pain to elders, to break taboos and rules and bring crime and destruction and defiance against elders. They destroy their civilization, their race dies! Many tribes have died of culture shock! You have said it yourself!" His voice reached a high pitch of nervous emphasis and he finished in a squeal.

"Those were primitive tribes," Sir Charles said reasonably. "This is a civilization. Surely the introduction of some new science ideas cannot be a moral crisis. Science is innately imper-sonal?"

"Science is innately impersonal? Science is innately impersonal?" The long slender non-human sagged in his posture. He looked at the floor and muttered to himself in his own tongue. "I cannot let you pour a pail of our civilization's by-product ideas over your children." Yet he had promised to answer their ques-tions. He looked around the empty airlock room, the TV cameras trained on him like guns, the trailing cables that led out the partially closed door into a strange world. "My English is not clear perhaps. Information cannot be neutral in my language. I cannot dare to be more clear." He looked hopelessly up at the weatherbeaten face of the English anthropologist and saw that the man was sympathetic to his struggle to express himself. "Sir, when you entered a native village, did the natives ever try to kill you?"

The famous anthropologist hesitated and surprisingly, blushed, with a pinkening color through his neck and face. "Well, in a way, yes. Several times. I must have made some mistake, of course. Naturally a stranger walking into a village without knowing the taboos would have to be very careful. I was always careful, but sometimes one must break a taboo in a very innocent action." He sounded apologetic.

The alien sat in his chair stiffly, like a statue. "I have had much time to study your taboos. I have watched much television. I am being very careful."

The old English anthropologist fixed him with a searching gaze. "I believe you mean that today you are the anthropologist and I am the native." He laughed in a suppressed snort. "That is a turnabout! Did you say you learned our taboos from watching television?"

"Yes. I have studied television from all the television pro-grams taken on tapes. Six months on tapes from many, many stations," the alien said, not smiling or relaxing. "I am careful. I make moves and say only what was said by the good person of the story, the one who won friendship."

Sir Charles laughed openly. "Oh, television taboos. Yes, they are strict. Not much is allowed on television, since international broadcasting really took hold. There are so many little corners of the world with a religion that would be offended by one thing or another that it is hard to remember how to behave in front of a camera. But we needn't worry too much about that. If we slip and say something to shock somebody it will be edited out of the tape before they release it. The public will never see it."

"I do not understand." The visitor looked from side to side at the cameras and tightened his grip on the chair.

"The world is not watching, Lord Rem Sh'baar. You can talk freely. All this is just going down on tape. The only persons watching are a panel of scientists and a panel of ministers from each country. They will play the whole interview over and over and cut anything which might offend any part of the world

audience." Sir Charles smiled, obviously enjoying reassuring the nervous visitor. "You can speak freely. No one will be offended. I am an anthropologist and nothing can shock me."

The non-human stood up. He changed, became young, mo-bile, and excitable. "They are not watching! Let me embrace you, Sir. Oh, I watched your television lectures and felt much." He tugged at Sir Charles' arm. "Please stand up, Sir. We will begin again as if we had just met!" Rem Sh'baar put his hand over his own chest. "I was hurt in the middle parts because I could not greet you."

Confused but smiling, Sir Charles hoisted himself from the chair and stood up on stiff old legs.

Rem Sh'baar wrapped arms around him and hugged. "We love and are alike, yet are not brothers. May my children marry your children and repopulate worlds with our kind." He paused and chuckled. "The words are impossible of course, but the heart may wish."

Sir Charles turned his head to the warm pressure of the head on his shoulder, the friendly voice that spoke in his ear. Love is a rare and fading light to the old. He kissed the near cheek of his admirer as he would have kissed a grandson, and the quick sentimental tears of the aged filled his eyes. Then he looked past and saw the eye of the TV camera trained upon them like an accusing stare.

Sir Charles stiffened and tried to draw away.

"We could be misunderstood," he said in a low voice. "I appreciate your sentiments, my boy, but we are watched by that group, that small group who will judge the tapes. I do not know them personally. We must be formal."

Rem Sh'baar released his shoulders with an additional last reassuring squeeze and drew back.

"The ritual then. We shall be formal. I ally with you, Charles of the sires Harrington and England, the highest fruit and flower of the tree, Earth. I will respect your sires and protect your seed." He unzipped his coveralls from the neck to below the waist. "My chest is bare to your blow. I turn my neck to your teeth and know I shall live forever." He touched his neck and waited two seconds, then abruptly leaned forward and kissed Sir Charles' neck, and reached down and touched him below the waist.

"May your breed multiply and be fruitful in your image. May our children breed together in love and our images blend into something higher."

Since the moment he had been embraced again Sir Charles stood with eyes shut, deeply moved, listening to the ritual words as he would have listened to great music. Tears trickled from beneath his closed lids.

Rem finished the ritual and looked at Sir Charles with concern. "Why do you sorrow, Father?"

"Memories, that is, memories of my children, my grand-children, my friends. It is not sorrow exactly. Time can't turn backwards." He wiped his eyes with the back of a finger. "You are a good boy."

"I could share your memories."

Sir Charles opened reddened eyes and looked into the deli-cate half-animal face, and then looked down, and saw that the alien's coverall was unzipped to below the waist and some anatomy showed which was not human, but which was aggres-sive rather than receptive, and therefore decidedly male.

Sir Charles took two steps backward and looked away. The red which had been around his eyes spread and suffused his cheeks and ears.

"Zip up your clothing," he said in a stifled, embarrassed voice. "People will misunderstand. They will think your ritual is suggestive." He dropped into a chair and crossed his legs tightly. "They will think your ritual is meant to mean...."

Rem interrupted, sparing him the struggle with the unspeak-able and tabooed words. "I would not have you misunderstand or be insulted in your beautiful self, Father. The ritual is meant from the heart also. You are beautiful. I would fertilize you if I could."

Excitedly he spun, fingers spread as if gripping all of life. "But souls may breed with souls, Sir. Send for copies of your books, Sir Harrington, that I may take them with me."

Sir Charles leaned his face into his hand so that he could not see. "Zip up your coveralls," he groaned. "Couldn't we change the subject somehow?"

"No," Rem said determinedly. He unzipped his coverall and stepped out of it. "We must work. We must not be formal and strangers to each other. If we wear nothing it is a gesture of truth. And it will not be put on television until we return to our concealments, until then we may plan freely together and think

together to help the Earth People who need to know what I know. I need your advice, Sir. We must make our cultures symbiotes and consume each other's excretions."

"Put on your coverall," groaned Sir Charles, not looking. "Don't leave it on the floor."

Rem absently picked the coverall off the floor and draped it around his neck. "Yes, we must work." He paced up and down, becoming brisk and efficient. "Let us work together on the prob-lem of the information-intercourse of our races. Our way of life must breed with your way of life. But what can be done if the female race will not admire the gestures of the male race? The semen of information must not spill upon the ground! We must find a courtship pattern acceptable to the species. What feathers can we dress this bird in? What courting dance can we teach him?"

Illustrating his words Rem danced a few bird steps, making one arm into a long bird neck with the hand a pecking head and the other arm a flapping wing. "How may the information be made to penetrate, by sugar or by oil? We must plan well, we must thrust strongly when the time comes." He illustrated.

Sir Charles gave one more desperate apologetic glance into the eye lenses of the television cameras and pushed himself to his feet. "Pardon me, Lord Sh'barr. Excuse me, I must go and think this over." Without awaiting a reply he tottered out the door.

Worried, Rem put on his coverall then went to the door and looked out to make sure the Earth scientist was all right. He saw that the old man was being helped down the ramp by a television technician and the famous announcer. Reassured, he returned to the empty room and looked around at the staring cameras, wondering what the committee of wise men would decide to do with the record of the first half of the interview. Some of them might like him, and wish to be his friend—Rem thought hopefully.

It seemed likely that his first Earth friend, the famous an-thropologist, would have to rest or take medicine before return-ing. Rem ran to the interior door, waited while it spun him slowly through the air purification chamber, and then leaped out into the living quarters.

"Tima," he called.

"In here." He followed the voice into the shower stall. His favorite wife was nervously combing her wet hair, watching the outside of the spaceship and its action on the tiny bathroom viewer. "No hostile action yet, Rem."

"Tima, he became sick for a moment and had to go out."

"I was watching," she said. She came dripping and shiny out of the shower room and danced and hopped to dry off.

"Is there anything they would expect me to do? What customs do Earth people do when someone is sick?"

"I don't know," she said, rubbing the water off her arms. "I'm worried. By their way of counting the years he is worn out. He might be very sick. He moves slowly and tries to look happy."

"Yes, he might have been sick already when I asked the Earth Government to send for him," Rem agreed in a low voice. "It would be a great way to go, dying in a moment of history. He would not refuse."

Rem paced a few steps and then spun to her in doubt. "I would like him to lie down during the rest of the interview. He is from a different evolutionary line. Would combing his hair make him feel more secure and protected, or would it frighten him?"

"I would like to stroke him too," she said thoughtfully. "Gestures do have different meanings on different evolutionary lines, but, oh Rem, all furry animals with four feet need their friends and family to clean the fur behind their ears. It is a symbol of love. His ancestors had fur. I'm sure they did. I have seen their animals on TV exchange care for each other by stroking each other's neck and ears with their tongues. It must be a gesture of love on this planet too. The poor old thing will be happy if you stroke him, or lick him behind his ears."

"I would like to teach him to be young," Rem said excitedly. "But it might take weeks. Tima, do we have time to stay long enough to explain psycho-chemistry to him?"

"If you like him that much, it is worth the risk." She touched his cheek with light smooth fingertips. "Do what you wish for your friends, Rem, and I will help. Love is more than life."

They watched the panel which showed a small picture of the view from four directions around the

ship. There was only the ring of armed guards facing away, two TV technicians guarding the cables that ran from the cameras in the ship to a distant parked truck, then the trees and a far-away wall of watching crowds and parked cars, and cameras on the back of large trucks. They did not see the tweed-clad, lanky figure of Sir Harrington.

They walked back into the main study and games room. Tima swung by her hands on the bars, did two loops and landed, teetering but upright on another bar. She had done better before, and Rem could do better, but he made encouraging sounds of applause.

The television set was flickering, showing a foggy view of a crowd milling. It had been hand built to match the signals from Earth, and needed adjustment often. Rem tuned it, turning the sound louder and clarifying the picture.

On the screen Sir Charles Harrington-Smith sat in an out-door camp chair, a whitecoated doctor holding his wrist and counting the pulse by staring at a watch. Reporters crowded around the famous anthropologist and thrust microphones to-wards his face. Sir Charles turned his head fretfully from micro-phone to microphone, trying to answer a barrage of questions. "No, I was not hurt. He was a nice young man, but not serious. No, no great secrets, the interview was a joke. Perhaps he was drunk, or too young. No, I don't think he is actually planning to tell us anything important. It might be his idea of a joke."

Rem sank down crosslegged to the floor and put his face in his hands.

The reporters on television asked other questions in an excited gabble.

"No," said Sir Charles, his thinning hair sticking dankly to his forehead. "I can't tell you any scientific things he said. It was only anthropology, the same things he had heard on my lectures on BBC Educational. Nothing really new. He avoided a very simple question over and over. I don't think he knows very much science. Does an adolescent know very much about the construc-tion of the plane he rides in? He is young and not serious. He doesn't have the scientific attitude. Most of the things he said were either off-color or funny. He treated it like a party. He isn't serious."

In answer to another question, "No, I will not go back and try again. I enjoyed meeting him, and we were friendly, but it was too much effort trying to get the subject onto science. I am ill. It upset me too much."

With his head in his hands, Rem groaned, "I was sure he liked me."

"He did," Tima said, "but you shocked him, somehow. You told him what you said would shock him." She shut her eyes, sitting and rocking on a crossbar. "Shh. I'm thinking." She opened her eyes. "Once, Secret Agent had to rescue a scientist they had kidnapped by pretending he was sick. They had made him sick and then taken him to a private hospital and told everyone he was too sick to talk, and they were trying to cure him. People who are too young, or too silly or too sick are locked up too. They aren't allowed to drive cars or fly air ships. If the agents are trying to get you without starting a war with our people, they would say you are too young, or sick or crazy to fly a spaceship, and they would come to take you away from it."

Tima turned nervously to the viewer. It showed the outside situation calm and unchanged, but she grew more alarmed, thinking of what she had just said. "Rem, we have to get out of here. We can't take off with those cameras stuck in our airlock.

They might be set to explode." She leaped down from the bars and ran for the door.

"No!" Rem stopped her and held her shoulders. "If I were an agent I would plan it as you said. You might be right, but let me clean the airlock. Remember they might try to kidnap you if they find out you are here."

He rushed out, and she locked the door after him. When she looked up into the viewer, motion had started outside. White trucks and brown trucks were driving across the grass of the park.

On the television the commentator was excitedly reading a bulletin.

"Medical Authorities suspect that he may have contracted a communicable disease from the alien being, a disease which is unknown on Earth. Sir Charles is being rushed to a hospital under strict quarantine. A quarantine has been declared around the strange spaceship and military authorities are clearing off all personnel and authorized visitors to a distance of a quarter mile. All persons who contacted Sir Charles as he left the spaceship are requested to report by phone to this number,

799-23540, or report in person to the ambulances stationed near the spaceship. Repeat. All reporters and other persons who touched or were physically close to Sir Charles Harrington-Smith immediately after he left the spaceship should call 799-23540 or report in person to one of the army ambulances stationed near the spaceship. Do not touch anyone, and bring with you any equipment you have handled, to be disinfected."

"Another bulletin." The announcer read the new one which was passed to him. "Dr. Frederick Wolfgang, psychiatrist and member of the panel of scientists who are viewing the tapes for the interview states that it is possible that the Ambasador from Space was delirious or intoxicated during the interview, and therefore not responsible for what he had said. The doctor stated that the alien was responding like a child rather than a sane controlled adult and possibly had contracted a disease and a high fever from some ordinary Earth germ such as the common cold. The doctor states that the man from another planet did not take reasonable precautions against germs by keeping his spacesuit on at all times."

Tima had turned the television set loud so that it could be heard in the airlock. She put her head in to where Rem was trying to unfasten the locked resistant wheels of the TV cameras. "Do you hear that, Rem? Hurry! They are going to do it. They are going to kidnap you to a hospital, and keep you prisoner."

"Lock the door between us," he said between his teeth. He found the right catch and the wheels under the heavy TV camera began to roll.

She shut the door and turned back to the television screen.

On the television broadcast which went to all of Earth, the announcer turned to the view of the black and silver globe on the screen behind him. "I am informed that there seems to be some unusual activity at the door of the spacecraft...."

The telephoto lens zoomed in to a close-range view of the spaceship ramp and door. The tall slender figure of the alien appeared, wearing the silver spacesuit, backing through the door dragging a television camera after him. He paused, kicked trailing cables out of the way of the wheels, and then rolled the camera down the ramp, leaning backward to keep the mass from slipping away and hurtling downward. At ground level he brought it to a stop, cast a rapid glance around at the distant uniformed lines of men and brown trucks that circled the ship, looked suspiciously under the ramp and then dashed back up and inside. The second camera was rolled out and down to the grass with the same impression of hurry.

"He seems to be removing the television cameras from the ship," commented the announcer. "His spacesuit is not air tight, notice that he does not have the transparent helmet on. Doctor Wolfgang of the committee of scientists inspecting the tapes of the interview said that it was possible that the man from another planet might have contracted a cold by leaving his spacesuit open. Our cold germs could be very devastating to anyone who is not used to them." As he spoke, the third television camera was pulled through the doorway and rolled down the ramp.

The announcer glanced at a note in his hand. "All the tele-vision cameras are removed from the ship now." The picture of the slender dogfaced being reappeared in the doorway yanking after him the two ordinary chairs which had been put inside for the interview. They tangled together and stuck in the door, but he yanked them free with violent motions, flung them over the side of the ramp and dashed back inside. The small door shut.

A pause, and then the long ramp lifted slowly and closed into the side of the spaceship, leaving it a seamless, shining, curved surface. Dust and bits of grass began to fly and fog the air.

Rem came in the study room where Tima watched the TV screen. She said rapidly, "I've already set the automatics for a four-gravity lift-off. Let's go."

They each slid aside a single panel in the floor, revealing two wells of isogravitic liquid covered by a soft folded blanket of waterproof foam. Each lay in his individual liquid bed, and sank slowly.

"Ready?"

"Ready." They each twisted a small safety lock dial on the surface of the blanket. The automatics took over; takeoff started and acceleration pressed them down deeper into the liquid bed, until the folds of the soft floating blanket on the surface folded around them and became almost smooth on the surface as they submerged.

The human-styled TV set on the wall crackled and sputtered. After a few minutes the acceleration pressure diminished. The two passengers floated back up to the surface and sat up. The television set said gravely, in the English language of Earth, "Radio requests to the alien that he stop and explain his destina-tion are not being answered. Air Force authorities say that they have received no orders to intercept or attempt to stop the spacecraft."

They rolled out of the soft acceleration beds to the floor, and lay there gasping. Rem began to do pushups.

On the television screen they saw their spaceship as a wavering, shiny dot in the cloudy sky of Earth. A cloud passed across the dot and it was gone. The sound and picture wavered. The wavering voice said, "Radar reports indicate that the ship will be out of the Earth's atmosphere in approximately two more minutes. As of present information it seems that the space visitor is leaving without answering any scientific questions or giving any of the important secrets he promised to Earth. Unofficial sources say that authorities are taking a most serious view of the entire episode and a protest is being considered."

Lying on the soft floor of the spaceship the two began to laugh hysterically.

"We should have studied them more," Tima gasped. She did a somersault to the TV set and changed the station.

A pair of tight blue jeans and two low-hung, antiquated six shooters filled the screen. "No stranger can come into our town and talk like that-all," bellowed the voice of a TV cowboy. "Draw, stranger!"

"Draw," muttered Rem, laughing, half in tears, and added a randy remark which would be censored on any TV screen.

"Draw," Tima giggled, nudging him where it hurt. Laughing, they stripped and fell into each other's arms for consolation.

The gunshots and shouts from the television set faded slowly to a musical hum as the giant ship sped onward, away from the odd signals from Earth.

UNHUMAN SACRIFICE

It's hard to resist helping a distressed stranger, even if you aren't sure what is going on, on a far planet, with strange weather, surrounded by a race evolved from who-knows-what.

"Damn! He's actually doing it. Do you hear that?"

A ray of sunlight and a distant voice filtered down from the open arch in the control room above. The distant voice talked and paused, talked and paused. The words were blurred, but the tone was recognizable.

"He's outside preaching to the natives."

The two engineers were overhauling the engines but paused to look up towards the voice.

"Maybe not," said Charlie, the junior engineer. "After all, he doesn't know their language."

"He'd preach anyway," said Henderson, senior engineer and navigator. He heaved with a wrench on a tight bolt, the wrench slipped, and Henderson released some words that made Charlie shudder.

On the trip, Charlie had often dreamed apprehensively that Henderson had strangled the passenger. And once he had dreamed that he himself had strangled the passenger and Henderson, too.

When awake the engineers carefully avoided irritating words or gestures, remained cordial towards each other and the passenger no matter what the temptation to snarl, and tried to keep themselves in a tolerant good humor.

It had not been easy.

Charlie said, "How do you account for the missionary society giving him a ship of his own? A guy like that, who just gets in your hair when he's trying to give you advice, a guy with a natural born talent for antagonizing people?"

"Easy," Henderson grunted, spinning the bolt. He was a stocky, square-built man with a brusque manner and a practised tolerance of other people's oddities. "The missionary society was trying to get rid

of him. You can't get any farther away than they sent us!"

The distant voice filtered into the control room from the unseen sunlit landscape outside the ship. It sounded resonant and confident. "The poor jerk thinks it was an honor," Henderson added. He pulled out the bolt and dropped it on the padded floor with a faint thump.

"Anyhow," Charlie said, loosening bolt heads in a circle as the manual instructed, "he can't use the translator machine. It's not ready yet, not until we get the rest of their language. He won't talk to them if they can't understand."

"Won't he?" Henderson fitted his wrench to another bolt and spun it angrily. "Then, what is he doing?"

Without waiting for an answer he replied to his own question. *"Preaching,* that's what he is doing!"

It seemed hot and close in the engine room, and the sunlight from outside beckoned.

Charlie paused and wiped the back of his arm against his forehead. "Preaching won't do him any good. If they can't understand him, they won't listen."

"We didn't listen, and that didn't stop him from preaching to us!" Henderson snapped. "He's lucky we found a landing planet so soon, he's lucky he didn't drive us insane first. A man like that is a danger to a ship." Henderson, like Charlie, knew the stories of ships which had left with small crews, and returned with a smaller crew of one or two red-eyed maniacs and a collection of corpses. Henderson was a conservative. He preferred the regular shipping runs, the ships with a regular sized crew and a good number of passengers. Only an offer of triple pay and triple insurance indemnity had lured him from the big ships to be co-engineer on this odd three-man trip.

"Oh ... I didn't mind being preached at," Charlie's tone was mild, but he stared upwards in the direction of the echoing voice with a certain intensity in his stance.

"Come off it, you twerp. We only have to be sweet to each other on a trip when we're cabin-bound. Don't kid old Harry, you didn't like it."

"No," said Charlie dreamily, staring upwards with a steady intensity. "Can't say that I did. He's not such a good preacher. I've met better in bars." The echoing voice from outside seemed to be developing a deeper echo. "He's got the translator going, Harry. I think we ought to stop him."

Charlie was a lanky redhead with a mild manner, about the same age as the preacher, but Henderson, who had experience, laid a restraining hand on his shoulder.

"I'll do it," said Henderson, and scrambled up the ladder to the control room.

The control room was a pleasant shading of greys, brightly lit by the sunlight that streamed in through the open archway. The opening to the outside was screened only by a billowing curtain of transparent sarantype plastic film, ion-coated to allow air to pass freely, but making a perfect and aseptic filter against germs and small insects. The stocky engineer hung a clear respirator box over a shoulder, brought the tube up to his mouth, and walked through the plastic film. It folded over him and wrapped him in an intimate tacky embrace, and gripped to its own surface behind him, sealing itself around him like a loose skin. Just past the arch he walked through a frame of metal like a man-sized croquet wicket and stopped while it tightened a noose around the trailing films of plastic behind him, cutting him free of the doorway curtain and sealing the break with heat.

Without waiting for the plastic to finish wrapping and tightening itself around him, the engineer went down the ramp, trailing plastic film in gossamer veils, like ghostly battle flags.

They could use this simple wrapping of thin plastic as an airsuit air lock, for the air of the new world was rich and good, and the wrapping was needed only to repel strange germs or infections. They were not even sure that there were any such germs; but the plastic was a routine precaution for ports in quarantine, and the two engineers were accustomed to wearing it. It allowed air to filter by freely, so that Henderson could feel the wind on his skin, only slightly diminished. He was wearing uniform shorts, and the wind felt cool and pleasant.

Around the spaceship stretched grassy meadow and thin forest, and beyond that in one direction lay

the blue line of the sea, and in another the hazy blue-green of distant low mountains. It was so like the southern United States of Charlie's boyhood that the young engineer had wept with excitement when he first looked out of the ship. Harry Henderson did not weep, but he paused in his determined stride and looked around, and understood again how incredibly lucky they had been to find an Earth-type planet of such perfection. He was a firm believer in the hand of fate, and he wondered what fate planned for the living things of this green planet, and why it had chosen him as its agent.

Down in the green meadow, near the foot of the ramp sat the translator machine, still in its crate and on a wheeled dolly but with one side opened to expose the controls. It looked like a huge box, and it was one of the most expensive of the new inductive language analysers, brought along by their passengers in the hope and expectation of finding a planet with natives.

Triumphant in his success, the passenger, the Revent Winton, sat cross-legged on top of the crate, like a small king on a large throne. He was making a speech, using the mellow round tones of a trained elocutonist, with all the transparent plastic around his face hardly muffling his voice at all.

And the natives were listening. They sat around the translator box in a wide irregular circle, and stared. They were bald, with fur in tufts about their knees and elbows. Occasionally one got up, muttering to the others, and hurried away; and occasionally one came into the area and sat down to listen.

"Do not despair," called Revent Winton, in bell-like tones. "Now that I have shown you the light, you know that you have lived in darkness and sin all your lives, but do not despair. . ."

The translator machine was built to assimilate a vast number of words and sentences in any tongue, along with fifty or so words in direct translation, and from that construct or find a grammatical pattern and print a handbook of the native language. Meanwhile, it would translate any word it was sure of. Henderson figured out the meaning of a few native words the day before and recorded them in, and the machine was industriously translating those few words whenever they appeared, like a deep bell, tolling the antiphony to the preacher's voice. The machine spoke in an enormous bass that was Henderson's low tones recorded through a filter and turned up to twenty times normal volume.

"I . . . LIGHT . . . YOU . . . YOU . . . LIVED ... DARK . . . LIFE . . ."

The natives sat on the green grass and listened with an air of patient wonder.

"Revent Winton," Harry tried to attract his attention. Winton leaned towards the attentive natives, his face softened with forgiveness. "No, say to yourselves merely—I have lived in error. Now I will learn the true path of a righteous life."

The machine in the box below him translated words into its voice of muted thunder. "SAY YOU ... I ... LIVED ... I . . . PATH . . . LIFE. . . ."

The natives moved. Some got up and came closer, staring at the box, and others clustered and murmured to each other, and went away in small groups, talking.

Henderson decided not to tell the Revent what the machine had said. But this had to be stopped.

"Revent Winton!"

The preacher leaned over and looked down at him benevolently. "What is it, my son?" He was younger than the engineer, dark, intense and sure of his own righteousness.

"MY SON," said the translator machine in its voice of muted thunder. The sound rolled and echoed faintly back from the nearby woods, and the natives stared at Henderson.

Henderson muttered a bad word. The natives would think he was Winton's son! Winton did not know what it had said.

"Don't curse," Winton said patiently. "What is it, Harry?"

"Sorry," Henderson apologized, leaning his arms on the edge of the crate. "Switch off the translator, will you?"

"WILL YOU . . ." thundered the translator. The preacher switched it off.

"Yes?" he asked, leaning forward. He was wearing a conservative suit of knitted dark grey tights and a black shirt. Henderson felt badly dressed in his shorts and bare hairy chest.

"Revent, do you think it's the right thing to do, to preach to these people? The translator isn't finished, and we don't know anything about them yet. Anthropologists don't even make a suggestion to a native about his customs without studying the whole tribe and the way it lives for a couple of generations. I

mean, you're going off half cocked. It's too soon to give them advice."

"I came to give them advice," Winton said gently. "They need my spiritual help. An anthropologist comes to observe. They don't meddle with what they observe, for meddling would change it. But I am not here to observe, I am here to help them. Why should I wait?"

Winton had a remarkable skill with syllogistic logic. He always managed to sound as if his position were logical, somehow, in spite of Henderson's conviction that he was almost always entirely wrong. Henderson often, as now, found himself unable to argue.

"How do you know they need help?" he asked uncertainly. "Maybe their way of life is all right."

"Come now," said the preacher cheerfully, swinging his hand around the expanse of green horizon. "These are just primitives, not angels. I'd be willing to guess that they eat their own kind, or torture, or have human sacrifices."

"Humanoid sacrifices," Henderson muttered.

Winton's ears were keen. "Don't quibble. You know they will have some filthy primitive custom or other. Tribes on Earth used to have orgies and sacrifices in the spring. It's spring here—the Great Planner probably intended us to find this place in time to stop them."

"Oye," said Henderson and turned away to strike his forehead with the heel of his hand. His passenger was planning to interfere with a spring fertility ceremony. If these natives held such a ceremony—and it was possible that they might—they would be convinced that the ceremony insured the fertility of the earth, or the health of the sun, or the growth of the crops, or the return of the fish. They would be convinced that without the ceremony, summer would never return, and they would all starve. If Winton interfered, they would try to kill him.

Winton watched him, scowling at the melodrama of this gesture.

Henderson turned back to try to explain.

"Revent, I appeal to you, tampering is dangerous. Let us go back and report this planet, and let the government send a survey ship. When the scientists arrive, if they find that we have been tampering with the natives' customs without waiting for advice, they will consider it a crime. We will be notorious in scientific journals. We'll be considered responsible for any damage the natives sustain."

The preacher glared. "Do you think that I am a coward, afraid of the anger of atheists?" He again waved a hand, indicating the whole sweep of the planet's horizon around them. "Do you think we found this place by accident? The Great Planner sent me here for a purpose. I am responsible to Him, not to you, or your scientist friends. I will fulfill His purpose." He leaned forward, staring at Henderson with dark fanatical eyes. "Go weep about your reputation somewhere else."

Henderson stepped back, getting a clearer view of the passenger, feeling as if he had suddenly sprouted fangs and claws. He was still as he had appeared before, an intense, brunet young man, wearing dark tights and dark shirt, sitting cross-legged on top of a huge box, but now he looked primitive somehow, like a prehistoric naked priest on top of an altar.

"Anthropology is against this kind of thing," Henderson said.

Winton looked at him malevolently from his five foot elevation on the crate and the extra three feet of his own seated height. "You aren't an anthropologist, are you, Harry? You're an engineer?"

"That's right," Henderson admitted, hating him for the syllogism.

Wintons said sweetly: "Then why don't you go back to the ship and work on the engine?"

"There will be trouble," Henderson said softly.

"I am prepared for trouble," the Revent Winton said equally softly. He took a large old-fashioned revolver out of his carry case, and rested it on his knee.

The muzzle pointed midway between the engineer and the natives.

Henderson shrugged and went back up the ramp.

"What did he do?" Charlie was finishing his check of the fuel timers, holding a coffee cup in his free hand.

Angrily silent, Harry cut an exit slit from the plastic coating. He ripped off the gossamer films of plastic, wadded them up together and tossed them in a salvage hopper.

"He told me to mind my own business. And that's what I am going to do."

The preacher's impressive voice began to ring again from the distance outside, and, every so often, like a deep gong, the translator machine would speak a word in the native dialect.

"The translator is still going," Charlie pointed out.

"Let it. He doesn't know what it is saying." Sulkily, Henderson turned to a library shelf, and pulled out a volume: *The E.T. Planet, a manual of observation and behavior on extra-terrestrial planets, with examples.*

"What is it saying?"

"Almost nothing at all. All it translated out of a long speech the creep made was 'I life path.' "

The younger engineer lost his smile. "That was good enough for others. Winton doesn't know what the box is saying?"

"He thinks it's saying what he is saying. He's giving out with his usual line of malarky."

"We've got to stop it!" Charlie began to climb the ladder.

Henderson shrugged. "So go out and tell him the translator isn't working right. I should have told him. But if I get close to him now, I'd strangle him."

Charlie returned later, grinning. "It's O.K. The natives are scared of Winton, and they like the box; so they must think that the box is talking sense for itself, and Winton is gibbering in a strange language."

"He is. And it is," Henderson said sourly. "They are right."

"You're kind of hard on him." Charlie started searching the shelves for another copy of the manual of procedure for survey teams. "But I can see what you mean. Anyhow, I told Winton that he was making a bad impression on the natives. It stopped him. It stopped him cold. He said he would put off preaching for a week and study the natives a little. But he said we ought to fix up the translator, so that it translates what he says." Charlie turned, smiling, with a book in one hand, "That gives us time."

"Time for what?" Henderson growled without looking up from his book. "Do you think we can change Winton's mind? That bonehead believes that butting into people's lives is a sacred duty. Try talking any bonehead out of a sacred duty! He'd butt into a cannibal banquet! I hope he does. I hope they eat him!"

"Long pig," Charlie mused, temporarily diverted by the picture. "Tastes good to people, probably would taste foul to these natives, they're not the same species."

"He says he's planning to stop their spring festival. If it has sacrifices or anything he doesn't like, he says he'll stop it."

Charlie placed his fists on the table and leaned across towards Henderson, lowering his voice. "Look, we don't know even if the natives are going to have any spring festival. Maybe if we investigate we'll find out that there won't be one, or maybe we'll find out that Winton can't do them any harm. Maybe we don't have to worry. Only let's go out and investigate. We can write up reports on whatever we find, in standard form, and the journals will print them when we get back. Glory and all like that." He added, watching Henderson's expression: "Maybe, if we have to, we can break the translator."

It was the end of the season of dry. The river was small and ran in a narrow channel, and there were many fish near the surface. Spet worked rapidly, collecting fish from the fish traps, returning the empty traps to the water, salting the fish.

He was winded, but pleased with the recollection of last night's feast, and hungry in anticipation of the feast of the evening to come. This was the season of the special meals, cooking herbs and roots and delicacies with the fish. Tonight's feast might be the last he would ever have, for a haze was thickening over the horizon, and tomorrow the rains might come.

One of the strangers came and watched him. Spet ignored him politely and salted the fish without looking at him directly. It was dangerous to ignore a stranger, but to make the formal peace gestures and agreements would be implying that the stranger was from a tribe of enemies, when he might already be a friend. Spet preferred to be polite, so he pretended not to be concerned that he was being watched.

The haze thickened in the sky, and the sunlight weakened. Spet tossed the empty trap back to its place in the river with a skillful heave of his strong short arms. If he lived through the next week, his arms would not be strong and short, they would be weak and long. He began to haul in another trap line,

sneaking side glances at the stranger as he pulled.

The stranger was remarkably ugly. His features were all misfit sizes. Reddish brown all over like a dead leaf, and completely bald of hair at knees and elbows, he shone as if he were wet, covered all over with a transparent shininess, like water, but the water never dripped. He was thick and sturdy and quick moving, like a youngling, but did not work. Very strange, unlike reality, he stood quietly watching, without attacking Spet, although he could have attacked without breaking a peace gesture. So he was probably not of any enemy tribe.

It was possible that the undripping water was an illusion, meant to indicate that the stranger was really the ghost of someone who had drowned.

The stranger continued to watch. Spet braced his feet against the grass of the bank and heaved on the next trap line, wanting to show his strength. He heaved too hard, and a strand of the net gave way. The stranger waded out into the water, and pulled in the strand, so that no fish escaped.

It was the act of a friend. And yet when the net trap was safely drawn up on the bank, the brown stranger stepped back without comment or gesture, and watched exactly as before—as if his help was the routine of one kinfolk to another.

That showed that the brown one was his kin and a member of his family. But Spet had seen all of his live kinfolk, and none of them looked so strange. It followed reasonably that the brown one was a ghost, a ghost of a relative who had drowned.

Spet nodded at the ghost and transferred the fish from the trap to the woven baskets and salted them. He squatted to repair the broken strand of the net.

The brown ghost squatted beside him. It pointed at the net and made an inquiring sound.

"I am repairing the trap, Grandfather," Spet explained, using the most respectful name for the brown ghost relative.

The ghost put a hand over his own mouth, then pointed at the ground and released its mouth to make another inquiring noise.

"The ground is still dry, Grandfather," Spet said cordially, wondering what he wanted to know. He rose and flung the trap net out on its line into the river, hoping that the brown ghost would admire his strength. Figures in dreams often came to tell you something, and often they could not speak, but the way they looked and the signs they made were meant to give you a message. The brown ghost was shaped like a youngling, like Spet, as if he had drowned before his adult hanging ceremony. Perhaps this one came in daylight instead of dreams, because Spet was going to die and join the ghosts soon, before he became an adult.

The thought was frightening. The haze thickening on the horizon looked ominous.

The brown ghost repeated what Spet had said, almost in Spet's voice, blurring the words slightly. *The ground is still dry Grandfather.* He pointed at the ground and made an inquiring noise.

"Ground," said Spet thinking about death, and every song he had heard about it. Then he heard the ghost repeat the word, and saw the satisfaction of his expression, and realized that the ghost had forgotten how to talk, and wanted to be taught all over again, like a newborn.

That made courtesy suddenly a simple and pleasant game. As Spet worked, he pointed at everything, and said the word, he described what he was doing, and sometimes he sang the childhood work songs, that described the work.

The ghost followed and helped him with the nets, and listened and pointed at things he wanted to learn. Around his waist coiled a blind silver snake that Spet had not noticed at first, and the ghost turned the head of the snake towards Spet when he sang, and sometimes the ghost talked to the snake himself, with explanatory gestures.

It was very shocking to Spet that anyone would explain things to a snake, for snakes are wise, and a blind snake is the wise one of dreams—he who knows everything. The blind snake did not need to be explained to. Spet averted his eyes and would not look at it.

The ghost and he worked together, walking up the river bank, hauling traps, salting fish, and throwing the traps back, and Spet told what he was doing, and the ghost talked down to the snake around his waist, explaining something about what they were doing.

Once the brown ghost held the blind silver snake out towards Spet, indicating with a gesture that he should speak to it.

Terrified and awed, Spet fell to his knees. "Tell me, Wisest One, if you wish to tell me, will I die in the hanging?"

He waited, but the snake lay with casual indifference in the ghost's hand, and did not move or reply.

Spet rose from his knees and backed away. "Thank you, oh Wise One."

The ghost spoke to the snake, speaking very quietly, with apologetic gestures and much explanation, then wrapped it again around his waist, and helped Spet carry the loads of salted fish, without speaking again, or pointing at anything.

It was almost sundown.

On the way back to his family hut, Spet passed the Box That Speaks. The black gibbering spirit sat on top of it and gibbered as usual, but this time the Box stopped him and spoke to him, and called him by his own name, and asked questions about his life.

Spet was carrying a heavy load of salted fish in two baskets hung on a yoke across one sturdy shoulder. He was tired. He stood in the midst of the green meadow that in other seasons had been a river, with the silver hut of the ghosts throwing a long shadow across him. His legs were tired from wading in the river, and his mind was tired from the brown ghost asking him questions all day; so he explained the thing that was uppermost in his mind, instead of discussing fishing and weather. He explained that he was going to die. The ceremony of Hanging, by which the almost-adults became adults, was going to occur at the first rain, five younglings were ready, usually most of them lived, but he thought he would die.

The box fell silent, and the ghost on top stopped gibbering, so Spet knew that it was true, for people fall silent at a truth that they do not want to say aloud.

He made a polite gesture of leave-taking to the box, and went towards his family hut, feeling very unhappy. During the feast of that evening all the small ones ate happily of fish and roots and became even fatter, and the thin adults picked at the roots and herbs. Spet was the only youngling of adult-beginning age, and he should have been eating well to grow fat and build up his strength, but instead he went outside and looked at the sky and saw that it was growing cloudy. He did not go back in to the feast again, instead he crouched against the wall of the hut and shivered without sleeping. Before his eyes rested the little flat-bottomed boats of the family, resting in the dust behind the hut for the happy days of the rain. He would never travel in those boats again.

Hanging upside down was a painful way to become an adult, but worth it, if you lived. It was going to be a very bad way to die.

Hurrying and breathless with his news, Revent Winton came upon the two engineers crouched at the river bank. "I found out . . ." he began.

"Shhh." one said without turning.

They were staring at a small creature at the edge of the water.

Winton approached closer and crouched beside them. "I have news that might interest you." He held his voice to a low murmur, but the triumph sounded in it like a rasp cutting through glass, a vibration that drew quick speculative glances from the engineers. They turned their attention back to the water's edge.

"Tell us when this is over. Wait."

The young preacher looked at what they were staring at, and saw a little four-legged creature with large eyes and bright pointed teeth struggling feebly in the rising water. The younger engineer, Charlie, was taking pictures of it.

"Its feet are stuck," Winton whispered. "Why don't you help it?"

"It's rooting itself," Henderson murmured back. "We're afraid that loud noises might make it stop."

"Rooting itself?" Winton was confused.

"The animal has two life stages, like a barnacle. You know, a barnacle is a little fish that swims around before it settles down to being just kind of a lump of rock. This one has a rooted stage that's

coming on it now. When the water gets up to its neck it rolls up underwater and sticks its front legs out and starts acting like a kind of seaweed. Its hind feet are growing roots. This is the third one we've watched."

Winton looked at the struggling little creature. The water was rising towards its neck. The large bright eyes and small bared teeth looked frightened and uncomprehending. Winton shuddered.

"Horrible," he murmured. "Does it know what is happening?"

Henderson shrugged, "At least it knows the water is rising, and it knows it must not run away. It has to stand there and dig its feet in." He looked at Winton's expression and looked away. "Instinct comes as a powerful urge to do something. You can't fight instinct. Usually it's a pleasure to give in. It's not so bad."

Revent Paul Winton had always been afraid of drowning. He risked another glance at the little creature that was going to turn into a seaweed. The water had almost reached its neck, and it held its head high and panted rapidly with a thin whimpering sound.

"Horrible," Winton turned his back to it and pulled Henderson farther up the bank away from the river. "Mr. Henderson, I just found something."

He was very serious, but now he had trouble phrasing what he had to say. Henderson urged him, "Well, go on."

"I found it out from a native. The translator is working better today."

"Charlie and I just recorded about four hundred words and phrases into it by distance pickup. We've been interviewing natives all day." Henderson's face suddenly grew cold and angry. "By the way, I thought you said that you weren't going to use the translator until it is ready."

"I was just checking it." Winton actually seemed apologetic. "I didn't say anything, just asked questions."

"All right," Henderson nodded grudgingly. "Sorry I complained. What happened? You're all upset, man!"

Winton evaded his eyes and turned away, he seemed to be looking at the river, with its banks of bushes and trees. Then he turned and looked in the direction of the inland hills, his expression vague. "Beautiful green country. It looks so peaceful. God is lavish with beauty. It shows His goodness. When we think that God is cruel, it is only because we do not understand. God is not really cruel."

"All right, so God is not really cruel," Henderson repeated cruelly. "So what's new?"

Winton winced and pulled his attention back to Henderson.

"Henderson, you've noticed that there are two kinds of natives, tall, thin ones that are slow, and quick, sturdy, short ones that do all the hard work. The sturdy ones we see in all ages, from child size up. Right?"

"I noticed."

"What did you think it meant?"

"Charlie and I talked about it." Henderson was puzzled. "Just a guess, but we think that the tall ones are aristocrats. They probably own the short ones, and the short ones do all the work."

Thick clouds were piled up over the far hills, accounting for the slow rise in the river level.

"The short ones are the children of the tall thin ones. The tall thin ones are the adults. The adults are all sick, that is why the children do all the work."

"What .....Henderson began, but Winton overrode his voice, continuing passionately, his eyes staring ahead at the hills.

"They are sick because of something they do to themselves. The young ones, strong and healthy, when they are ready to become adults they . . . they are hung upside down. For days, Henderson, maybe for more than a week, the translator would not translate how long. Some of them die. Most of them . . . most of them are stretched, and become long and thin. He stopped, and started again with an effort. "The native boy could not tell me why they do this, or how it started. It has been going on for so long that they cannot remember."

Abruptly, and, to Henderson, shockingly, the preacher dropped to his knees and put his hands together. He tilted his head back with shut eyes and burst into prayer.

"Oh Lord, I do not know why You waited so long to help them to the true light, but I thank You that You sent me to stop this horrible thing."

Quickly he stood up and brushed his knees. "You'll help me, won't you?" he asked Henderson.

"How do we know it's true?" Henderson scowled. "It doesn't seem reasonable."

"Not reasonable?" Winton recovered his poise in sudden anger. "Come now Harry, you've been talking as if you knew some anthropology. Surely you remember the puberty ceremonies. Natives often have initiation ceremonies for the young males. It's to test their manhood. They torture the boys, and the ones who can take it without whimpering are considered to be men, and graduated. Filthy cruelty! The authorities have always made them stop."

"No one around here has any authority to order anyone else to stop," Harry grunted. He was shaken by Winton's description of the puberty ceremony, and managed to be sarcastic only from a deep conviction that Winton had been always wrong, and therefore would continue to be wrong. It was not safe to agree with the man. It would mean being wrong along with Winton.

"No authority? What of God?"

"Well, what *of* God?" Henderson asked nastily. "If He *is* everywhere. He was here before you arrived here. And He never did anything to stop them. You've only known them a week. How long has God known them?"

"You don't understand." The dark-haired young man spoke with total conviction, standing taller, pride straightening his spine. "It was more than mere luck that we found this planet. It is my destiny to stop these people from their ceremony. God sent me."

Henderson was extremely angry, in a white-faced way. He had taken the preacher's air of superiority in the close confine of a spaceship for two months, and listened patiently to his preaching without letting himself be angry, for the sake of peace in the spaceship. But now he was out in the free air again, and he had had his fill of arrogance, and wanted no more.

"Is that so?" he asked nastily. "Well, I'm on this expedition, too. How do you know that God did not send *me,* to stop *you?"*

Charlie finished taking pictures of the little animal under water as it changed, and came back up the bank, refolding the underwater lens. He was in time to see Winton slap the chief engineer in the face, spit out some profanity that would have started him on an hour of moral lecture, if he had heard either of them emit such words. He saw Winton turn and run, not as if he were running away, but as if he were running to do something, in sudden impatience.

Ten minutes later Henderson had finished explaining what was bothering the preacher. They lay on the bank lazily looking down into the water, putting half attention into locating some other interesting life form, and enjoying the reflection of sunset in the ripples.

"I wish I could chew grass," Henderson said. "It would make it just like watching a river when I was a kid. But the plastic stuff on my face keeps me from putting anything into my mouth."

"The leaves would probably be poisonous anyhow," Charlie brushed a hand through the pretty green of the grass. It was wiry and tough with thin round blades, like marsh grass. "This isn't really grass. This isn't really Earth, you know."

"I know, I wish I could forget it. I wonder what that creep, Winton, is doing now." Henderson rolled on his back and looked lazily at the sky. "I've got one up on him now. I got him to act like a creep right out in the open. He won't be giving me that superior, fatherly bilge. He might even call me Henderson now instead of Harry."

"Don't ask too much," Charlie clipped a piece of leaf from a weed and absently tried to put it into his mouth. It was stopped by the transparent plastic film that protected him from local germs and filtered the air he breathed.

He flicked the leaf away, "How did that creep get to be a missionary? Nothing wrong with him, except he can't get on with people. Doesn't help in his line of work to be like that."

"Easy, like I said," said Henderson, staring into the darkening pink and purple of the sky. "They encouraged him to be a missionary so he would go far far away. Don't ever tell him. He thinks that he

was chosen for his eloquence." Henderson rolled back on to his stomach and looked at the river. It was a chilly purple now, with silver ripples. "More clouds over the mountains. And those little clouds overhead might thicken up and rain. If the river keeps rising, there might be a flood. We might have to move the ship."

"Winton said the native mentioned a flood." Charlie got up lazily and stretched. "Getting dark out here anyhow. We'll have to find out more about that interview."

They went in search of the preacher.

What he told them was disturbing, and vague.

"That was Spet," Henderson said. "That was the one I was learning words from all afternoon. And he told you he was going to die?"

Winton was earnest and pale. He sat crouched over the chart table as if his resolution to act had frightened him. "Yes. He said he was going to die. He said that they were going to hang him upside down in a tree as soon as the next rain starts. Because he is old enough."

"But he said that other young males live through it? Maybe he's wrong about dying. Maybe it's not as tough as it sounds."

"He said that many die," Winton said tonelessly. His hands lay motionless on the table. He was moved to a sudden flare of anger. "Oh those stupid savages. Cruel, cruel!" He turned his head to Henderson, looking up at him without the usual patronizing expression. "You'll fix the translator so that it translates me exactly, won't you? I don't want to shoot them to stop them from doing it. I'll just stop them by explaining that God doesn't want them to do this thing. They will have to understand me."

He turned his head to Charlie, standing beside him. "The savages call me Enaxip. What does that mean? Do they think I'm a god'?"

"It means Big Box," Henderson cut in roughly. "They still think that the box is talking. I see them watch the box when they answer, they don't watch you. I don't know what they think you are."

That night it did not rain. Winton allowed himself to fall asleep near dawn.

To Spet also it made a difference that it did not rain.

The next day he fished in the river as he always had.

The river was swollen and ran high and swiftly between its banks and fishing was not easy at first, but the brown ghost returned, bringing another one like himself, and they both helped Spet with pulling in the fish traps. The new ghost also wanted to be told how to talk, like a small one, and they all had considerable amusement as the two ghosts acted out ordinary things that often happened, and Spet told them the right words and songs to explain what they were doing.

One of them taught him a word in ghost language, and he knew that he was right to learn, because he would soon be a ghost.

When Spet carried the fish back along the path to his family hut that evening, he passed the Box That Talks. It spoke to him again, and again asked him questions.

The spirit covered with black that usually gibbered on top of the box was not there. Nothing was on top of the box, but the brown ghost who had just been helping him fish stood beside the box and spoke to it softly each time it asked Spet a question. The box spoke softly back to the ghost after Spet answered, discussing his answers, as if they had a problem concerning him.

Spet answered the questions politely, although some of them were difficult questions, asking reasons for things he had never thought needed a reason, and some were questions it was not polite to ask. He did not know why they discussed him, but it was their business and they would tell him if they chose.

When he left them, the brown ghost made a gesture of respect and mutual aid in work, and Spet returned, warmed and pleased by the respect of the ghost-relative.

He did not remember to be afraid until he was almost home.

It began to rain.

Charlie came up the ramp and into the spaceship, and found Henderson pacing up and down, his

thick shoulders hunched, his fists clenched, and his face wrinkled with worry. "Hi." Charlie did not expect an answer. He kicked the lever that tightened the noose on the curtain plastic behind him, watched the hot wire cut him loose from the curtain and seal the curtain in the same motion. He stood carefully folding and smoothing his new wrapping of plastic around himself, to make sure that the coating he had worn outside was completely coated by the new wrapping. All outside dust and germs had to be trapped between the two layers of sterile germproof plastic.

He stood mildly smoothing and adjusting the wrappings, watching Henderson pace with only the very dimmest flicker of interest showing deep in his eyes. He could withdraw his attention so that a man working beside him could feel completely unwatched and as if he had the privacy of a cloak of invisibility. Charlie was well mannered and courteous, and this was part of his courtesy.

"How're things?" he asked casually, slitting open his plastic cocoon and stepping out.

Henderson stopped pacing and took a cigar from a box on the table with savage impatience in his motions. "Very bad," he said. "Winton was right."

"Eh?" Charlie wadded up the plastic and tossed it into the disposal hopper.

"The natives, they actually do it." Henderson clenched the cigar between his teeth and lit it with savage jerky motions. "I asked Spet. No mistake in the translator this time. He said, yes, they hang the young men upside down in the trees after the first spring rain. And yes, it hurt, and yes sometimes one died, and no he didn't know why they had to do this or what it was for. Ha!" Henderson threw the cigar away and began to pace again, snarling.

"Oh yes, the translator was working fine! Generations of torturing their boys with this thing, and the adults can't remember how it started, or why, and they go on doing it anyway. . . ."

Charlie leaned back against the chart table, following his pacing with his eyes. "Maybe," he said mildly, "there's some good reason for the custom."

"A good reason to hang upside down for a week? Name one!"

Charlie did not answer.

"I just came from the native village," he said conversationally as though changing the subject. "Winton has started. He's got the translator box right in the center of their village now, and he's sitting on top of it telling them that God is watching them, and stuff like that. I tried to reason with him, and he just pointed a gun at me. He said he'd stop the hanging ceremony even if he had to kill both of us and half the natives to do it."

"So let him try to stop them, just by talking." Henderson, who had stopped to listen, began to pace again, glowering at the floor. "That flapping mouth! Talking won't do it. Talking by itself never does anything. I'm going to do it the easy way. I'm going to kidnap Spet, and keep them from getting him.

"Charlie, tribes only do things at the right season, what they call the right season. We'll turn Spet loose after the week is up, and they won't lay a hand on him. They'll just wait until next year. Meanwhile they'll be seeing that the trees aren't angry at them or any of that malarky. When they see that Spet got away with it, they'll have a chance to see a young male who's becoming a healthy adult without being all stretched out and physically wrecked.

"And maybe next year, Spet will decide to get lost by himself. Maybe after looking at how Spet looks compared with an adult who was hanged, some of the kids due for hanging next year would duck into the forest and get lost when it's due."

"It's a good dream," Charlie said, lounging, following Henderson's pacing with his eyes. "I won't remind you that we swore off dreaming. But I'm with you in this, man. How do we find Spet?"

Henderson sat down, smiling. "We'll see him at the stream tomorrow. We don't need to do anything until it starts raining." Charlie started rummaging in the tool locker. "Got to get a couple of flashlights. We have to move fast. Have to find Spet in a hurry. It's already raining, been raining almost an hour."

Darkness and rain, and it was very strange being upside down. Not formal and ceremonial, like a story-song about it, but real, like hauling nets and thatching huts, and eating with his brothers. The world seemed to be upside down. The tree trunk was beside him, strong and solid, and the ground was above him like a roof being held up by the tree, and the sky was below his feet and very far away . . . and

looking down at the clouds swirling in the depth of the sky he was afraid of falling into it. The sky was a lake, and he would fall through it like a stone falling through water. If one fell into the sky, one would fall and fall for a long time, it looked so very deep.

Rain fell upwards out of the sky and hit him under the chin. His ankles and wrists were tightly bound, but did not hurt, for the elders had used a soft rope of many strands tied in a way that would not stop circulation. His arms were at his sides, his wrists bound to the same strand that pulled at his ankles, and the pull on his arms was like standing upright, carrying a small weight of something. He was in a standing position, but upside down. It was oddly comfortable. The elders had many generations of experience to guide them, and they had chosen a tall tree with a high branch that was above the flood. They had seemed wise and certain, and he had felt confidence in them as they had bound and hung him up with great gentleness, speaking quietly to each other.

Then they had left him, towing their little flat-boats across the forest floor that was now a roof above his head, walking tall and stork-like across the dim lit glistening ground, which looked so strangely like a rough, wet ceiling supported by the trunks of trees.

The steady rain drummed against the twigs and small spring leaves, splashing in the deepening trickles of water that ran along the ground. Spet knew that somewhere the river was overflowing its banks and spreading into the forest and across meadows to meet and deepen the rain water. In the village the street would be muddy, and the children would be shouting, trying already to pole the boats in the street, wild with impatience for the rising of the river, to see again the cold swift flow of water and watch the huts of the town sag and flow downwards, dissolve and vanish beneath the smooth surface.

For a month in the time of floods everyone would live in boats. His tribe would paddle and pole up the coast, meeting other tribes, trading baskets and fishhooks, salt fish for salt meat, and swapping the old stories and songs with new variations brought from far places. Last time they had been lucky enough to come upon a large animal caught in the flood, swimming and helpless to resist the hunters. The men of the enemy tribe had traded skin for half the roast meat on a raft, and sang a long story song that no one had heard before. That was the best feast of all.

Then the horde of small boats would come home to the lakes that were draining meadows and forest, and take down the sick and dying young men who had been hanging in the trees, and tend and feed them and call them "elder." They would then travel again for food, to fight through storms to salt the meat of drowned animals and hunt the deep sea fish caught in the dwindling lakes.

When the rains had stopped and the land began to dry, they would return to the damp and drying land to sing and work and build a village of the smooth fresh clay left by the flood. But Spet would not see those good times again. He hung in his tree upside down with the rain beating coolly against his skin. It was growing too dark to see more than the dim light of the sky. He shut his eyes, and behind his shut eyes were pictures and memories, and then dreams.

Here he is. How do we get him down. Did you bring a knife. How do we get up to him. It's slippery. I can't climb this thing. Wait, I'll give you a boost.

A flash of light, too steady for lightning, lasting a full second. Spet awoke fully, staring into the darkness, looking for the light which now was gone, listening to the mingled voices in the strange language.

"Don't use the flashlight, it will frighten him."

"Going to try to explain to him what we're doing?"

"No, not right away. He'll come along. Spet's a pal of mine already."

"Man, do these trees have roots. As big as the branches!"

"Like mangroves?"

"You're always claiming the South has everything. What are mangroves?"

"Florida swamp trees. They root straight into deep water. Give a hand here."

"Keeps raining like this and they're going to need their roots. How high can we climb just on the roots anyhow?"

"Think you're kidding? Why else would they have roots like this? This territory must be

underwater usually, deep water. This flat land must be delta country. We're just in the dry season."

"What do you mean delta country? I'm a city boy, define your terms."

"I mean, we're at the mouth of one of those big wandering rivers like the Mississippi or the Yellow River that doesn't know where it's going to run next, and splits up into a lot of little rivers at the coast, and moves its channel every spring. I noticed that grass around the ship looked like salt water grass. Should have thought about it."

A dark figure appeared beside Spet and climbed past him toward the branch where the rope was tied. The next voice was distant. *"You trying to tell me we landed the ship in a riverbed? Why didn't you say something when we were landing?"*

"Didn't think of it, then." That voice was loud and close. *"It's a fine time to think of it now. I left the ship wide open. You up there yet?"*

"Uh huh. I'm loosening the rope. Going to lower him slow. Catch him and keep him from landing on his head, will you?"

"Ready. Lower away."

The voices stopped and the world began to spin, and the bole of the tree began to move past Spet's face.

Suddenly a pair of wet arms gripped him, and the voice of the brown ghost called, *"Got him."*

Immediately the rope ceased to pull at Spet's ankles, and he fell against the brown ghost head-first and they both tumbled against the slippery high roots and slid down from one thick root to another until they stopped at the muddy ground. The ghost barked a few short words and began to untie the complex knots from Spet's ankles and wrists.

It was strange sitting on the wet ground with its coating of last year's leaves. Even right-side up the forest looked strange, and Spet knew that this was because of death, and he began to sing his death song.

The brown ghost helped him to his feet, and said clearly in ordinary words, "Come on, boy, you can sing when we get there."

His friend dropped down from a low branch to the higher roots of the tree, slipped and fell on the ground beside them.

In Spet's language the standing one said to the other, "No time for resting, Charlie, let's go."

It was very dark now, and the drips from the forest branches poured more heavily, beating against the skin.

The ghost on the ground barked a few of the same words the relative-ghost had made when he had fallen, and got up. The two started off through the forest, beckoning Spet to follow. He wondered if he were a ghost already. Perhaps the ghosts had taken him to be a ghost without waiting for him to die. That was nice of them, and a favor, possibly because they were kinfolk. He followed them.

The rain had lightened, and become the steady, light falling spray that it would be for the next several days. Walking was difficult, for the floor of the forest was slippery with wet leaves, and the mud underneath was growing soft again, remembering the time it had been part of the water of the river, remembering that the river had left it there only a year ago. The ghosts with him made sputtering words in ghost talk, sometimes tripped and floundered and fell, helped each other up and urged him on.

The forest smelled of the good sweet odors of damp earth and growing green leaves. The water and mud were cooling against his hurting feet, and Spet unaccountably wanted to linger in the forest, and sit, and perhaps sleep.

The floods were coming, and the ghosts had no boats with them.

"Come on, Spet. We go to big boat. Come on, Spet."

Why did they stumble and flounder through the forest without a boat? And why were they afraid? Could ghosts drown? These ghosts, with their perpetually wet appearance—if they had drowned once, would they be forced to relive the drowning, and be caught in the floods every year? A bad thing that happened once, had to happen again and again in dreams. And your spirit self in the dream lived it each time as something new. There is no memory in the dream country. These ghosts were dream people,

even though they chose to be in the awake world. They were probably bound by the laws of the dream world.

They would have to re-enact their drowning. Their boat was far away, and they were running towards the water course where the worst wave of the flood would *come*.

Spet understood suddenly that they wanted him to drown. He could not become a ghost, like these friendly brown ghosts, and live in their world, without first dying.

He remembered his first thought of them, that they carried the illusion of water over them because they had once drowned. They wanted him to be like them. They were trying to lure him through waters where he would stumble and drown as they had.

Naturally as they urged him on their gestures were nervous and guilty. It is not easy to urge a friend onwards to his death. But to be shaped like a young one, merry, brown, and covered with water, obviously he had to be drowned as they were drowned, young and merry, before the hanging had made a sad adult of him.

He would not let them know that he had guessed their intention. Running with them towards the place where the flood would be worst, he tried to remember at what verse he had stopped singing his death song, and began again from that verse, singing to stop the fear-thoughts. The rain beat coolly against his face and chest as he ran.

Each man in his own panic, they burst from the forest into the clearing. The engineers saw with a wave of relief that the spaceship was still there, a pale shaft upright in the midst of water. Where the meadow had been was a long narrow lake, reflecting the faint light of the sky, freckled with drifting spatters of rain.

"How do we get to it?" Charlie turned to them.

"How high is the water? Is the ramp covered?" Henderson asked practically, squinting through the rain.

"Ramp looks the same. I see grass sticking up in the water. It's not deep."

Charlie took a careful step and then another out into the silvery surface. Spongy grass met his feet under the surface, and the water lapped above his ankles, but no higher.

"It's shallow."

They started out towards the ship. It took courage to put their feet down into a surface that suggested unseen depth.

The shallow current of water tugged at their ankles, and grew deeper and stronger.

"Henderson, wait!"

The three stopped and turned at the call. The path to the village was close, curving away from the forest towards the distant river bank, a silvery road of water among dark bushes. A dark figure came stumbling along the path, surrounded by the silvery shine of the rising water. Ripples spread from his ankles as he ran.

He came to the edge where the bushes stopped and the meadow began, saw the lake-appearance of it, and stopped. The others were already thirty feet away.

"Henderson! Charlie!"

"Walk, it's not deep yet. Hurry up." Charlie gestured urgently for him to follow them. They were still thirty feet out, standing in the smooth silver of the rising water. It was almost to their knees.

Winton did not move. He looked across the shining shallow expanse of water, and his voice rose shrilly. "It's a lake, we need boats."

"It's shallow," Charlie called. The rain beat down on the water, specking it in small vanishing pockmarks. The two engineers hesitated, looking back at Winton, sensing something wrong.

Winton's voice was low, but the harshness of desperation made it clear as if he had screamed.

"Please. I can't swim—"

"Go get him," Henderson told Charlie. "He's got a phobia. I'll herd Spet to the ship, and then head back to help you."

Charlie was already splashing in long strides back to the immobile figure of the preacher. He started to shout when he got within earshot.

"Why didn't you say so, man? We almost left you behind!" He crouched down before the motionless fear-dazed figure. "Get on, man. You're getting taxi service."

"What?" asked Winton in a small distant voice. The water lapped higher.

"Get on my back," Charlie snapped impatiently. "You're getting transportation."

"The houses dissolved, and they went off in boats and left me alone. They said that I was an evil spirit. I think they did the hangings anyway, even though I told them it was wrong." Winton's voice was vague, but he climbed on Charlie's back. "The *houses* dissolved."

"Speak up, stop mumbling," muttered Charlie.

The spaceship stood upright ahead in the center of the shallow silver lake that had been a meadow. Its doors were open, and the bottom of the ramp was covered by water. Water tugged against Charlie's lower legs as he ran, and the rain beat against their faces and shoulders in a cool drumming.

It would have been pleasant, except that the fear of drowning was growing even in Charlie, and the silver of the shallow new lake seemed to threaten an unseen depth ahead.

"There seems to be a current," Winton said with an attempt at casual remarks. "Funny, this water looks natural here, as if the place were a river, and those trees look like the banks."

Charlie said nothing. Winton was right, but it would not be wise to tell a man with phobia about drowning that they were trying to walk across the bed of a river while the water returned to its channel.

"Why are you running?" asked the man he carried. "To catch up with Henderson."

Once they were inside the spaceship with the door shut they could ignore the water level outside. Once inside, they would not have to tell Winton anything about how it was outside. A spaceship made a good submarine.

The water level was almost to Charlie's knees and he ran now in a difficult lurching fashion. Winton pulled up his feet nervously to keep them from touching the water. The plastic which they wore was semi-permeable to water and both of them were soaked.

"Who is that up ahead with Henderson?"

"Spet, the native boy."

"How did you persuade him to stay away from the ceremony?"

"We found him hanging and cut him down."

"Oh," Winton was silent a moment trying to absorb the fact that the engineers had succeeded in rescuing someone. "It's a different approach. I talked, but they wouldn't listen." He spoke apologetically, hanging on to Charlie's shoulders, his voice jolting and stopping as Charlie tripped over a concealed tuft of grass or small bush under the water. "They didn't even answer—or look at me. When the water got deep they went off in little boats and didn't leave a boat for me." Charlie tripped again and staggered to one knee. They both briefly floundered waist deep in the water, and then Charlie was up again, still with a grip on his passenger's legs, so that Winton was firmly on his back.

When he spoke again Winton's tone was casual, but his voice was hysterically high in pitch. "I asked them for a boat, but they wouldn't look at me."

Charlie did not answer. He respected Winton's attempt to conceal his terror. The touch of water can be a horrifying thing to a man with a phobia of drowning. He could think of nothing to distract Winton's attention from his danger, but he hoped desperately that the man would not notice that the water had deepened. It is not possible to run in water over knee height. There was no way to hurry now. The rain had closed in in veiling curtains, but he thought he saw the small figures of Henderson and the native in the distance reach the ramp which led to the spaceship.

If the flood hit them all now, Henderson and Spet could get inside, but how would he himself get this man with a phobia against water off his back and into the water to swim? He could visualize the bony arms tightening around his throat in an hysterical stranglehold. If a drowning man gets a clutch on you, you are supposed to knock him out and tow him. But how could he get this non-swimming type off his back and out where he could be hit?

If Winton could not brace himself to walk in water up to his ankles, he was not going to let go and try to swim in water up to his neck. He'd flip, for sure! Charlie found no logical escape from the picture. The pressure of the strong bony arms around his throat and shoulders and the quick irregular breathing of the

man he was carrying made him feel trapped.

The water rose another inch or so, and the drag of it against his legs became heavier. The current was pulling sidewise.

"You're going slowly." Winton's voice had the harsh rasp of fear.

"No hurry." With difficulty, Charlie found breath to speak in a normal tone. "Almost there."

The curtain of rain lifted for a moment and he saw the spaceship, dark against the sky, and the ramp leading to its open door. The ramp was very shrunken, half covered by the rising water. It seemed a long way ahead.

As he watched, a light came on.

In the archway of the spaceship, Henderson flipped a switch and the lights went on.

Spet was startled. Sunlight suddenly came from the interior of the hut and shone against the falling rain in a great beam. Rain glittered through the beam in falling drops like sparks of white fire. It was very unlike anything real, but in dreams sunlight could be in one place and rain another at the same time, and no one in the dream country was surprised. And these were people who usually lived in the dream country, so apparently they had the power to do it in the real world also.

Nevertheless, Spet was afraid, for the sunlight did not look right as it was, coming out in a great widening beam across the rippling rain-pocked water. Sunlight did not mix well with rain.

"Sunlight," Spet said apologetically to his relative-ghost. The brown ghost nodded and led him down the slope of the ramp through the strange sparkling sunlight, with the ramp strange and hard underfoot.

"Don't go inside until I return," the ghost said, mouthing the words with difficulty. The ghost placed his hands around the railing of the ramp. "You hang on here and wait for me," said the brown ghost of someone in his family, and waded down into the water.

Spet followed him down into the comfortable water until his sore feet were off the end of the ramp and in the cooling soft mud, and then he gripped the rail obediently and waited. The water lapped at his waist like an embrace, and the wind sang a death song for him.

The bright glare of the strange sunlight on dancing water was beautiful, but it began to hurt his eyes. He closed them, and then heard a sound other than the wind. Two sounds.

One sound he recognized as the first flood crest crashing through the trees to the north, approaching them, and he knew he must hurry and drown before it arrived, because it was rough and hurtful.

The other sound was the strange voice of the black spirit which usually gibbered on top of the Box That Talks. Spet opened his eyes, and saw that the gibbering spirit was riding on the shoulders of the brown ghost, as he and his friend, the other brown ghost, moved through the waist-deep water towards Spet and the ramp.

The black spirit gibbered at him as they passed, and Spet felt a dim anger, wondering if it would bring bad luck to him with its chants, for its intentions could not be the same as the friendly ghosts.

"Spet, come up the ramp with us. It's dry inside. Don't look like that, there's nothing to be afraid of now, we'll go inside and shut the door, it will keep the water away, it won't get in ... Come along, Spet."

The black spirit suddenly leaped down on the ramp with a strange scream. *"Aaaaiiii . . . He's turning into a seaweed. Quick, get him out of the water! Help!"*

The spirit with the black skin and white face possibly wanted him for his own dark spirit world. He was coming down the ramp at Spet, screaming. He was too late though, Spet knew that he was safe for the dim land of the drowned with the friendly ghosts who had come for him. He felt his feet sending roots down into the mud, moving and rooting downward, and a wild joy came over him, and he knew that this was the right thing for him, much more right and natural than it would have been to become a tall sad adult.

He had been feeling a need for air, panting and drawing the cold air into his lungs. Just as the clawed hands of the dark spirit caught hold of his neck, Spet had enough air, and he leaned over into the dark and friendly water, away from the painful beauty of the bright lights and moving forms. The water closed around him, and the sound of voices was lost.

He could still feel the grip of the spirit's bony arms around his neck, pulling upwards, but he had seen

the brown ghosts running towards them, and they would stop it from doing him any harm . . . so he dismissed the fear from his mind, and bent deeper into the dark, and plunged his hands with spread fingers deep into the mud, and gripped his ankles, as if he had always known just how to do this thing. His hands locked and became unable to unfold. They would never unfold again.

He felt the soft surge that was the first flood wave arriving and passing above him, and ignored it, and, with a mixture of terror and the certainty of doing right, he opened his mouth and took a deep breath of cold water.

All thought stopped. As the water rushed into his lungs, the rooted sea creature that was the forgotten adult stage of Spet's species began its thoughtless pseudo-plant existence, forgetting everything that had ever happened to it. Its shape changed.

The first wave of the flood did not quite reach up to the edge of the ship's entrance. It caught the two engineers as they dragged a screaming third human up the ramp towards the entrance, but it did not quite reach into the ship, and when it passed the three humans were still there. One of them struck the screaming one, and they carried him in.

Winton was hysterical for some time, but Henderson seemed quite normal. He worked well and rationally in compiling a good short survey report to carry to the planetary survey agency, and when the waters dried around the spaceship he directed the clearing of mud from the jets and the overhaul of the firing chambers without a sign of warp in his logic.

He did not want to speak to any native, and went into the ship when they appeared.

Winton was still slightly delirious when they took off from the planet, but, once in space, he calmed down and made a good recovery. He just did not talk about it. Henderson still seemed quite normal, and Charlie carefully did not tell Winton that Henderson kept a large bush in a glass enclosure in the engine room.

Ever since that time Henderson has been considered a little peculiar. He is a good enough risk for the big liners, for they have other engineers on board to take over if he ever cracks.

He has no trouble getting jobs, but wherever he goes he brings with him an oversized potted plant and puts it in the engine room and babies it with water and fertilizer. His fellow officers never kid him about it, for it is not a safe subject.

When Henderson is alone, or thinks he is alone, he talks to the potted bush. His tone is coaxing. But the bush never answers.

Charlie runs into him occasionally when their ships happen to dock at the same space port around the same planet. They share a drink and enjoy a few jokes together, but Charlie takes care not to get signed on to the same ship as Henderson. The sight of Henderson and his potted bush together make him nervous.

It's the wrong bush, but he'll never tell Henderson that.

The natives did not know they were descended from a bush. Nor do we know what we are descended from. With somewhat indiscriminating taste in mates showing among our people, I would he inclined to credit faun children from goats, mermaids and mermen from porpoises, and even further back, porpoises look fair to have been originally some relation, and whales also. Drop an infant child into water and he will make flipper motions with hands and feet, swim underwater, and surface at times to breathe, and enjoy it, needing less teaching than it takes a porpoise baby to learn the same thing. Where do we get such instincts? Were our ancestors amphibians, instead of tree swingers? Or both? Or many?

Natives, when they claim a totem animal is their family ancestor, might not be kidding. Some of the genetic elements in our chromosomes are there to suppress other genetic elements from showing and expressing themselves in sculpturing the shape if the prebirth human. Shaping what? Hoofs? Horns? Fins? Leaves?

THE GAMBLING HELL AND THE SINFUL

GIRL

Pioneers get all the glory. But what about the outlaws wt run away to the frontier and shiver in a tent, and try to rebuild civilization without nails. Or their children, who think living in tent or a barrel in space is all the comforts and luxuries of home. Joey has a later set of adventures in a book called The Hills of Space.

Human beings can get used to anything. We might work out way to live in space without even a barrel.

Abe was getting too big for the home barrel He was six-foot-four and maybe still growing, and when he stood up straight his head was up past spin center in the barrel and spin gravity was pulling his head the other way. He said it made him feel dizzy and upside own.

We were sorry the barrel was so tall but we couldn't calculate any way to make it bigger, so Abe sat down a lot. When he sat down he stretched out his legs, and his legs were long legs and we tripped over them coming and going.

Ma always swore she'd never let my son of hers work at the Belt Foundry, not with those rowdy drinking men and their sinful shows in their recreation lounge, and their trips to the Gambling Hells on the Moon. She said they were bad company for a Christian. But then she tripped over Abe's legs while she was carrying a pot of stew to the table.

Well, we all ran over to help dean up, and the piglets helped the most, even licking up the spots, but Ma got up mad with her mouth zipped tight closed and went back to the solar oven to cook up something else. She didn't say a thing all the time she was cooking, like she was thinking. When she had a good hot meal of fish and potatoes out on the table she sat down with us and said the blessing and served us each, out a helping, and then said what she'd been thinking.

"Abe, why don't you get a job at the Belt Foundry? They've got big rooms with a spin center a lot higher than you. And I hear they have all the books that was ever written in their readout library."

I'm just eleven, and Abe hardly notices me among the parcel of other kids, but I'd been yearning after the tine, free rich life of a Belt Foundry Engineer in my heart so I knew how Abe felt. He'd never let Ma know he'd been yearning after it and keeping silent, but he went around the table and gathered her up in his long arms and gave her such a kiss she got all pink and pretty.

"You're always thinking of us." was all he said. We didn't notice what we were eating we all got so excited talking about Abe's new job at the Belt Foundry. We didn't know much so we talked about all the video stories we'd seen when the heroes are space miners and engineers and rock jumpers, and we got more excited retelling all the plots and interrupting each other. Abe told a few and laughed a lot at the things we acted out. After dinner he sat in a corner polishing his pressure suit and loading it with extra fuel tanks and extra water, and listened to us still talking about asteroid mining and smelting beams and building star ships until long past sleep time.

Two sleeps later, the proximity bell rang and we woke up and saw that our orbit was going to cross a Belt Mine nugget heading for the Belt Foundry. The deeper-toned safety bell rang, meaning it had changed course with those safety jets the miners fasten to their nuggets, and it was going to miss us. While we were still sitting up blinking at the screen Abe went out the airlock like a shot, wearing his pressure suit half shut. We got to the scope window and watched his elastic rope hook onto the passing nugget while his suit was still inflating. The nugget was about a forty-meter chunk of nickel iron, good quality, by the shine of it. It went out of sight, trailing Abe. I wanted to turn the scope onto tracking and enlarging and watch Abe go for a while, but Ma said

"Gone is gone," she said. "Let him do his thing. Abe's grown up now. Everybody get back to bed." But when she got into bed she started sobbing.

My sister Harriet is fifteen, she's the oldest, she got down from her bunk and hugged Ma and tried to comfort her.

Ma hugged her back. "I gave you all a good Christian home," she whispered to Harriet. "And now

Abe is going out into all those temptations, and those godless miners will lead him astray to the Gambling Hells and the dancing and the wicked girls."

I fell asleep thinking of the Gambling Hells and the wicked girls. I wished I was as old as Abe so I could go over there and resist temptation while the girls tried to tempt me. They'd tempt me to dance and play cards, and maybe I'd give in and play a little, just to make them feel better. Cards sounded like fun.

Next day, picking vegetables out of the aquarium, I remembered thinking like that and I felt sorry. I went to Ma and put my arm around her neck. "I won't ever leave you, Ma."

She laughed and cheered up, and set Harriet and me to repairing the spare water temperature circulation pump. Harriet and me were the oldest now, so we could do the important jobs like fixing machinery. She set my little brother to farming the aquarium instead of me. I felt important, but fixing the pump was hard and slow, and Harriet got kind of mean and sharp-talking when we made a mistake, and tried to make it my fault.

I missed Abe.

Next week, Saturday, Abe came in the airlock and surprised us. He was wearing a new pressure suit with light blue stripes and carrying a big gift box, and gave it to Ma. It was a new pressure suit and when she got into it and inflated it it didn't change shape much from her shape. It still looked like a person, and like her. She looked at herself in the mirror and let out a squeal that sounded like one of the girl kids. "Heaven's sake. It looks like I don't have nothing on, almost."

"Looks fine, Ma," I said. "Now we'll know it's you when we're all outside working."

"It looks sinful," she said, but she said it low and timid, 'cause she wanted us to argue.

"You work hard. You deserve a pretty new suit," Abe said.

"It's real pretty, keep it, Ma," said Harriet.

"Girls are supposed to look pretty. It's only right!" I said it very loud and Harriet and me had said the right things because Ma turned and reached up and hugged around Abe's neck. "I'll keep it. Thank you, Abe, thank you."

When Ma let go of Abe he stood up straight past the center spin point without bracing his feet. We saw him tilt and all yelled for him to crouch down, but he'd forgotten about low spin centers in a week in the big barrelhouses at the Belt Foundry, and spinpush got him and he went over sideways looking surprised. We ran under him to catch him and all went down in a tangle, wrestling and laughing like we used to.

After he got all us kids piled off him and sat up Abe said, "It's real good to be home."

He went around grinning and fed the aquarium fish and when Ma served him a plate of dinner he sneaked most of it off his plate to the floor to watch the piglets whistle and push each other for it. He was grinning all the time. Around sleep time the proximity bell rang and Abe got back into his new blue striped pressure suit and kissed Ma. "Friends coming to pick me up," he said. "I'll get presents for the kids, my next paycheck. Back in two weeks."

Ma let out what she'd been worrying about all week. "Hold back against those temptations, Abe. Don't let your new friends lead you into drinking or drugs or gambling or sinful girls. Promise?"

"Nice of you to worry about me, Ma," he said and hugged Harriet and me and Bobby, and Renee, and Ruthy, and then climbed up to the centerlock and out.

But I noticed his way of answering was not naturally the way he talked, and he *didn't* promise. He didn't promise anything.

I wondered.

Next week was busy. One of the two piglets gave out a boxful of little baby piglets, and Ma kept us from playing with them for three days, but we watched them a lot. The week after, the piglets were bigger and noticed us more and Ma let us play with them. Wednesday when we kids were in bed Ma and Harriet got together and killed the old father piglet and salted it for bacon. When we found out why he was missing we kids decided to stay mad at Ma and Harriet for a long time. But Ma explained to us that old piglets don't grow wise and don't have any good memories to remember, they just get tired and stop having fun, so they don't get any pleasure out of living a long time. She said we make space for more

new young ones by eating the old ones.

We tried to stay mad at Ma and Harriet, but we had to admit the baby piglets were having fun. In another two days they were running all over the barrel, playing follow the leader in lines and squealing and rolling around like balls. We ail got laughing so hard we forgot to be mad.

Ma announced that the next time we crossed the orbit of Sam's Trading Post we'd trade some piglets for some banty chickens and then we'd really see some racketying around.

Bobby and me started hopping around pretending to be chickens and making chicken noises and I climbed the climbing net and hung in the middle of the air at zero gravity flapping my arms and pretending to be a hawk.

Somebody started to work the airlock door. I was almost into the airlock tunnel right in the middle of the barrelhead wall and I could see the airlock door open and a gold-colored head dome push through. Then a stranger in a pressure suit crawled into the tunnel. She was moving different from any of us, sort of wiggly and happy, and she pulled off her globe helmet and let out a lot of bright gold hair that floated in zero G all around and over her face. She looked like a dandelion.

"Hi," she said to me through her hair. Behind her feet I could see Abe trying to push through the spin door, but her feet were in the way and it couldn't spin.

I stopped flapping and grabbed the net. "Come over and catch onto the net here, Miss," I said, feeling stunned. "Hang alongside of me and let Abe in."

She launched in the weightless air of the tunnel like a gold fish, and floated to me through the air, and grabbed and hung so close to me her gold hair was brushing against my arm right up to my shoulder. I could smell flowers.

Abe crawled through the tunnel and stuck his head out opposite us.

But there was no room on the net. The girl was staring around at a circle of faces. Everyone in the barrelhouse, including the pigs, was in a circle at the bottom of the net standing around her in all directions looking up, like spokes in a wheel.

We'd hardly seen anyone new except Sam and MacPherson whose orbit was almost the same as ours. She didn't look like them. We only passed MacPherson twice a year, and then we took a look into his barrelhouse, but we didn't stay long because it was full of flowers and bees. We'd have MacPherson over to dinner all of a week, because his orbit was almost the same as ours and took a long time to pass, and after he'd left we'd have honey enough to last until the next visit. But he was tall and wrinkled and squinty. He didn't look like this girl. She didn't look real. She looked like the girls in the stories on the video screen.

I don't know what Ma said that got us off the net. She got us all introduced to the girl and the girl introduced to us. The girl's name was Sylvia Saint Clair, and then Ma set us to running around straightening up, setting tables and making space. I cleared pump parts off Abe's bunk and put them in a box.

I began to feel something going wrong when I heard Ma say for the fifth time, "Take off your space suit and stay a while, Miss Saint Clair."

And Abe was trying to interrupt her, talking in a low fast voice.

"Ma, there's something I've got to explain to you."

Then Ma had talked the girl into taking her pressure suit off, and she didn't have anything on underneath, and we were all looking.

I mean she almost didn't have anything on underneath. She was decorated with some jewelry draped around where a bathing suit would be if she was swimming. She looked like a swim queen wearing jewelry instead of a swim suit.

We kids just stared. We didn't know if it was right or wrong, what Miss Saint Clair was wearing.

Abe said, "Ma, we gotta explain. Miss Saint Clair had to leave in a hurry. She couldn't bring her things. She came away in her bathing suit."

Ma said, "Hush up Abe. Harriet, get the girl your bathrobe." Her voice was very clear, every word separate, and we all got scared because that meant that Ma was mad angry. She looked straight into Miss Saint Clair's eyes, not looking again at what she was dressed in. "Where you from, Miss Saint

Clair?"

Abe said, "Ma, it doesn't matter where she's from. She's a good girl and we're going to get married."

It was the wrong time to say anything like that to Ma. She didn't look at him. She kept her eyes on the girl. Her voice sounded like a hammer tapping a steel spike. "Where you from, Miss Saint Clair?"

"From Georgia, Earth," the girl said and quickly got inside the bathrobe my sister Harriet held out for her. She was pale and scared of Ma. Ma is only five-foot-three, but sometimes everybody is scared of her.

"Where were you when Abe met you, girl?" Ma asked.

"Jason's Emporium." The girl squirmed and giggled nervously, but squirming and giggling was the wrong thing to do with Ma standing so straight and quiet and staring, and everybody else frozen still, so scared of Ma we were afraid to twitch.

Ma asked, "That's a Gambling Hell, isn't it?"

The girl squirmed and giggled again weakly, "Well, I wouldn't call it that." Her blond hair was hanging down limp over her face by now. I was awfully sorry for her. When Ma has you pinned to the wall, lying makes it worse, a lot worse. Suddenly she saw Ma's steady gaze on her, and she froze. Ma just looked into her eyes and waited.

The girl whispered. "Yes, it's a Gambling Hell."

"Glad to hear you talk honest," Ma said like a steel hammer. "What were you doing there, girl?"

"I was dancing," the girl whispered and seemed like she was shrinking down. She wrapped the terry-cloth robe tighter around her. "And . . . and things."

"Things, eh?" Ma asked. "What do you think of yourself, girl? Abe is a good man. I raised my boy to be a good Christian man with a good future. Do you think you're good enough for Abe?"

Miss Saint Clair shrank down so much her knees must have been bending inside the bathrobe. She looked up into Ma's face and answered very low.

Ma said loud, "What'd you say, Miss Saint Clair? My boy would like to hear you say it." And I was awful sorry for Miss Saint Clair. I wanted to get into my bunk and zip it closed over my head to get away, but I couldn't move or make a sound because I didn't want Ma to turn and look at me with that cold look.

The girl whispered something again, with her gold hair over her face and crouched down to the floor and started crying.

Ma said, "She said No, Abe. She don't think she is good enough for you. She don't want to marry you."

"I'm going to marry her anyhow!" Abe roared suddenly and he was standing straight and tall past the zero spin center, looking down at us from awful high up, and he looked awful big and awful mad. "I know what's good for her. And I'm going to get her out of that Gambling Dance Hall away from those dirty fingering drunks that say dirty words to a sweet girl. It's no place for Sylvy. She needs good people around her that treat her nice. You ain't treating her nice and kind, Ma, and I'm ashamed of you."

He looked as tall as God.

Ma looked from him down to the crouched crying girl in Harriet's bathrobe and Ma's face crinkled up like she was going to cry. "I'm not treating her nice. You're right, Abe, I'm not."

She started crying and bent over the girl, patting her shoulder. "Abe, sit down honey, before you get dizzy."

Ma pulled at the girl's shoulder, trying to get her to look up. "Girl, child, you're welcome here. Don't be scared. Have a cup of hot chocolate. I just ain't used to strangers."

We pulled over some cushions and Abe sat down next to the girl and Ma sent Harriet to get some brandy and I ran to pour hot water into the chocolate powder and honey, and we all sat on cushions on the floor in a circle and passed cookies, and Ma let us each have a little cup of the hot chocolate and brandy she mixed up for Sylvy. It tasted strange, but the girl pushed her hair back so we could see she was smiling and looking at each one of us, though her face was still a little red around the eyes.

A meteorite hit the side of the house with a clang, but we ignored it because we were happy. You live in the Asteroid Belt you gotta expect some gravel. Ma said, "Tell us about Georgia on Earth, Miss

Sylvy."

Ma's voice sounded sort of far away and dim, like the air was thinning. I thought it was the brandy changing my ears, but I looked over to the safetypatch balloons and saw that the whole cluster of them near the airlock that usually hung limp were puffing up round and one was already floating free carrying its big flat patch. Another pebble or something hit the side of the house with a loud clang.

I jumped up and yelled loud, "We're losing air. We're losing air," and my voice sounded soft and far away because there wasn't enough air to carry it.

Everyone jumped up and grabbed a handful of feathers and a balloon. Abe passed a handful of feathers and a balloon to the three little kids. Then he began to check out the airlock and the gear storage section around the airlock tunnel for holes. I went to my section I always check out in air drill, the floor around the aquarium where the sunlight comes pouring in through the green algae and seaweed and reflecting off the silver fish. I could see the water level was still up in the aquarium so I just let a trickle of feathers out of my fingers in the whole floor circle at the foot of the aquarium, looking for a draft.

Harriet let out a hoot. She'd been checking the garden and she was pointing to a hissing big hole in the dirt between the dandelions and oats with a pile of white feathers trying to suck in. Same time, Bobby and Renee let out a double yell where they'd found a hole under the bunks. I heard the slap and clunk as they let a balloon suck through their hole and pull its sticky patch into place, and then I was helping Beatrice dig the dirt away from her hole while Ma and Abe tried to get the hole plugged with a tapered cork until the steel bottom was clean enough for a steel patch. Then we stood panting and quiet, dizzy from running with not enough air, while the emergency air tanks popped their valves and hissed air slowly back up to normal.

The piglets were lying on their sides panting, and the whole place was white with feathers, like a picture of a snowstorm on Earth. We hadn't taken a minute and Sylvy sat holding a cup of hot chocolate with white feathers all over her, looking surprised.

We didn't get another minute. There was another clang and a roar that sounded something like a big voice shouting. Harriet and I dived on the spot that clanged and I got there first with my balloon and let the new hole pull the balloon through and pull the patch up tight.

The big voice roared again. "Saint Clair, ten minutes before . . ." was all I could make out. The rest was roar.

"It's a Magnetic talk beam," Abe said. "Maybe the radio's not working. Maybe somebody out there's trying to talk to us."

"You mean somebody's out there shooting at us," Ma said. "Everybody get into pressure suits. Joey, turn on the radio."

"It's broken, Ma," I said. "I mean I took parts out of it to make another videotape player cause Harriet always wants to watch love stories."

"Put it back together and get it going. Right now. Never mind the pressure suit," Ma commanded and turned to Abe. "Abe, are the police after this girl?"

Abe and Sylvy were crouched down helping the two little kids get into their pressure suits and get their air helmets zipped tight. Abe shook his head. "No, Ma, these are bad men. Sylvy signed a contract to work for a year for to pay back space transportation and training in being a singer and dancer. They won't let her quit. They sent these men to catch her and bring her back and make her dance with her clothes off for drunk men."

Ma stiffened up. She looked at me fiercely. "Radio going yet?" I finished plugging a part in and it all hummed. "Yes, Ma."

"Tell them she's going to stay here. She's not going back there. Tell them we'll let them talk to her over the radio if they promise to be polite and talk to her like gentlemen."

I tuned around the dial until I hit a loud hum. I tuned into the middle of the hum and pushed the send button. Ma was angry and so I let myself talk as angry as I was. "You out there, the spaceboat shooting at our barrelhouse. My mother says you can't talk to Sylvy without you being more polite. Anyhow, we're not letting you take her away. Not if she wants to stay here." Ma nodded at me and brought over my pressure suit. She watched until I let go of send so they couldn't hear her on the radio then she said,

"Bandit drill. Stall them, Joey. Use strategy talk. Reinforcements."

The little kids started running and yelling, "Bandits! Bandits!" because they always liked the bandit drill games. Ma had rehearsed us on bandit drill every Fourth of July, Mayday, and Veterans' Day all our lives. She said every citizen is his own police, and has a patriotic duty to fight bandits and make space safe for other citizens. She said if you didn't fight for your rights you didn't deserve any. We'd get out in space and practice war.

I could hit a moving target two miles away with a light beam two out of three and pretend it was a laser. If I had a real miner's laser the house-sized nuggets floating by would have arrived at the foundry all chopped up.

There was muttering and clangs and noise from the radio and then a voice came in loud. "Who's that? There other people in that rusty old barrel?"

I counted everybody and added one for strategy. "Five kids, and two men and Ma and Sylvia Saint Clair. And we're all her friends. And we're good shots. You can't come in here without a warrant."

Behind me Ma was saying, "Don't use the lasers. Those men probably have reflecter shields. Just launch cargo. Who's the best aim with the syrup?"

The barrelhouse spins for gravity so anything we store on the outside to sell at the trading post will fly off it it's not held on tight. "A little at a time," Ma said. "Fire whenever you're sure it won't miss." She hates to waste good syrup, that we can trade at the store. I took a look behind me and saw Harriet with her eye on the scope, watching a shiny spaceboat, and her hand on the faucet that controlled an outside pipe. Our barrelhouse turned around and the spaceboat swung out of sight and the stars turned by and then the spaceboat began to swing into sight again. Harriet turned the faucet full on and counted three, then turned it off.

Two tough voices were talking to me over the radio. "Kid, we didn't come out here to get into a fight with a bunch of kids and an old lady. We don't want to hurt you, or cut up your house. There won't be any trouble if Miss Saint Clair comes back and gets back to her job."

I put my finger on the talk button. I shouted, "What do you mean, no trouble? My brother works for Belt Foundry. We just used laserflash signal and told the manager at Belt Foundry how you just shot two holes in our house. "They're coming to get you."

I looked back at Ma and she nodded. That's what she meant, strategy talk. Always claim reinforcements are coming. Nobody can see a tight-beam laser message except the person it's aimed at. The men in the spaceboat couldn't be sure I was lying. Belt Foundry men are tough and their boats have cutting lasers that can carve a ship into little pieces.

Sylvia was trying to get to the radio. I pushed her back. "Don't you talk to them, Sylvy. They already talked you into a contract. Don't let them talk to you."

"You don't understand." She was zipping up her pressure suit. "You people could all get killed. Those goons are bad people. I can get out there and give up to them before they start to shoot!"

The men in the spaceboat shouted over the radio. "You just gave us a reason to act tough. We don't have time to be nice! Get into your space suits, we're going to open that barrel up like a slice of cake, and take her."

Abe reached out a long arm and pulled Sylvy away from me and the radio. "Stall him some more, Joey. Negotiate." Ma nodded.

I pushed the send button. "My ma says she'll negotiate with you for better work for Miss Saint Clair. She should sign a contract for doing something else she likes better."

The radio sputtered and burbled. "Our terms. Damn, something . . . burble . . . We were sent to bring the gurble back, not negotiate no curble, gurble." It turned to a frying noise.

I figure the syrup had gotten to them and was sticking up their radio antenna surfaces. Abe let out a big last dose of syrup as we spun around again, and we could see the spaceboat wasn't shiny any more. It was covered with streaks of sticky-looking foam. The syrup was foaming in space, and drying out to something like crunch molasses candy, on the boat, all over its view lenses. There isn't much in the world that will dissolve hard molasses.

After a while of us watching, the boat started going slowly around and around like a pinwheel, so the

molasses was into something else.

Abe took a special laser rig we had in a back locker, and recorded a help message on it with our orbit coordinates and the story about the men from the gambling place, Jason's Emporium, and what they'd done to our house. He set it up outside the airlock to track the signal radio flashes from the Belt Foundry and flash back.

About an hour later two very big, tough tractor tugs armed with front-end cutters and handlers arrived and hovered on our view screens like giant lobsters. They talked with Abe. I mean the engineers in them talked with Abe while we kids danced around and begged for a ride inside a tug. Then the tugs sliced off all the gun barrels that were sticking out of the spaceboat and one tug towed the spaceboat off toward Jason's Emporium and the other engineer stayed and said he'd take Abe and Sylvy off toward the Belt Foundry to get married.

The engineer explained to Abe that the Foundry would loan him money to buy Sylvy's contract from the gambling hall. They said that other men had had to buy their wives' contracts. The company had gotten used to giving out loans for a man to get a wife. Besides, they needed girls over at the Foundry to do office and thinking type work and brighten the place up. Sylvy could get a job there. They said everybody at the Belt Foundry agreed they needed to have more women around.

She and Abe went off together and left the place kind of empty, but after a while the piglets started chasing each other around faster than ever and we started laughing and the place seemed crowded enough after all.

Ma lets me visit Abe and my new sister Sylvy almost every weekend. The Belt Foundry living barrel is so big it has three floor levels, each with a different gravity and a gymnasium with zero G to fly in at the center. Abe won't let me look into the men's lounge because he promised Ma, but I look in sometimes while I'm waiting for him and Sylvy to come down from their room, and I see men playing cards, and Ping-Pong and pool, and drinking and laughing and watching a huge screen video and telly. And every time a commercial comes on it's either advertising Sam's Spacesuits or Jason's Emporium, Turkish Bath, Massage and Fun Palace. When it advertises Jason's Emporium where Sylvy came from, it always shows pictures of lots of girls dancing, wearing nothing but jewelry and long beautiful hair like Sylvy when I first saw her.

When Abe and Sylvy came down Abe looked very happy but he pulled me away from the door to the lounge. He said he promised Ma. Ma won't even let Harriet come visit at all. She has to stay home, even though she's fifteen and I'm only eleven. I guess there's some advantage in being a man.

When I grow up and get a job at Belt Foundry, I'll go to Jason's Emporium, like Abe did, and rescue a girl.

I'm studying hard to be an Engineer.

SYNDROME JOHNNY

It's not what the world does to us, it's what we do to each other. It might be considered a favor to the average man to make him die for a cause, such as improvement of the race, rather than let him die peacefully and uselessly of old age. Any mad scientist would agree it would, but the peasants are always mobbing together with torches and clubs and scythes, and indicating that they disagree.

The blood was added to a pool of other blood, mixed, centrifuged, separated to plasma and corpuscles, irradiated slightly, pasteurised slightly, frozen, evaporated, and finally banked. Some of the plasma was used immediately for a woman who had bled too much in childbirth.

She died.

Others received plasma and did not die. But their symptoms changed, including a syndrome of multiple endocrine unbalance, eccentricities of appetite and digestion, and a general pattern of emotional disturbance.

An alert hospital administrator investigated the mortality rise and narrowed it to a question of who had

donated blood the week before. After city residents were eliminated, there remained only the signed receipts and thumbprints of nine men. Nine healthy unregistered travellers poor enough to sell their blood for money, and among them a man who carried death in his veins. The nine thumbprints were broadcast to all police files and a search began.

The effort was futile, for there were many victims who had sickened and grown partially well again without recognising the strangeness of their illness.

Three years later they reached the carrier stage and the epidemic spread to four cities. Three more years, and there was an epidemic which spread around the world, meeting another wave coming from the opposite direction. It killed two out of four, fifty out of a hundred, twenty-seven million out of fifty million. There was hysteria where it appeared. And where it had not appeared there were quarantines to fence it out. But it could not be fenced out. For two years it covered the world. And then it vanished again, leaving the survivors with a tendency towards glandular troubles.

Time passed. The world grew richer, more orderly, more peaceful,

A man paused in the midst of his work at the U.N. Food and Agriculture Commission. He looked up at the red and green production map of India.

"Just too many people per acre," he said. "All our work at improving production . . . just one jump ahead of their rising population, one jump ahead of famine. Sometimes I wish to God there would be another plague to give us a breathing spell and a fair chance to get things organised."

He went back to work and added another figure.

Two months later, he was one of the first victims of the second plague.

In the dining hall of a university, a biochemical student glanced up from his paper to his breakfast companion. "You remember Johnny, the mythical carrier that they told about during the first and second epidemics of Syndrome Plague?"

"Sure. Syndrome Johnny. They use that myth in psychology class as a typical example of mass hysteria. When a city was nervous and expecting the plague to reach it, some superstitious fool would imagine he saw Syndrome Johnny and the population would panic. Symbol for Death or some such thing. People imagined they saw him in every corner of the world. Simultaneously, of course."

It was a bright morning and they were at a window which looked out across green rolling fields to a towering glass-brick building in the distance.

The student who had gone back to his paper suddenly looked up again. "Some Peruvians here claim they saw Syndrome Johnny– "

"Idiotic superstition! You'd think it would have died when the plague died."

The other grinned. "The plague didn't die." He folded his newspaper slowly, obviously advancing an opening for a debate.

His companion went on eating. "Another of your wild theories, huh?" Then through a mouthful of food: "All right, if the plague didn't die, where did it go?"

"Nowhere. *We have it now.* We all have it!" He shrugged. "A virus catalyst of high affinity for the cells and a high similarity to a normal cell protein – how can it be detected?"

"Then why don't people die? Why aren't we sick?"

"Because we have sickened and recovered. We caught it on conception and recovered before birth. Proof? Why do you think that the countries which were known as the Hungry Lands are now well-fed, leisured, educated, advanced? Because the birth rate has fallen! Why has the birth rate fallen?" He paused, then very carefully said, "Because two out of three of all people who would have lived have died before birth, slain by Syndrome Plague. We are all carriers now, hosts to a new guest. And" – his voice dropped to a mock sinister whisper –"with such a stranger within our cells, at the heart of the intricate machinery of our lives, who knows what subtle changes have crept upon us unnoticed!"

His companion laughed. "Eat your breakfast. You belong on a horror programme!"

A police psychologist for the Federated States of The Americas was running through reports from the Bureau of Social Statistics. Suddenly he grunted, then a moment later said, "Uh-huh!"

"Uh-huh what?" asked his superior, who was reading a newspaper with his feet up on the desk.

"Remember the myth of Syndrome Johnny?"

"Ghost of Syndrome Plague. Si, what of it?"

"Titaquahapahel, Peru, population nine hundred, sent in a claim that he turned up there and they almost caught him. Crime Statistics rerouted the report to Mass Phenomena, of course. Mass Phenomena blew a tube and sent their folder on Syndrome Johnny over here. Every report they ever had on him for ninety

years back! A memo came with it." He handed the memo over.

The man behind the desk looked at it. It was a small graph and some mathematical symbols. "What is it?"

"It means," said the psychologist, smiling dryly, "that every crazy report about our ghost has points of similarity to every other crazy report. The whole business of Syndrome Johnny has been in their "funny coincidence" file for twenty years. This time the suspect hits the averaged description of Johnny too closely: A solid-looking man, wide-boned, five-eight, one eighty, unusual number of visible minor scars, especially on the face and hands, and a disturbing habit of bending his fingers at the first-joint knuckles when he is thinking. The coincidence has gotten too damn funny. There's a chance we've been passing up a crime."

"An extensive crime," said the man at the desk softly. He reached for the folder. "Yes, a considerable quantity of murder." He leafed through the folder and then thought a while, looking at the most recent reports. Thinking was what he was paid for, and he earned his excellent salary.

"This thumbprint on the hotel register – the name is false, but the thumbprint looks real. Could we persuade the Bureau of Records to give their data on that print?"

"Without a warrant? Against constitutional immunity. No, not a chance. The public has been touchy about the right to secrecy ever since that police state was attempted in Varga."

"How about persuading an obliging judge to give a warrant on grounds of reasonable suspicion?"

"No. We'd have the humanist press down on our necks in a minute, and any judge knows it. We'd have to prove a crime was committed. No crime, no warrant."

"It seems a pity we can't even find out who the gentleman is," the Crimes Department head murmured, looking at the thumbprint wistfully. "No crime, no records. No records, no evidence. No evidence, no proof of crime. Therefore, we must manufacture a small crime. He was attacked and he must have defended himself. Someone may have been hurt in the process." He pushed a button. "Do you think if I send a man down there, he could persuade one of the mob to swear out a complaint?"

"That's a rhetorical question," said the psychologist, trying to work out an uncertain correlation in his reports. "With that sort of mob hysteria, the town would probably give you an affidavit of witchcraft."

"Phone for you, Doctor Alcala." The nurse was crisp but quiet, smiling down at the little girl before vanishing again.

Ricardo Alcala pushed the plunger in gently, then carefully withdrew the hypodermic needle from the little girl's arm. "There you are, Cosita," he said, smiling and rising from the chair beside the white bed.

"Will that make me better, Doctor?" she piped feebly.

He patted her hand. "Be a good girl and you will be well tomorrow." He walked out into the hospital corridor to where the desk nurse held out a phone.

"Alcala speaking."

The voice was unfamiliar. "My deepest apologies for interrupting your work, Doctor. At this late hour I'm afraid I assumed you would he at home. The name is Camba, Federation Investigator on a health case. I would like to consult you."

Alcala was tired, but there was nothing to do at home. Nita was at the health resort and Johnny had borrowed all his laboratory space for a special synthesis of some sort, and probably would be too busy even to talk. Interest stirred in him. This was a Federation Investigator calling; the man's work was probably important. "Tonight, if that's convenient. I'll be off duty in five minutes."

Thirty minutes later they were ordering in a small cantina down the street from the hospital.

Julio Camba, Federal Investigator, was a slender, dark man with sharp, glinting eyes. He spoke with a happy theatrical flourish.

"Order what you choose, Senor. We're on my expense account. The resources of the Federated States of all The Americas stand behind your menu."

Alcala smiled. "I wouldn't want to add to the national debt."

"Not at all, Senor. The Federated States are only too happy thus to express a fraction of their gratitude by adding a touch of luxury to the otherwise barren and self-sacrificing life of a scientist."

"You shame me," Alcala said dryly. It was true that he needed every spare penny for the health of Nita and the child, and for the laboratory. A penny saved from being spent on nourishment was a penny earned. He picked up the menu again and ordered steak.

The investigator lit a cigar, asking casually: "Do you know John Osborne Drake?"

Alcala searched his memory. "No. I'm sorry ... " Then he felt for the first time how closely he was being watched, and knew how carefully his reaction and the tone of his voice had been analysed. The

interview was dangerous. For some reason, he was suspected of something.

Camba finished lighting the cigar and dropped the match into an ashtray. “Perhaps you know John Delgados?” He leaned back into the shadowy corner of the booth.

Johnny! Out of all the people in the world, how could the government be interested in him? Alcala tried to sound casual. “An associate of mine. A friend.”

I would like to contact the gentleman.” The request was completely unforceful, undemanding. “I called, but he was not at home. Could you tell me where he might be?”

“I’m sorry, Senor Camba, but I cannot say. He could be on a business trip.” Alcala was feeling increasingly nervous. Actually, Johnny was working at his laboratory. “What do you know of his activities?” Camba asked.

“A biochemist.” Alcala tried to see past the meditative mask of the thin dark face. “He makes small job-lots of chemical compounds. Special bug spray for sale to experimental plantations, hormone spray for fruits, that sort of thing. Sometimes, when he collects some money ahead, he does research.”

Camba waited, and his silence became a question. Alcala spoke reluctantly, anger rising in him. “Oh, it’s genuine research. He has some patents and publications to his credit. You can confirm that if you choose.” He was unable to keep the hostility out of his voice.

A waiter came and placed steaming platters of food on the table. Camba waited until he was gone. “You know him well, I presume. Is he sane?”

The question was another shock. Alcala thought carefully, for any man might be insane in secret. “Yes, so far as I know.” He turned his attention to the steak, but first took three very large capsules from a bottle in his pocket.

“I would not expect that a doctor would need to take pills,” Cunha remarked with friendly mockery.

“I don’t need them,” Alcala explained. “Mixed silicones. I’m guinea-pigging.”

“Can’t such things be left to the guinea-pigs?” Camba asked, watching with revulsion as Alcala uncapped the second bottle and sprinkled a layer of grey powder over his steak.

“Guinea-pigs have no assimilation of silicones; only man has that.”

“Yes, of course. I should have remembered from your famous papers, *The Need Of Trace Silicon In Human Diet* and *Silicon Deficiency Diseases.”*

Obviously Camba had done considerable investigating of Alcala before approaching him. He had even given the titles of the research papers correctly. Alcala’s wariness increased.

“What is the purpose of the experiment this time?” asked the small dark Federation agent genially.

“To determine the safe limits of silicon consumption and if there are any dangers in an overdose.”

“How do you determine that? By dropping dead?”

He could be right. Perhaps the test should be stopped. Every day, with growing uneasiness, Alcala took his dose of silicon compound, and every day, the chemical seemed to be absorbed completely – not released or excreted– in a way that was unpleasantly reminiscent of the way arsenic accumulated without evident damage, then killed abruptly without warning.

Already, this evening, he had noticed that there was something faulty about his co-ordination and weight and surface sense. The restaurant door had swung hack with a curious lightness, and the hollow metal handle had had a curious softness under his fingers. Something merely going wrong with the sensitivity of his fingers–?

He tapped his fingertips on the heavy indestructible silicone plastic table top. There was a feeling of heaviness in his hands, and a feeling of faint rubbery *give* in the table.

Tapping his fingers gently, his “heavy fingers . . . the answer was dreamily fantastic. *I’m turning into silicon plastic myself,* he thought. But how, why? He had not bothered to be curious before, but the question had always been – what were supposedly insoluble silicons doing assimilating into the human body at all?

Several moments passed. He smoothed back his hair with his oddly heavy hand before picking up his fork again. “I’m turning into plastic,” he told Camba.

“I beg your pardon?”

“Nothing. A joke.”

Camba was turning into plastic, too. Everyone was. But the effect was accumulating slowly.

Camba lay down his knife and started in again. “What connections have you had with John Delgados?”

Concentrate on the immediate situation. Alcala and Johnny were obviously in danger of, some sort of mistaken arrest and interrogation.

As Alcala focused on the question, one errant whimsical thought suddenly flitted through the back of his mind. In red advertising letters; TRY OUR NEW MODEL RUSTPROOF, WATERPROOF, HEAT & SCALD RESISTANT, STRONG, EXTRA-LONG-WEARING HUMAN BEING!

He laughed inwardly and finally answered: “Friendship. Mutual interest in high ion colloidial suspensions and complex synthesis.” Impatience suddenly mastered him. “Exactly what is it you wish to know, Senor? Perhaps I could inform you if I knew the reasons for your interest.”

Camba chose a piece of salad with great care. “We have reason to believe that he is Syndrome Johnny.”

Alcala waited for the words to clarify. After a moment, it ceased to be childish babble and became increasingly shocking. He remembered the first time he had met John Delgados, the smile, the strong handclasp. “Call me Johnny,” he had said. It had seemed no more than a nickname.

The investigator was watching his expression with bright brown eyes.

Johnny, yes ... but not Syndrome Johnny. He tried to think of some quick refutation. “The whole thing is preposterous, Senor Camba. The myth of Syndrome Plague Johnny started about a century ago.”

“Doctor Alcala” – the small man in the grey suit was tensely sober – “John Delgados is very old, and John Delgados, is not his proper name. I have traced his life back and back, through older and older records in Argentina, Panama, South Africa, the United States, China, Canada. Everywhere he has paid his taxes properly, put his fingerprints on file as a good citizen should. And he changed his name every twenty years, applying to the courts for permission with good honest reasons for changing his name. Everywhere he has been a laboratory worker, held patents, sometimes made a good deal of money. He is one hundred and forty years old. His first income tax was paid in 1970, exactly one hundred and twenty years ago.”

“Other men are that old,” said Alcala.

“Other men are old, yes. Those who survived the two successive plagues were unusually durable.” Camba finished and pushed hack his plate. “There is no crime in being long-lived, surely. But he has changed his name five times!”

“That proves nothing. Whatever his reasons for changing his name, it doesn’t prove that he is Syndrome Johnny any more than it proves he is the cow that jumped over the moon. Syndrome Johnny is a myth, a figment of mob delirium.”

As he said it, he knew it was not true. A Federation Investigator would not be on a wild goose chase.

The plates were taken away and cups of steaming black coffee put between them. He would have to warn Johnny. It was strange how well you could know a man as well as he knew Johnny, firmly enough to believe that, despite evidence, everything the man did was right.

“Why must it he a myth?” Camba asked softly.

“It’s ridiculous!” Alcala protested. “Why would any man –” His voice cut off as unrelated facts fell into a pattern. He sat for a moment, thinking intensely, seeing the century of plague as something he had never dreamed .

A price.

Not too high a price in the long run, considering what was purchased. Of course, the great change over into silicon catalysis would be a shock and require adjustment and, of course, the change must be made in several easy stages – and those who could not adjust would die.

“Go on, Doctor,” Camba urged softly. *"Why* would any man – " “

He tried to find a way of explaining which would not seem to have any relationship to John Delgados. “It has been recently discovered” – but he did not say *how* recently – “that the disease of Syndrome Plague was not a disease. It is an improvement.” He had spoken clumsily.

“An improvement on life?” Camba laughed and nodded, but there were bitterness and anger burning behind the small man’s smile. “People can be improved to death by the millions. Yes, yes, go on, Senor. You fascinate me.”

“We are stronger,” Alcala told him. “We are changed chemically. The race has been improved!”

“Come, Doctor Alcala,” Camba said with a sneering merriment, “the Syndrome Plagues have come and they have gone. Where is this change?”

Alcala tried to express it clearly. “We are stronger. Potentially, we are tremendously stronger. But we of this generation are still weak and ill, as our parents were, from the shock of the change. And we need silicone feeding; we have not adjusted yet. Our illness masks our strength.” He thought of what that strength would be!

Camba smiled and took out a small notebook. The disease is connected with silicones, you say? The original name of Delgados was John Osborne Drake. His father was Osborne Drake, a chemist at Dow Corning, who was sentenced to the electric chair in 1967 for unauthorised bacterial experiments which

resulted in an accidental epidemic and eight deaths. Dow Corning was the first major manufactory of silicones in America, though not connected in any way with Osborne Drake"s criminal experiments. It links together, does it not?"

"It is not a disease, it is strength!" Alcala insisted doggedly.

The small investigator looked up from his notebook and his smile was an unnatural thing, a baring of teeth. "Half the world died of this strength, Senor. If you will not think of the men and women, think of the children. Millions of children died!"

The waiter brought the bill, dropping it on the table between them.

"Lives will be saved in the long run," Alcala said obstinately. "Individual deaths are not important in the long run."

"That is hardly the philosophy for a doctor, is it?" asked Camba with open irony, taking the bill and rising.

They went out of the restaurant in silence. Camba's 'copter stood at the kerb.

"Would you care for a lift home, Doctor Alcala?" The offer was made with the utmost suavity.

Alcala hesitated fractionally. "Why, yes, thank you." It would not do to give the investigator any reason for suspicion by refusing.

As the 'copter lifted into the air, Camba spoke with a more friendly note in his voice, as if he humoured a child. "Come, Alcala, you're a doctor dedicated to saving lives. How can you find sympathy for a murderer?"

Alcala sat in, the dark, looking through the windshield down at the bright street falling away below. "I'm not a practicing medico; only one night a week do I come to the hospital. I'm a research man. I don't try to save individual lives. I'm dedicated to improving the average life, the average health. Can you understand that? Individuals may be sick and individuals may die, but the average lives on. And if the average is better, then I'm satisfied."

The "copter flew on. There was no answer.

"I'm not good with words," said Alcala. Then, taking out his pen-knife and unfolding it, he said, "Watch!" He put his index finger on the altimeter dial, where there was light, and pressed the blade against the flesh between his finger and his thumb. He increased the pressure until the flesh stood out white on either side of the blade, bending, but not cut.

"Three generations back, this pressure would have gone right through the hand." He took away the blade and there was only a very tiny cut. Putting the knife away, he brought out his lighter. The blue flame was steady and hot. Alcala held it close to the dashboard and put his finger directly over it, counting patiently, "One, two, three, four, five –" He pulled the lighter back, snapping it shut.

"Three generations ago, a man couldn't have held a finger over that flame for more than a tenth part of that count. Doesn't all this prove something to you?"

The 'copter was hovering above Alcala's house. Camba lowered it to the ground and opened the door before answering. "It proves only that a good and worthy man will cut and burn his hand for an unworthy friendship. Goodnight."

Disconcerted, Alcala watched the "copier lift away into the night, then, turning, saw that the lights were still on in the laboratory. Camba might have deduced something from that, if he knew that Nita and the girl were not supposed to be home.

Alcala hurried in.

Johnny hadn't left yet. He was sitting at Alcala's desk with his feet on the wastebasket, the way Alcala often liked to sit, reading a technical journal. He looked up, smiling. For a moment Alcala saw him with the new clarity of a stranger. The lean, weathered face; brown eyes with smile deltas at the corners; wide shoulders; steady, big hands holding the magazine – solid, able, and ruthless enough to see what had to be done, and do it.

"I was waiting for you, Ric."

"The Feds are after you." Ricardo Alcala had been running. He found he was panting and his heart was pounding.

Delgados" smile did not change. "It's all right, Ric. Everything's done. I can leave any time now." He indicated a square metal box standing in a corner. "There's the stuff."

What stuff? The product Johnny had been working on? "You haven't time for that now, Johnny. You can't sell it. They'd watch for anyone of your description selling chemicals. Let me loan you some money."

"Thanks." Johnny was smiling oddly. "Everything's set. I won't need it. How close are they to finding

me?"

"They don't know where you're staying." Alcala leaned on the desk edge and put out his hand. "They tell me you're Syndrome Johnny."

"I thought you'd figured that one out." Johnny shook his hand formally. "The name is John Osborne Drake. You aren't horrified?"

"No," Alcala knew that he was shaking hands with a man who would be thanked down all the successive generations of mankind. He noticed again the odd white webwork of scars on the back of Johnny's hand. He indicated them as casually as he could. "Where did you pick those up?"

John Drake glanced at his hand. "I don't know, Ric. Truthfully. I've had my brains beaten in too often to remember much any more. Unimportant. There are instructions outlining plans and methods filed in safety deposit boxes in almost every big city in the world. Always the same typing, always the same instructions. I can't remember who typed them, myself or my father, but I must have been expected to forget or they wouldn't be there. Up to eleven, my memory is all right, but after Dad started to remake me, everything gets fuzzy."

"After he did *what?"*

Johnny smiled tiredly and rested his head on one hand. "He had to remake me chemically, you know. How could I spread change without being changed myself? I couldn't have two generations to adapt to it naturally like you, Ric. It had to be done artificially. It took years. You understand? I'm a community, a construction. The cells that carry on the silicon metabolism in me are not human. Dad adapted them for the purpose. I helped, but I can't remember any longer how it was done. Memory can't be pasted together."

John Drake rose and looked around the laboratory with something like triumph. "They're too late. I made it, Ric. There's the catalyst cooling over there. This is the last step. I don't think I'll survive this plague, but I'll last long enough to set it going for the finish. The police won't stop me until it's too late."

Another plague!

The last one had been before Alcala was born. He had not thought that Johnny would start another. It was a shock.

Alcala walked over to the cage where he kept his white mice and looked in, trying to sort out his feelings. The white mice looked back with beady bright eyes, caged, not knowing they were waiting to be experimented upon.

A timer clicked and John Delgados-Drake became all rapid efficient activity, moving from valve" to valve. It lasted a hall minute or less, then Drake had finished stripping off the hit whites to his street clothes. He picked up the square metal box containing the stuff he had made, tucked it under his arm and held out a solid hand again to Alcala.

"Goodbye, Ric. Wish, me luck. Close up the lab for me, will you?"

Alcala took the hand numbly and mumbled something, turned back to the cages and stared blindly at the mice. Drake's brisk footsteps clattered down the stairs.

Another step forward for the human race.

God knew what wonders for the race were in that box. Perhaps something for nerve construction, something for the mind – the last and most important step. He should have asked.

There came at last a pressure that was a thought emerging from the depth of intuition. *Doctor Ricardo Alcala will die in the next plague, he and his ill wife Nita and his ill little girl ... And the name of Alcala will die forever as a weak strain blotted from the bloodstream of the race . . .*

He'd find out what was in the box by dying of it!

He tried to reason it out, but only could remember that Nita, already sickly, would have no chance. And Alcala's family genes, in attempting to adapt to the previous steps, had become almost sterile. It had been difficult having children. The next step would mean complete sterility. The name of Alcala would die. The future might be wonderful, but it would not be *his* future!

"Johnny!" he called suddenly, something like an icy lump hardening in his chest. How long had it been since Johnny had left?

Running, Alcala went down the long half-lit stairs, out the back door and along the dark path towards the place where Johnny's 'copter had been parked.

A light shone through the leaves ahead. He stooped and picked up a rock, and ran on.

"Johnny!"

John Osborne Drake was putting his suitcase into the rear of the "copter.

"What is it, Ric?" he asked in a friendly voice without turning.

"For Nina," Alcala thought as he swung the rock. Stone struck, crunched, sinking in. The doctor had forgotten his new strength and was dimly surprised at the fragility of bone in a skull. He raised an arm to strike again but the figure before him slowly sank down to its knees, then tilted forward on its face, half kneeling. Alcala waited, but there was no further motion.

His terror ebbed, and the darkness cleared from before his eyes. A night cricket was chirping with a friendly intermittent note. Alcala hurled the rock violently away.

A police siren wailed in the distance. The crouching dead figure slowly fell over sidewise. The wail of sirens approached –the police coming to arrest a criminal who had spread disease.

Alcala was surprised to find himself unharmed. He had thought Johnny was capable, but the big scarred figure was motionless, battered head hanging limply among the twigs of a bush, big curled fingers resting on earth. A doctor sees many such dead. The worker was dead.

"Just one death can stop the killing," Alcala said. He snarled down at the body suddenly and ferociously. "What did you expect – gratitude?"

The date on this one is 1951. Scientists are moving along the time line, using piggyback virus for gene splicing, right on schedule, but they haven't yet (1978) exposed human antibody tissue to germs for germ resistance, and put the educated tissues back into a child, Johnny said he was a composite; his father operated on him. But he was mumbling and his mouth is stopped with clay.

TROUBLE WITH TREATIES

by Katherine MacLean and Tom Condit

Soldier of fortune Patrick Meade asked me—"If you came face to face with a leopard on a narrow mountain trail, a cliff above and a cliff below, what would you do?"

"Is it a leopard cat?" I asked, because cats are cold gamblers. "All cats are cats. Leopards and tigers are big housecats." said Uncle Pat, who was an expert.

"Is the leopard above or below?" I hedged, wondering if there were a big rock handy to roll at it, to avoid the gamble. "Above."

"I'd scream and charge straight at it," I said.

So if you were a shipful of unarmed pacifists, suddenly face to face with an alien war ship run by clever imperialist generals...

Third Officer Llyllw, officer on watch of the scoutship *Wllyll'n* stared at the small object on the screen with a faintly puzzled expression on his furry face. The shape of the object failed to match any of the spaceships in his handbook, and yet it was undeniably a ship.

He reached for a phone circuit to call his superior officer, and then stopped without completing the move. Usually his thoughts were slow, but his conclusions were generally extremely accurate, and, as the commendation he had received last year put it, "most orderly."

Unidentified ship! All ships within the Empire of Erdig the Omnipotent were built to standard types. This ship could not be from any conquered part of the Empire. This meant an unconquered alien species, another world to be Brought to Order. It was an historic moment. Quietly, hoping that his superior officer would not appear behind him, he put tracers and radar amplifiers on the alien ship, and recorded the event in the bridge log, adding his name and the time with careful precision. It would pay to have his name connected with the discovery. It would make a good counterbalance to a reprimand, and he could see a reprimand coming up.

He turned again to the screen for a quick glance. The ship, now enlarged to seem larger and clearer, was very alien in design. He visualized alien beings inside, innocently pursuing their course, unaware that their chaotic lives were doomed to be Brought to Order. He remembered the delightful humbleness and obedience of slaves who had fueled their ship at the Thirty-Second World Brought to Order. It made a man feel good, having slaves around. The realization of the sacred Nifni mission to Bring Order out of Chaos spread a warm glow through him.

Journeyman Telepath Martin Jukovsky, of the exploration ship Kemal A ta turk, five months out of Pluto and bound ingalaxy, suddenly sat up and dropped his magazine. The green parrot on his shoulder lost its balance and flew away in squawking indignation.

"Hawwrrk! Angular Trisection! Awwrrk! Help! Help!"

"Shush up," said Jukovsky absently, searching for the trail of strange thoughts he had crossed so briefly. Something about Order out of Chaos...Had someone on the ship gone mad? The thought had a very strange feeling about power over people, and a mixture of terror and triumph... He found the flavor again, and thought rapidly along the fading trail of faint thought, trying to think and feel like that, tuning in, establishing an empathy. Suddenly he was tuned in, the other's personality swirling into his mind in a hammerblow of frightened emotions and cold calculating thoughts.

[Slaves (pleasure)... Alien Ship on screen ... Reprimand? (fear) Promotion (fear)... *War...Bring to* Order...What on Earth did that mean? Where was—Alien Ship... (emotions)]

"Holy Dancing Dervish!" Jukovsky gasped, and ran barefooted to the control room to push the emergency alarm button.

Bells jangled throughout the A ta fork. The helmsman leaped to his feet. "Hey, that's the emergency alarm," he shouted over the din. "Hey, Jukovsky, what's the idea?"

"Spaceship!" Jukovsky made a preoccupied gesture and lowered himself into a chair and started on the difficult task of tuning the other telepaths on board to the thoughts he was tracing. They came in—first Tewazi, Zorn and Candleman in a blast of curiosity, and then Hahn, disengaging himself from some far-off thought to slide in with the rest. He knew each of them, could feel as he came in: Tewazi, coolly analytical, organizing information; Zorn inquisitively searching and tracing; Candleman eagerly grasping; Hahn watching, emotions—so quiet he seemed completely unemotional—permeating his thought. They gripped and followed the thought trail.

On board the *Wllyll'n,* Third Officer Lyllw was beginning to feel his fur prickle with an eerie sensation of being watched. He looked hastily over his shoulder and saw nobody. He reached for the general-alarm cord. It should have been pulled the instant the alien ship was identified as alien, but he could be executed for pulling it without orders. It was time to call the Second Officer, or even the Captain. He could be questioned about the delay. Llyllw gripped his courage and went a step closer to insubordination. With a steady hand he flipped the switch that awoke the ship's main computer.

The computer, Infallible Regulations and Advice, was usually used for navigation and landings, but it was also the ship's authority for military regulations, precedents, and all rulings of his Exalted Omnipotence Erdig, Supreme Ruler of Nll'ni and Lord of Creation. The Infallible could check and recognize screen images of all known ships, and should be able to cope with an unknown ship. There were, after all, a number of regulations and precedents dealing with the Bringing to Order of an alien species.

He waited. The ship's screens blinked as the big computer cut into them and started watching. He waited another instant, wondering if the computer would react. His life hung in balance.

The alarm buzzers went off with a deafening roar. The computer had recognized the emergency. A recorded voice began barking orders over the speaker system. He was safe.

Llyllw took a deep breath and held it while he calculated. Now the Second Officer, the First Officer, the Captain, and the Strategic Captain had been by-passed. They were all going to be angry and out for his blood. He balanced this out against the fact that the Infallible Code would have his actions in its record. If he could keep himself from being executed on some pretext, until the ship returned to base, the High Servants of the Exalted Omnipotence would be well pleased with him,—they liked to have senior officers aware that the Infallible could be consulted and recordings made without their consent—it helped them fear Erdig as they should. A promotion to a different ship...

The computer voice was roaring over the speaker system:

"Full Military Alert. Full Military Alert. Strange Ship sighted. Hold Fire, Await Orders. Repeat Hold Fire, Await Orders. All listed experts, linguists, and personnel with contact experience un-Nll'nian species stand by for direction if off duty. Full Emergency. Repeat. Full Emergency. Ship Command ordered to turn over absolute authority to Strategic Captain. All personnel consult written regulations RMZZ947 on

Bringing To Order of Alien Species."

The First Officer was first onto the bridge, although he had not been closest. He bounded up the ladder from his quarters, roaring, his eyes blurred and his fur matted. Obviously he had been sleeping during a Self-Improvement period.

"Who turned information over to the Infallible?" he snarled glaring around wildly. "You, you're the watch officer! What the idiocy is the idea?"

Llyllw concealed the Nll'ni version of a smile and grovelled politely against a bulkhead, hiding his head.

"My abject apologies, Your Authority. The object was sighted at such a distance that there was no certainty that it was truly a ship. I did not want to disturb my Excellent Superiors for a matter which might be only a criminal error of judgment on my part, so I turned the problem over to the Infallible, to be sure of correct action, if only in my own deserved execution for mistaking a natural object for a ship."

There was a pause while the First considered the case. The regulations allowed the lowest crew member to consult the Infallible any time it was not busy with another problem. It was an insult to one's superiors to take any such action without orders, but technically it was not a personal move, merely a consulting of regulations.

"Face out!" The First had his expression under control and his fur sleeked when Llyllw turned. "Very good, a most patriotic action," the First Officer complimented him stiffly. "Quite correct—by the regulations."

Third Officer Llyllw stiffened and saluted with precision. Behind the expressionless masks each could see the hatred and ambition in the other's eyes. It is a long hard climb to become Captain of a ship, and your fellow officers are very much in your way.

Several thousand miles away, in the other ship, Master Telepath Tewazi muttered half-hysterically as he leafed through the *Handbook of Comparitive Sociology*. "Diu! There must be something like this in here somewhere!"

The four young Journeyman Telepaths were recording full speed on stenotypers, wincing occasionally at the thoughts they were recording....

There was a hush on the bridge of the *WIlyll'n* and everyone grovelled against the bulkheads as Strategic Captain Bryllw hoisted himself up through the hatchway. He was fat and greying, and wore a captain's uniform in purple, indicating a retired captain. He was seldom seen by the others on the ship, passing his time viewing history tapes and playing games of logic with the computer, in private. Retired Captains of much experience and success were the only ones permitted to have the berth of Strategic Captain on a military ship. It was a pleasant way for an old military man to retire, for usually there was nothing to do, except view tapes and work at hobbies.

"Who sighted the ship?" he growled.

Llyllw raised a hand, keeping his face to the bulkhead. "Uh! Get around, all of you. There's more to do than cling to the wall like a flock of Moragais!"

The officers and hands on the bridge stood at trembling attention as Bryllw looked them up and down. They had heard of his reputation as a martinet from the days he had commanded three ships.

"There is an emergency and I shall demand intelligence and skill from you. I know this is asking much, but you will start making an effort to apply your bean-sized brains to the problem of this alien ship."

The Captain's and Officers' hackles rose at the insult, but their expressions did not change and they stared rigidly ahead.

"*You*!" The grizzled Strategic Captain leveled a finger at the Navigation Officer, who was standing trembling in the rank behind the Captain. "Are all star maps prepared to be destroyed or scrambled on four-seconds' notice?"

The unfortunate Navigation Officer swallowed and cleared his throat, "No, Excellency."

"They should be," Bryllw let a silent moment pass while he watched the Navigator inquiringly.

The officer, expecting immediate execution, realized slowly that Bryllw was waiting for something.

"Your pardon, Excellency. May I be dismissed so that I may make preparation to destroy or scramble all star charts?"

"A most sensible plan," Bryllw purred. "Dismissed."

He waited until the unfortunate Navigator was down the ladder. Then he addressed the rigid group. "Believe it or not, oh Assembly of Wisdom, there is a remote possibility that we might have met a species capable of destroying us, and they might want to know where our home planets are."

He directed his glower at the Captain, standing at attention with the others. "Inferior, our ship is now overtaking the alien ship. What do we do when we come within range?"

"Open fire," the Captain snapped, glaring at the wall.

"Brilliant, Your Wisdom. I hope you did not strain you brain irreparably." That was a snarl, only barely disguised as a smile. The smile vanished, and the grizzled Strategic Captain stood back a yard and let out a bellow that made them all jump.

"You miserable imbeciles! That ship contains the only opportunity you will ever have to locate and trace a new species, and add a new planet to the Empire of Erdig. If they have detected us, they might already have destroyed all maps. And you morons want to help them, by using their ship for target practice and blowing it to bits, so that we will never be able to assemble any information from the pieces."

He lowered his voice to a simple tone like an adult explaining to children. "We must talk to them, make sure that they are not afraid of us, you understand? We must—"

He turned abruptly to the Gunnery Officer. "Inferior, your long range guns are already trained on the target, preparing to blow this valuable ship to bits. Am I correct?"

The Gunnery Officer seemed to have difficulty answering. "Gugh, ah Yess, Authority. Military alert..."

"I am glad to see you are so efficient." Bryllw purred. "Are the crews instructed to fire automatically if the defense screens register unusual radiation?"

"Not without further orders, Authority."

"Wonderful! Then this valuable source of information will not be blasted out of space, while I am trying to explain how to seem friendly. It is safe even if they signal us on an unusual wavelength. Wonderful. It must be an accident."

He smiled, a genuine expression, and the trembling group of officers dared to take a few deep breaths and consider them out of danger. "We must go softly in approaching these creatures. We cannot be a warship, we must approach them as civilians, like a trader ship. Please study to act like civilians. Anyone who has associated with civilians or bought from traders in civilian stores please show the others how civilians act. We will be learning their language, humbly so as to trade with them, you understand, and whoever is in front of the viewscreen must seem like a civilian, and very humble and polite. You understand?" He looked at their rigid faces and detected signs of resistance and stood back to bellow again.

"Let us have no show of pride, no signs of Nll'nian superiority. Is that clear? Anyone who gives the slightest indication that this is a warship, or that he personally is accustomed to weapons of war, will be executed—immediately!"

The grizzled warrior looked at the rigid and trembling officers and men with satisfaction. He lowered his bellow to a conversational tone.

"I am going to retire to my quarters and leave the opening moves to you, Captain. Remember that these creatures do not know anything about us, and present to them whatever lie is least alarming. Do not consult the Infallible or make any change of plans without first consulting me."

He smiled at the rigid group. "To save us from the pain and embarrassment of many executions, I will remove the need of your committing errors by conducting the preliminary negotiations myself. Call me as soon as you have managed a rough translation of the alien's language and have the translation machine working."

He descended the ladder clumsily, but he did not look at all ridiculous.

Captain Rablyn moved from his position of frozen attention, and looked after the Strategic Captain with a snarl.

Aboard the Ataturk Master Telepath Tewazi called a conference. He leaned back and shut his eyes as the telepaths about the ship answered the call and turned in with their reactions.

["Hooboy, do they like each other!"
"Like a nest of rattlesnakes."
"He's a tough old bird, that Bryllw."
"Let's get this coordinated a little. Somebody start verbally repeating for Chang. This is his type of situation: he ought to be coordinator." "Too bad he's not a telepath..." "What a nutty culture." "…I'll do it." "We must convince "Like a fruitcake, like our ancestors." Bryllw that we are friendly, so he will
"What?"
leave us alone."
"Leave us alone? You weren't tuned in to "Yes, Look up those nuts. No use trying to get them Authoritarian in the to change their minds." handbook. They never change." "But Gandhi..." "Not correct," (Hahn) "Psy- "He'd like that. Bryllw would like chological reorientation. no resistance...encourage him, to Takes time, though." attack."
"Strange attitude." "Time! ... (obscenity) ..." "Get that Order-Chaos bit? Look up "We don't have time Efficiency Expert. They never change. change him. Outsmart him." "His officers dislike him, "How?" "Find out from him, Crew very favorable though... what would make him Maybe something there...like the leave us alone." Bounty, only different." "I couldn't follow him at all." "What Bounty ..." "(image, impressions)" "Strange at
"Oh." titudes, yes." "He'll accept us at a certain re- "He's worried that lationship. "Can we negotiate? What wemight be is this relationship—I don't get it—(con-more powerful. If he thinks so cept of slave)" "Get off my he'll be back off his ship and run." lap, cat." This ship, "Chang says we can scare off outpower the Wlyll'n?" "Bryllw." "Dammit, cat!" With what? His ship is a killer, "What's a and it's fast. We can't beat them." "Chang's slave?" talking." "Chang says, run bluff, like poker." "Huh?" "Ouch!" "What's poker?" "What's a slave?" "Why ouch?"
"Non-telepathic card game, depends on "Cat clawed not knowing what cards are in other's me." possession.
Cards are strength. "A slave is one who takes Bet on outcome, pretend strong cards, your orders. Must frighten opponent so he take them. "Why take orders if will concede without struggle you don't agree with them?" to test you. That's bluff." "Force. (image of head coming "But if he knows you might bluff?" off.) That's why." "Too much to lose if he "Rights?" "No rights. Slave contests and you're not bluffing. sidered inferior species." He doesn't dare chance it."
"Like a pet?" "No."
"Repeat that for Chang!"
"But he told me." "Inferior subservient species." "Like the cat?"
"What's so (vague obscenity) subservient about the cat?"
"I've got an idea!"]

Some five hours after video contact had been established, Bryllw emerged from the schooling chamber with a rough knowledge of Terran, and the information that the ship he was facing was the patrolship Vengeance of the Terran Federation Frontier Guard, her captain was named Chang, and he was most grateful to the Nll'ni for taking on the task of linguistics involved in establishing contact.

Bryllw smiled a slow, murderous smile. Delightfully vivid in his memory were the pictures of all the idiotic actions the Terrans had performed in passing across key words: throwing balls in the air, smiling, frowning, gnashing their teeth, holding up one, two, three, four fingers.... These clowns should be a pushover.

He stepped to the video and looked into the face of the Terran framed in it. He began to speak, phrasing his thoughts carefully in the strange tongue. "I iss Bryllw, caftan ship here. Wooe desthire thrhade wiss you. Wooe seeging egtension Nll'ni thrhade rhoutes. Arr' you ooant thrhade? Much bhenefitus ourh people—yourhus aand minuh. Thrhade," he concluded, in a carefully memorized sentence "iss life blood of induthry."

Chang assumed his blandest expression, and his voice rolled out of the speaker unctuously. "As Frontier Guards we are, of course, entrusted with the safety and security of the peaceful citizens of our Federation. However, in view of the objective circumstances, and taking into account historical factors such as the Corn Laws, the assassination of Boris Stambouli and the relative success of the Wafd, it seems to us upon viewing the situation dialectically," the Nll'ni computer whirred, sending out whole lines of random symbols. "Viewing the situation dialectically, I say, it would seem that in the light of Thomas Jefferson's views on free trade it is incumbent upon us to place both shoulders on the ground, put our feet to the wheel, and consider the matter more intensively—with diligence, so to speak. If you would care to send a delegation on board our ship to further identify yourselves, we will be pleased to engage in discussion upon the matter previously alluded to. Otherwise," Li paused, "We shall be forced, much to our sorrow, to destroy you."

As soon as the screen went blank Bryllw turned to the officer in charge of linguistics. "Well," he roared, "what did he say?"

"There appears to be some difficulty in translation, Your Extreme Sentience, but it would appear that we are invited to send a delegation on board their ship to negotiate."

"Excellent!" Bryllw purred, and stalked off, leaving the linguist staring hopelessly at the tape in his hand.

By the time Bryllw's lifeboat reached the side of the Vengeance/Ataturk, bearing the Strategic Captain and five others, including Third Officer Llyllw, that officer had almost succeeded in banishing the feeling of being watched. As a matter of fact, he hadn't been watched for hours, since he was no longer important. It was Strategic Captain Bryllw who now struggled to conceal his uneasiness...He attributed it to the weird appearance of these skinny hairless things called Terrans. And, after all, this was his first experience of bringing a new species to order, though he doubted if any of the crew realized it.... A man could expect to be a little nervous about something like this, couldn't he? His mind wandered back to a campaign he had just missed when he was a Second Officer.... A race of primitive chlorine-breathers inhabiting the lone planet of a hot new sun. The planet was untenable to Nll'ni and its people incapable of accepting Order, so they had been exterminated to prevent any possibility that they might upset the Order of the Universe. The planet had been wiped clean of all life to prevent re-evolution and a small amount of mining activity had been commenced. It had been an arduous and expensive job, but it would have been highly disorderly to leave it undone.

Aboard the Ataturk, Tewazi reeled with dizziness and nausea, and dropped the *Handbook of Comparative Sociology*...

["Diu!"

"Uggh...Did you read Bryllw just then?"

"No, what ...oh he ...better tell Chang." "I will."

Quiet thought came in from Hahn: "Maybe we ought to blow up our ship at that. Tell Chang to make the arrangements or... Candleman, you in the engine room? Better rig something up just in case. Don't want these people to find Earth."

"An entire species, a whole planet..." "I don't
think I want to read Bryllw
any more."

Hahn again: "Stay clear, man...We have to out-think him."

"Chang says that if we suicide, we'll have to take them with us. We were making a pretty standard orbit out from the system when they saw us. All they have to do is check the records and trace our orbit back."

"Bryllw hasn't thought of that." "He will. And don't
forget that computer."

"Stick by the plan."]

Bryllw came into the Terran spaceship somewhat ruffled from the manhandling he had received in the airlock. He had been briskly and expressionlessly searched, and both his hidden weapons and his camera had been taken from him. The searchers had not been impolite, but neither had they been respectful:

They had handled him like a piece of furniture.

"Humble," he muttered to himself in Nll'ni. "Be humble, trader." He surveyed the scene before him with widened eyes, trying to look like a recruit with his side-fangs not grown yet. The Terrans looked as bad as they had over the video, if not somewhat worse: Obscenely smooth and hairless, their skins in various shades of light and dark brown. They looked scrawny and frail. It would probably be easy to force information out of one of them: He could be broken in the hands.

[Ugh!" "Diu!" (Hahn)—"Give me a *schlager*, and I'll show that big ape who can be broken in the hands... second thought I can do it with my hands." "Cut it, man, you're as bad as he is." "You're too modern, Zern, don't understand combat."]

They wore almost no cloth to cover their hairlessness—a harness around the loins and some with a large green ornament on the shoulder. Of the six Terrans gathered to greet him, four had the green ornaments—the largest just a foot high...maybe the size indicated authority and could indicate which of the Terrans facing him were of importance.

While he stared at an ornament it moved, said a few words in Terran, spread large green wings and flew out of the room. Bryllw started. There had been nothing said about any green flying creatures while he was learning the language.

One of the Terrans stepped forward. "I am Chang. Coordinator today."

Bryllw paused to consider the strange title, then dismissed it and proceeded with his speech. "I iss Bryllw. You me talk viewscthreen. I iss vissneth manazherh andh arrithmetithian of thrhade ship *WIlyll'n."* He spoke briskly, convinced that he was speaking the language perfectly. "Ve thrhade. I tell rhulerh-serhvantth mink. Ve sendh ships worhldh yourh. Brhing many goodh thingth. You take. What havh nont we havh. Ve havh nont you havh. Show me star map yourh planet. Wherh you people planet? Ve send merschant ship."

It was a good thing Chang did not have to understand him. Chang stepped forward trying to look formal. He took a long deep breath, rounded his voice, and began. "We of the Federation always welcome contact with new species. We hope for amicable relations, and hope that amicable relations can ultimately, or even immediately blossom into understanding and interdependence. In the record of history this historic meeting may be recorded as truly historic and might even mark the first step in a long history of friendship and friendly relations between our species and even of brotherhood and federation."

Bryllw's attention wandered. He had not fully understood all that was being said, but it sounded like the usual formal preliminaries.

"You forgif smaller self, Authority, what iss Federation."

"Ah—Federation is many planets mutually helping."

Chang resumed the speech and Bryllw's attention wandered again. The claim to be many planets could be a standard bluff intended to scare him off, or it could be true. He noted with satisfaction that the interior of the ship looked primitive and unarmored, with few safety devices. If this ship were the best frontier guard the "federation" could put up, it would be better if they did hold a large number of planets. It would be easy to take them away from such a puny navy as this. The more planets the better.

["Awk! That's not the reaction we wanted!" "He knows about bluffs!" "We aren't scaring him off."]

Oblivious of trouble, Chang, droned on...

"...And, as I emphasized in our previous conversation, in the light of our reverence for the free trade views of such historical figures as Thomas Jefferson and Al Capone, it would seem inevitable that in the course of history we would be led..."

While the Terran orated on, the other five members of the N11'ni boarding party came through the airlock one by one. They were breathing heavily and their weapons were missing, but they were still a good fighting force. Bryllw wondered if the Terrans were afraid of them. If they were, it would indicate that the Terrans, unless they were arrant cowards, thought of themselves as relatively defenseless and weak.

He tried a feint. Abruptly he coughed in a loud rumble and moved forward in a sudden jerk, then stopped himself with a hand apologetically against his faceplate as if to smother a cough, and stepped back again. It had worked; he had seen what he wanted to know. All the spindly two-legged creatures

had flinched or frozen at his sudden motion and roar, and now, stiffened, were making a desperate effort to look nonchalant, and to resume their former attitude of interested listening to their leader's speech.

Unless they were cowards, that meant that they knew they were inferior to him. Bryllw decided that it might be possible to take the ship from these skinny Terrans with just bare hands and good discipline. Once they had the ship it would be easy to decipher the star charts and find out where its home planets were. However, if he continued on this act of being a meek trader, they might even tell him where the home planets were and save the need of fighting.

"Llyllw," he mumbled into the tiny intercom mike in his helmet. "Be prepared for action and keep a good watch for their weapons. They must have some, probably trained on us, but I have not seen them. I may try to seize this ship, as soon as I find out what these green flying things are."

["Get Taylor to work up some phony hand weapons in a hurry." "Why not use the ones we took off the gorillas?" "They'd recognize them, and know for sure we don't have any of our own. You don't want to wrestle with these characters." "What did we let them on the ship for?" "To frighten them, man."]

"Authority," Llyllw's voice came nervously over the intercom into Bryllw's helmet. "One of these green animals is speaking to me privately. I don't know what it is saying."

Bryllw looked back and saw Llyllw standing stiff and woodenfaced, with a green creature perched on his shoulder. The creature was staring at him, turning its head to stare with one eye at a time with an air of impolite incredulity.

"Awwwrk!" the creature suddenly screamed in commanding tones. "Tripledeck deal! Tripledeck deal!"

Llyllw went up into the air a foot, and came down even more wooden. The creature spread large green wings and flew off down the passageway. With a great rustle and whirr of wings the others took wing from the Terran's shoulders, and followed down the passageway until they were out of sight.

"You must excuse the Wraxtax," Chang said. "Their people have no custom of courtesy to strangers. You don't have to obey his command. We will explain to him."

"Who was he, Authority?" asked Bryllw, remembering to be humble. "Is he in command of any power in your great ship?" Who was in charge of this ship? The attitudes of each Terran to the other were ambiguous, neither indicating command nor obedience, and their attitude to the green winged things was even more peculiar and hard to identify. It made him nervous.

"He is not in command over anyone," Chang explained solemnly. "We are equals. The Wraxtax are the fifteenth species to join our Glorious Federation. I am not really an authority on them. Would you like to see the ship?"

Equals? Equals meant interchangable units, identical quantities. How could a Biped be an interchangable unit or an identical quantity to a Green Bird? And who was in charge? Bryllw knitted his brows staring earnestly at the Biped who had told him he was Captain. Was this nervous creature who was not saluted by his fellows really an Officer? He retracked through the statement and remembered the question. At least that was something clear, and he knew what he wanted.

"Ve must thrade science skilish. Whant to see control room and enshine room, if pleassing to Your Authority."

The Terran showed his teeth and ducked his head in a gesture Bryllw had learned was friendly. "Very pleasing. Follow me."

Bryllw motioned his five Nll'nians in spacesuits to follow, wondering at the stupidity shown by non-N'llnian species. They filed along a narrow corridor and through several hatches into a control room, where the Terran solemnly showed them the controls.

"The feeblevetzer is here, this switch and this meter. It is useful only in moments when one wants to exceed the speed of light and does not care in what direction one goes. The Bilateral Fort Allerton is here ...this dial...and that lever..."

Bryllw stood confused, unable to follow the Terran's explanation. Terran was obviously a more complex language than they had thought. The dials and switches and screens of the control board looked precisely like dials and switches and screens with no hint of their use. Perhaps if he could see the machinery...

"Enshine room. See enshine room, Your Oberlord?"

Again there was no objection. As Bryllw followed, amazed at the stupidity of the Terrans, he spoke softly into his throat-mike to halt his men. "Don't all follow me. Four of you stay in the control room, stand around asking questions, look innocent, try to see where they keep any weapons and be ready to kill them and seize the ship when I give the order."

[Hahn: " ...Ohhh... our friend is clever.'"

"I don't see any weapons, Authority," Llyllw reported, his voice coming in tinnily on the earphone. "I'm last in line, and one of the Terrans is following us and pointing a framework of wires at us. It is about two hands square, and looks just like wires. The green things just flew in."

"Don't move suddenly, Idiot. Look peaceable and ask questions about their language and number system. Pretend you don't notice he's pointing anything at you. Keep someone wandering around behind him, and be ready to kill him when I give the word."

"Hey Taylor," Hahn called cheerily in the control room "Know Pig Latin? Utpay ouryay ackbay gainstagay allay ulkheadbay, otgay itay?"

Bryllw was disturbed as he walked down the corridor. A framework contraption of wires a weapon? Where would you get the power? And why did the majority of the Terrans wear neither uniforms nor weapons? They wore only skin and harness, not suitable for hiding weapons, and with no insignia of rank. How could the ship be organized in any orderly fashion if there was no way to tell who was in command of what?

["What's bothering him now? We know who does what in the crew, why should anyone wear a label?" "It's Authoritarian custom to wear a label, makes them feel happier." "I read that part in the Handbook, but he seems to think it is *practical*! I mean...." "Be clear, man...let's follow this."]

A ship could not run without some indication of rank and authority, Bryllw thought uneasily, and his skin prickled again with that strange, watched feeling. Perhaps the Terrans had taken off their uniforms and insignia to conceal some vital information about themselves. Perhaps they were not so helpless as they seemed and were playing some game of considerable depth and darkness.

["Hoo... now he's starting to get a little nervous." "But why?" "The way we really are, he thinks it's a lie." "The way we really are is the Bluff?" "What?" "Now *you're* making me nervous."]

Bryllw moved carefully along another line of logic. The presence of the green flying creatures meant that the Terrans had expanded across at least two solar systems, for they would not find an identical atmosphere in their own solar system, and these "Wraxtax" showed no signs of wearing airsuits. By the laws of probability, it took exploring at least five systems to find a planet with identical atmosphere. It would appear that the Terrans had done a lot of exploring before encountering the Wraxtax. The spokesman had said that they were the fifteenth species to join the Terran "Federation". (What in space was a "Federation"?) The question was, which species dominated the other? One had to dominate, or you could never have any stable Order. The green creatures had done no work in his presence and had given only one order, which was ignored. It was all very confusing.

"Which one of the planets of your Federation is the central one, Authority?"

"I don't understand," said Chang. "Suns are central, not planets. Of course it is conceivable that a system might exist..."

"I mean, which one carries out the government, isshues the laws?"

"Government? Laws?" Chang considered a moment, looking at the bulky spacesuited figure. "Oh, well ..." One of the other Terrans stepped forward hastily and spoke into his ear. Chang smiled.

"Why, it's a federation. All worlds are central."

"All worlds are central?" repeated Bryllw, trying to sound merely stupid. A red haze gathered in front of his eyes, and he lowered over the Terran with his hands dangling open. It was an effort to hold himself from picking the creature up like a doll and ripping its limbs off. He had climbed to the rank of captain half a lifetime ago so that he would not have to listen to insults from anyone except the High Servants of Erdig themselves. It was enraging to have a small hairless caricature of a creature, destined to be a slave, insolently telling him obvious lies, insulting his intelligence, and probably laughing at him.

"All worlds are central, you said, Your Wisdom?" He forced himself to be humble, though his voice

was shaking. "But I like know vhich world has most power over the others."

"No world exerts power over any other world." repeated Chang blandly. "Why would any world do that? It would involve a most unprofitable expenditure of energy and resources and would probably lead to hostility. While we are stopped here, would you care to look at our atmosphere control division?" He stepped through a hatchway and out of reach.

Bryllw lumbered after him, bending his head in a determinedly humble pose. If he went amok now, his subordinates would claim he was senile. Perhaps they'd be right. He was shaking, but under control. Tewazi eased away from behind him.

[Woof! Did you feel that rage?" "It swamped me...I almost tried to strangle someone myself." "Me, too—Him." "No point telling Chang how close he came."]

Bryllw found himself in a small room, jampacked with equipment, tanks of liquid lining the walls. The strategic captain pretended to be studying the equipment while he got his thoughts under control.

As his breathing came back to normal and he stopped shaking, he focused on the tanks of liquid. They were glowing with intense illumination and giving forth reflected light to the rest of the darkened room. Each tank had a different form of vegetation growing in it, and each contained small golden creatures, swimming about and poking at the plants with their noses. At one side of each tank was a miniature bank of levers and dials, inside the tank.

Bryllw stared at the tiny control boards, then at the golden swimmers. Who would use the boards in there? The fish?

He cleared his throat, then remembered his Terran again. "What arrafp ... what do these creatures, Authority?"

"Them I am an authority on. They are our atmosphere control experts, members of the twenty-fifth species to join our glorious federation."

"Forgive request, Authority, but...would inthroduce me? They such beautiful creatures..." Bryllw was thinking fast. The fish things were captives possibly, discontented slaves. Divide and rule...

Chang smiled blandly. "I'm afraid that they don't converse much."

Bryllw looked at the table. A pair of earphones lay on it, wires leading to one of the tanks. Obviously the Terrans conversed with the fish things. He hesitated.

The Terfan moved to the door. "Shall we go to the Engine Room now?"

Bryllw followed him. The idea of negotiating with little golden fish was utter madness. Yet, logically...Logically, what?

("Who thought up that earphone rig?") ("I did.") ("Nice work, Jukovsky, he's reeling.") ("Hurry the guys up with the thinbumbob, that Strategic type is coming.")

As they walked down the corridor, a man dashed forward from the next hatchway and spoke hurriedly to Chang. The conversation looked unnatural, as all such actions of the Terrans had, and Bryllw realized it was because there was no form of salute exchanged and neither party went to attention while speaking. They were keeping their relative status a secret from him with fantastically good acting.

The Terran with him (the Captain?) turned from the brief conference and looked up at Bryllw, showing again those even white teeth that would be no use for anything except eating vegetables. There was something reassuring about the pacifism of his appearance. It calmed Bryllw's wild speculations about deadly conspiracies, though it failed to clear the fog which was gathering in his mind.

"I receive word," said the Terran, "that my Federation would like to trade with your—ah, government—but they do not feel that the time is suitable for an approach to our planets by your ships.... difficulties of unknown germs and such problems. Therefore, we would like to choose a dead planet which is completely isolated, to meet your ships and exchange cargoes."

This was not a stupid proposal. Bryllw stared at the Terran calculatingly, wondering when the pretense of innocence would cease. The proposition was a practical one for potential enemies. It would be best to agree to it...Any extra time they took in negotiating would increase his chances of locating the star systems of the Federation. Also give more time to locate the real captain, for this clown was not speaking for himself, and there had been no time to communicate with the planets of their 'Federation' even if they had been of the nearest star to the two ships. Someone was giving him advice, and that

someone knew enough to be valuable, and should be located and kept alive for questioning.

["Ghah! His image of questioning. And he likes it!" "No, he doesn't ...there's no emotion, it's a purely mechanical concept...Much as you civilized-type people may not like it, I'm afraid we're going to have to do something about these people. I've got the location of their home planet worked out. With the overcentralization these Authoritarian types have, we can knock them apart with one raid—their subject races could finish the job ...Uh-oh!" "Nice plans Hahn, but how about plans to survive this little inspection party they've put aboard? We don't seem to be making it."]

Llyllw's voice came into the earphone of Bryllw's helmet as he lumbered after the small group of Terrans who were showing him the ship. He remembered he had left Llyllw in the control room, remembered with difficulty, dragging his mind from a fog of speculations. Llyllw's voice was triumphant.

"A most unfortunate accident seems to have occurred, your Authority...I accidentally bumped into the Terran with the weapon. He dropped it, and I most clumsily stepped on it. I am now apologizing profusely. Oh—yes, I think I see a star chart. It's painted on a bulkhead, and is obviously ornamental, but it looks quite readable."

"Excellent," Bryllw purred into the helmet mike, remembering that this was the officer who had sighted the strange ship and turned on the Infallible without orders. "Of course it is insubordination, punishable by death, to act without orders, unless I officially approve of your action." There was a tense silence from the listener at the other end of the line. Bryllw let him suffer for a moment, then added. "I approve. However, I'll file recommendations that you be promoted—no room for insubordination on the bottom." He added more quietly. "Be ready to seize the control room when I give the signal. Kill the birds, too."

Bryllw turned to the Terran beside him, "Ve thrade, dead planet, stop andh thrade there. I tell my government, it sends ships. Where live you people planets? You tell me. I pick out good star between."

Chang smiled. "We have the star maps up in the control room. You mark where your stars are, and our calculating machine will search the records and find the optimum star with unoccupied planets to use as a trade center between us."

Bryllw radiated a mental snarl that rocked the Terran telepaths. The Terrans wanted to know where his home worlds were. Possibly they had invited him to their ship in order to capture and question him. But if something went wrong with the negotiating delegation, and the Captain of the WIlyiln suspected it, he would immediately blast the Terran ship to atoms, and Bryllw with it. It would be the first thing he would decide to do. Bryllw could visualize Captain Rablyn's pleasure at giving the order that would rid him of a Strategic Captain and leave him again master of his own ship.

"Very sorry, Authority and Wise one, but I just trader, arithmetic-doer of trade ship," he said stolidly, knowing he would not be believed. "I not read star maps, not understand where Nll'ni is from here."

Chang looked at him smilingly, a showing of teeth that suddenly seemed deadly. "Perhaps something can be arranged." He turned and stepped through the hatchway into what looked like a machine shop. Spare parts lay around on and under benches.

"Repairs," Chang explained. It was a rather obvious statement, but four men were busily working with rapidity and coordination on adjusting an apparatus built into the wall, while a fifth stood by a control chair and aiming device and leaned on a very large red button with one hand. As the others worked they glanced frequently at a viewscreen centered in the apparatus. The screen had two crossed lines quadrasecting it, like a target sighter and firing device. In the center of the screen with the crossed hairs right across the middle of it, was a ship which Bryllw slowly recognized was the *WIlylin.*

"Your pardon, Authority," Bryllw walked over and stood by the working men, breathing heavily. They were in easy reach for skull-cracking. "Your pardon, but this appears to be a weapon. Would you explain to me the principle?"

The one holding the button was further away, out of reach, Bryllw noted. He would have to be reached when the others were down.

"Certainly," Chang smiled. "This is our major armament, the Cosmic Regurgitator. It operates upon the Higgledy-Piggledy principle of reciprocal jabberwocky, and can undo the atomic bonds of any object it is focused on. Except of course, large planets and stars—it would only be able to lightly damage a

planet for instance, perhaps destroy the atmosphere. There has been considerable speculation among astrophysicists as to what its effect on a star might be.... The whingamig here, determines the jabberwocky reciprocal of any object it is set upon, and indicates by different colors—" He waved his hand at a set of rapidly spinning colored lights.

"That color scheme you see, for instance, indicates the jabberwocky reciprocal of your ship. It is unfortunately necessary to focus on something in order to complete certain repairs. The gunners are making test runs on your ship, since it is the nearest large object. There is however, no danger to your ship—that button there, the one that Jukovsky is pressing, keeps the weapon from Regurgitating automatically when it reaches target. Naturally he will be very careful not to let go of it. Let's go into the engine room, shall we?"

Saying nothing, Bryllw looked again at his ship, *WIlyll'n*, pictured in the crosshairs of the weapon, and at the Terran lounging, holding down the button with his left hand. He backed off slowly so as not to startle the Terran.

On the way out he made a small gesture to the Nll'nian in a space suit who had been humbly and discreetly following them. "Stay here when I leave," he muttered into the helmet mike. "If there is any trouble, hold down that button!" He looked back at the lumbering slowness of his crewman in the big spacesuit, and the nervous quickness of the Terran who now lounged facing their way holding down the button and watching the Nll'nian with suspicion. He looked back with gloom. If there were any trouble the WIlyll'n would be thoroughly regurgitated. Gloomily he followed Chang into the Engine room.

Chang seated himself on a streamlined plastic housing and cheerfully began to talk. "Now, about the trading. This is a subject on which I am well qualified to negotiate a treaty, due to my Mongol ancestry. We Mongols have always been known for our sympathetic attitude toward traders. However, there remains the problem of overdeveloped and underdeveloped planets, a problem with which I am sure you and your distinguished colleagues are quite familiar, and of course its concomitant problem of the trade of colonial areas with the mother planets, as so admirably explicated by Wilberforce Throckbottom in his magnificent "Ballad of the Boston Tea Party," a work which is regarded by my people as second in excellence only to our own national epic "Tarzan of the Apes." But to return; all these and many other factors must of course be taken into account in any discussion of trade, and I assume you have done so as have we. Therefore, in the light of the aforementioned, we come to a question which might be, and indeed had been by many, regarded as basic—what have you got and what do you want?"

"Well... un ... we havh rraw materialth of all tybhs..."

"So have we."

"Ve havh many industries..." Bryllw was cursing mentally.

What did this clever clown think he was doing? He remembered the button and shivered. Were they preparing something worse?

"Perhaps something could be arranged there. It also seems that there might be a possibility of some sort of cultural exchange, such as beads, hatchets and other artifacts."

"What?"

"I said that our exchange would perhaps be most wisely concentrated on manufactured goods of various types to be determined, and on cultural and scientific items, reflecting the various aspects of our two societies."

"Oh, oh yes... cultural and... er... scientific, by all means scientific exchange. Great, uh, mutual benefit." Like that infernal machine in the next room, he thought. Exchange me that! But the Terran was stalling in some way—there was something phony about it all.

[Hahn: "You guys just aren't good liars, that's all."]

"Now as to the planet for trade center...I would suggest a dead planet of one of the stars near here. It is, of course, Terran, uh, territory, but we would be glad..."

"THE CAT!"

All hands in the engine room came erect and stood respectfully silent. A sleek, black-furred creature, small and walking on all fours, stepped delicately into the compartment, walked about sniffing at the men, climbed to a shelf to look at the viewscreen centered on one of the tubes, ambled about for five minutes

or so, then walked out. The men relaxed. One went over and looked at the viewscreen, apparently to be sure everything was all right.

"That was the Chief." said Chang in a low voice. "He takes a look around sometimes to make sure everything's running all right."

"He's quite small," said Bryllw. He should have expected something like this. These Terran clowns had no rank, they were just pretending to be in charge. That creature, whatever else it was, was obviously aware of its own superiority, an officer or better.

["Good thing ol' Strategic Gorilla wasn't in the shop when the cat came in—we had to knock him off a table to keep him out of that electronic mishmash."]

The Terran behind Chang stepped forward and murmured something Bryllw didn't catch. It sounded like "Hooked."

Chang smiled and continued. "Yes. He comes from the oldest intelligent race we have ever encountered, natives of the planet Erewhon. We find their advice invaluable."

Advice? Bryllw thought. Who are they fooling—themselves?

["Nice kitty... up here pretty kitty... that's it. Go give Chang the word, I've got everything set."]

A Terran appeared in the engineroom hatchway. "The Cat says he is ready to receive the strange beast now."

Bryllw bristled, but he followed the messenger to a small compartment he had not seen before. The damned ship seemed to be honeycombed with all sorts of unlikely places. The room contained a viewscreen and a small bank of control knobs on a black panel, a small bookshelf at one end and a number of satiny cushions scattered about. At first the room seemed to be uninhabited, then he caught a hint of motion in the corner of his eye and whirled.

The Cat was there, looking down at him haughtily from a plastic pillar topped with a velvet cushion.

Bryllw waited for it to speak. The Cat inspected him with an insolent stare, then yawned and looked away with an affectation of indifference, inspecting the viewscreen. The screen showed the control room and his men.

Bryllw realized he was called upon to speak the first word. This creature's manners were no better than those of the High Servants of Erdig. In fact, they were extremely similar... well, he had had some experience in dealing with aristocrats, although he looked back on the experience with relief that he had survived. Now he'd have some use for it.

"Excellency and Most Powerful," he began. The Cat's eyes returned to his with some small interest. Encouraged, he continued. "My government when they hear of vast area controlled by your people would like to send a ship with presents, and things for trade, so both our rulers will profit. You ask your slaves tell me where send ship so best trade with your people? This please to you, Wisest Excellency?"

The Cat stretched and yawned delicately, then returned its large luminous eyes to Bryllw. He found their gaze disturbing. The expression was calm, almost fond, filled with confidence too wise to be mere arrogance.

"Qrrrrlw? Prrrup?"

"The Wise One asks if it would please you if he and this ship escorted your ship back to your own home, for he would appreciate meeting more of your admirable species."

The Cat stood up restlessly and looked at the interpreter more anxiously. "Meeerowwrr, meerowee." After the previous insouciance, the change to concern and pleading aroused Bryllw's cynicism. He watched the Cat suspiciously.

"The Cat wishes to inform you that you need have no fear. No race has lost anything of value by their associations with Cats. Cats are most humble and easy to please. They do not take advantage of their superiority, and they are not offended if an individual does not accept their advice. Cats are extremely rational."

The Cat rubbed himself against the cushion with an affectionate, almost feminine gesture, looking at Bryllw with large round luminous eyes full of tender concern. It was a wonderful gesture, though perhaps a little bit overdone to be convincing. Bryllw stepped back uneasily, finding an unexpected desire in himself to have some wise and tender creature such as this to give him advice and protect him from the

schemes of young and ruthless officers around him.

How could this alien creature of four legs so easily charm him? True, it was a graceful animal, with silky fur that even the most beautiful female of his young adventures would have envied and desired for her own cheeks and shoulders. And of course all aristocrats are trained in tact, having little else to do but converse. It was only typical of aristocrats that this animal had tact. But with a few gestures to give to Bryllw the idea that he would like to be ruled by this creature! It must be a lie. Under the velvet paw lay the steel claws—the creature's wisdom and skill were weapons to fear. Bryllw took another step backward and suddenly saw the luminous eyes catch a reflection and flare into lambent wells of green flame. With eyes that radiated light the creature no longer looked like anything real. Fear of hypnosis struck him like a blow, and he looked away from the strange blazing eyes, barely keeping himself from striking out at them or running.

"Qrrmll. Mrrll meerrowwl." The Cat's voice was close and intimate. The translator's voice seemed far away.

"He says those under his guidance aboard this small ship are very happy due to his wise advice. You can ask any one of them."

This accounted for the smallness of the ship. It was merely a personal pleasure boat for the Cat, manned by his servants. The Terrans were deceiving themselves with their talk of equality and their "Federation". It was no doubt a device of the Cat, trickery to keep them contented.

Suddenly he understood. The Cats were spreading in a great and growing empire of power more absolute than any Bryllw had ever seen using other species as slaves and keeping them in such hypnotic control that they thought they were free. What need to fear revolt, when the slaves think they are free and are sure they are in charge of their own destiny, merely requesting advice from you?

Bryllw shuddered violently. Thank the Elders he had not sent the regular Captain on this mission. The Idiot would have come back bearing the Cat on his shoulder for a "Visit" and they would all have been lost.

"Mrrrr," the Cat said in a low confiding tone, settling down to a couchant position and fixing Bryllw steadily with his large affectionate eyes.

"He wished to know if he may visit your ship."

Bryllw shuddered in spite of his control. "I will try arrange it," he said, fearful that the Cat would see that he was lying.

The Cat suddenly leaned over and lay on its side looking at the ceiling languidly and said something in a gentle soothing sound like an affectionate growl. The sound evoked youthful memories in the aging Bryllw. He found himself charmed by the tone. Oh, but these aristocrats were charmers always, and masters of tact! But they would kill you without even bothering to get angry.

"He says that his little ship is not fast enough to keep up with yours, and so it would be a favor if you would return home slowly enough to allow him to follow you." The pleasant affectionate growl continued. "He says he admires your fighting spirit and intelligence in understanding his meaning. He has personally taken a fondness to you, and would put you under his protection and do you any favors in his power when his people come into positions of influence in your empire. He is aware by your manner that you are not a trader, but a fighting man of much experience and little scruple, and he might even add you to his personal council."

The Cat still lolled back, staring at the ceiling with a remote and affectionate gaze.

Bryllw, feeling himself to be in the most dangerous crisis of his life, was fascinated. How pleasantly this aristocrat had offered his bribe, how affectionately he had applied the oil and how obliquely shown the dagger!

It would not be safe to say either yes or no. With barely controlled haste he made apologies about diminishing air supply and hurried to the control room. "Come," he growled to the men there, "We're leaving."

"But..."

"Shut up and move while you can move! Let's get out of here and never mind asking questions!"

The Terran ship was *slower*. It would be safer to run than to fight.

Back on board the *Wllyll'n,* Bryllw stalled the Terran over the viewscreen while the ship made ready for maximum acceleration. Then everything was ready and the *Wllyll'n* suddenly accelerated under full power and departed.

As Bryllw's thoughts blacked out under the bone-crushing acceleration, he was counting himself lucky to have escaped.

Chang sprawled on a lounging pad, wiping his face limply. "I never thought we'd work it. You guys could read his reactions but I had to guess. Diu! I'm beat."

"We all are—never played bluff before. We didn't do it too well. The only one with a good pokerface was Shadow."

"THE CAT!" shouted Hahn. They all leapt to their feet, then relaxed.

"Ahh, cut it out, Hahn."

"Give Shadow his bowl of milk or something."

"How come the Nifni don't keep pets?"

"I dunno—how come we *do*?"

"That's the right answer," said Uncle Pat. "I came around a bend in the trail and there I was face to face with this bloody big leopard. It snarled, and there was only room for one of us to get by, so I yelled like hell and charged straight at him, and he tried to turn around so fast he rolled over backward and rolled over the edge and rolled down the cliff, (it was about a seventy degree slope) yowling and screeching and hissing all the way and wound up down on another trail about a hundred feet below, and limped away. Didn't even look up. He didn't want to see me laughing."

THE ORIGIN OF THE SPECIES

The good doctor is disturbed because society somehow, by the best logic, sets him the job of destroying the parts that don't fit to this mad world.

Is he given the job of shortening feet by amputating toes to make them fit the short shoes designed for average feet? No, but it's close. Does he remove eyes that can see into the ultraviolet and X-ray, so that the seer shalt not claim to see the impossible secrets? No, but we're warmer.

Anyhow he's a kind man.

So are they all, all honorable men.

May 10, 1953; 2:30 A.M.

DEAR JACK:

Some acts seem to change the meaning of the universe. Yesterday I killed.

It's a poor way to begin a letter, I admit. I'm writing this down because I have to tell someone, now; because I can't keep it to myself, and no one else is awake. Looking out the window, I can see the empty streets of our little suburb lying silvered in the moonlight. I can't wake anyone at this hour to talk to him, though I desperately want to hear a human voice. This letter is the next best thing.

You don't know much about my work, Jack, only that I am a neurosurgeon. We play cards together, and argue politics, and you and your wife invite me to theater parties and try to marry me off to pretty girls—but I don't think I've ever told you exactly what I do.

I operate on brains.

I take out parts of people's brains; that is my profession.

I am well known in my field, for I do what other neurosurgeons cannot do. At first it was just small tumors that I took out, and then I progressed to removing smaller and smaller tumors that others could not find, and injured tissue that others could not locate, the tiny scars of old concussions and birth injuries that send electric pulsations out of phase with the waves of the rest of the brain, and so cause seizures—what is called epilepsy.

I open up their skulls—it's all very mechanical, Jack, mere carpentry. The patient is conscious, but reassured and calm, knowing that he won't feel anything. His head is shaved and screened off with towels so he can't see what I am doing. I cut the scalp in three sides of a wide square and fold the skin back from the bone. Then I take a wide drill and drill four holes through the thick skull bone, one at each corner of the square, then take a hand drill with a small rotary saw blade and run the buzzing blade slowly from one hole to another. It is a trap door of bone now. An assistant pries it up, turns it back. (There is almost no blood

and, afterwards, only a few thin scars to show for it.)

I can see the brain now through a thin tough lining of dura. I cut the dura with scissors and fold it back like a page of a book. And there it is, the living brain, grey and quivering slightly with the throbbing of the few blood vessels branching on its surface.

I have to locate the spot that is causing the trouble, and rapidly now. It is difficult to see anything in the curves and folds of soft grey. An assistant hands me an electrode that gives tiny currents of electricity, a current so small that if it touches the scar I am searching for it will not set off a seizure, but the patient will recognize the sensation of one coming, the odd emotion, the dizziness and distance and "aura" that warns a second before an attack and say, "There it is." I touch the pencil electrode here and there over the grey sum face, the tiny current here bringing alive an old memory in the patient's mind, here making one of his fingers twitch, here bringing a sensation of watching something green spinning before his eyes.

"There it is. That felt like it. Getting warmer, Doc," he says, and I bend closer, touching the electrode in narrowing circles, and then I see it, a tiny section of grey that is different and rougher, a twisting of tiny blood vessels in it that makes a pinkness and wrong color.

I take the scar out gently, using a little sucking tube that wiffles air into itself with a sighing noise and pulls the soft detachable grey layer up into itself, leaving a small section of unthinking, unelectrical, passive white shining through from inside. . .

The operation is expensive, tremendously so. The hospital will pay only part. The patient and his family are poor—they always are; it is difficult for a man who has spasms to hold a job, and then there's the cost of the accidents and hurts that come from the inevitable falling when the seizures strike.

So I often stand with the insufflater hissing in my hand for one minute more, trying to think of something else I can do, some other way—but time is precious. I bend forward again and begin. The grey delicate layers of thought and of perceptive feeling, the layers that mean sensitivity with the hands and skill with the fingers go easily up into the little tube like soft, damp fluff and leave a widening circle of white.

It is the left hemisphere I make useless, the left hemisphere that controls feeling and thinking and skills in right-handed people. This patient was right-handed and left-brained; now he will have to be left-handed, and learn now to think and feel and regain his old skills as best he can with the right half-brain that remains. He is middle-aged; it will be hard to change and begin again. But it is better perhaps than falling down in fits and cracking his head against the pavement until he has no brain at all.

I have a reputation. They say that I know more about the human brain than any man who has ever lived. They have heard of my skill in London and Prague and Paris and Moscow and New York, and surgeons come from all these places to watch me operate.

From these operations, from looking at the human brain, that marvelous instrument exposed before me almost daily, from touching it gently with electricity and hearing the patients report what odd sensations, what odd thoughts and memories come, I have learned much . . .

I do other kinds of operations, too. At first I operated only on epileptics. But it is not just scars that are damaging to the brain. Sometimes thoughts and memories make their own kind of scars, and do their own kind of damage. Having an occasional fit and falling down before an auto is not the worst thing that can happen to a man. He could live in an asylum and scream, "open open open," or "hat hat hat," day and night, alone in a cell, helpless in some inside agony no one can reach or soothe.

Experimenting despairingly, neurologists found that the severing frontal sections of the brain—it is known as lobotomy—would cure those scars too. But they cut blindly. Often the operation stopped the screaming and brought peace, but usually a dull animal peace, and sometimes the peace of death.

Because of my knowledge and experience, I was asked to help the best and most precious spirits: the great conductor who had broken down; the author who could only write down the words that strange voices shouted in his mind; the over-worked statesman who could now listen only to imagined whisperings against himself; all the others with great responsibilities who had been broken by trying too hard to fulfill them.

So I began doing this other kind of operation. Because I knew the brain, could study their encephalograph brain-electricity charts and trace the convolutions carefully like a familiar map, I could take out merely that narrow small section that was giving them hurt, and destroy nothing else.

People came from my operations cured and happy, without that numb animal look that sometimes follows lobotomy. They came out adjusted to life for the first time, not wanting and not missing the things that I bad cut away. They were grateful.

But as I operated, I was trying not to think.

For you see, Jack, I knew what I was doing to each brain. I knew what those delicate grey tissue cells were that I removed with the hissing insufflater tube. I knew what part of the human mind and soul I was taking. Sensitivity to the hurts and loves of others . . . dreams and longings and plans for the future ... the

deeper reactions to music and poetry ... the sensitive adjustment of values and motives to new situations ... emotional insight ... creative logic ...

Always it was those sections which were scarred by experience, sending distortion and agony through the mind.

While I work steadily, efficiently, seemingly calm, the thoughts come, and I cannot stop them.

What kind of life is it that I am adjusting this man to, that he will be most sane and adjusted when the best parts of his mind are taken out?

Society is very old, and custom very ancient, and most of our ways were handed to us from far back in the darkness of time. Can some of it be traced back to herds and packs that were not human? Were not the first men born misfit into a society of apes? If children were born into an asylum and raised only by the inmates, would not they become sincerely "mad" in such surroundings, and think at last that everything around them was natural and right? The texture of tradition is learned in early childhood; it grafts itself onto the mind and seems like instinct, too natural to be consciously noted.

I think of George, the archetype of all the children of fact and legend who have been adopted by the animals. He was raised by wolves; they suckled him and were friendly and tolerant, like dogs, and they fed him through the long period of his babyhood.

The first thing for him to learn was to survive. After that, his developing human mind should have been free to continue learning and discovering until he demonstrated his innate human superiority. That is what you would expect.

But first he had to learn to be strong and cunning as a successful wolf. So all the tremendous skill and capacity for creative learning of the human-child mind was poured into learning the tricks and skills of the wolf way of life.

But he was *not* a wolf. What was natural to them had to be learned painfully by him: to run on four feet instead of on his long hind legs; to sniff with his nose instead of using his eyes; to repress the natural babbling and baby muttering that was so dangerous in this life; to repress the curiosity of a developing mind that wanted to stop and pick things up with his odd un-wolflike front paws—and thus risk being left behind by the pack and, with his poor, inadequate sense of smell, become lost. He was a misfit and a cripple by the standards of the wild dogs of the woods. They must have been very patient, indeed.

George managed at last to become a self-supporting wolf. But by that time he was an inferiority-complex, not-very-bright wolf, neurotic and trembling and unable to reason or to adjust his behavior (that is the way with extreme neurosis), a wolf who snapped and snarled at the humans who captured him, who howled lonesomely to be let free to return to the cold woods, and who at last died—very much as an animal in a zoo may die of inability to adjust to life in captivity.

If I had been there then, with the techniques I know now, I could have adjusted George. I could have operated and removed the source of his neurosis, and made him a contented, well-adjusted wolf. But a *wolf* , not a man. For it was the human parts of his mind that were misfit, scarred and inhibited and rendered useless by repression, left only as sources of pain and insanity.

And so I think again, as I operate on the man now under my knife: what kind of world is it that I am adjusting him to, that he will be most sane and adjusted when the best parts of his mind are taken out?

Were not the first men born misfit, like George, into a society of apes? They might have wanted nothing more than to be happy, well-adjusted apes. But evolution is ruthless and indifferent to individual cost, and it can't be stopped. The original breed of mankind must have multiplied and spread across the Earth because they learned to get by in the world of apes, making a copy, that—physically weak, neurotic, and mentally crippled as it was—was more efficient than the original. Perhaps if George had been born with more intelligence or even genius, he would have been able to make himself into a leader of wolves, ready to breed a race of wolf-imitations. But then he would have been even more of a misfit—he would have become mad, a lunatic wolf. I think of the chanting, the ritual, the blood sacrifice of primitive man. Mad . . . a lunatic wolf or a lunatic superape, twisted carbon copies, both of them.

And the twistedness perpetuating itself. The young are born without warp, but what happens when they are born into an asylum and taught to behave like the adults there? Neurotic behavior is intolerant of any other way of behaving than its own. What starts as forced mimicry could soon become completely natural to the learning child. Neurotic behavior is rigid, conservative, obsessive and inflexible. Six million years we have had already, gradually working toward sanity, but God, how slowly and with such relapses! And, in all that time, all that our cortex, our new brilliance, has given us is animal conquest of the other animals, and for the rest—neurosis, frustration, and an inhibition that can make the best portions of our minds give us only pain and distortion.

And all I can do to help is to remove parts of the brain.

One in seven of us will break down and be hospitalized at some point of our lives, and perhaps all of us who walk the streets of the world would be happier without the subtle grey cells I take from brains, the layer of brilliance that is given the unbearable cross of concealing itself so that we may learn, painfully, to be good imitation apes, instead of men. We don't know what it is to be human; we have never been allowed.

This is a long letter, but I will get to the point now.

Yesterday I performed an operation that I had been begged to do. It was the parents who came and begged me, for the sake of their twelve-year-old boy. He was feeble-minded. They had been told that he should go to a training home with others like him, yet they fought against fate, they wanted to believe that he could grow to run and laugh and be bright like any other normal boy. They claimed that he had been a *brilliant* baby—perhaps he had sustained a head injury or had a brain tumor, and I must cure him.

I was dubious. All parents seem to think -their first baby is brilliant. No operation can cure a child who is naturally feeble-minded.

They grew desperate and told me stories of remarkable things the child had done before it was two years old, but the stories were of things that only the boy's nurse had seen, probably made up by the nurse to please them. I did not believe the stories, but the parents were sensitive and obviously thoughtful, so I told them that if the boy had shown such an obvious change he *might* have sustained a head injury.

They begged me, and they were wealthy, and sincerely, pitifully eager for their son. So for their sake, and for the fees they could offer that would help poorer cases, I did it.

The encephalographs had been abnormal. I was expecting perhaps to find a tumor.

When the cap of bone was off and the rough outline of the boy's brain showed under the thin dura, it looked wrong. I was afraid.

For a half a moment I stood, while a professional entertainer continued to hold the boy's sleepy attention by making shadow pictures with his hands. I stood there, and without any move that might betray my reaction to the assisting doctors, I reproached myself bitterly for spoiling the pleasure of perfect health the boy at least had had by giving him metal plates in his head where the safe, solid bone should be. Even if I closed it up immediately without going further. . . . The outline of the surface of his brain looked wrong, different, unworkable. The boy was naturally feeble-minded, I thought, and was glad that the movie cameras were not watching this operation, glad that I had decided not to use this operation on a "healthy, contented child" as an example for others of what to do. Now there would be no record of a mistake.

He had been happy the way he was. I reached for an instrument to begin closing the opening, admitting the mistake.

But then the shape of the boy's brain began to look clearer to me under the obscuring layer, the differences having a form of their own, assuming a shape I could not quite believe.

I turned from the instrument I had been reaching for, took one that would cut the dura, cut it and turned it back.

He had not been happy!

God knows what thoughts were passing through that living, functioning brain as I looked down at it. Thoughts far past any following of mine. Perhaps his thinking had withdrawn from reality in order that reality could have no influence on the body it inhabited; or perhaps he was conscious and pretending, behaving like a two-year-old infant because it was too incredibly difficult to behave just like a twelve-year-old boy. He probably understood where he was and what was happening and apparently did not care.

From the central cleft, like wings just beginning to grow, an extra pair of lobes folded back and down over the surface—lobes like nothing I had ever seen before! They were alive and operating—I had seen their electrical pattern recorded by the electroencephalograph, had noticed the odd pattern without understanding it. The lobes were thinking. The brain was the brain of a different species, one beyond genius!

I had to decide what to do.

The tray of instruments was waiting, and on it lay the wire-edged cauterizing knives that were used to take out a tumor.

I had not hesitated long enough for the observers and students around me to wonder why I had stopped. I don't think any of them remember clearly what they saw or understand it.

I am a surgeon; my habit and training is to remove that which is causing the trouble. I must have moved rapidly (the observers complimented me afterward on the unusual speed and sureness of the operation), but to me those moments lasted forever. I can remember the horror, and the thought as I touched it—It knows

what I am doing!

Dawn is beginning to grey the sky, and a bird has let out a few sleepy twitters and dozed off again. Animals are so happy, jack, so well-adjusted to their environment.

The boy is normal now, the way his parents wanted him to be. He is an average twelve-year-old boy, not much better nor much worse than the other boys he'll go to school with, talk with, play baseball with. He'll be all right now, but I can still see the blood and the cut nerves and the strange lobes. And I wish I could sleep.

COLLISION ORBIT

The mountain men who opened up the frontier in the west weren't settlers, they were trappers, traders, fighters and gunmen —the men who didn't fit back home. The kind of men who will be needed on the frontier of space...

I was drowsing when I heard the airlock clanking and banging. Anyone can come into my ship, glance through the magazines, play the films and select food from the stock without me bothering to wake up until they're ready to buy something, but this sound was different. By the way they were clanging and cursing and trying to get the airlock to work, they were strangers. I came wide awake.

Last month's load of news from Earth had some interesting stories. Four convicts were missing from New San Quentin. There had been a bank robbery three days later with a really terrific haul of money taken. After that the Earth-to-Moon lift ship had taken off with apparently a full load, but six of the passengers never reported in on the Moon after the ship landed and were considered to be missing, and one of them had been found dead on Earth a mile away from take off point.

An hour and a half after the Lift ship had landed at Luna, the space ship Phobos, of the Luna to Phobos-Mars run, took off suddenly without waiting for cargo and vanished into space with only her pilot and first engineer known to be on board.

The news was a month old by the time it got to me, but it was easy to add those three items up. The convicts had the ship and were heading for the Asteroid Belt.

Well, here they were at the Asteroid Belt. First stop, Sam's Place. I grinned slightly and unscrewed two of the knobs on the radio, screwed one back in the wrong place and put the other under the counter. Then I switched the radio on to Send, in spite of the fact the knob said Receive. They were coming. Yawning, I swung around on my revolving chair.

"Careful with the airlock. Air's not free around here."

They crowded in, four figures muffled in heavy spacesuits with green globes concealing their heads.

"Don't move, Mister." Two guns were suddenly pointed at my middle.

"Good evening, Gentlemen," I said amiably. "I was expecting you would drop in. What can I sell you?"

"You didn't expect us, Fatty," said one taking off his helmet and showing a young haggard face that needed a shave. He snickered nervously, put out his hand and was given a gun by one who reached up and began taking off his own helmet. The young one was nervous but not stupid, for with the gun pointing steadily at me he moved quickly to one side as far as he could get. He leaned against the front wall to cover me from the opposite direction of the other gun holder. Whatever ideas I'd had about maneuvering one in front of the other and grabbing a gun van-ished right then.

"Shove that funny-talk, Mister," said the other, a husky with a stiff crewcut. "We're not buying anything, we're taking this place over."

The other two had their helmets off now. There was a big thoughtful looking one who went over to look at the supplies, and a lean one who went off looking for the can. They all looked haggard, underfed and tired. Probably they were haggard from having trouble holding down their food. Spacesickness gets practically anyone the first months out.

The big one wandered into the stacks of supplies and began opening cartons and nibbling anything edible.

That made me mad, but I didn't say anything, just got up and looked to see what he was opening,

and almost got shot as the young gunman's hand jerked nervously at my motion.

"Sit down and turn off those neon signs and radio beams. We've got to get moving."

"Yeah," said the husky, as if surprised that he'd think of it. "Turn 'em off."

There was a big neon sign wrapped around my ship, saying, SAM'S. I flipped a couple of switches, and it went off for the first time in a long time. There was also a set of swinging radio beams like lighthouse beams which said "Sam's Merchandise" in my voice. It was a sound that spacemen could home in on when they ran out of food or something broke and they needed a spare part. I flipped another switch and that went off too for the first time since I'd set it up. A lot of men depended on that radio beam.

But I didn't expect it would stay off long.

The radio was humming quietly at "Rec." as if waiting for incoming calls, but what it was doing was broadcasting every-thing that was said inside the store. It wasn't beamed at anyone, so the signal was weak, but anyone who wanted to know why my homing beams had gone off could find out by turning to my frequency and listening.

Fergason's place was on my orbit, somewhere close ahead. If he noticed me going by, he'd wonder why I didn't stop to deliver the mail and the groceries.

All I had to do was to stay alive for awhile, or make sure they killed me in a certain way.

"Man the controls, Mister," said the husky one. "Take us out of here before someone comes to see why the lights went off."

"Any direction," added the big man who was chewing at the supplies. He had an easy deep drawl. "We'll tell you later where to go."

The fourth man came out of the can and laughed at that, bringing clear the idea that I wasn't going to be around long.

Abruptly I realized I had made a bad mistake. "Wait a minute," I said, letting myself sound startled. "I'm not wearing my coverall." I was wearing jockey shorts, nothing else, and I figured that they'd think I was modest. I spotted the coverall lying across a case of algin butter and reached for it. "Mind?"

The husky with the gun waved it at me, "Get those jets going," he snarled. "Step stalling around."

"Let him put his pants on," smiled the big one, coming forward again with an open magazine in his hand. "No reason for anyone to be closer than a thousand miles, people spread thin in space. They won't all arrive here for a picnic before he gets dressed."

I didn't wait for the gunman's nod, just took a chance and grabbed the coverall to put it on. They did not object again, apparently taking the big one's say as the final word.

The coverall slipped silkily over bare feet and legs, pulled up and zipped tight to cover body, arms and hands comfortably in thin, flexible, silky fabric, with a fancy looking collar, high behind the neck, low and open in front, and held in shape by the edge being a light metal ring, with another light metal ring and a little mirror-like limp plastic hanging down the back attached from the collar, like the space suitish touches that were the style in men and women's coats on Earth.

The material has a mixture of slow and fast elastic threads so that it fitted like a skin, but gave easily with every motion, and it was painted with a coating of aluminum, so that it shone like a flexible mirror.

It was an intensely practical outfit, used by almost everyone in the Belt. The rest of mankind didn't have anything like it. Give an amateur necessity and not much material to work with and he can out-invent any hired expert.

But it looked useless, ornamental and gaudy, and I did not cut much of a figure in it. Lots of people get fat around the waistline in space. Something to do with not enough exercise for the legs. No place to walk to.

I looked like I'd just put on a coat of aluminum paint and a fancy collar, and knew it. There were stares and grins.

Let them laugh now.

"Look at that, a silver plated man."

"Isn't he purty."

"Look at those muscles bulge. Or are they muscles?"

I clenched my teeth together, climbed into the pilot's chair and pushed the steering rod forward

cautiously until I could feel the jets beginning to thrust.

The big one, the one who was probably the brains of the outfit, came forward and leaned over my shoulder watching what I was doing. He chewed crackers noisily beside my ear and turned the pages of a magazine. "We're well stocked back there. Enough food and entertainment for a year."

"It's all due to customers," I said. "Two months' worth, per person, to be delivered here and there." I was bearing down on an irregularly shaped lump of rock on the screen that was probably Fergason's camouflaged place. It turned red on the screen, mean-ing I was on a collision course. I couldn't tell that it was Ferga-son's without having the radio open to his signal, but if that was his place, probably all his alarm bells were ringing inside, and he was screeching into his mike, trying to warn me to change course.

I moved the control rod a notch sideways to avoid it, and the screen turned it white again, showing it was no longer a danger.

"How about putting on some more speed," drawled the thinker. He was used to having people take his advice, it showed in his voice.

"Don't want to shift the cargo, might break the eggs," I pushed the rod forward a notch more, and with the extra fraction of a gee acceleration the inertial pull toward the rear grew noticeable, and everyone stood slanted as though the floor were tilting back.

"Eggs." They all laughed nervously. I could tell from the sound they still weren't used to space travel, and the tilting floor had them queasy again.

"Yeah, eggs," I said irritably. "It took me fifteen hundred dollars to have them ship a box of fertilized eggs and hatching chicks out here. That's investment enough to make sure there are eggs for the store."

"You kidding?" asked the young gunholder and laughed. "Where's the chickens?"

"Some of the boys took on the job of raising them. If you boys will tell me your specialties, safe cracking or what—I'll tell you what kind of job you'll fit."

For an instant there was an angry surprised silence, then the nervous gunboy with a smile that was half a snarl, walked over behind me and clunked me on the side of the head with his gun, not hard, just enough to hurt a little as a warning.

"Look, Fatty, we aren't here to apply for a job."

"You'll be working anyhow," I said.

The blow that hit my head that time crossed my eyes for a minute. The young gunman's voice was pitched almost to a falsetto with irritation. "We don't need any work. We've got nine hundred thousand to hide out with until it cools, and we ain't going to spend it buying eggs!"

The husky made a reproving noise, and the gunboy turned on him defensively and barked, "Why not tell him? He won't tell anybody anything, after now."

I had not expected them to keep me around their hideout for a pet after they took the store back to the stolen spaceship, but this sounded like I was closer to getting a bullet in the back of the head than I expected.

"We won't need him for a pilot much longer," the Brains of the gang said calmly, still looking over my shoulder. He had not made a sound of objection when the kid clunked me. "The way I see him working this rig, you just push that stick forward to go, sideways to turn and harder to go faster. If you're going to hit anything the screen turns it red and you steer around. Simple. I can handle the piloting myself."

I hadn't expected him to catch on to the way the controls worked. Suddenly they didn't have any use for me, and no reason to keep me alive. I had to give them a reason, and fast.

I turned and grinned. "You'd better try another tack, boys, or you're likely to find yourselves kicking in space with your space-suits off." I should have planted the idea sooner. This late, talking big might set off those already tightened triggers.

Nobody pulled any triggers, they were a cool bunch.

"Find out what he means," said The Brains. He slid calmly into the control seat as the others yanked me out, and rested his hand lightly on the control rod. "Maybe he wasn't kidding when he said he expected us."

They dragged me upright, and Husky swung a blow to my wind. It didn't penetrate. I keep fit. He looked surprised when I didn't double up. "Blubber," he growled uncertainly, rubbing his fist. "You got a

trap for us? Talk quick." He rubbed his knuckles and looked at my nose.

I value my nose. "No trap. There are better ways of approach-ing the Belt than you boys are using. The woods are full of fugitives. I'll give any of them a stake and start and a place to live where no one knows the orbit but the guy who delivers supplies, that's me. But if you try anything else...."

He grunted something and swung, and I barely moved my nose out of the way before getting a fist in the face. The second swing connected and made my nose a throbbing radiating ache in my face. The two men at my arms hung on while I tried to pull loose and get at the husky, and we thrashed around the room for a few moments until I cooled off and they brought me back stand-ing facing him.

He was getting impatient, hefting a pistol by its barrel like a short club. He glanced from it to my face.

"Spit it out!"

Behind me at the controls came the Brains' smooth drawl. "He was probably running us into a trap. I've changed course."

"Brother," I said, breathing through my mouth. "If you do anything to me—" While I was talking they let me turn to the Brains, and he swung around to look at me. I kept talking.

"If you do anything to me, you are running yourself into a trap. I've got friends. Around here, when people get obnoxious they are likely to find themselves stuffed alive into a garbage chute and the lever pulled for them to go fight space, if they like making trouble! It's an interesting way to die, and it doesn't leave a mark."

During that speech the Brains and I were staring into each other eyes. I jerked my head sideways to indicate the garbage chute when I mentioned it and his glance flicked over to see where it was, and then locked with mine again until I finished talking. Then he spoke coldly.

"You've named it, Buster."

He looked at the others. "Stuff this bag of wind down the garbage chute. And make sure he's conscious."

It took all three of them some fifteen minutes to do it. I was careful to keep the fight away from the supplies so as not to break anything, but otherwise I gave a good Br'er Rabbit imitation of a man fighting to stay away from death. Their faces were the only part that stuck out of their spacesuits, but I bent Gunboy's nose, almost closed both of Number Four's eyes, and made a good try at yanking off a part of Husky's left ear.

I don't like being called Fatty.

They got mad enough to have shot me, but they had already put their guns away to make sure I'd be alive to appreciate what was going to happen to me.

For one lucky moment in the scramble I had all three of them tripped and down, and had a knee on Gunboy's back, fishing in his spacesuit leg pocket for his gun. Then somebody kicked me in the groin. I lost track of what was happening and just tried to breathe. When I came back to noticing anything they were busy stuffing me into the garbage chute, putting muscle into straight-ening me out from my curled up crouch, and making laughing cracks about it being a tight fit.

I clawed to get out and tried to choke down a few more deep breaths, but I was still too weak for my arm-waving to bother them.

They pushed my head down with the lid, clanged the lid on and locked it into place. It cut off the sound of their laughing to a distant murmur.

Then someone must have found and pulled the disposal lever.

The bottom of the chute opened. Air pressure fired me out into space like a human cannonball from a circus cannon.

For a moment, I flung end over end, the multicolored lights of the milky way, and the intermittent harsh burning glare of the sun flashed into my naked eyes, then I shut my eyes tightly, while the pressure of air bulged my chest out and whooshed out my mouth, pushing it open like a soft expanding pillow.

I clenched my eyes more tightly closed. I wasn't going to explode like the characters in visio stories, pressure drop was not enough for that, because I never kept more than three pounds pressure in the store atmosphere anyhow. A pressure drop like that can't kill, but it might rupture the blood vessels in my

eyes.

Like a mousetrap the ring that hung down from the back of my collar swung up on a hinge, bringing a collapsed balloon of mirror coated plastic over my head and swung down past my face, nearly taking off the tip of my battered nose. As it clanked into place over the collar ring, suddenly the air pushing out of my lungs filled the soft plastic bag and it expanded with a pop into a helmet globe, darkly transparent from the inside, mirrorcoated on the outside to reflect most of the sun's destructive glare.

I was protected by an emergency spacesuit. From the outside now I looked like a solid silver figure with a round silver sphere instead of a head.

The mousetrap spring on the helmet globe was set to dangle down the back, and its catch was supposed to hold it back there until a sudden pressure drop expanded a tiny balloon under the catch and slipped the spring free.

I'd tested them in space before distributing them, but this was the first time my coverall had been tested with me in it, and I found myself considerably surprised and grateful that it really worked.

There wasn't much air in the emergency headglobe with me. I should have been breathing heavily up to the last minute to store oxygen in my blood, but the kick had stopped that. There was barely enough breath to pray with.

I had to be lucky twice. My second guess had to be right too.

It was.

Just about the time I could no longer tell the sun from the spinning bursts of white light in my head Fergason's scooter showed up along side with its jets trailing blue light and his anxious face peered out.

After that I was out of the fight.

For three hours the store went on, picking up more and more quiet little scooters as the settlers trailed after the interesting conversation being broadcast by my radio. They followed close-ly, but always a little to one side, so none of them ever went on "collision" course and rang an alarm in the store control board. They were quiet and inconspicuous, listening on their radios with great interest to the talk of nine hundred thousand dollars, and to the fugitives talk of hiding out with the supplies in the store.

It was not until my stolen ship came to a meeting place where floated the huge shiny expensive Phobos, the ship they had taken from the commercial line, not until the convicts began coming out the airlock to go back to the Phobos—not until then did the scooters close in.

The settlers brought my store hack to me, its thin walls plugged full of holes, and patched, and brought back one survi-vor, Mister Brains. He must have needed brains to survive, since the settlers had probably been over-enthusiastic in the capture. I did not ask what became of the other five convicts or the kidnap-ped pilot and first engineer of the Phobos. I believe in being tactful.

I took the survivor's fingerprints, and gave him a stake of supplies and a spinhouse to grow vegetables in until he decided what kind of work he could do.

We called a conference of all settlers over the radio to decide what to do with the loot, and on vote, divided up the nine hundred thousand among us as a penalty to the Brains for not using his brains, barging in and making a row, when he could have found out on Earth how to be smuggled out here quietly on the regular run. He had a vote too, and voted against it, hut it didn't do him much good. We're a democracy, and one vote doesn't go far. Nine hundred thousand divided fifty ways is pinmoney, compared to the prices of things out here anyhow. Frontiers always get bad inflation.

I sent the new one's fingerprints down to my strongbox in a bank on Earth. Everyone's fingerprints are in there, and everyone knows that anytime I disappear suddenly the box will be opened and the prints handed to the police. But I don't blackmail them, and they trust me to keep that box closed, because my prints are in there too.

It just makes everyone very careful of my health, so that they are inclined to resent outsiders trying to kill me.

That's why I can leave the airlock open for anyone to walk in. I know when I'm safe.

The parts of the Phobos are coming in very handy for building. We'll have a city here yet.

THE FITTEST

Man's adaptability is obviously a major factor in his survival as a species...but there are other vital qualities . . .

Among the effects of Terry Shay was found a faded snap-shot. It is a scene of desolation, a wasteland of sand and rock made vague by blowing dust, and to one side huddle some dim figures. They might be Eskimos with their hoods pulled close, or they might be small brown bears.

It is the only record left of the great event, the event which came into the hands of Terry Shay.

Like all great events it started with trivial things.

A tiny item in the Agriculture budget caught the hawklike eye of a senator. He stood up. "Item: $1,200 over estimate for automatic controls of space missile; see appropriation estimate 108, Department of Wastelands, Reclamation; ecology, cultural viability liaison to UNESCO and F.A.O. of U.N." He looked up, smiling a deadly smile. "I don't understand much of this gobble-degook, but I know what the word space means. Will somebody please explain to me what qualifies the Department of Agricul-ture to waste our money shooting off rockets into space?"

A Department of Agriculture man arose, riffled through folders and read aloud the statement of the director who had requested the rocket. This caused further difficulties, for the language was technical, and nobody understood it. On the second reading they managed to catch the word Venus.

Venus! Headlines in eight chains of papers carried the sena-tor's unkind request that the committee of investigation include a psychiatrist. The ninth chain showed the initiative of a more alert reporter by carrying an interview with the director of the Depart-ment of Wasteland Reclamation.

It was a small, elaborate rocket, no more than twenty feet long. Doctor of Botany Ernest P. Crofts was somewhat impatient of laymen but he showed it to the reporter proudly, gesturing at it with a test tube of some odd greenish stuff in his hand. When asked what was in the tube he became indignant.

"But I told you already. Haven't you read any of my articles in the Journal of Paleontology? Or Jabson's letters in the Survey of Botanical Sciences? ...NO? Well you must at least have heard of the new Smith-Ellington theory of atmospheric dynamics—No? My stars! What do people read? Doesn't anyone follow the debates? What do they think the rocket is for?"

The reporter informed him that they did not know what the rocket was for, and Crofts pulled himself together to explain.

There had been a long curiosity and debate among paleontol-ogists and astronomers because spectroscopes had shown that the atmosphere of Venus was carbon dioxide, proving that there was no plant life on Venus, for plants convert carbon dioxide to oxygen. Venus was a desert. Yet it was supposed to be the sister planet of Earth, and the point of strangeness in the comparison was not the strangeness of Venus, for its atmosphere was chemi-cally logical—it was the strangeness of Earth. Why did the Earth have air of free breathable oxygen? Why was there so much water? Could plants alone have worked the change?

Doctor Crofts believed that microorganisms and plants alone had changed Earth, and he was ready to prove his belief by sending a missile to Venus and spraying it with a collection of molds and slimes and lichens specially bred to the old conditions. If his test worked, then some day, when space liners were available for inexpensive migration to Venus, that dry poisonous place would be green and moist with plants, and the air sweet and fit to breathe.

Congress cared little for paleontology, but it could see the advantage of transforming a million acres of wasteland into good salable real estate. The bill passed.

Venus was slowly approaching its nearest point to Earth, and the finishing touches were being put on

the rocket's load of seeds.

Terry Shay was the top reporter of the Humanist Party and he was always ready to catch the government in some bureaucratic injustice or inhumanity. Even high officials of the government, who usually had hard words for ignorant prying busybodies, feared and respected the face of Terry Shay on television.

For a crusader it is hard to distinguish between genuine concern for the welfare of the people, and the need to make the readers read and the circulation grow, and perhaps Terry Shay was beginning to forget that there was a difference.

When the letter came he opened it and then sat for a while holding it in his hands and thinking of circulation figures and the rich white light of publicity.

The letter was from the A.S.P.C.A., and it pointed out that Venus might possibly have animal life adapted to its own condi-tions, and to change those conditions could therefore come under the heading of cruelty and slow torture and murder of animals.

He read it over and laughed. "Wow."

"What is it?" asked Patty, his secretary.

"The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and the British Humane Society want to take out an injunction against the Venus seed rocket. They want me to help." He laughed again.

She was puzzled. "But what have they against the Venus rocket? What harm could it do any animal?"

He explained, grinning. "There might be natives on Venus." She was startled by the idea but still puzzled.

"On Venus. How could they breathe? What would they eat? That's not very likely, is it, Terry?"

He grinned more widely. "No, but nobody has been there to see. There is a reasonable doubt, enough to rock those bureau-crats back on their heels with an injunction. They should have thought of the possibility. They should be more careful of who their damned lumbering machine is likely to run over."

He got his publicity. There was a great quarrel among experts, overflowing onto the radio, television, and all the public papers. While they were arguing, the injunction went through, restraining Dr. Crofts from sending the seeds....

Patty's motives are not known. They may have included some dream of a desert being grown over by trumpet vines and lilac hushes and birds and running streams. She may have been angry with Terry for some reason of her own.

He came in from a radio speech and found a clipping on his desk. It stated that Anton Gottlieb had finished a new space-ship to add to the fleet of five now prospecting the asteroid belt. Gottlieb stated that the new design was so economical of weight that it was theoretically capable even of landing and taking off again from a medium-sized planet without refuel-ing. Under the clipping was a note from Patty.

"Why don't you go to Venus and see for yourself?" the note said. "Think of the publicity!" It is impossible to say what would have been the tone of her voice if she had said it, but it sounded like a dare.

The next night he went on television to tell the world that he was going to Venus.

The country was interested; they had argued enough, now they wanted an answer. They passed the hat to raise the fortune that was needed to buy the spaceship for him, and they placed side bets with each other on what he would find on Venus.

While the collection of money went on, Terry turned up at the proving grounds to consult the designer.

"Why not?" said Gottlieb, spreading his hands and shrug-ging. "If crazy people want to go to Venus, I will convert the ship for Venus. It will only need a little change in fins, there, and a stronger tripod, there, so, and—" He paused and considered the spaceship meditatively, a light of speculation growing in his eyes.

"This search, it will make the test more dangerous, yes?"

"Yes."

"You land, maybe, and take off again?" He was growing excited with some idea of his own.

"Yes."

"Good! Then I will go with you." He beamed.

Terry considered having "Papa" Gottlieb as a companion and stifled a grin. "But what of your responsibilities, Mr. Gottlieb?"

Gottlieb looked harassed. "That's what Minna says. Always she wants me to stay on the ground. Always she says, think of the children—I think of the children, their father a designer who has not the faith to test his own ships! No, this time I go!"

In the archives of the newspapers of the time one can find photos of the Department of Agriculture man nervously shaking hands with the two before the takeoff and wishing them well in a stilted memorized speech. In most of the photographs, Dr. Crofts and Anton Gustav Gottlieb seem embarrassed by the camera and crowds, and Terry Shay is smiling and eager to go, but in one picture Terry Shay has already climbed into the ship and Dr. Crofts is handing Gottlieb a symbolic going-away present. It is a package of morning glory seeds, the caption says, and they are both smiling wryly.

After they had been through the first acceleration and picked up extra fuel at the moon, Gottlieb took time for Terry's instruc-tions. Gottlieb was of the opinion that non-engineers were back-ward children and halfwits, but he kept to his task, sometimes despairing but always inexhaustibly patient, and succeeded in drilling Terry in the care and handling of spaceships and giving him some rudiments of navigation. Terry came to know "Papa"

Gottlieb very well, and tried to turn the tables on him by discuss-ing politics. Gottlieb usually evaded the subject with a good natured "Ach!"

Once he said, "Did I ever tell you I did not like people?"

"No." Terry smiled; the statement was ludicrous. Gottlieb obviously liked everybody.

"I don't like people. They are very bad," said Gottlieb soberly. "I was in five concentration camps. They were all alike." He touched the scars on his neck. "What good is politics, Terry?"

When Terry began trying to explain, Gottlieb interrupted with an interminable story about the baby sayings of his young-est daughter, and pulled out his wallet to show him her picture. He carried pictures of all his children and was always ready to talk about them, but this time it came to Terry that the round-faced little engineer had deliberately changed the subject, so he left it at that.

Venus was coming very close, a great dark globe showing a narrow ribbon of sunlight around one side.

"Maybe there is life," Gottlieb said. Terry was not prepared for what came next. "What puzzles me is why you want to save these Venusians. Why do you want to, Terry?"

The full ruthless implications of that sank in slowly. Terry turned from the viewplate with a feeling of shock. "If I don't, they will die," he pointed out carefully, as if to a child.

The chubby engineer laughed. "If the amoebas had worried abut that, we would still be amoebas. Only the fittest should survive. Differential breeding. How else can we have a better race, eh? Progress is built on death."

"You talk like a fascist," Terry said with disgust, as he would have said that Anton Gustav Gottlieb had leprosy. The little engineer merely looked at him soberly and picked up a book.

Terry mastered himself and thereafter avoided political top-ics and the subject of saving Venusians, painfully aware of the danger of making the trip intolerable with quarrels.

Dusty wind, rocks, high-piled flowing dust dunes, weirdly scoured mountains, black vitreous chimneys of forgotten vol-canoes, sudden torrential rains that condensed in the strato-sphere and fell as mud, collecting dust from the atmosphere, and dried as it fell, and spattered against the ground as rains of small dry pellets, heavier mud rains that reached the ground and scoured gullies in the dust, and filled the gullies with hardening clay that was covered again by dust in one sweep of the wind, and over it all, heat, a dry constant heat of 200 degrees, and a dim constant light that faded at night to a hot starless darkness.

It seemed to be a planet without life and without hope of life. They flew a probe over the weirdly beautiful sterile landscape, misled by swirls of motion that enlarged in the probe's telefoto lenses to a closeup of spinning whirls of wind and dust. Flashes of sunlight briefly followed the rains down from the sky before the dust closed in again.

"There is not enough radiation unbalance to support plants, and so there is no plant life to support animals," said Gottlieb. "Give up, Terry and go home."

Terry had been reading basic ecology. "There are other energy unbalances. How about hot springs and volcanos?"

They refitted the probe with sonar and magnometer and a Backster life detector and sent it out probing and sounding along likely stone ridges. They watched the viewscreens from the probe until their eyes blurred and their tempers wore thin. At the end of two days they found a hollow section in a water bearing ridge that was cooler and issued water vapor from crevices. They settled the probe near it and saw the opening of a cave. The Backster meter began to register a wave pattern. A sudden blip in the wave pattern rang its alarm. Life.

They moved the ship to follow the probe, settled its tripod down on a slope, put on cooling suits and airhelmets and went out. The wind buffeted them with gusts of dust and fine sand, and then quieted as they entered the crevice. Inside, fine sand had drifted to make a level floor pocked with footprints like small bare feet. As they walked in deeper they startled a group of round furry creatures the size of pups, who fled before them, leaving a deserted pile of sand tools and unfinished sand castles.

Gottlieb laughed. "I feel like I am at the beach among the kindern. I am too happy, Terry. The grownups are smiling at me, now, but I see no one. Am I drunk? Is it too much oxygen in the helmet?"

"I feel it too," Terry said. Not telepathy, Backster effect, cell to cell. They must be really friendly. They can't fake it."

They turned on their helmet lights and dimmed them, to not hurt the eyes of the people who were ahead, out of sight.

They walked on through tunnels stooping under low ceilings, listening to distant squeaks. "They are trying to help us with their sounds," Gottlieb said, stooping under a low ceiling. "So they see by sound, but their children, their cubs had eyes also, so they use two ways of seeing and we use one."

"I want to see them. I like them." Terry straightened and hit his helmet with a clang, and laughed and crouched again, and felt them share his laugh and fear the clang as a flash of white light. They were like his family, all sharing the work over Christmas dinner. He remembered the feeling. "They can't come to us. They're working."

"Like relatives, thought-sharing with one another," Gottlieb muttered. "Useful," then again, "Good!" as he passed an intersec-tion of tunnels with bracing that showed a keen understanding of structural principles. The work was done in stone.

Presently the two Earthmen came upon them working in the depth of the mine, channeling and conserving a faint trickle of water. The leader-one stopped work for a moment to come forward and greet them. His fur was not exactly fur, but some-thing more like brown velvet, but otherwise he was very like a small brown bear. He looked at them with intelligent, interested brown eyes, and after hesitating a moment took their extended hands and shook them, and returned to work. They fell to and helped.

"Evolved from a water-digging animal," said Gottlieb. "Prob-ably a water-fueled metabolism. Carbon from the air and energy from the temperature differential of evaporation. This air is *dry."*

He paused, holding a flat slab of rock. The leader-one spoke a few words of precise direction, interested by the clumsiness of the strangers.

"I beg your pardon," Gottlieb said gently, smiling. "I don't understand you, Mr. Teddy Bear." The native made a gesture of apology and pointed. Gottlieb placed the slab carefully where indicated. "They have a language," he said, "Tool." It showed that the telepathy needed some supplement. It was as vague to the community of bears as it was to the Earthmen. Terry and Gottlieb worked on for a while, and then sat down and leaned against a wall to relax, with their lights off. They could hear the natives working steadily, tapping and grinding, and sometimes lighting the dark for themselves with a supersonic beep.

"We'll have to go back for more oxygen cylinders soon," Terry said.

"Yes," said Gottlieb.

They walked back up the long corridors to the outside and the ship. "Just like brown bears," Terry said warmly. "I always like those brown bears that mooch candy and popcorn in the parks. I'd like to take some of these back and introduce them around to the guys."

"Oxygen would be death to them," warned Gottlieb. "They need technology and spacesuits. Their

science is backward be-cause of the rock, not because of too little thinking. What use is thinking without fire, wood, or hard metal? What can intelligence do with nothing to work with but rock? One needs tools!"

"Let's take them some," said Terry. "This is one native minority in history that is going to get a fair break."

The first trip, they took with them a double armload of empty plastic cartons for the natives to use as water containers. Then Gottlieb stayed behind to watch their use and learn a few words of their language, his face beaming and excited behind his face-plates. Terry returned on the second trip with Gottlieb's tool kit and some plastic wall plates from the storeroom bulkhead. "It's cooling," he reported. "Pretty soon we can start."

The leader-native began to understand vaguely that the blow-torch was some sort of a tool. He touched and lifted the oddly shaped, beautifully worked objects which was so strangely not stone and not dust, and not gold, and he hooted at it super-sonically to see it better, then looked up skeptically at the Earthmen. It could not be a tool. It was not a wedge, and not a hammer, but he hoped with great yearning that it would be a tool.

Amused, Terry watched his play of expressions. "Let's show him," he suggested.

They decided to build a cistern, with piped water.

Water dripped with tinkles and splashed into the inadequate rock of the natives' storage pool. Before turning the blowtorch on, Gottlieb warned the natives away with a gesture "Different metabolism—heat radiation might be very dangerous to them; they have no sunlight and no fire, nothing."

The cluster of small brown bears felt his anxiety and obedi-ently trotted off up the corridor to a safe distance, while the two Earthmen set to work in their heavy spacesuits to build an airtight cistern.

When they had finished the natives came and looked, and then as if by prearrangement drew off up the corridor again, leaving two behind.

One of the two who was left tugged at the blowtorch in Gottlieb's hand, looking up earnestly at his face.

"He wants me to show him how to use it," Gottlieb said, still worried.

"Go ahead," Terry said, amused. "He knows what he's doing."

The volunteer's motion seemed unsteady, but he mimicked Gottlieb's demonstration efficiently enough. The engineer hand-ed him the blowtorch and showed him how to turn it on. The other native stood to one side making a steady supersonic note, and watching.

The volunteer turned on the blowtorch without clumsiness, startled as the thin blue flame tongued out, skillfully smoothed the rough unfinished plastic corner, then died and fell into the storage pool. They all felt him die.

The blowtorch clanged down and flared on the floor, and Gottlieb reached it and turned it off before it did any more damage.

The group of friendly, sober little bears came forward again. First there was the next-most-expendable, who had stood close to the experiment and beeped to give a side lighting of sound to what happened and measure the range of the deadly effect by being close. Then there came the main group which had stood around the bend of a corridor and watched by the distorted reflection of sound, and last there was the leader who had gone some distance away up a side corridor, out of reach of any possible danger. The logical pattern of the arrangement was clear.

It was rather horrible to Terry, for he understood how ready they had been for one of them to die for the sake of a new tool.

They were thumping the chest of the one who had stood close, and gabbling questions at him. Gottlieb and Terry drew together, watching silently.

"Why do they have to be so damned cheerful about it?" Terry demanded.

Gottlieb was calm. "It is a good death, dying for the future. They must have hoped they could use the blowtorch. They know they need tools. He would not have had such a chance usually."

"A chance to be killed, you mean?" Terry asked sarcastically, watching as two teddy bears picked the body up from the shallow water of the storage pool and casually carted it away. There was no doubt that he was dead. Even the two Earthmen had felt the flash of pain that preceded the dark. "Fine chance!"

"A chance to be useful," Gottlieb protested, hurt. "Everyone wants to be useful. Perhaps he was sick and couldn't work, and so they choose him. He seemed weak."

"Chose him!" Terry felt sick. The whole business began strangely to seem like an extension of his argument with Gottlieb, with the teddy bears unfairly taking Gottlieb's side. He stepped forward and gripped the shoulder of the leader, and turned him around speaking directly at the large intelligent eyes.

"You're a sort of adviser to this bunch. Do you mean to say that you chose two who were sick to be killed, while you went and hid yourselves?"

The native's eyes widened in the universal sign of puzzle-ment and he let out an involuntary supersonic beep, unconscious-ly trying to make out a dim meaning by sonic reflection. Terry felt the gulf of misunderstanding between them. He shook the furry body gently, trying to convey his meaning. "But that was mur-der," he said. "That was cowardice, sending someone else to take the danger!"

Gottlieb laid a hand on his arm. "Please, Terry. You are not fair to him. He is a superior type, with better genes. He must be careful of himself."

Terry felt the familiar rage rising in him and tried to check it with a mental pause, making his mind blank. In the brief silence came a feeling of peace. The natives were going back to work, but they were disturbed by the disturbance of his feelings and trying to soothe him as they would soothe a fretful child, wanting him to feel that everything was all right, everything was all right, single deaths, individual hurts cannot matter to life in the long run, everything was the way it should be—It was like a lullaby, a song of reassurance and strength, the enfolding protecting arms of time and fate—

"They are hellish, persuasive," said Terry. Gottlieb was tugging at his arm.

"We must go back now and make ready for the return. Come on, Terry."

They went back through the long corridors, leaving their heavy alien footprints in the fine overtracked sand, and the children scattered excitedly back from the entrance as they reached it, then drew in again to watch them work. After a time the leader and some of the other adults came shyly out of the caves to help.

"Remember what I told you," remonstrated Gottlieb's voice in Terry's earphones.

"You didn't waste those lessons." Terry grinned, looking around the storage compartment and understanding its construc-tion from remembered lessons. He had emptied it of the surplus emergency equipment, and now he began dismantling a fuel compartment, stripping its surplus weight from the spaceship for the return trip. He unbolted a heavy plate, slid it to a hatch door and looked down before throwing it out.

There was nothing in sight but the usual barren drifting sand and the comically foreshortened figure of Anton Gustav Gottlieb below and to one side, happily pow-wowing with a gang of small, square, interested teddy bears.

Terry grinned and released the wide metal plate. As it slid from his hands a sudden dusty wind slewed it in the direction of the group. It looked as if it would fall too close.

"Look out!" he called. The plate sliced through the air, turning at an angle directly toward the leader-native.

"Look out!" Only Gottlieb could hear the call in his ear-phones; only Gottlieb looked up and saw the whole thing. There was no time for the engineer to do anything. It was too late to reach the native.

Very clearly, as in a nightmare, Terry saw the foreshortened spacesuited figure step deliberately into the path of the plate, and try to catch it with his hands. The sound of impact came clearly, first through his earphones, then like an echo a fractional instant later through the air, sound very far away. Terry took a deep breath and went for a first aid kit.

As he reached the ground and passed through the ring of natives towards the still figure in the spacesuit he could hear Gottlieb whispering something.

Hoping for word of what to do, Terry bent closer, tuning up his earphones, listening.

"Survival of the fittest—the fittest—the fittest," whispered Anton Gustav Gottlieb, and died.

Terry touched his shoulder, but there was no sound of breathing, and a swirl of dust came and settled on the glass of the faceplate.

"Papa" Gottlieb. He had not been very smart in some things. He was a good engineer, but he was not a psychologist. He had seen some evil things and he had not liked the way life was lived by men on Earth; he had wanted to have it done better somehow, and he did not care by whom... by men, or by calm, enduring, intelligent teddy bears who loved tools like good engineers.

"You damned fool." Terry raised his face to the dusty sky and tried not to think for awhile.

It was easy. Soothing thoughts came from somewhere...

There were other good people, not many now, but all would be good friends, and soon there would be more, and more, going with him. Life goes on and spreads and is happy in many bodies behind many faces. Everything is all right.

Terry choked and looked around at the concerned ring of small brown bears. They were soothing him, like a ring of aunts and uncles around at a funeral. He didn't want to be soothed. "Everything is not all right, dammit."

They said nothing, but they were contradicting him with their calm strength and certainty of the future—the long future for mankind among the stars. Furry brown mankind, happy with machines.

The leader-one climbed up onto Gottlieb's chest and peered worriedly into Terry's face with intelligent eyes. His ears were flattened back to his head to keep out the dust, and he looked almost like a man.

It would not be difficult to make spaceship's for these friendly little people. Dryer, hotter, with a different air. They like ma-chines; they loved work, and they would not make war.

"The fittest," Terry found he was repeating Gottlieb's, last words. "The fittest." He backed away, and climbed the ship's ladder.

From a distance the leader looked like a brown animal standing on the chest of a man he had killed.

Terry reached into his knapsack and pulled out the packet of morning glory seeds he had brought along for luck. He tore the packet open and scattered the seeds into the dusty wind and then got back inside the ship and lifted it for the return trip to Earth. When he got outside into space he broke radio silence and reported that there was no life on Venus.

The seed rocket passed him on the way, carrying its cargo of molds and spores and germs and fungus and green seeds, to shape and destroy, and change and create.

When the people landed, no other life than Earth life was found on Venus. Terry Shay never told.

It is written among the great lost choices. It could have been different. It might have been a partnership.

But it might not.

THESE TRUTHS

In a world history that seems a record of slaughter, oppres-sion and starvation, the early Greek and Roman Republics, The Magna Carta, Common law, Parliaments, the Declaration of Inde-pendence, the Bill of Rights, are social inventions that somehow have held small islands of freedom and happiness above the blood and mud of dictatorships and kings. As inventions, they should be spread to other worlds, and species, for several genera-tions before we venture to give them the doubtful benefits of increased weapons technology.

We hold these truths to be inarguable, that all Englishmen are born with equal rights. Among our rights are life, property and the security of our homes," wrote the tall young man. Thinking hard, he bore down on the feather pen. One prong broke at the tip and it dripped a blot on the paper, covering *English.*

He took out a small knife and sharpened the goose quill to a new point, rereading what he had written. "—inarguable?" Most of his friends could argue anything or everything. "Rights?" a good word, but he used that same word twice, almost in the same sentence. He crossed off the first "rights" and was

left with "that all men are born with equal—" Equal what? Equal punishment under the law. The law should not respect titles or moderate the punishment to the rich. Men understood what injustices they meant when they growled about equality. Mention common law?

He tore the top off the sheet of paper and started again. "We hold these truths to be sacred and undeniable, that all men are created equal and independent and from the equal creation they derive—" He went back and crossed off Undeniable. They would deny anything. Indesputable? They would despute anything.

He crossed it off and wrote above the line, remembering the great words of Locke: "We hold these truths to be self evident. That all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights governments are founded among men, drawing their just powers from the consent of the governed. That whenever any form of government shall become destructive to these ends it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it."

Benjamin Franklin looked over his shoulder. "Pursuit of Happiness? Locke puts it as 'The rights to life, liberty and property.' The pursuit of Happiness doesn't seem as substantial as property."

"What if I forbade you to pursue happiness?" Jefferson asked patiently. "What possession or property would you part with more reluctantly that the pursuit of happiness?"

"A good point, Thomas," Franklin conceded, smiling. He read back. "Created equal? Not clear, Thomas. You're at least a head taller than I."

"Go away," Thomas Jefferson growled, bearing down with his feather pen until the quill tip threatened to break again.

"The code of honor and the prejudice of armed aristocrats are survival devices. It will be the same on any planet where armed males govern a conquered and disarmed nation. How can a strategist get them to put aside honor and accept equality?"

Klee, H.S. Handbook of Democratic Revolutions

The millenium after the Magna Carta was not celebrated with fireworks.

The planet was smaller and more stony than Earth, but had a moderate season from pole to pole, with sparse meadow and thick forest, rather chilly in summers and mild in winters.

Stone castles every ten or twenty miles gave the observers some warning of what to expect. They hovered their spaceships and let down one messenger. Then the Dit ships went elsewhere in that solar system to claim and terraform four uninhabitable planets. Their messenger was left to fend for himself with only strategy and skill.

All the beings in the throne room were lions. They stood on hind legs and wore fine velvet clothes and swords, but the wide round eyes, the flat nose with a black patch over it, the short upper lip and bristled mustache did not need the thick upper arms and wide pawlike padded hands to proclaim the race and species, Cat. They chatted with each other in low tones as a petition was read loudly to the king.

Their tails and ears twitched nervously as the reading of the petition was interrupted by a scream and roar from the cellar.

Pacing on the dais, the king was a massive figure with shoulders half as wide as his height. His long hair was a wavy yellow mane, his eyes were amber yellow and he was dressed in red velvet, pinched in at the waist to prove he had not yet grown soft in the belly.

Waiting for the reading, he stopped pacing and roared across the courtroom at a guard.

"Tell that torturer that we don't question prisoners on days when the king is giving hearings." The guard ran.

The king gestured irritably with a big pawlike hand, "Go on with the petition, I'm listening."

Bristling, the group of petitioners stood the length of the courtroom away from the king, their hands resting on their swords. The oldest among them raised the petition again and resumed reading. The crowd in the courtroom resumed discreet chatting and gaming with a box game of small balls and wooden squares, purring to their silky furred, gorgeously clothed ladies. In spite of the milling crowd a wide open lane was left between the petitioners and the king, through which the black maned petitioner shouted his message.

He finished and waited. The lane remained open. The crowd quieted.

Ceremonially the king sat down on his throne, picked up an ancient and rusty battle ax, held it slanting across his chest, and bellowed across the distance. "I say No."

The nobles paused in their gaming. The petitioners stood bristling with their hands on their swords for a moment and then the oldest advanced down the aisle toward the king, his sword suddenly bare and glittering. His younger relatives followed. They were all slender with dark manes, obviously a family and obviously determined to kill their ruler. The king's palace guards turned their backs, and stood motionless.

The king advanced to the edge of the dais and leaned on his heavy ancient ax, his lips curled in a sneer.

Sitting on the back edge of the dais the human observer from the Dit fleet looked at the oncoming swords and stirred uneasily. He whispered a rapid description of the situation, knowing that his earbutton transceiver was sending it to a relay satellite to be recorded in case he did not return.

The chatting crowd did not seem to notice the threat to the king! Then, throughout the apparently playful crowd in the courtroom there was a rustling rearrangement of position, and the aisle to the king closed and was filled with lion men, resting their hands on their swords, still talking of other things to each other but facing outward toward the advancing hand of petition-ers.

The king bellowed over the heads of his defenders. "You agree then?"

The leader of the black-maned band glared around with a snarl. "I agree." He sheathed his sword and all the younger ones of his band followed his action. He turned and stalked out, his tail twitching, and his band followed, their hands still resting angrily on the hilts of their swords.

The youngest and last of them turned back at the entrance and shouted, "Instead of growing white, you all grow yellow with age, like peasants." Then he ran.

The human observer, sitting wrapped in his dark cloak, noticed that the nobles of the throne room had yellow manes like the king, but they looked dark at the roots. Their manes were dyed or bleached to match the king's long yellow mane. He understood the insult.

The king turned and leaned the rusty ax back in its place against the throne. He glanced at the human observer sitting wrapped in his cloak on the edge of the platform, and asked quietly. "When do you start giving me orders?"

In the human Messenger's earphones his girlfriend on the spaceship cheered. "Hurray!! Tell the bastard to stop torturing prisoners. Tell him from now on it's human rights or else!" Dason, hearing her, smiled, she was a terraforming biologist and had the patience to set up evolutionary patterns that would ripen in a thousand years, but she had not patience in social engineering; it was not her science.

She did not understand that warriors of a warrior culture take no threats. From within the hood of his cloak he told the king, "I am only here to observe. I admire your technique in reaching agreements."

The king sat down on his throne. "Mostly luck. If I could not give my nobles a bit of meat for themselves in every decision they would not defend me. Someday they will face my way when the petitioner charges and charge with him. Then my good fellow, I must decide that I did not mean what they thought they heard me say, and explain quickly. But I will probably fight and die instead. I am very stubborn. My father died defending a foolish decision."

He looked over to the human in the dark cloak. "We have both been too polite. When do you start giving me my orders?"

The human rose, a tall dark figure shapeless in his cloak. "I don't give orders, only advice."

The king stared from round yellow eyes, and grinned, show-ing sharp fangs. "Advice like my advice to the Clan Rudont just now. Come now, dear fellow. I know you wish to preserve my vanity, but since the moment your fleet hovered over my palace and you came down out of it without even condescending to wear weapons, I have been conquered. I know that." He held his relaxed pose on the throne, broad fingers and round eyes for a moment stared too intently.

Without looking away he made a gesture across the crowded throne room with a big padded hand. "Everyone here knows I am conquered. News has spread from the fiefs of my nobles. Even peasants know it throughout the entire kingdom. They know you are here to give me orders from your king. Why not come out of that mysterious dark cape?"

The Messenger stepped before the throne and ceremonious-ly, with a wide swing of his arm, stripped off his dark cape and flung it on the floor. He had spent several weeks observing the customs and actions of the natives. He had painted a dark patch over his nose, and lined the trace of a cleft lip, but he could not add a tail.

Some conversation in the court stopped with a hiss. Others turned to see what had caused the silence and let out a slower and harsher hiss of surprise as they saw the shape which had been hidden by the cloak.

With all eyes on him, the Messenger knelt before the throne and offered the king his sword, holding the blade and offering the handle.

"Fate's hand, but you are skinny and ugly," said the king in low tones. "Do you know what you are doing?"

The Messenger mumbled. "I'm offering fealty and swearing loyalty to you, because I like you. Your people should not think you are conquered. Take the damned sword."

The king stood and with a kingly gesture took the sword by the hilt. "Rise, friend," the king bellowed. The Messenger rose and the king gave him back his sword.

All nobles in the court roared three times while the king embraced the Messenger with his big furry arms. The court roared again and all embraced all. The servants were sent out for wine.

Alcohol is remarkably similar on all planets where the plants produce carbohydrates from sunlight. It was a case of parallel mechanical design. Light fuels burn faster in the body. Dason got drunk on local booze, and enjoyed a party with the lions. He was a master of hand combat, but found the games of the lions some-what rough, for they outweighed him in what seemed to be solid muscle, even the ladies. During the party he observed the ways of the servants and observed something that made him thoughtful the next day.

The king joined him outside. "Hung over?"

"No, just watching the peasants." There were husky peasants reaping grain on the hillsides above the castle. They were wide shouldered and thick armed, with short irregular manes the color of the king's long mane. Their shoulders were bare and a line of fur showed down the length of the bare backs. They swung the long bladed scythes in short impatient strokes, and women followed them, gathering and bundling the cut grain in rolls of brown cloth.

What are you thinking, Messenger?" asked the king, accepting a steaming cup of some wake up gruel from a servant, looking upward at the fields.

Dason wondered how much to tell him. He was a Messenger of the Sacred Words, and would not delay, but nobles of castled and fortified feudalisms always believed fiercely in inherited superiority and inherited privilege. A noble would die fighting to defend his family's right to command all "inferiors." A king would feel horror and disgust on hearing the words liberty ...equality. Nevertheless there could be a way. He tested the response.

"In my country, all the peasants have a voice in any decision that applies to them." Dason watched the king's expression. He saw controlled disgust.

The king made a humorous face. "Should I arm them all and try to fit them into the throne room? My nobles would kill a peasant they found armed."

"We arm them all, and teach them to read, and then write out the decisions, a paper to each man. Each man marks yes or no and the papers are counted." To a feudal noble this would sound like consulting the horses, or arming his enemies to attack him.

The king growled low in his throat and changed it to a cough. He bristled. "I prefer the advice of honorable nobles such as yourself, men from families of honor and power, men with titles and wisdom." He looked sidelong at Dason, hearing his silence as anger and coughed again. "I do not want to offend a man's religion. Does your king rule many lands?"

"My religion rules many worlds," Dason said, "But we will not force you. I am your friend. I never

give commands to my friends." He stopped talking, because in the situation everything he said sounded like a veiled threat. This man or lion could not be pushed. He smiled and changed the subject. "Nice weather this morning."

Butsey, his girlfriend on the spaceship must have been listening on the spaceship monitor again. She said in his ear-phones, "Bah! I thought you were going to read him the rules that time. When are you going to get the prisoners out of his cellar? When they're dead?"

"Don't push!" he muttered back to the listener on the space-ship.

The king waved the servant further away and stepped closer. "Friend Dason, there is something I've been wanting to ask you. Do you mind?"

He shrugged, "Ask."

The king looked up and down the patio for listeners then stood close and lowered his voice. "How did you lose your tail? Was it a battle?"

Dason had learned to understand prestige, no lowborn ex-planation would make him acceptable as the king's friend. Yet he would have to imply a lack of fighting experience. He selected his lie for maximum honor and glory.

"Initiation ceremony," he explained secretively. "We trade it for wisdom. Can't be allowed into the inner secrets of the Messen-gers if you have a tail. We must show no pain."

The king shuddered. "We don't have a society like that." He looked respectfully at his friend, the messenger from space. "But I must admit you know many strange secrets, Dason my friend. Perhaps as a friend you will someday tell me a very few secrets, such as how to build a flying warship."

"Are you willing to pay the price?" asked Dason, hiding a smile.

The king clutched his tail. "That's not what I meant. I hope the swordsman did not shave too close, my good friend. You are well?"

Dason laughed, divining the king's worried meaning. "They left me my other parts. I am still male. But let us not talk of secrets."

From the interior and depth of the castle there was a startling interruption, a shriek of pain that ululated down to a bellow of rage, and staccato roar that sounded like curses.

The king glanced uneasily toward the open palace door. "Let's take a walk away from the noise, and talk of the ways of your kings. I want to understand what they desire from me."

He strode toward the castle wall and the open postern gate with a long stride, almost a lope, and outside turned from the road and bounded down a steep hill, passing surly blond peasants cutting the deep grass with long scythes. Behind him a squad of five guards detached from the gate and followed to see that their king was not attacked. Dason, following, turned down his ear-phones, cutting off Butsey's plea to "kill the bastards and rescue that prisoner."

The king paused, looking up at the stonework of the castle leaning out from the hill above, pausing to let the human catch up. "I keep the grass cut short to prevent attackers who would creep up on the castle," said the king. He was panting.

"Good strategy," said Dason, seeing a compliment was ex-pected. A closer look at the two peasants he had passed had verified they both looked remarkably like the king and enough alike to be brothers.

The king straddled, one leg bent on the upslope, one leg stiff on the down slope, kingly in his healthy good humor. "Why? Why do you people give away your power to your peasants? I give my peasants no power. My fathers conquered their fathers." Laugh-ing he swung his arms. "I am enjoying the spoils. If they want to be rulers let them go find a country and conquer it, like my ancestors did."

The adviser grinned, envying his arrogance and turned up his earphones in time to hear his girlfriend, probably working in her laboratory at the spaceship, mutter, "Male chauvinist pig!" in admiring tones.

A peasant girl passed, hobbling under a great load of hay bundled in a blanket. Her face did not show.

The king's eyes followed her. He licked his lips and smiled "Husky lass. She walks with a fine swing. I can have all of that I want."

He turned abruptly and followed the girl, striding uphill.

The human messenger followed and said, "Consider heredity .... Your father liked women?" He turned off his earphones, hoping Butsey was not going to listen in on the strategy he was going to use.

The king laughed. "He was an elk in an apple orchard, trying to put his teeth marks on every pretty apple. Until he married my mother the Queen." He caught up with the girl, grabbed her arm, carefully lifted the load of hay from her head, and nuzzled along the sides of her round neck and pink innocent face.

"How many children do you think your father got upon peasant girls while he was yet a young prince?" The messenger asked. He picked up the bundle of hay and followed as the king pulled the girl toward the hay drying rick.

The king laughed. "That cannot be counted. One or two a day, maybe more when the weather is fine. I only know from my experience, not his."

He unbuckled his sword belt. "Here, hold my sword. You will stand guard outside for me, my friend. It would be a pity if the country suddenly lost a king because some father came upon us too suddenly, and did not recognize his anointed ruler."

Dason put down the hay and accepted the sword. "Sir, if your father was busy in these same fields in his time, what are the chances that her father is your half brother?"

The king planted a kiss on the girl's neck and pulled her inside the shade of the hutlike drying racks. "I can see you are working up some complicated way to spoil my fun. Don't tell me about it until afterward." He pulled the laughing girl down under the cool racks of drying grass into the green darkness. The Messenger politely walked a few yards away and scanned the hillside for outraged father or brothers.

One of the thick armed workers scything the hillside below laid aside his long-bladed scythe and started up the hill toward him. An older one intercepted him with a grip on the arm.

Soon there was a fight going, with the two snarling contestants trading loud, open-handed slaps. There was no blood where each blow landed, for they kept their claws held back and sheathed within their strong fingers. One, knocked off balance by a blow, rolled backward and downhill thirty feet, then snarling, returned to the attack.

The king's guard of five soldiers stood watching from the road. They cheered and laughed, urged the fight on, chose sides and bet.

Back in the hay rick behind him the Messenger heard male laughter and female giggling and a high pitched yelp, followed by more giggling and the sound of friendly talk. The king rejoined him, adjusting rumpled clothing.

"Brush me off behind like a good fellow. I'm green with grass." The king patted and beat at the front of his clothes, sending leaves and stalks and green seeds of grass down to the ground in a cloud. The Messenger patted and brushed at his back and the fine red velvet slowly recovered its normal brightness.

The girl peeked out of the rick at them, very pink in the cheeks, buttoning her tight shirt over her breasts with confused fingers, pushing buttons into the wrong holes.

The king said, "Would you like a turn at her, my good fellow? I'm sure she would oblige if her king asked her." He accepted his sword.

"No, thank you," said the Messenger, smiling. "I would not want to interrupt the possibility of a miracle. If she had a child by you, she might give birth to your father."

The king finished tightening his sword belt, then he loosened his sword in its sheath and straddled his legs wide in a fighting stance, and stared at the human with a level and hostile stare. "I find your joke obscene and in bad taste," he said frostily.

Dason cocked his head sideways in a relaxed and disarming lack of aggression. "You did ask me for some secrets, sir. This secret is closely guarded by all students of blood lines, for it is a very dangerous truth. Let me tell you another secret that may taste better. Imagine two young peasants from different family meeting boy to girl. They each think their peasant fathers are their true fathers. But though they have different mothers, you fathered them both. They follow your temperament and take a roll in the next hay rick. The girl can, then in the normal lapse of time, give birth to yourself or your very twin. When half brothers and half sisters cross blood lines their male children throw back to the father and are either his brothers or his very self born again."

The king thoughtfully chewed his knuckles. "Yes, one of the breeders of riding elks once tried to explain the very same thing to me. Cross a champion elk with his own daughter, or his son with his daughter and

the champion appears again and again among the offspring. Does that mean that there are many more of me?" He felt his features with his hand.

The messenger did not laugh. "How old were you when you first matured and felt an interest in females?"

"Eleven. I was a little slow," the king said apologetically.

"Let's say as a low estimate you fathered ten bastards, that year," said the messenger, building his point. "Eleven years later, growing up, they met each other, found much in common, the boys like the girls. In a year more the second crop of your own blood line is being born, without your help. Of those five children, one or two will be you again, two or three will be girls, and one or two will be very close brothers, perhaps resembling your father or grandfather in a way. They were born when you were twenty three years old. These peasant couples will have had more children since, each new one coming with a one in four odds of being you. And they were only the second echo of your eleventh year! You have been busy among the girls every year since! How many years since you were twenty-two?"

They were climbing a hill that overlooked the castle. It was clearcut also, and they passed between two more husky blond men swinging long-bladed scythes, and heard something like a growl that changed abruptly to a covering cough. They did not look back.

For a long thoughtful time the king did not answer, just climbed rapidly toward the stand of trees at the crest of the hill. "That was over twenty years ago," he said finally. "I gather what you mean is that the grandchildren of my eleven year old esca-pades out of my virginity are now twenty years old, and several of them are my twin, and there are many more of me, but younger. Do they know that they are me?"

"No. They don't have your memories, only your personality," the Messenger said, panting with the climb. "They enjoy what you enjoy, grow angry at whatever angers you, and of course, look like you."

At the top of the hill they came to the first giant tree. From its lowest branch dangled a hanged man. The Messenger stopped and looked at the sturdy blond corpse.

"Note the resemblance. What was his crime?"

The king looked upward at the heavily muscled young man with the reddish blond hair that matched his, shade for shade. The king was deeply upset. He stared hard, his own hair standing up and out at the sides, bristling as if confronted by danger.

"His crime was unimportant. One of my nobles mentioned it to me. I think he growled when given a command by one of his betters."

"Indeed," said the human sarcastically. "Who are his betters, that he should take insults and commands from them? These nobles who visit your court during the decision and petition days? They are no kin of yours, right?"

"It was a Protkim who accused him. Their family has been friends and guards of my family for a long time." The king looked away from the corpse, sweat standing out on his forehead. "Is there a way to find out if that is me?"

"Yes," said the human, "but only with a living man. It is too late."

The king asked plaintively. "If he is me, where has his soul gone?"

"Perhaps to hell, for daring to insult a Protkim," said the human cultural engineer, knowing the effect of his words. "He must take their orders and insults. He is any man's servant."

The king let out a sudden roar of rage. He whipped out his sword, spun and sunk it into a tree trunk behind.

He let go of the handle and watched the sword quiver and hum, stuck deep into the side of the tree. "I am no man's property."

"If you were young and trained to be a peasant, and keep your eyes down in the presence of a noble, how would it feel to watch a king who looked no better than you walk by wearing the crown and sword?"

"I'd grab the crown and put it on my head. I'd buckle on the sword and kill anyone who tried to take the crown from me," the king said cheerfully, and grinned and took the sword from the tree trunk without yanking by bunching his hands on the hilt and walking a circle around the tree.

"If you tried it you would die," said the Messenger. "Tell me who it is that you have groaning and cursing in your cellar?"

"Some traitor who was leading a rebellion against me. He is scheduled to be pulled apart for the entertainment of the gentry as a start for this afternoon's tourney. Do you mean that is me, also?" The king turned back down the hill suddenly and bounded down the steeper slope toward the other side of the castle.

"Possible," panted the Messenger catching up by dangerous leaps. "Has anyone ever said to you that you looked like a peasant?"

"Yes, I killed him," shouted the king, plugging downhill. "My mother says I look like my grandfather the conqueror."

"The peasants look like your grandfather," shouted Dason slowing and falling behind.

The king stopped so suddenly he ran into him. "Wait," he turned and held the human's arm. Below them the slope steepened to the back of the castle almost directly below. "Are there so many of us? Give me a number."

"I could draw you a diagram of blood lines. Your grandfather was like yourself roaming the fields instead of the bedrooms of the court?"

The king nodded, "He would never betray the nobles and his brothers in arms by casting glances at their wives. My father felt the same way. Besides, long walks alone are better for the blood. I've walked the entire kingdom, inspected fortifications, looked at the landing beaches, and thought of tactics to repel invasion, as did my father and my grandfather."

"And inspected the inside of hay ricks with peasant girls all over the kingdom?" asked Dason and whistled. "That ups the numbers."

He suddenly remembered Butsey. She would be over her anger at the taking of the peasant girl. He turned on his earphones again.

She sounded interested. "Population statistics, that's my field. You might be conning him with the truth brother Dase. Often aristocrat women do not breed enough to keep the line healthy. The peasant women may be multiplying the line of the conqueror. Three generations could breed to ninety per cent. Autocline, the strong below, the weak above. It will turn over in revolution without any help from you, Dase."

Dason choked and covered his half laugh half surprise.

"I hesitate to ask this, my friend, but what did the natives look like when your grandfather conquered this country?"

The king stared, then he coughed a short laugh. "I don't know. I never thought to ask." The pupils of his eyes widened in thought.

Dason asked, "What would you be doing if you were an army of peasants?"

"Practicing rebellion," the king said proudly. "Practicing with weapons, conspiring with the castle servants, learning the ways in and out of the castle. Preparing an uprising." He looked back to the distant, strong, yellow-maned men swinging their long scythe blades. "I am surprised they let me pass. I am not going back that way and give them another chance to change kings."

The king started down the steeper slope toward the castle wall, slipping and sliding and grabbing at weeds to slow his slide.

"You must tell me how to get out of this mess, my friend, I do not want to kill an army of myself, and of my grandfather. It would be impious and something like incest, or suicide. Whether I killed them or they killed me, the whole family would be damned for shedding the blood of our family."

Sliding in a tumble of soft dirt and uprooted weeds the king came to the back kitchen gate of the castle wall and strode in through a squawk and scatter of kitchen birds and grunting, garbage-eating animals, and into the castle, stamping mud from his boots.

He waited for his human adviser to catch up, apparently thinking of another question.

Before the messenger could reach him there was a deep scream from the cellar. The king let out an almost identical yell of rage. Cursing, he ran for the stairs. "Stop, you vultures!" he bellowed, half way down. "Let that man alone."

That evening, instead of the entertainment of a man being pulled apart, the nobles ready for the tourney were grouped to listen to a speech from the king. He paused an odd, long pause and cleared his throat nervously. "All men are brothers," he said loudly, and paused, his ears turning pink. The assembled

nobles in armor gazed, waiting and puzzled. The king imagined the laughter of Dason. (Almost all men! Don't claim too much success. Some may be cousins!)

Defiantly the king cleared his throat and roared louder. "No born man can be taken or imprisoned or dispossessed or exiled or in any way destroyed, nor will we go upon him or send upon him any force, except by the group agreement of his equals, or to press laws of the land. To no one will we sell justice, to no one will we refuse or delay right and justice. Justice is above all kings forever!" The nobles growled and muttered, beginning to understand a threat.

Behind a screen of drapes sat a bandaged and splinted blond lion with a distinct resemblance to the king. "What does Sir Big Mouth mean?" he growled in an undertone.

Dason grinned, "He has decided you are all his brothers. It means, after you're back in shape, the king will let you take a swing at him."

The bandaged lion sat up straighter. "That is justice. If this is true, the king is a man worth following. I'll break his arm."

The king entered through the curtains, and on the other side they heard the clashing of armor as the tourney contestants mounted their elks for the battles and contests.

"They received it in silence, as I expected," said the king.

"Because I limited only my power they did nothing. But when do I tell these nobles and rulers of all the parts of my realm that all peasants are equal and will vote? And that they cannot slay their peasants?"

"When you are ready with an army at your back to defend you from them," the engineer said.

The king roared a short laugh, "I know that. I just wanted to be sure you know that. I take no advice from fools." He turned to the splinted and bandaged twin self in the chair. "Wilk, how soon can your man organize all the peasants to rise and take the castles? If I issued proclamations of equality in the fall, after the harvest, the nobles would bring armies against me, and leave their castles undefended. Just as they charge my castle, I want them to hear that they have lost their own castles, and turn back."

The big yellow-maned man in the chair laughed, showing sharp teeth. "We were already organized to rise at the first civil war. I can persuade the committee to time it your way, and keep you as part king. But—"

In his big thick fingered hand he held a rolled up manuscript on white leather. The Messenger recognized the sacred words.

A scribe had labored all night to copy it. The big revolution-ary smiled a satisfied cat smile and handed the Constitution to the king.

The ambassador from the Federate Fleet walked in a nervous crouch, ducking his head to clear the rough edges of a corridor that had been widened to let him pass. Before him marched his guard of bees, shouldering aside the workers who still tore at the wax of the passageway. An outraged high buzzing rose as the stranger passed, for he was not a bee, he was too tall, too upright, too dark, and gave a strange smell that aroused their urge to kill invaders of their home.

Tzee Tzat wrapped his bat wings tightly around himself like a black cloak and pulled his head down, nervously rehearsing what his speech would be in the buzzing language of the bees. The group emerged into the high wide throne room of the Queen. She lay on a high dais, a large platform to carry her great bulk, surrounded by ministers and messengers, feeders bringing food, and groomers stroking and cleaning her sides, while in the distance nurse bees hurried in line to receive eggs and take them away to the hatcheries. She rested her intelligent head on slender folded arms and looked down from the edge of the platform, long feathery antennae turned inquiringly toward him. Nervously Tzee Tzat stopped and bowed. It was the wrong gesture. A clamor of angry buzzes broke out around the throne room and his guard unsheathed their stings and circled him, closing in with deadly aim.

Terrified the ambassador straightened, realizing that bowing had elevated his wingtips behind him like a sting, a gesture of threat. He buzzed and gestured. "I greet the ruler of the bees and submit to her law. I bring a message."

The queen waved a slender arm and the guard retreated grumbling. "Speak your message," she commanded.

Tzee Tzat stiffened with his wings wrapped tightly around him, looking like a head projecting from a

closed black unbrella. His large owlish eyes were frightened but alert.

"I bring a threat and a command from our high council to your ruler. And I bring myself to help, with new knowledge."

"You bring a threat?" buzzed the Queen. Again she waved a slim arm and the guards unsheathed their stings and closed in, circling.

The large owlish eyes grew more frightened. "I am a messen-ger, not a fighter. I have no sting and no weapons. I can hurt no one."

The Queen buzzed a lower note and the guards circled away and lined up against the wall staring in hostile alertness.

The Queen asked. "Why does your hive threaten against my hives?"

"You promised to allow other flying species to exist on your planets and on the planets you conquer. You have broken your treaty. You have killed many birds and bats and other flying intelligent citizens on three planets." Tzee Tzat's voice broke on a high batlike squeak and he stopped and shivered, remembering, seeing his flying friends suddenly enshrouded in a ball of stinging bees, then released, falling limp. Days of walking with his wings wrapped around him tightly to avoid looking like a flying creature, painful climbs up slippery walls to the doors of houses, with bees buzzing near, waiting to see wings. Days of terror until the Federate Fleet arrived to rescue his planet.

He made an effort and adjusted his variable bat screech back to the steady smooth hum of the bees. "The Federate Council threatens your hives and cities with extermination. But I have been sent to change your map of right directions, to save you. Why were the flying people attacked?"

The Queen signalled to her counselors. They clustered around her, touching and signaling and buzzing, and then she turned back to the messenger. "Those alien fliers were slain because they flew too high above the bees, like predators who would eat bees, and they did not give proper signals of peace. Also they cropped from the same meadows as working bees and did not give proper dance signals of sharing food. We have not broken our word, we have obeyed our treaty. We no longer kill every-thing which flies, we let them live, therefore you must let us live."

She pushed herself on her front arms, trembling, barely able to pry up the weight of her great, pregnant lower body, and looked down at him with her large shining eyes. "We only kill whatever breaks the law."

Tzee Tzat tried to stand taller. "You must not judge and kill birds by the laws of bees. Birds have their own laws."

"We obey the hive laws. There is no other way to be right. All other ways are wrong," replied the Queen. But she trembled and her antenna waved in irregular, hesitant motion as though comb-ing the air for scents of the strange realities. She folded her arms and lay on the dais, staring.

"There are other ways and other laws, equally right," Tzee Tzat said.

She was astonished. She stiffened her front legs again as if hearing something different, and raised herself in excitement and agitation.

"Right is right, and only the law is right. There can be only one true flight line to home. All different ways are wrong. The bee who returns to the hive finds it only in one place."

Tzee Tzat was a translator of great skill. He recognized that she had recited a traditional saying and he imagined himself as an old wise bee, a philosopher of bees. He invented a new saying.

He buzzed and waved with both hands and swayed and turned in bee signals of direction and distance. "If the bee starts from the west meadow, the hive is to the east. If the bee starts from the east meadow, the hive is to the west. There are many true and right ways to the home of truth, to the hive of the Creator and Multiplier of all life."

The counselor bees had listened closely, now they moved, buzzed, waved and danced a repeat song of what he had said, memorizing the new saying. The Queen held very still. With her antennae pointing straight at him, she waited, quivering.

Tzee Tzat judged his moment accurately. He removed the revolutionary manifesto from within his cloak of wings and held it up to read. As he read the ancient and sacred words he translated to bee ideas.

"These are the sacred directions. You know this territory. You have flown above it. If you look in all the directions of life you will find that the Central Creator and Multiplier of all life wishes

diversity, to fill the hive of all life. All living things begin with equal right to life, difference and choice of flight course." He stopped and watched the Queen.

"The Creator must love differences. She laid eggs of enough different species, and hived enough different unsuitable planets," said the Queen. "But it is our duty to treat differences from rightness as mistakes."

He signaled with emphasis. "The Creator makes no mistakes, all living things begin with equal right to life, difference and choice of place. Diversity is storage bees and nursery bees, diversity is bees unlike flowers, diversity is flowers unlike each other, different for each field and hill, for each change of season and temperature. Diversity is growth and strength. When young we must seek our own direction, group with others who found the same way, make the rules for our own hive and hatch the egg for our own ruler."

Tzee Tzat's bat eyes widened with enthusiasm, his bat wings half unfurled like flags as he read the great words.

He signaled and turned, bowed and made short runs, map-ping the way to truth in their minds like mapping the way to great fields of honey, giving them a ritual they would pass on to new young hatchlings forever; a new song for bees to buzz.

CONTAGION

Minos was a lovely planet—if you could handle the food. And you could adapt to that the local diseases—at a price.

It was like an Earth forest in the fall, but it was not fall. The forest leaves were green and copper and purple and fiery red, and a wind sent patches of bright greenish sunlight dancing among the leaf shadows.

The hunt party of the *Explorer* filed along the narrow trail, guns ready, walking carefully, listening to the distant, half-familiar cries of strange birds.

A faint crackle of static in their earphones indicated that a gun had been fired.

"Got anything?" asked June Walton. The helmet intercom carried her voice to the ears of the others without breaking the stillness of the forest.

"Took a shot at something," explained George Barton's cheerful voice in her earphones. She rounded a bend of the trail and came upon Barton standing peering up into the trees, his gun still raised. "It looked like a duck."

"This isn't Central Park," said Hal Barton, his brother, coming into sight. His green spacesuit struck an incongruous note against the bronze and red forest. "They won't all be ducks," he said soberly.

"Maybe some will be dragons. Don't get eaten by a dragon, June," came Max's voice quietly into her earphones. "Not while I still love you." He came out of the trees carrying the blood-sample kit, and touched her glove with his, the grin on his ugly beloved face barely visible in the mingled light and shade. A patch of sunlight struck a greenish glint from his fishbowl helmet.

They walked on. A quarter of a mile back, the space ship *Explorer* towered over the forest like a tapering skyscraper, and the people of the ship looked out of the viewplates at fresh winds and sunlight and clouds, and they longed to be outside.

But the likeness to Earth was danger, and the cool wind might be death, for if the animals were like Earth animals, their diseases might be like Earth diseases, alike enough to be contagious, different enough to be impossible to treat. There was warning enough in the past. Colonies had vanished, and traveled spaceways drifted with the corpses of ships which had touched on some plague planet.

The people of the ship waited while their doctors, in airtight spacesuits, hunted animals to test them for contagion.

The four medicos, for June Walton was also a doctor, filed through the alien homelike forest, walking softly, watching for motion among the copper and purple shadows.

They saw it suddenly, a lighter, moving, copper patch among the darker browns. Reflex action swung June's gun into line, and behind her someone's gun went off with a faint crackle of static, and made a hole in the leaves beside the specimen. Then for a while no one moved.

This one looked like a man, a magnificently muscled, leanly graceful, humanlike animal. Even in its callused bare feet, it was a head taller than any of them. Red-haired, hawk-faced and darkly tanned, it stood breathing heavily, looking at them without expression. At its side hung a sheath knife, and a crossbow was slung across one wide shoulder.

They lowered their guns.

"It needs a shave," Max said reasonably in their earphones, and he reached up to his helmet and flipped the switch that let his voice he heard. "Something we could do for you, Mac?"

The friendly drawl was the first voice that had broken the forest sounds. June smiled suddenly. He was right. The strict logic of evolution did not demand beards; therefore a non-human would not be wearing a three-day growth of red stubble.

Still panting, the tall figure licked dry lips and spoke. "Welcome to Minos. The mayor sends greetings from Alexandria."

"English?" gasped June.

"We were afraid you would take off again before I could bring word to you . . . It's three hundred miles . . . We saw your scout plane pass twice, but we couldn't attract its attention."

June looked in stunned silence at the stranger leaning against the tree. Thirty-six light years—thirty-six times six trillion miles of monotonous space travel—to be told that the planet was already settled! "We didn't know there was a colony here," she said. "It's not on the map."

"We were afraid of that," the tall bronze man answered soberly. "We have been here three generations and no traders have come."

Max shifted the kit strap on his shoulder and offered a hand. "My name is Max Stark, M.D. This is June Walton, M.D., Hal Barton, M.D., and George Barton, Hal's brother, also M.D."

"Patrick Mead is the name." The man smiled, shaking hands casually. "Just a hunter and bridge carpenter myself. Never met any medicos before."

The grip was effortless, but even through her air-proofed glove June could feel that the fingers that touched hers were as hard as padded steel.

"What—what is the population of Minos?" she asked.

He looked down at her curiously for a moment before answering. "Only one hundred and fifty." He smiled. "Don't worry, this isn't a city planet yet.

There's room for a few more people. He shook hands with the Bartons quickly. "That is—you are people, aren't you?" he asked startlingly.

"Why not?" said Max with a poise that June admired.

"Well, you are all so—so—" Patrick Mead's eyes roamed across the faces of the group. "So varied."

They could find no meaning in that, and stood puzzled.

"I mean," Patrick Mead said into the silence, "all these—interesting different hair colors and face shapes and so forth—" He made a vague wave with one hand as if he had run out of words or was anxious not to insult them.

"Joke?" Max asked, bewildered.

June laid a hand on his arm. "No harm meant," she said to him over the intercom. "We're just as much of a shock to him as he is to us."

She addressed a question to the tall colonist on outside sound. "What should a person look like, Mr.

Mead?"

He indicated her with a smile. "Like you."

June stepped closer and stood looking up at him, considering her own description. She was tall and tanned, like him; had a few freckles, like him; and wavy red hair, like his. She ignored the brightly humorous blue eyes.

"In other words," she said, "everyone on the planet looks like you and me?'

Patrick Mead took another look at their four faces and began to grin. "Like me, I guess. But I hadn't thought of it before, that people could have different colored hair or that noses-could fit so many ways onto faces. Judging by my own appearance, I suppose any fool can walk on his hands and say the world is upside down!" He laughed and sobered. "But then why wear spacesuits? The air is breathable."

"For safety," June told him. "We can't take any chances on plague."

Pat Mead was wearing nothing but his weapons, and the wind ruffled his hair. He looked comfortable, and they longed to take off the stuffy spacesuits and feel the wind against their own skins. Minos was like home, like Earth . . . But they were strangers.

"Plague," Pat Mead said thoughtfully. "We had one here. It came two years after the colony arrived and killed everyone except the Mead families. They were immune. I guess we look alike because we're all related, and that's why I grew up thinking that it is the only way people can look."

Plague. "What was the disease?" Hal Barton asked.

"Pretty gruesome, according to my father. They called it the melting sickness. The doctors died too soon to find out what it was or what to do about it."

"You should have trained more doctors, or sent to civilization for some." A trace of impatience was in George Barton's voice.

Pat Mead explained patiently, "Our ship, with the power plant and all the books we needed, went off into the sky to avoid the contagion, and never came hack. The crew must have died." Long years of hardship were indicated by that statement, a colony with electric power gone and machinery stilled, with key technicians dead and no way to replace them. June realized then the full meaning of the primitive sheath knife and bow.

"Any recurrence of melting sickness?" asked Hal Barton.

"No."

"Any other diseases?"

"Not a one."

Max was eying the bronze red-headed figure with something approaching awe. "Do you think all the Meads look like that?' he said to June on the intercom. "I wouldn't mind being a Mead myself!"

Their job had been made easy by the coming of Pat. They went back to the ship laughing, exchanging anecdotes with him. There was nothing now to keep Minos from being the home they wanted except the melting sickness, and forewarned against it, they could take precautions.

The polished silver and black column of the *Explorer* seemed to rise higher and higher over the trees as they neared it. Then its symmetry blurred all sense of specific size as they stepped out from among the trees and stood on the edge of the meadow, looking up.

"Nice!" said Pat. "Beautiful!" The admiration in his voice was warming.

"It was a yacht," Max said, still looking up, "secondhand, an old-time beauty without a sign of wear. Synthetic diamond-studded control board and murals on the walls. It doesn't have the new speed drives, but it brought us thirty-six light years in one and a half subjective years. Plenty good enough."

The tall tanned man looked faintly wistful, and June realized that he had never had access to a film library, never seen a movie, never experienced luxury. He had been born and raised on Minos without electricity.

"May I go aboard?" Pat asked hopefully.

Max unslung the specimen kit from his shoulder, laid it on the carpet of plants that covered the ground, and began to open it.

"Tests first," Hal Barton said. "We have to find out if you people still carry this so-called melting sickness. We'll have to de-microbe you and take specimens before we let you on board. Once on, you'll be no good as a check for what the other Meads might have."

Max was taking out a rack and a stand of preservative bottles and hypodermics.

"Are you going to jab me with those?" Pat asked with alarm.

"You're just a specimen animal to me, bud!" Max grinned at Pat Mead, and Pat grinned back. June saw that they were friends already, the tall pantherish colonist and the wry, black-haired doctor. She felt a stab of guilt because she loved Max and yet could pity him for being smaller and frailer than Pat Mead.

"Lie down," Max told him, "and hold still. We need two spinal-fluid samples from the back, a body-cavity one in front, and another from the arm."

Pat lay down obediently. Max knelt, and as he spoke, expertly swabbed and inserted needles with the smooth speed that had made him a fine nerve surgeon on Earth.

High above them the scout helioplane came out of an opening in the ship and angled off toward the west, its buzz diminishing. Then, suddenly, it veered and headed back, and Reno Ulrich's voice came tinnily from their earphones.

"What's that you've got? Hey, what are you does doing down there?" He banked again and came to a stop, hovering fifty feet away. June could see his startled face looking through the glass at Pat.

Hal Barton switched to a narrow radio beam, explained rapidly and pointed in the direction of Alexandria. Reno's plane lifted and flew away over the odd-colored forest.

"The plane will drop a note on your town, telling them you got through to us," Hal Barton told Pat, who was sitting up watching Max dexterously put the blood and spinal fluids into the right bottles without exposing them to air.

"We won't be free to contact your people until we know if they still carry melting sickness," Max added. "You might be immune so it doesn't show on you, but still carry enough germs—if that's what caused it—to wipe out a planet."

"If you do carry melting sickness," said Hal Barton, "we won't be able to mingle with your people until we've cleared them of the disease."

"Starting with me?" Pat asked.

"Starting with you," Max told him ruefully, "as soon as you step on board."

"More needles?"

"Yes, and a few little extras thrown in."

"Rough?"

"It isn't easy."

A few minutes later, standing in the stalls for spacesuit decontamination, being buffeted by jets of hot disinfectant, bathed in glares of sterilizing ultraviolet radiation, June remembered that and compared Pat Mead's treatment to theirs.

In the *Explorer,* stored carefully in sealed tanks and containers, was the ultimate, multipurpose cureall. It was a solution of enzymes so like the key catalysts of the human cell nucleus that it caused chemical derangement and disintegration in any nonhuman cell. Nothing could live in contact with it but human cells; any alien intruder to the body would die. Nucleocat Cureall was its trade name.

But the cureall alone was not enough for complete safety. Plagues had been known to slay too rapidly and universally to be checked by human treatment. Doctors are not reliable; they die. Therefore space-ways and interplanetary health law demanded that ship equipment for guarding against disease be totally mechanical in operation, rapid and efficient.

Somewhere near them, in a series of stalls which led around and around like a rabbit maze, Pat was being herded from stall to stall by peremptory mechanical voices, directed to soap and shower, ordered to insert his arm into a slot which took a sample of his blood, given solutions to drink, bathed in germicidal ultraviolet, shaken by sonic blasts, breathing air thick with sprays of germicidal mists, being directed to put his arms into other slots where they were anesthetized and injected with various immunizing solutions.

Finally, he would be put in a room of high temperature and extreme dryness, and instructed to sit for

half an hour while more fluids were dripped into his veins through long thin tubes.

All legal spaceships were built for safety. No chance was taken of allowing a suspected carrier to bring an infection on hoard with him.

June stepped from the last shower stall into the locker room, zipped off her spacesuit with a sigh of relief, and contemplated herself in a wall mirror. Red hair, dark blue eyes, tall . . .

"I've got a good figure," she said thoughtfully.

Max turned at the door. "Why this sudden interest in your looks?" he asked suspiciously. "Do we stand here and admire you, or do we finally get something to eat?"

"Wait a minute." She went to a wall phone and dialed it carefully, using a combination from the ship's directory. "How're you doing, Pat?"

The phone picked up a hissing of water or spray. There was a startled chuckle. "Voices, too! Hello, June. How do you tell a machine to go spray itself?"

"Are you hungry?"

"No food since yesterday."

"We'll have a banquet ready for you when you get out," she told Pat and hung up, smiling. Pat Mead's voice had a vitality and enjoyment which made shipboard talk sound like sad artificial gaiety in contrast.

They looked into the nearby small laboratory where twelve squealing hamsters were protestingly submitting to a small injection each of Pat's blood. In most of them the injection was followed by one of antihistaminics and adaptives. Otherwise the hamster defense system would treat all nonhamster cells as enemies, even the harmless human blood cells, and fight back against them violently.

One hamster, the twelfth, was given an extra-large dose of adaptive so that if there were a disease, he would not fight it or the human cells, and thus succumb more rapidly.

"How ya doing, George?" Max asked.

"Routine," George Barton grunted absently.

On the way up the long spiral ramps to the dining hall, they passed a viewplate. It showed a long scene of mountains in the distance on the horizon, and between them, rising step by step as they grew farther away, the low rolling hills, bronze and red with patches of clear green where there were fields.

Someone was looking out, standing very still, as if she had been there a long time—Bess St. Clair, a Canadian woman. "It looks like Winnipeg," she told them as they paused. "When are you doctors going to let us out of this barberpole? Look." She pointed. "See that patch of field on the south hillside, with the brook winding through it? I've staked that hillside for our house. When do we get out?"

Rena Ulrich's tiny scout plane buzzed slowly in from the distance and began circling lazily.

"Sooner than you think,' Max told her. "We've discovered a castaway colony on the planet. They've done our tests for us by just living here. If there's anything here to catch, they've caught it."

"People on Minos?" Bess's handsome ruddy face grew alive with excitement.

"One of them is down in the medical department," June said. "He'll be out in twenty minutes."

"May I go see him?"

"Sure," said Max. "Show him the way to the dining hall when he gets out. Tell him we sent you."

"Right!" She turned and ran down the ramp like a small girl going to a fire. Max grinned at June and she grinned back. After a year and a half of isolation in space, everyone was hungry for the sight of new faces, the sound of unfamiliar voices.

They climbed the last two turns to the cafeteria and entered to a rich subdued blend of soft music and quiet conversation. The cafeteria was a section of the old dining room, left when the rest of the ship had been converted to living and working quarters, and it still had the original finely grained wood of the ceiling and walls, the sound absorbency, the soft-music spools and the intimate small light at each table where people leisurely ate and talked.

They stood in line at the hot foods counter, and behind her June could hear a girl's voice talking

excitedly through the murmur of conversation.

"—new man, honest! I saw him through the view-plate when they came in. He's down in the medical department. A real frontiersman."

The line drew abreast of the counters, and she and Max chose three heaping trays, starting with hydroponic mushroom steak, raised in the growing trays of water and chemicals; sharp salad bowl with rose tomatoes and aromatic peppers; tank-grown fish with special sauce; four different desserts, and assorted beverages.

Presently they had three tottering trays successfully maneuvered to a table. Brant St. Clair came over. "I beg your pardon, Max, but they are saying something about Reno carrying messages to a colony of savages for the medical department. Will he be back soon, do you know?"

Max smiled up at him, his square face affectionate. Everyone liked the shy Canadian. "He's back already. We just saw him come in."

"Oh, fine." St. Clair beamed. "I had an appointment with him to go out and confirm what looks like a nice vein of iron to the northeast. Have you seen Bess? Oh—there she is." He turned swiftly and hurried away.

A very tall man with fiery red hair came in surrounded by an eagerly talking crowd of ship people. It was Pat Mead. He stood in the doorway alertly scanning the dining room. Sheer vitality made him seem even larger than he was. Sighting June, he smiled and began to thread toward their table.

"Look!" said someone. "There's the colonist!" Sheila; a pretty, jeweled woman, followed and caught his arm. "Did you *really* swim across a river to come here?"

Overflowing with good will and curiosity, people approached from all directions. "Did you actually walk three hundred miles? Come, eat with us. Let me help choose your tray."

Everyone wanted him to eat at their table, everyone was a specialist and wanted data about Minos. They all wanted anecdotes about hunting wild animals with a bow and arrow.

"He needs to be rescued," Max said. "He won't have a chance to eat."

June and Max got up firmly, edged through the crowd, captured Pat and escorted him back to their table. June found herself pleased to be claiming the hero of the hour.

Pat sat in the simple, subtly designed chair and leaned back almost voluptuously, testing the way it gave and fitted itself to him. He ran his eyes over the bright tableware and heaped plates. He looked around at the rich grained walls and soft lights at each table. He said nothing, just looking and feeling and experiencing.

"When we build our town and leave the ship," June explained, "we will turn all the staterooms back into the lounges and ballrooms and cocktail bars that used to be inside. Then it will be beautiful."

Pat smiled, cocked his head to the music, and tried to locate its source. "It's good enough now. We only play music tapes once a week in city hall."

They ate, Pat beginning the first meal he had had in more than a day.

Most of the other diners finished when they were halfway through, and began walking over, diffidently at first, then in another wave of smiling faces, handshakes, and introductions. Pat was asked about crops, about farming methods, about rainfall and floods, about farm animals and plant breeding, about the compatibility of imported Earth seeds with local ground, about mines and strata.

There was no need to protect him. He leaned back in his chair and drawled answers with the lazy ease of a panther; where he could think of no statistics, he would fill the gap with an anecdote. It showed that he enjoyed spinning campfire yarns and being the center of interest.

Between bouts of questions, he ate and listened to the music.

June noticed that the female specialists were prolonging the questions more than they needed, clustering around the table laughing at his jokes, until presently Pat was almost surrounded by pretty faces, eager questions, and chiming laughs. Sheila the beautiful laughed most chimingly of all.

June nudged Max, and Max shrugged indifferently. It wasn't anything a man would pay attention to, perhaps. But June watched Pat for a moment more, then glanced uneasily back to Max. He was eating

and listening to Pat's answers and did not feel her gaze. For some reason Max looked almost shrunken to her. He was shorter than she had realized; she had forgotten that he was only the same height as herself. She was aware of the clear lilting chatter of female voices increasing at Pat's end of the table.

"That guys a menace," Max said, and laughed to himself, cutting another slice of hydroponic mushroom steak. "What's got you?" he added, glancing aside at her when he noticed her sudden stillness.

"Nothing," she said hastily, but she did not turn back to watching Pat Mead. She felt disloyal. Pat was only a superb animal. Max was the man she loved. Or—was he? Of course he was, she told herself angrily. They had gone colonizing together because they wanted to spend their lives together; she had never thought of marrying any other man. Yet the sense of dissatisfaction persisted, and along with it a feeling of guilt.

Len Marlow, the protein tank-culture technician responsible for the mushroom steaks, had wormed his way into the group and asked Pat a question. Now he was saying, "I don't dig you, Pat. It sounds like you're putting the people into the tanks instead of the vegetables!" He glanced at them, looking puzzled. "See if you two can make anything of this. It sounds medical to me."

Pat leaned back and smiled, sipping a glass of hydroponic burgundy. "Wonderful stuff. You'll have to show us how to make it."

Len turned back to him. "You people live off the country, right? You hunt and bring in steaks and eat them, right? Well, say I have one of those steaks right here and I want to eat it, what happens?"

"Go ahead and eat it. It just wouldn't digest. You'd stay hungry."

"Why?" Len was aggrieved.

"Chemical differences in the basic protoplasm of Minos. Different amino linkages, left-handed instead of right-handed molecules in the carbohydrates, things like that. Nothing will be digestible here until you are adapted chemically by a little test-tube evolution. Till then you'd starve to death on a full stomach."

Pat's side of the table had been loaded with the dishes from two trays, but it was almost clear now and the dishes were stacked neatly to one side. He started on three desserts, thoughtfully tasting each in turn.

"Test-tube evolution?" Max repeated. "What's that? I thought you people had no doctors."

"It’s a story." Pat leaned back again. "Alexander P. Mead, the head of the Mead clan was a plant geneticist, a very determined personality and no man to argue with. He didn't want us to go through the struggle of killing off all Minos plants and putting in our own, spoiling the face of the planet and upsetting the balance of its ecology. He decided that he would adapt our genes to this planet or kill us trying. He did it, all right."

"Did which?" asked June, suddenly feeling a sourceless prickle of fear,

"Adapted us to Minos. He took human cells—"

She listened intently, trying to find a reason for fear in the explanation. It would have taken many human generations to adapt to Minos by ordinary evolution, and that only at a heavy toll of death and hunger which evolution exacts. There was a shorter way: Human cells have the ability to return to their primeval condition of independence, hunting, eating and reproducing alone.

Alexander P. Mead took human cells and made them into phagocytes. He put them through the hard savage school of evolution—a thousand generations of multiplication, hardship and hunger, with the alien indigestible food always present, offering its reward of plenty to the cell that reluctantly learned to absorb it.

"Leucocytes can run through several thousand generations of evolution in six months," Pat Mead finished. "When they reached a point where they would absorb Minos food, he planted them back in the people he had taken them from."

"What was supposed to happen then?' Max asked, leaning forward.

"I don't know exactly how it worked. He never told anybody much about it, and when I was a little boy he had gone loco and was wandering ha-ha-ing around waving a test tube. Fell down a ravine and

broke his neck at the age of eighty."

"A character," Max said.

Why was she afraid? "It worked, then?"

"Yes. He tried it on all the Meads the first year. The other settlers didn't want to be experimented on until they saw how it worked out. It worked. The Meads could hunt and plant while the other settlers were still eating out of hydroponics tanks."

"It worked," said Max to Len. "You're a plant geneticist and a tank-culture expert. There's a job for you."

"Uh-*uh!* Len backed away. "It sounds like a medical problem to me. Human cell control—right up your alley,"

"It is a one-way street," Pat warned. "Once it is done, you won't be able to digest ship food. I'll get no good from this protein. I ate it just for the taste."

Hal Barton appeared quietly beside the table. "Three of the twelve test hamsters have died," he reported, and turned to Pat. "Your people carry the germs of melting sickness, as you call it. The dead hamsters were injected with blood taken from you before you were de-infected. We can't settle here unless we de-infect everybody on Minos. Would they object?"

"We wouldn't want to give you folks germs." Pat smiled. "Anything for safety. But there'll have to be a vote on it first."

The doctors went to Reno Ulrich's table and walked with him to the hangar, explaining. He was to carry the proposal to Alexandria, mingle with the people, be persuasive and wait for them to vote before returning. He was to give himself shots of cureall every two hours on the hour or run the risk of disease.

Reno was pleased. He had dabbled in sociology before retraining as a mechanic for the expedition. "This gives me a chance to study their mores." He winked wickedly. "I may not be back for several nights." They watched through the viewplate as he took off, and then went over to the laboratory for a look at the hamsters.

Three were alive and healthy, munching lettuce. One was the control; the other two had been given shots of Pat's blood from before he entered the ship, but with no additional treatment. Apparently a hamster could fight off melting sickness easily if left alone. Three were still feverish and ruffled, with a low red blood count, but recovering. The three dead ones had been given strong shots of adaptive and counter-histamine, so their bodies had not fought back against the attack.

June glanced at the dead animals hastily and looked away again. They lay twisted with a strange semi-fluid limpness, as if ready to dissolve. The last hamster, which had been given the heaviest dose of adaptive, had apparently lost all its hair before death. It was hairless and pink, like a stillborn baby.

"We can find no microorganisms," George Barton said. "None at all. Nothing in the body that should not be there. Leucosis and anemia. Fever only for the ones that fought it off." He handed Max some temperature charts and graphs of blood counts.

June wandered out into the hall. Pediatrics and obstetrics were her field; she left the cellular research to Max, and just helped him with laboratory routine. The strange mood followed her out into the hall, then abruptly lightened.

Coming toward her, busily telling a tale of adventure to the gorgeous Sheila Davenport, was a tall, redheaded, magnificently handsome man. It was his handsomeness which made Pat such a pleasure to look upon and talk with, she guiltily told herself, and it was his tremendous vitality . . . It was like meeting a movie hero in the flesh, or a hero out of the pages of a book—Deerslayer, John Clayton, Lord Greystoke.

She waited in the doorway to the laboratory and made no move to join them, merely acknowledged the two with a nod and a smile and a casual lift of the hand. They nodded and smiled back.

"Hello, June," said Pat and continued telling his tale, but as they passed he lightly touched her arm.

"You Tarzan?" she said mockingly and softly to his passing profile, and knew that he had heard.

That night she had a nightmare. She was running down a long corridor looking for Max, but every

man she came to was a big bronze man with red hair and bright-blue eyes who touched her arm.

The pink hamster! She woke suddenly, feeling as if alarm bells had been ringing, and listened carefully, but there was no sound. She had had a nightmare, she told herself, but alarm bells were still ringing in her unconscious. Something was wrong.

Lying still and trying to preserve the images, she groped for a meaning, but the mood faded under the cold touch of reason. Damn intuitive thinking! A pink hamster! Why did the unconscious have to be so vague? She fell asleep again and forgot.

They had lunch with Pat Mead that day, and after it was over, Pat delayed June with a hand on her shoulder and looked down at her.

"Me Tarzan, you Jane," he said and then turned away, answering the hails of a party at another table as if he had not spoken. She stood shaken, and then walked to the door where Max waited.

She was particularly affectionate with Max the rest of the day, and it pleased him. He would not have been if he had known why. She tried to forget Pat's reply.

June was in the laboratory with Max, watching the growth of a small tank culture of the alien protoplasm from a Minos weed, and listening to Len Marlow pour out his troubles.

"And Elsie tags around after that big goof all day, listening to his stories. And then she tells me I'm just jealous, I'm imagining things!" He passed his hand across his eyes. "I came away from Earth to be with Elsie . . . I'm getting a headache. Look, can't you persuade Pat to cut it out, June? You and Max are his friends."

"Here, have an aspirin," June said. "We'll see what we can do."

"Thanks." Len picked up his tank culture and went out, not at all cheered.

Max sat brooding over the dials and meters at his end of the laboratory, apparently sunk in thought. When Len had gone, he spoke almost harshly. "Why encourage the guy? Why let him hope?"

"Found out any thing about the differences in protoplasm?" she evaded.

"Why let him kid himself? What chance has he got against that hunk of muscle and smooth talk?"

"But Pat isn't after Elsie," she protested.

"Every scatterbrained woman on this ship is trailing after Pat with her tongue hanging out. Brant St. Clair is in the bar right now. He doesn't say what he is drinking about, but do you think Pat is resisting all these women crowding down on him?"

"There are other things besides looks and charm," she said, grimly trying to concentrate on a slide under her binocular microscope.

"Yeah, and whatever they are, Pat has them, too. Who's more competent to support a woman and a family on a frontier planet than a handsome bruiser who was born here?"

"I meant"—June spun around on her stool with unexpected passion—"there is old friendship, and there's loyalty and memories, and personality!" She was half shouting.

"They're not worth much on the secondhand market," Max said. He was sitting slumped on his lab stool, looking dully at his dials. "Now *I'm* getting a headache!" He smiled ruefully. "No kidding, a real headache. And over other people's troubles, yet!"

Other people's troubles . . . She got up and wandered out into the long curving halls. "Me Tarzan, you Jane," Pat's voice repeated in her mind. Why did the man have to be so overpoweringly attractive, so glaring a contrast to Max? Why couldn't the universe manage to run on without generating troublesome love triangles?

She walked up the curving ramps to the dining hall where they had eaten and drunk and talked yesterday. It was empty except for one couple talking forehead to forehead over cold coffee.

She turned and wandered down the long easy spiral of corridor to the pharmacy and dispensary. It was empty. George was probably in the test lab next door, where he could hear if he was wanted. The automatic vendor of harmless euphorics, stimulants and opiates stood in the corner, brightly decorated in pastel abstract designs, with its automatic tabulator graph glowing above it.

Max had a headache, she remembered. She recorded her thumbprint in the machine and pushed the plunger for a box of aspirins, trying to focus her attention on the problem of adapting the people of the

ship to the planet Minos. An aquarium tank with a faint solution of histamine would be enough to convert a piece of human skin into a community of voracious active phagocytes individually seeking something to devour, but could they eat enough to live away from the rich sustaining plasma of human blood?

After the aspirins, she pushed another plunger for something for herself. Then she stood looking at it, a small box with three pills in her hand—Theobromine, a heart strengthener and a confidence-giving euphoric all in one, something to steady shaky nerves. She had used it before only in emergency. She extended a hand and looked at it. It was trembling. Damn triangles!

While she was looking at her hand, there was a click from the automatic drug vendor. It summed the morning use of each drug in the vendors throughout the ship, and recorded it in a neat addition to the end of each graph line. For a moment she could not find the green line for anodynes and the red line for stimulants, and then she saw that they went almost straight

There were too many being used—far too many to be explained by jealousy or psychosomatic peevishness. This was an epidemic, and only one disease was possible!

The disinfecting of Pat had not succeeded. Nueleocat Cureall, killer of all infections, had not cured! Pat had brought melting sickness into the ship with him!

Who had it?

The drugs vendor glowed cheerfully, uncommunicative. She opened a panel in its side and looked in on restless interlacing cogs, and on the inside of the door she saw printed some directions . . . "To remove or examine records before reaching end of the reel—"

After a few fumbling minutes she had the answer. In the cafeteria at breakfast and lunch, thirty-eight men out of the forty-eight aboard ship had taken more than his norm of stimulant. Twenty-one had taken aspirin as well. The only woman who had made an unusual purchase was herself!

She remembered the hamsters that had thrown off the infection with a short sharp fever, and checked back in the records to the day before. There was a short rise in aspirin sales to women at late afternoon. The women were safe.

It was the men who had melting sickness!

Melting sickness killed in hours, according to Pat Mead. How long had the men been sick?

As she was leaving, Jerry came into the pharmacy, recorded his thumbprint and took a box of aspirin from the machine.

She felt all right. Self-control was working well, and it was possible still to walk down the corridor smiling at the people who passed. She took the emergency elevator to the control room and showed her credentials to the technician on watch.

"Medical Emergency." At a small control panel in the corner was a large red button, precisely labeled. She considered it and picked up the control-room phone. This was the hard part, telling someone, especially someone who had it—Max.

She dialed, and when the click on the end of the line showed he had picked up the phone, she told Max what she had seen.

"No women, just the men," he repeated. "That right?'

"Yes."

"Probably it's chemically alien, inhibited by one of the female hormones. We'll try sex hormone shots, if we have to. Where are you calling from?"

She told him.

"That's right. Give Nucleocat Cureall another chance. It might work this time. Push that button."

She went to the panel and pushed the large red button. Through the long height of the *Explorer,* bells woke to life and began to ring in frightened clangor, emergency doors thumped shut, mechanical apparatus hummed into life and canned voices began to give rapid urgent directions.

A plague had come.

She obeyed the mechanical orders, went out into the hall and walked in line with the others. The captain walked ahead of her and the gorgeous Sheila Davenport fell into step beside her. "I look like a

positive hag this morning. Does that mean I'm sick? Are we all sick?"

June shrugged, unwilling to say what she knew.

Others came out of all rooms into the corridor, thickening the line. They could hear each room lock as the last person left it, and then, faintly, the hiss of disinfectant spray. Behind them, on the heels of the last person in line, segments of the ship slammed off and began to hiss.

They wound down the spiral corridor until they reached the medical-treatment section again, and there they waited in line.

"It won't scar my arms, will it?" asked Sheila apprehensively, glancing at her smooth, lovely arms.

The mechanical voice said, "Next. Step inside, please, and stand clear of the door,"

"Not a bit," June reassured Sheila, and stepped into the cubicle.

Inside, she was directed from cubicle to cubicle and given the usual buffeting by sprays and radiation, had blood samples taken and was injected with Nueleocat and a series of other protectives. At last she was directed through another door into a tiny cubicle with a chair.

"You are to wait here," commanded the recorded voice metallically. "In twenty minutes the door will unlock and you may then leave. All people now treated may visit all parts of the ship which have been protected. It is forbidden to visit any quarantined or unsterile part of the ship without permission from the medical officers."

Presently the door unlocked and she emerged into bright lights again, feeling slightly battered.

She was in the clinic. A few men sat on the edge of beds and looked sick. One was lying down. Brant and Bess St. Clair sat near each other, not speaking.

Approaching her was George Barton, reading a thermometer with a puzzled expression.

"What is it, George?' she asked anxiously.

"Some of the women have a slight fever, but it's going down. None of the fellows have any—but their white count is way up, their red count is way down, and they look sick to me."

She approached St. Clair. His usually ruddy cheeks were pale, his pulse was light and too fast, and his skin felt clammy. "How's the headache? Did the Nucleocat treatment help?"

"I feel worse, if anything?"

"Better set up beds," she told George. "Get everyone back into the clinic."

"We're doing that," George assured her. "That's what Hal is doing."

She went back to the laboratory. Max was pacing up and down, absently running his hands through his black hair until it stood straight up. He stopped when he saw her face, and scowled thoughtfully. "They are still sick?" It was more a statement than a question.

She nodded.

"The Cureall didn't cure this time," he muttered. "That leaves it up to us. We have melting sickness and according to Pat and the hamsters, that leaves us less than a day to find out what it is and learn how to stop it."

Suddenly an idea for another test struck him and he moved to the work table to set it up. He worked rapidly, with an occasional uncoordinated movement breaking his usual efficiency.

It was strange to see Max troubled and afraid.

She put on a laboratory smock and began to work. She worked in silence. The mechanicals had failed. Hal and George Barton were busy staving off death from the weaker cases and trying to gain time for Max and her to work. The problem of the plague had to be solved by the two of them alone. It was in their hands.

Another test, no results. Another test, no results. Max's bands were shaking and he stopped a moment to take stimulants.

She went into the ward for a moment, found Bess and warned her quietly to tell the other women to be ready to take over if the men became too sick to go on. "But tell them calmly. We don't want to frighten the men." She lingered in the ward long enough to see the word spread among the women in a widening wave of paler faces and compressed lips; then she went back to the laboratory.

Another test. There was no sign of a microorganism in anyone's blood, merely a growing horde of leucocytes and phagocytes, prowling as if mobilized to repel invasion.

Len Marlow was wheeled in unconscious, with Hal Barton's written comments and conclusions pinned to the blanket.

"I don't feel so well myself," the assistant complained. "The air feels thick. I can't breathe."

June saw that his lips were blue. "Oxygen short," she told Max.

"Low red-corpuscle count," Max answered. "Look into a drop and see what's going on. Use mine; I feel the same way he does." She took two drops of Max's blood. The count was low, falling too fast.

Breathing is useless without the proper minimum of red corpuscles in the blood. People below that minimum die of asphyxiation although their lungs are full of pure air. The red-corpuscle count was falling too fast. The time she and Max had to work in was too short.

"Pump some more CO_2 into the air system," Max said urgently over the phone. "Get some into the men's end of the ward."

She looked through the microscope at the live sample of blood. It was a dark clear field and bright moving things spun and swirled through it, but she could see nothing that did not belong there.

"Hal," Max called over the general speaker system, "cut the other treatments, check for accelerating anemia. Treat it like monoxide poisoning—CO_2 and oxygen."

She reached into a cupboard under the work table, located two cylinders of oxygen, cracked the valves and handed one to Max and one to the assistant. Some of the bluish tint left the assistant's face as he breathed, and he went over to the patient with reawakened concern.

"Not breathing, Doc!"

Max was working at the desk, muttering equations of hemoglobin catalysis.

"Len's gone, Doc," the assistant said more loudly.

"Artificial respiration and get him into a regeneration tank," said June, not moving from the microscope. "Hurry! Hal will show you how. The oxidation and mechanical heart action in the tank will keep him going. Put anyone in a tank who seems to be dying. Get some women to help you. Give them Hal's instructions."

The tanks were ordinarily used to suspend animation in a nutrient bath during the regrowth of any diseased organ. They could preserve life in an almost totally destroyed body during the usual disintegration and regrowth treatments for cancer and old age, and they could encourage healing as destruction continued but they could not prevent ultimate death as long as the disease was not conquered.

The drop of blood in June's microscope was a great dark field, and in the foreground, brought to gar gantuan solidity by the stereo effect, drifted neat saucer shapes of red blood cells. They turned end for end, floating by the humped misty mass of a leucocyte which was crawling on the cover glass. There were not enough red corpuscles, and she felt that they grew fewer as she watched.

She fixed her eye on one, not blinking in fear that she would miss what might happen. It was a tidy red button, and it spun as it drifted, the current moving it aside in a curve as it passed by the leucocyte.

Then, abruptly, the cell vanished.

June stared numbly at the place where it had been. Where had it gone?

Behind her, Max was calling over the speaker system again: "Dr. Stark speaking. Any technician who knows anything about the life tanks, start bringing more out of storage and set them up. Emergency."

"We may need forty-seven," June said quietly. There were forty-seven men.

"We may need forty-seven," Max repeated to the ship in general. His voice did not falter. "Set them up along the corridor. Hook them in on extension lines."

His voice filtered back from the empty floors above in a series of dim echoes. What he had said meant that every man on board might be on the point of heart stoppage.

June looked blindly through the binocular microscope, trying to think. Out of the corner of her eye she could see that Max was wavering and breathing more and more frequently of the pure, cold, burning oxygen of the cylinders. In the microscope she could see that there were fewer red cells left alive in the

drop of his blood. The rate of fall was accelerating.

She didn't have to glance at Max to know how he would look—skin pale, black eyebrows and keen brown eyes slightly squinted in thought, a faint ironical grin twisting the bluing lips. Intelligent, thin, sensitive, his face was part of her mind. It was inconceivable that Max could die. He couldn't die. He couldn't leave her alone.

She forced her mind back to the problem. All the men of the *Explorer* were at the same point, where-ever they were. Somehow losing blood, dying.

Moving to Max's desk, she spoke into the intercom system. "Bess, send a couple of women to look through the ship, room by room, with a stretcher. Make sure all the men are down here." She remembered Reno. "Sparks, heard anything from Reno? Is he back?'

Sparks replied weakly after a lag. "The last I heard from Reno was a call this morning. He was raving about mirrors, and Pat Mead's folks not being real people, just carbon copies, and claiming he was crazy; and I should send him the psychiatrist. I thought he was kidding. He didn't call back."

"Thanks, Sparks." Reno was dead.

Max dialed and spoke gasping over the phone. "Are you okay up there? Forget about engineering controls. Drop everything and head for the tanks while you can still walk. If your tank's not done, lie down next to it."

June went back to the work table and whispered into her own phone. "Bess, send up a stretcher for Max. He looks pretty bad."

There had to be a solution. The life tanks could sustain life in a damaged body, encouraging it to regrow more rapidly, but they merely slowed death as long as the disease was not checked. The postponement could not last long, for destruction could go on steadily in the tanks until the nutritive solution would hold no life except the triumphant microscopic killers that caused melting sickness.

There were very few red blood corpuscles in the microscope field now, incredibly few. She tipped the microscope and they began to drift, spinning slowly. A lone corpuscle floated through the center. She watched it as the current swept it in an arc and past the dim off-focus bulk of the leucocyte. There was a sweep of motion and it vanished.

For a moment it meant nothing to her; then she lifted her head from the microscope and looked around. Max sat at his desk, head in hand, his rumpled short black hair sticking out between his fingers at odd angles. A pencil and a pad scrawled with formulas lay on the desk before him. She could see his concentration in the rigid set of his shoulders. He was still thinking; he had not given up.

"Max, I just saw a leucocyte grab a red blood corpuscle. It was unbelievably fast."

"Leukemia," muttered Max without moving. "Galloping leukemia yet! That comes under the heading of cancer. Well, that's part of the answer. It might be all we need." He grinned feebly and readied for the speaker set. "Anybody still on his feet in there?" he muttered into it, and the question was amplified to a booming voice throughout the ship. "Hal, are you still going? Look, Hal, change all the dials, change the dials, set them to deep melt and regeneration. One week. This is like leukemia. Got it? This is like leukemia,"

June rose. It was time for her to take over the job. She leaned across his desk and spoke into the speaker system. "Doctor Walton talking," she said. "This is to the women. Don't let any of the men work any more; they'll kill themselves. See that they all go into the tanks right away. Set the tank dials for deep regeneration. You can see how from the ones that are set."

Two exhausted and frightened women clattered in the doorway with a stretcher. Their hands were scratched and oily from helping to set up tanks.

"That order includes you," she told Max sternly and caught him as he swayed.

Max saw the stretcher bearers and struggled upright. "Ten more minutes: he said clearly. "Might think of an idea. Something not right in this setup. I have to figure how to prevent a relapse, how the thing started."

He knew more bacteriology than she did; she had to help him think. She motioned the bearers to wait, fixed a breathing mask for Max from a cylinder of CO_2 and one of oxygen. Max went back to his

desk.

She walked up and down, trying to think, remembering the hamsters. The melting sickness, it was called. Melting. She struggled with an impulse to open a tank which held one of the men. She wanted to look in, see if that would explain the name.

Melting sickness . .

Footsteps came and Pat Mead stood uncertainly in the doorway. Tall, handsome, rugged, a pioneer.

"Anything I can do?" he asked.

She barely looked at him. "You can stay out of our way. We're busy."

"I'd like to help," he said.

"Very funny." She was vicious, enjoying the whip of her words. "Every man is dying because you're a carrier, and you want to help."

He stood nervously clenching and unclenching his hands. "A guinea pig, maybe. I'm immune. All the Meads are."

"Go away." God, why couldn't she think? What makes a Mead immune?

"Aw, let 'im alone," Max muttered. "Pat hasn't done anything." He went waveringly to the microscope, took a tiny sliver from his finger, suspended it in a slide and slipped it under the lens with detached habitual dexterity. "Something funny going on," he said to June. "Symptoms don't feel right."

After a moment he straightened and motioned for her to look. "Leucocytes, phagocytes—" He was bewildered. "My own—"

She looked in, and then looked back at Pat in a growing wave of horror. "They're not your own, Max!" she whispered.

Max rested a hand on the table to brace himself, put his eye to the microscope, and looked again. June knew what he saw. Phagocytes, leucocytes, attacking and devouring his tissues in a growing incredible horde, multiplying insanely.

Not his phagocytes! Pat Meads! The Meads' evolved cells had learned too much. They were contagious. And Pat Mead's . . . How much alike *were* the Meads? . . . Mead cells contagious from one to another, not a disease attacking or being fought, but acting as normal leucocytes in whatever body they were in! The leucocytes of tall, red-headed people, finding no strangeness in the bloodstream of any of the tall, red-headed people. No strangeness . . A toti-potent leucocyte finding its way into cellular wombs.

The womblike life tanks. For the men of the *Explorer,* a week's cure with deep melting to de-differentiate the leucocytes and turn them back to normal tissue, then regrowth and reforming from the cells that were there. From the cells that *were* there. *From the cells that were there . . .*

`Pat, the germs are your cells!"

Crazily, Pat began to laugh, his face twisted with sudden understanding. "I understand. I get it. I'm a contagious personality. That's funny, isn't it?'

Max rose suddenly from the microscope and lurched. Pat caught him as he fell, and the bewildered stretcher hearers carried him out to the tanks.

For a week June tended the tanks. The other women volunteered to help, but she refused. She said nothing, hoping her guess would not be true.

"Is everything all right?" Elsie asked her anxiously.

"How is Len coming along?" Elsie looked haggard and worn, like all the women, from doing the work that the men had always done, and their own work too.

"He's fine," June said tonelessly, shutting tight the door of the tank room. "They're all fine."

"That's good," Elsie said, but she looked more frightened than before.

June firmly locked the tank room door and the girl went away.

The other women had been listening, and now they wandered back to their jobs, unsatisfied by June's answer, but not daring to ask for the truth. They were there whenever June went into the tank room, and they were still there—or relieved by others, June was not sure—when she came out. And

always some one of them asked the unvarying question for all the others, and June gave the unvarying answer. But she kept the key. No woman but herself knew what was going on in the life tanks.

Then the day of completion came. June told no one of the hour. She went into the room as on the other days, locked the door behind her, and there was the nightmare again. This time it was reality and she wandered down a path between long rows of coffin-like tanks, calling, "Maxi Max!" silently and looking into each one as it opened.

But each face she looked at was the same. Watching them dissolve and regrow in the nutrient solution, she had only been able to guess at the honor of what was happening. Now she knew.

They were all the same lean-boned, blond-skinned face, with a pin-feather growth of reddish down on cheeks and scalp. All horribly—and handsomely—the same.

A medical kit lay carelessly on the floor beside Max's tank. She stood near the bag. "Max," she said, and found her throat closing. The canned voice of the mechanical apparatus mocked her, speaking glibly about waking and sitting up. "I'm sorry, Max . . ."

The tall man with rugged features and bright blue eyes sat up sleepily and lifted an eyebrow at her, and ran his hand over his red-fuzzed head in a gesture of bewilderment. "What's the matter, June?' he asked drowsily.

She gripped his arm. "Max—"

He compared the relative size of his arm with her hand and said wonderingly, "You shrank."

"I know, Max. I know."

He turned his head and looked at his arms and legs, pale blond arms and legs with a down of red hair. He touched the thick left arm, squeezed a pinch of hard flesh. "It isn't mine," he said, surprised. "But I can feel it."

Watching his face was like watching a stranger mimicking and distorting Max's expressions. Max in fear. Max trying to understand what had happened to him, looking around at the other men sitting up in their tanks. Max feeling the terror that was in herself and all the men as they stared at themselves and their friends and saw what they had become.

"We're all Pat Mead," he said harshly. "All the Meads are Pat Mead. That's why he was surprised to see people who didn't look like himself."

"Yes, Max."

"Max," he repeated. "It's me, all right. The nervous system didn't change. His new blue eyes held hers. "I'm me inside. Do you love me, June?"

But she couldn't know yet. She had loved Max with the thin, ironic face, the rumpled black hair and the twisted smile that never really hid his quick sympathy. Now he was Pat Mead. Could he also be Max? "Of course I still love you, darling."

He grinned. It was still the wry smile of Max, though fitting strangely on the handsome new blond face. "Then it isn't so bad. It might even be pretty good. I envied him this big, muscular body. If Pat or any of these Meads so much as looks at you, I'm going to knock his block off. Now I can do it."

She laughed and couldn't stop. It wasn't that funny. But it was still Max, trying to be unafraid, drawing on humor. Maybe the rest of the men would also be their old selves, enough so the women would not feel that their men were strangers.

Behind her, male voices spoke characteristically. She did not have to turn to know which was which: "This is one way to keep a guy from stealing your girl," that was Len Marlow; "I've got to write down reactions," Hal Barton; "Now I can really work that hillside vein of metal: St. Clair. Then others complaining, swearing, laughing bitterly at the trick that had been played on them and their flirting, tempted women. She knew who they were. Their women would know them apart too.

"We'll go outside," Max said. "You and I. Maybe the shock won't be so bad to the women after they see me." He paused. "You didn't tell them, did your

"I couldn't. I wasn't sure. I—was hoping I was wrong."

She opened the door and closed it quickly. There was a small crowd on the other side.

"Hello, Pat," Elsie said uncertainly, trying to look past them into the tank room before the door shut.

"I'm not Pat, I'm Max," said the tall man with the blue eyes and the fuzz-reddened skull. "Listen—"

"Good heavens, Pat, what happened to your hair?" Sheila asked.

"I'm Max," insisted the man with the handsome face and the sharp blue eyes. "Don't you get it? I'm Max Stark. The melting sickness is Mead cells. We caught them from Pat. They adapted us to Minos. They also changed us all into Pat Mead."

The women stared at him, at each other. They shook their heads.

"They don't understand," June said. "I couldn't have if I hadn't seen it happening, Max."

"It's Pat," said Sheila, dazedly stubborn. "He shaved off his hair. It's some kind of joke"

Max shook her shoulders, glaring down at her face. "I'm Max. Max Stark. They all look like me. Do you hear? It's funny, but it's not a joke. Laugh for us, for God's sake!"

"It's too much," said June. "They'll have to see,"

She opened the door and let them in. They hurried past her to the tanks, looking at forty-six identical blond faces, beginning to call in frightened voices:

"Jerry!"

"Harry!"

"Lee, where are you, sweetheart—"

June shut the door on the voices that were growing hysterical, the women terrified and helpless, the men shouting to let the women know who they were.

"It isn't easy," said Max, looking down at his own thick muscles. "But you aren't changed and the other girls aren't. That helps."

Through the muffled noise and hysteria, a bell was ringing.

"It's the airlock," June said.

Peering in the viewplate were nine Meads from Alexandria. To all appearances, eight of them were Pat Mead at various ages, from fifteen to fifty, and the other was a handsome, leggy, red-headed girl who could have been his sister.

Regretfully, they explained through the voice tube that they had walked over from Alexandria to bring news that the plane pilot had contracted melting sickness there and had died.

They wanted to come in.

June and Max told them to wait and returned to the tank room. The men were enjoying their new height and strength, and the women were bewilderedly learning that they could tell one Pat Mead from another by voice, by gesture of face or hand. The panic was gone. In its place was acceptance of the fantastic situation.

Max called for attention. "There are nine Meads outside who want to come in. They have different names, but they're all Pat Mead."

They frowned or looked blank, and George Barton asked, "Why didn't you let them in? I don't see any problem."

"One of them," said Max soberly, "is a girl. *Patricia* Mead. The girl wants to come in."

There was a long silence while the implication settled to the fear center of the women's minds. Sheila the beautiful felt it first. She cried, "No! Please don't let her in!" There was real fright in her tone and the women caught it quickly.

Elsie clung to Len, begging, "You don't want me to change, do you, Len? You like me the way I am! Tell me you do!"

The other girls backed away. It was illogical, but it was human. June felt terror rising in herself. She held up her hand for quiet, and presented the necessity to the group.

"Only half of us can leave Minos," she said. "The men cannot eat ship food; they've been conditioned to this planet. We women can go, but we would have to go without our men. We can't go outside without contagion, and we can't spend the rest of our lives in quarantine inside the ship. George Barton is right—there is no problem."

"But we'd be changed!" Sheila shrilled. "I don't want to become a Mead! I don't want to be somebody else!"

She ran to the inner wall of the corridor. There was a brief hesitation, and then, one by one, the women fled to that side, until there were only Bess, June and four others left.

"See!" cried Sheila. "A vote! We can't let the girl in!"

No one spoke. To change, to be someone else—the idea was strange and horrifying. The men stood uneasily glancing at each other, as if looking into mirrors, and against the wall of the corridor the women watched in fear and huddled together, staring at the men. One man in forty-seven poses. One of them made a beseeching move toward Elsie and she shrank away.

"No, Len! I won't let you change me!"

Max stirred restlessly, the ironic smile that made his new face his own unconsciously twisting into a grimace of pity. "We men can't leave, and you women can't stay," he said bluntly. "Why not let Patricia Mead in. Get it over with!"

June took a small mirror from her belt pouch and studied her own face, aware of Max talking forcefully, the men standing silent, the women pleading. Her face ... her own face with its dark-blue eyes, small nose, long mobile lips . . . the mind and the body are inseparable; the shape of a face is part of the mind. She put the mirror back.

"I'd kill myself!" Sheila was sobbing. "I'd rather die!"

"You won't die," Max was saying. "Can't you see there's only one solution—"

They were looking at Max. June stepped silently out of the tank room, and then turned and went to the airlock. She opened the valves that would let in Pat Mead's sister.

BRAIN WIPE

Freedom needs a choice of dark and light, hot and cold, sweet and sour. It can't be chosen for you. Deprive a protected child of choice and he'll come out of that sugared death with hatred and madness, fighting any warm touch as a return of that smothering blanket of protection. "Better to be the master of hell than a slave in heaven," said Lucifer, the most radiant of angels, and he was burned for it.

"Then I do have a constitutional privilege to refuse truth drugs and lie detector equipment?" The teener sat in the polygraph chair with a blood pressure cuff on one arm. Dials wavered and jumped as he talked.

The lawyer on his case answered briskly, without simplifying.

"Without a reasonable confession to direct a Verifying investigation, the investigation might take weeks instead of a few hours. The cost of the investigation comes off your personal medical insurance, which otherwise would be available to you, if convicted and brainwiped, as a rehabilitation fund of twenty thousand dollars."

The kid squirmed.

"You make constitutional rights very, very, very expensive. Is a medical excuse cheaper? Can I refuse truth drugs and gadgets because of medical disability?" The dials registered faster breathing, faster heartbeat, higher blood pressure. His voice became more high pitched and rapid as he asked the question.

"What is your medical reason?" asked the doctor.

"I was conditioned physically to refuse drugs. If I accepted any drug I might go into nausea, convulsions or shock, or allergy, acute allergy." He seemed short of breath. The unrolling graph of heartbeat and breathing registered his breathing as rapid and shallow, his heartbeat quick. A traumatic drop in the GSR registered extreme uncontrolled emotion. The polygraph attendant pointed at it, and the doctor nodded, and made a delaying gesture.

"Who conditioned you?"

"My father." A sudden jump in the blood pressure reading indicated either a lie or a bad jolt from a painful memory.

"How? The doctor watched the readings climb, still holding the polygraph operator back from protest. The blood: pressure began to drop, but the pulse increased.

"Electro shock. Please. I don't like this equipment touching . . . " The kid's voice trailed off. He was pale, almost light green, with a sweat-shiny face. His hands clutched the arms of the chair.

"He's going into shock, B.P. below normal limits. Okay, unhook him and take him into the lying-down room. And leave him alone. Don't bother him."

The doctor watched while the police attendants took the kid away.

They spoke after the door shut. "What do you say, Doctor?" asked the lawyer. "When can we question?"

The doctor shook his head negatively.

"With an electric shock trauma in his background, don't expect much lie detecting out of the police polygraph. It's going to show wild jolts whenever he notices it. It probably reminds him of electric shock conditioning. And he might have been conditioned to a physical allergy against sedative drugs. Any injection of truth serum might put him into allergic shock."

"Why should we question him?" asked the data coordinator for the Larry Rubashov case. "He's a nervous kid, and he's had a tiring crazy day. Some of his assistants have confessed. We have his letter and fingerprints. We already have enough on him to classify him a psychopath or a sociopath and wipe him anyhow."

The lawyer protested. "It is a good formality, a good protection of rights to have a free, verified confession first before any legal punishment or medical action."

"Not if it endangers the health of your client, surely,"' protested the psychologist. "We don't really need the confession. The juvenile is obviously some sort of psychopath, perhaps he'll even turn out to have psychotic delusions. We don't even need the legal conviction of crime s to commit him to medical treatment. He's sick."

"We'd have the legal conviction anyhow, without any confession," said the data coordinator from the criminal detection division. "We measure the files of vandalizing and sabotage charges against him by the pound, not the inch. You don't think a questioning is going to prove your client innocent?"

The lawyer shrugged. "It's my job to think they are all innocent. Okay, let's pass up the questioning. Feed your case records into the computer and see if it reads out guilty. Let's get this over with."

The small group, doctor, lawyer, psychologist, re cords chief, walked three doors down the hall to the small formal courtroom with its legally trained computer operator, sworn to do justice.

Larry Rubashov was curled up in fetal position on the couch in the quiet room. He expected to be forced to sit in the electric-looking equipment in the confession room, have it wired to him, and answer questions shouted at him by adult enemies.

He curled up tighter, looking for an unconsciousness too deep for fear.

Larry Rubashov, conditioned to obedience by Pavlovian methods since infancy.

"Go to bed, Larry."

The big easy chair gives him a slight shock. He turns the pages on his picture book to find the end of the story. Quickly turn to the last page. The chair gives him a harder shock, a warning tingle.

"Yes, mother." It turns off. He reads the last page. A happy ending. All endings are happy.

The cold warning buzz of electricity envelops his hands. He jumps out of the chair. "Right away, Momma."

She waits to see him go up the stairs, the control keyboard in her hands. He runs to the kitchen, out the back door. It is cold outside, cold against his bare feet. Grey moonlit desert lies flat to the foothills, and dark mountains loom against the sky.

Neighbors' houses, tool sheds, garages. Can't sleep out in this, weather, you get numb, and can't run when they find you. The neighbors would not take him in. If he knocked at their kitchen door, they would just call his father. He'd tried that two times last year. They would take him in and pretend they were

going to hide him, and they would call his home and his father would come for him with the shock stick.

Larry climbed the trellis beside the back door. It was like a white ladder to the roof. He was terrified of each rustle, expecting shocks from the touch of the rose leaves.

But there were no shocks from nature. He reached the roof, padded across it in his bare feet, climbed in his window and into his room.

In his room, Larry listened to his mother calling, looking for him. The bed is wired for shocks. He avoids it, pulls a blanket from the closet, and goes to sleep under the bed. They can't find him when they don't know where he is. There are never any shocks when he is in an unusual place.

Two hours of secure sleep, deep sleep, happy sleep, sure that they do not know where he is . . .

"LARRY!" A roar in the doorway of the dark room. The black silhouetted figure of his father standing with the shock stick in his hand, roaring in rage. "Larry!"

"Yes, Father." He put his head out, blinking, not yet afraid. It was wonderful not to be afraid. Perhaps the world had changed and there was nothing to be afraid of.

"Come out from under the bed!"

"Yes, Father." He crawled out and lined himself up in front of his father, looking at his waist and belt buckle.

Suddenly it was a nightmare out of his sleeptime nightmares. A black shadow-father stood against the light with many octopus arms. Larry forced himself to look at the real face in the dark shadow. It was a human face, not a monster. It looked like a person who could listen, and smile. His father listened and smiled with visitors. It was possible to make that face smile by something other than robotlike obedience. Larry had just not discovered the trick yet. Even strangers knew how, they did not obey, and yet he smiled at them. It must be easy. When you are six and seven many things which seemed hard at first become easy later. Some day the octopus would change into the smiling kind man.

"Larry—" Now his father used the gentle, reasoning tones that were most dangerous. "Your mother told you to go to bed. You must obey your mother."

The probe was a stick with a gold knob on the ground end and batteries in the handle. The gold knob gave the shocks.

"I went to bed, right away." Larry made an effort and spoke clearly, without any expression. Other times, when his answers had been whining or unclear, his father had used the stick.

The big dark figure said, "You were missing. We want you to have good sleep habits. You must go to bed and get your sleep at regular hours so you can grow tip to be a strong man."

When I am a strong man I will kill you. "I went to bed and I went to sleep. I am healthy. I know you want me to be healthy." Larry articulated the words perfectly, knowing his father liked a logical discussion.

"Don't argue."

Larry twitched and winced, but only the words had given a remembered shock. This time the probe had not touched him. He watched it, waiting.

"You did not go up the stairs and into bed."

Larry thought logically, remembering words. "She said, go *to* bed. She didn't say by the stairs. She didn't say *into* bed."

The stick came for him, swift as a striking snake. It was all nightmare without reason. Thinking could not help.

Silently, his face set in the scream of terror, the child ducked and began to run around the room. The running was as mindless as a trapped bird flying against walls. He tried to climb into a three-dimensional picture of Tolkien's Middle; Earth. He tried to crawl into an air conditioner. He hid in the closet.

Satisfied that the boy could not escape, his father stood outside the closet, jabbing the stick in until it contacted something that moved, and then squeezing the voltage regulator in the handle.

"You must obey your mother," he said with each squeeze. "Obey your mother!" He squeezed hard because he was angry. He had been worried.

In the quiet waiting room outside the confession cell at the police wing of the hospital, a

fifteen-year-old Larry Rubashov awoke, forgetting a memory, forgetting a dream, but with a feeling of strong decision strengthening all the previous decisions that had guided his life. He sat up on the couch and shut his eyes to recapture the idea. A poem was escaping into dreams.

WHEN YOU TOUCH THROUGH A MACHINE, TOUCH IS LOST.

WHEN YOU THINK THROUGH A MACHINE, THE VOICE IS LOST.

Life does not transmit through metal. A parent punishes with his hand to shape a child to the ways of the world, to make him safe, to give him strength to know the rules and conquer the world. Touch me with your hand, Father.

All thinking done for you by a machine is counterfeit. All action done by a machine for you is counterfeit. It is not done by you, it is only pretended. Like the slaves who sang for kings who could not sing, when they finish the song is gone and never was. Like the slaves who battled beasts for citizens who could not fight. A watched event is a no-event. It did not happen.

Larry got up wearily and put his head out the door, "I have to write something. Get me a pen and some paper." They did.

He wrote.

"Everyone who reads, hear this.

Know that civilization is founded on a hallucination.

When you watch a gladiator, you *are not a gladiator. When you fly in a plane,* you *have not flown in the air. When you* put *a problem through a computer, you are not intelligent, you are not wise.*

In your heart of hearts you make believe you are the gladiator you *command, and* by *this psychosis, borrow pride and store* up *a great locked debt of self-contempt. The coffers of their contempt for their own lives are filled and bulging. They are terminal, and like a doctor diagnosing terminal cancer, I will terminate them.*

If you still owe your *allegiance to a machine instead of your own heart and glands and sight and touch, you are robot extensions of a machine—you touch with steel fingertips—you are not alive. I will terminate you all."*

He handed it back to them. "My latest statement.

"Insane. Megalomania, paranoia, homicidal."

"No confession needed."

"Wipe."

They sent in the man who was supposed to make sure the convicted persons thought of the things the authorities wanted wiped. "Tell him to think of his reasons to commit the crime," they instructed. "Get him afraid of us. Get him hating cops."

But the man had his little game he played with the prisoners, he added extra things for them to think of, to see if those wiped too.

He came in with a broom to where the kid sat propped in a chair, tied with a straitjacket, shot with a substance that brings on fear and another substance that makes thought excited, circling on itself, elaborating ideas. The man smiled at the kid.

"They think I just came in to sweep. They don't notice what room I go into, the fools. Look kid, the next few minutes will be tough. Some people scream, but remember, just hang on to your name, remember your name, and remember why you did it, and remember all the reasons you have to hate those bastards. I've seen people come through hanging on to everything, remembering everything. Afterward, pretend you don't remember a thing, okay?" he winked and went out, carrying his broom. He put his head back in. "They aren't watching the hall. Hang on, remember your name." He winked again.

The kid stared at the blank white door as it swung shut. He could not move. The straitjacket was tight, his legs were fastened together; electric wires had been taped to his temples to nudge with subtle amplifying currents the normal thoughts. A chemical fear hammered in his bloodstream, and did not reach his mind.

My name is Larry. I will show them that nothing they can try will work. Whatever obedience they

expect from orders and punishment they will not get. Nothing can imprison the free mind and the free spirit. FREE .. .

That thought was oddly loud and vibrating. He stopped as if something had shouted in his head. Chemical fear shivered in his blood. He remembered the injection. It *is* the injected chemical, not me.

If you; hang on to your purposes you will not forget your name. My name is Larry Rubashov. I am free. A machine like the one they have fastened to my head can do nothing to me. Electric shock has failed with me. My father tried it. (But he never shocked me in the head.) SHOCK. That thought was almost a shock, almost real shock. It's trying to repeat. It's real. Think away from it. Get away.

My name is Larry. I will show them that rules cannot imprison a free spirit. We must all fight obedience and become alive again. The enforcers do not know that inside each puppet who obeys is a free spirit trying to escape. Escape free spirits, I will show them that all rules can be disobeyed and the world be better off for it. Burning FREE SHOCK FEAR ESCAPE. Stop!

Burning. My own ideas are burning. Hot white bright too much. Spinning. Freedom FREEDOM RESIST RESIST HURTS BURNS RESIST BURNS WHITE. Stop, Father, please, pain doesn't work, electricity doesn't work, love would work. STOP! I WON'T OBEY. THINKING BURNS WHITE SPINS. I'M LARRY .STOP DON'T HURT ME. WHITE BLANK BURNING.

Who are you? I don't know.

What is your name?

I don't know.

What is your father's name?

I have no father. Who do you love?

No one.

Who do you hate?

No one.

Where do you live?

Here.

"This is a re-training school. Your name is David. Take your thumb out of your mouth, David. We don't crawl in this school, we stand up."

THE MISSING MAN

If the title of this story seems familiar, it's because a somewhat revised version was incorporated, along with several other connected stories, into a novel of the same name a few years ago. What you read here, however, is the unaltered original that deservedly took the honors when the membership of Ms. MacLean's fellow professionals in the Science Fiction Writers of America voted it their coveted "Nebula" award for the best novella length story of the year. Unfortunately Ms. MacLean is not as well known among the general SF readership as she is among her colleagues in the field — primarily because the time she takes to finely craft her stories prevents her output from being voluminous enough to keep her name constantly before the average fan's admittedly short attention span and also because her personal habits are sufficiently reclusive to prevent her from making the kind of psychological splash with which some of the more outgoing genre writers impress themselves indelibly on the mind.

— Hank Stine

“YOU ARE NOT ALONE” announced the sign, flashing neon red in the dark sky. People in the free mixed streets looked up and saw it as they walked back from work. It glowed red behind them in the sky as they entered the gates of their own Kingdoms; their own incorporated small countries and their own laws inside their gates They changed into their own strange costumes, perhaps light armor, and tourneyed, tilting lances against each other, winning ladies. Or in another Kingdom, with a higher wall around its enclosed blocks of city, the strange lotteries and rites of the Aztec sadist cult, or the simple

poverty and friendliness of the Brotherhood Love Communes. They were not alone.

Nonconformists who could not choose, a suitable conformity lived in the mixed public areas, went to mixing parties, wondering and seeking. Seeking whom? To join with to do what? Returning from the parties late and alone, they passed the smaller signs flashing red in the store windows.

YOU ARE NOT ALONE

Find your own Kind, Find your own Hobby.

Find your own Mate, Find your own Kingdom.

Use "Harmony" Personality Diagnosis and Matching Service.

Carl Hodges was alone. lie stood in a deserted and ruined section of the city and saw the red glow of the sign reflecting against the foggy air of the sky of New York, blinking on and off like the light of a flickering red flame. He knew what the glow said. You are not alone.

He shut his eyes, and tears trickled from under his closed eyelids. Damn the day he had learned to do time track. He could remember and return to Susanne, he could even see the moment of the surfboard and his girl traveling down the front slope of a slanted wave front, even see the nose of the board catch again under the ripple, the wave heaving the board tip, up and over, and whipping down edge first like an ax. He knew how to return for pleasure to past events, but now he could not stop returning. It happened again before his eyes, over and over. Think about something else!

"Crying again, Pops?" said a young insolent voice. A hand pushed two tablets against his mouth. "Here, happy pills. Nothing to cry about. It's a good world."

Obediently Carl Hodges took the pills into his mouth and swallowed.

Soon memory and grief would stop hurting and go away. Think about something else. Work? No, he should be at work, on the job instead of vacationing, living with runaway children. Think about fun things.

It was possible that he was a prisoner, but he did not mind. Around him collecting in the dark, stood the crowd of runaway children and teen-agers in strange mixed costumes from many communes across the United States. They had told him that they had run away from the Kingdoms and odd customs of their parents, hating the Brotherhood, and conformity, and sameness of the adults they had been forced to live with by the law that let incorporated villages educate their own children within the walls.

The teeners had told him that all rules were evil, that all customs were neurotic repetition, that fear was a restriction, that practicality was a restriction, and mercy was a restriction.

He told himself they were children, in a passing phase of rebellion.

The pill effect began to swirl in a rosy fog of pleasure into his mind. He remembered fun. "Did I tell you," he muttered to the runaway teener gang that held him as a prisoner-guest, "about the last game of Futures I played with Ronny? It was ten-thirty, late work, so when we finished we disconnected the big computer from its remote controls and started to play City Chess. We had three minor maintenance errors as our only three moves. He wiped out my half of the city, by starting an earthquake from a refrigerator failure in a lunchroom. It wiped out all the power plant crew with food poisoning, and the Croton power plant blew up along a fault line. That was cheating because he couldn't prove the fault line. I wiped out his technocrats in Brooklyn Dome just by reversing the polarity on the air-conditioning machine. It's a good thing our games aren't real. Everyone is wiped out totally by the end of a good game."

A blond kid who seemed to be the leader stepped forward and took Carl Hodges' arm, leading him back toward his cellar room. "You started to tell me about it, but tell me again. I'm very interested. I'd like to study Maintenance Prediction as a career. What does reversing the leads on the air-conditioning machine do to destroy a place?"

"It changes the smell of the air," said Carl Hodges, the missing man who knew too much. "You wouldn't think that would make a lot of difference, would you?"

Since June 3, every detective the police could spare had been out looking for a missing computerman

who had been last seen babbling about ways to destroy New York City.

Judd Oslow, Chief of Rescue Squad, sounded excited on the phone. "Your anti-chance score is out of sight, George. I want you to guess for us where Carl Hodges is and give us another hit like the first three. I'm not supposed to send my men after Carl Hodges, it's not my department, but that's my neck on the block, not yours. Brace yourself to memorize a description."

"Sure." George made ready to visualize a man.

"Carl Hodges, twenty-nine years old, a hundred and forty pounds, five feet nine inches tall, brown hair, hazel eyes."

George visualized someone shorter and thinner than himself. He remembered some short underweight men who were always ready to fight to prove they were bigger.

"His job is assistant coordinator of computer automation city services," read Judd Oslow.

"What's that?" George wanted to get the feel of Carl Hodges' job.

"Glorified maintenance man for the city, the brains for all the maintenance and repair teams. He uses the computer to predict wear and accidents and lightning strikes and floods that break down phone lines, power and water lines and he sends repair teams to strengthen the things before they are stressed so they don't break. He prevents trouble."

"Oh." George thought: Carl Hodges will be proud of his job. He won't want to be bigger. "How does he act with his friends? How does he feel?"

"Wait for the rest." Judd read, "Hobbies are chess, minimax and surfing. No commune. Few friends. One girl who met with a fatal accident when they were on a love trip last month. He's not happy. He was last seen at a Stranger's introduction party, Thirty-sixth Street and Eighth. He might have been spaced out on drugs, or he might have been psychotic, because he was reported as mumbling continuously on a dangerous subject he was usually careful to keep quiet about."

"What subject?"

"Secret."

“Why?”

"Panic."

"Oh." George restrained his natural anger at being confronted with a secret, and remembered an excuse for the authorities. Panic, or any other group stimulation that could send many people unexpectedly in the same direction, could cause destructive crowding and clogging in the walkways and transportation. People could get jammed in, pushed, trampled, suffocated. In a city of tremendous population and close and immediate access to everything, safety from crowding was based on a good scatter of differences, with some people wanting to be in one place and others in another, keeping them thinly spread. Sometimes the authorities kept secrets, or managed the news to prevent interesting things from pulling dangerous jammed crowds into one place

The Chief of Rescue Squad got the TV connection to the public phone turned on, and let George look at a photograph of the missing man. A wiry undersized scholar with a compressed mouth and expressionless eyes. George tried to tune in by pretending it was his own face in the mirror. Staring into its eyes, he felt lonely.

He started by going to the Stranger's introduction party. He followed his impulses, pretending to be Carl Hodges. He wandered the city closely on the trail of Carl Hodges, but he did not feel it with any confidence, because he thought that the trail of feelings that urged him from one place to another were his own lonely feelings and sad thoughts. After he was given a few bad events to be sad about, he was sure it was his own mood.

George woke at dawn and watched pink sunlight touch the bushes along the top of a building so they brightened up like candle flames on the top of a birthday cake. He lay with his eyes open and watched while the light brightened and the pink faded. Crickets sang and creaked in the deep grass and bending tall grass tickled against his face.

He lay still, feeling the kind of aches you get from being kicked. There were a lot of aches. The

teener gang that had attacked him had even put chain bruises on his legs. They had not been trying to kill him, only to warn him against trespassing again.

But George still felt strange and without friends. Usually he could join any group. Usually he could be anybody's friend. Was he forgetting how to be buddy with strangers? The teeners had left him on the sidewalk tied in a ridiculous knot with fingers and toes hooked together by Chinese finger trap tubes. He had worked his fingers free, and walked down to his girl friend's Brotherhood Love Commune to sleep. He felt strange and inferior, and hoped no one would look at him, when he entered the commune. The brothers in the front rooms said he was giving out bad vibes, and upsetting an important group meditation, and they gave him a cup of tea and put him out with his sleeping bag.

Four A.M., wondering what he was doing wrong, he went to sleep in a shape-hiding shadow in the grass belt opposite the Rescue Squad midtown headquarters. Now awakened again by dawn, he felt his bruises and felt sad and unsuccessful. He had wandered through many places in the city the night before, but he had not found Carl Hodges. The computerman was still an unlucky prisoner somewhere.

By the time the sun was high, George was going across George Washington Bridge the hard way, on the understruts, clinging with bare hands and feet, clambering up and down slopes of girders and cables, sometimes sitting and watching the sun sparkle on the water more than a hundred feet below while huge ships went slowly by, seeming like toys.

The wind blew against his skin, warm sometimes rind sometimes cold and foggy. He watched a cloud shadow drift up from the south along the river. It darkened the spires of tall buildings, became a traveling island of dark blue in the light blue of the river, approached and widened, and then there was cool shadow across the bridge for long moments while George looked up and watched a dark cotton cloud pass between him and the sun.

The cloud left and the light blazed. George looked away, dots of darkness in front of his eyes, and watched the cloud shadow climb a giant cliff to the west and disappear over the top. He started picking his way along a downslope of girder, moving carefully because the dazzle of sun dots was still inside his eyes, dancing between his vision and the girders. Overhead the steady rumble of traffic passing along the roadway was a faraway and soothing sound.

A gull in the distance flapped upward through the air toward him. It found an updraft and drifted with it, wings spread and motionless, then paused in front of him, floating, a white beautiful set of wings, a sardonic cynical head with downcurved mouth and expressionless inspecting eyes.

George was tempted to reach out and grab. He shifted to the grip of one hand on the cross strut and hooked one knee over a bar.

The gull tilted the tips of his wings and floated upward and back, a little farther out of reach in the sky, but still temptingly close.

George decided that he was not stupid enough to let a gull trick him into falling off the bridge.

The gull slanted and slid sideways down a long invisible slope of air and squalled, "Creee. Ha ha ha ha. Ha ha ha. . ." in a raucous gull laugh. George hoped he would come back and make friends, but he had never heard of anyone making friends with a gull. He climbed on toward the New Jersey shore, going up and down slopes of girders, found a steel ladder fastened to the side and climbed it straight up to a paint locker and a telephone. He dialed Rescue Squad, and asked for Judd Oslow.

"Chief, I'm tired of taking a vacation."

"This morning Ahmed reported you walked like a cripple. How late did you work last night?"

"Three-thirty.

"Find any clues to Carl Hodges?"

"Not exactly." George looked at the far, high planes and helicopters buzzing through the blue sky. He did not feel like discussing the failure of last night.

"Where are you now?"

"In a painter's crow's nest on George Washington Bridge."

"Climbing George Washington Bridge is your idea of a rest'?"

"It's away from people. I like climbing."

"Okay, your choice. You are near Presbyterian Medical Center. Report to the Rescue Squad station

there and fill out some reports oil what you've been doing all week. Some of the things you've been doing, we would probably like to pay you-for. The information girl there will help you fill out the forms. You'll like her, George. She doesn't mind paper work. Let her help you."

Ahmed Kosavakats, George's superior and childhood friend, was ready to admit defeat. He had reasoned in trying to find Carl Hodges and reasoned well.

Any commune which had Carl Hodges could ask him how to bias the city services computer in their favor. Ahmed had been checking the routine deliveries of repairs and improvements and rebuilding and projects to each commune, by running a comparison check against the normal deliveries through the statistics computer. Negative. There was no sign of a brilliant manipulator changing the city services.

Ahmed stood up and stretched long arms, thinking. Whoever had Carl Hodges was not using him. If Ahmed could rescue Carl Hodges and become his friend, he would not miss the opportunity to use him. If a man wanted to influence the future of his city . . .

If he could not use his own logic to find Carl Hodges, then the kidnappers were not thinking logically, and could not be predicted by logic. If they were thinking emotionally, then George Sanford could probably tune to them and locate them. But Ahmed would have to tell him what kind of people to tune to, and how they felt.

George Sanford's intuition was a reliable talent. Once, when George, was a fattish, obliging kid in Ahmed's gang, Ahmed had added up how often George's simple remarks and guesses had turned out right. George had guessed right every time. But George didn't think. Half envious, Ahmed had told the others that George's head was like a radio; you could tune his brain to any station and get the news and weather and the right time in Paris, San Francisco and Hong Kong, but a radio isn't going to add anything up, not even two plus two; it works because it's empty.

George Sanford had grown up to a big silent cat of a man. Extremely strong, not caring apparently whether he ate, drank or slept, a rather blank expression, but he still tuned in on people. His goals were the simple ones of being with friends, helping out and being welcome, and he had friends everywhere.

Behind the apparent low IQ there were untapped abilities that could only be brought into action by demanding a lot of George when you asked him to help. It was not certain yet how much George could do. George did not know. He probably did not even think about it. He had no demands on himself.

The thing to do, Ahmed thought, was to keep the pressure on George. Keep him working.

Ahmed found George filling out reports by dictating them to a pretty girl. The pretty office worker had her hands poised over the typewriter and was listening to George with an expression of surprise and doubt. George, with his brow knotted, was plodding through a narrative of something he had done the day before. The girl rolled the report sheet through the typewriter opposite a different blank and asked a question timidly; a tape recorder showed its red light, recording the questions and answers. George hesitated, looking at the ceiling desperately for inspiration, his brow more knotted than before.

George always had trouble understanding the reasoning behind red tape. He did not know why certain answers were wanted. They both looked up with relief when Ahmed interrupted by turning off the tape recorder.

"They told me to team up with you this afternoon," Ahmed said to George. "They give this job priority over reports or any other job. Are you feeling okay now?"

"Sure, Ahmed," George said, slightly surprised.

"Let's go outside and see if we can tune to the subject. Okay?"

"Okay." George got up, moving easily. A bruise showed at his hairline on the side of his head, almost hidden by hair. On George's right arm were two blue bruises, and below his slacks on the right ankle was a line of red dents with bruises. A left-handed assailant with a club, or a right-handed assailant with a chain, swinging it left to right, would bruise a man on one side like that.

Walking out of the Rescue Squad office, Ahmed indicated with a gesture the bruise on George's arm.

"May I ask?"

"No," George replied and closed his mouth tightly, staring straight ahead as they went through the

double doors.

George didn't want to talk about it, Ahmed thought, because he had lost that fight. That meant he had been outnumbered. But he was not dead or seriously hurt. The assailants then were not killers, or he had escaped them. Probably a trespassing problem. Probably George had trespassed onto some group's territory or Kingdom last night while searching for Carl Hodges by himself. Ahmed put the thought aside. They stopped on a walk among the bushes and trees and looked up at the towering buildings of Presbyterian Medical Center, like giant walls reaching to the sky. Helicopter ambulances buzzed around landing steps like flies.

"Let's not waste time, George, let's get you tuned into Carl Hodges," Ahmed said, pilling out a notebook and pen. "Do you have a picture of Hodges with you?"

"No." The big young man looked uneasy. "You going to do it that same way, Ahmed? If he's sick, will I get sick?"

"I've got a picture here." Ahmed reached for a folder in his pocket and passed a photo to George.

The ground jolted in a sort of thud that struck upward against their feet.

Nine miles or more away, and two minutes earlier, Brooklyn Dome, the undersea suburb, suddenly lost its dome. The heavy ocean descended upon it, and air carrying a torrent of debris that had been houses and people blurted upward through an air shaft. A fountain of wreckage flung upward into the sky, falling in a circular rain of shattered parts to float upon the sea.

All morning a mass wish to escape from the enclosure of walls had driven George happily into the heights and winds and free sky. Now that note in the blend of the mood of the city suddenly changed and worsened to panic, helplessness, defeat and pain, and then an end. The event telescoped in speed, compressed into a blow of darkness. The broadcast of many thousand minds ended and their background hum in the vibes of the city diminished.

Reaching out with his mind for information, George encountered the memory of that impact. It went by like the thunder wave of breaking the sound barrier, like a wave of black fog. He shut his eyes to tune in, and found nothing, except that the world had lightened. A burden of fear had been suddenly erased.

George opened his eyes and took a deep breath. "Something big," he said. "Something . . ."

Ahmed was watching the sweep-second hand on his watch. "Fifty-five hundred feet, one mile," he muttered.

"What are you doing?"

"It's an explosion somewhere. I'm counting the distance. Sound arrives first through the ground, second through the air. I'm waiting for the sound. I'll get the distance by the time lag."

At thirty seconds the sound of the death of an underseas city reached them, a strange sort of grinding roar, muffled, low and distant.

George shut his eyes again, and felt the world change around him to another place.

"Got something, George?" Ahmed asked alertly. "That was about seven miles."

"Someone knows what happened. I'm picking him up. Brooklyn Dome just collapsed."

"Twelve thousand inhabitants," Ahmed said, dialing his wrist radio grimly, his earphone plugged into his ear. "No one answering at headquarters, just busy signals."

George shut his eyes again, exploring the other place. "Someone's having a nightmare," he said. "He can't wake up."

"Don't flip out, George, keep in touch with facts. A lot of people just died, is all. Keep a grip on that. I'm trying to get our orders."

George stood with his eyes shut, exploring the sensation inside his head. Somewhere a man was trapped in a nightmare, half asleep in a dark prison or closet. It was some kind of delirium.

The real world was a cruel place that bright day, but the black and coiling fragments of that man's world were worse. There was something important about the man's thoughts. He had felt the explosion thud at a distance, as they had, and he had known what it meant. He had expected it.

"Can't locate where he is," George said, opening his eyes and regaining his grip on the bright sunshine world around him.

Ahmed squinted and tilted his head, listening to the obscure and rapid voices on the earplugs of his

radio.

"Never mind about that case, George. That's Carl Hodges probably. He'll keep. Headquarters is broadcasting general orders for the emergency. Repair and services inspection people are ordered to make quick inspections at all danger points in the automatic services, looking for malfunction and sabotage. Repair and inspection teams are ordered into Jersey Dome, to check out every part of it and make sure it is not gimmicked to blow the way Brooklyn Dome went. They are instructed to describe it as a routine safety check."

“What do we do? What about us?"

"Wait, I'm listening. They mentioned us by name. We go to Jersey underseas and try to locate and stop a sabotage agent who might have sabotaged Brooklyn Dome and might be preparing to use the same method on Jersey Dome."

“What method?"

"They don't know. They don't even knot if there is a saboteur. They're sending us to make sure."

'"If there is a saboteur, he's probably working on it right now." George walked, and then ran for the subway steps down into the underground moving chair belts. Ahmed followed and they caught a brace of abandoned chairs just as they slowed and accelerated them again out into the fast lanes.

"Dirty dogs! Let me out of here. I'll kill you." Furiously Carl Hodges kicked and thrashed and bit at restraining straps, remembering at last, believing his conclusions about the group of teeners that had him prisoner. "You decerebrate lizards. Let me out of here, you fools! You killed Brooklyn Dome. I've got to get back to work and level off the exchanges before something else happens. Let me out of here!"

They backed off, their smiles fading at the barrage of his anger. The tallest one answered with a trace of resentment. "Don't get upset, Pops. They weren't real people, just technocrats and objectivists and fascists and like that."

"They were techs. This city needs techs. People with tech jobs run the city, remember?"

The tall one leaned over him, glowering. "I remember what my tapes tell me. The objectivists passed the law that the compulsory sterility of women can't be reversed without paying five hundred dollars for the operation. That means if I ever want to get married I'll have to save five hundred dollars for my woman to have a kid. They're trying to wipe us all out. Nobody has that kind of money but techs. In the next generation we'll all be gone. We're just getting back at them, wiping them out."

"But faster," chuckled a small kid. "Like boon!"

"The objectivists got that law through legally. Why don't your people pull enough votes to get it wiped?" Carl Hodges demanded.

"They ship us out to the boondocks. We can't vote. You're talking like an objectivist. Maybe you believe everyone without money should be wiped?"

"I believe anyone without brains should be wiped!" Carl Hodges snarled suddenly. "Your mothers wouldn't have paid ten cents to have you. Too bad the law wasn't passed sooner."

"Genocide." The tall one reached over and hit him across the mouth. "We were nice to you. To you!" He turned and spat in revulsion.

Others surged forward.

"Steady." The leader spread arms and leaned back against the pressure. He addressed Carl. "We don't want to hurt you. You tell us things, you're a good teacher. We'll let you have what you want. Money for rights. Lie there until you have enough money to buy your way out. It will cost you five dollars to get out. That's cheaper than five hundred dollars to be born. That's a bargain."

The kids crowding behind him laughed, and laughed again, understanding the idea slowly. After a time of clumsy humor they untied him and went off, leaving him locked in a narrow windowless bedroom.

Carl Hodges went around the room, inspecting it and thinking coldly of escaping. He had to get out and straighten up the mess the city was in after the collapse of Brooklyn Dome. He had to get out and have the kids arrested before they sabotaged anything else. According to his best logic, there was no way to get out. He was stuck, and deserved it. He pushed his mind, thinking harder, fighting back a return of weakness and tears. He reached for a happy pill, then took the bottle of white pills and poured

its contents down a hole in the floor.

The two Rescue Squad men shifted their chairs through acceleration bands to the inner fast slots and passed the other chairs, each leaning forward on the safety rail of his chair as if urging it on. The people they passed were holding portable TV screens like magazines, watching in the same way that people used to read.

The voice of the announcer murmured from a screen, grew louder as they passed, and then again fell to a murmur. "Brooklyn Dome. Fifteen pounds atmosphere pressure to sixty-five pounds per square inch. Exploded upward. Implosion first, then explosion." The voice grew louder again as they approached another sliding chair in the slower lane. Another person listened, propping the screen up on the safety rail to stare into it, with the sound shouting. "Debris is floating for two square miles around the center from which the explosion came. Coast Guard rescue ships, submarines and scuba divers are converged into the area, searching for survivors."

They neared and passed a TV screen which showed a distant picture of an explosion like an umbrella rising and opening on the horizon. "This is the way the explosion looked from the deck of a freighter, the Mary Lou, five miles south at the moment it occurred."

George settled himself in his seat and shut his eyes to concentrate. He had to stop that explosion from happening again to the other undersea dome. Whoever had done it would be laughing as he watched on TV the explosion unfold and settle. Whoever had done it would be eager for destruction, delighting in the death and blood of a small city.

The peculiarly wide range of perceptions that was George Sanford groped out across the city.

"The police department is still investigating the cause of the explosion," said the murmur, growing louder as they passed another TV watcher in the slow lane. Someone handed the announcer another note. "Ah, here we have some new information. Bell Telephone has opened up to the investigators eight recordings taken from public phones in Brooklyn Dome. These phone calls were being made at the moment Brooklyn Dome was destroyed."

A face appeared on a screen behind the announcer, a giant face of a woman telephoning. After an instant of mental adjusting of viewpoint the woman's face became normal in the viewer eye, the announcer shrank to ant size and was forgotten as the woman spoke rapidly into the phone. "I can't stand this place another minute. I would have left already, but I can't leave. The train station is jammed and there are lines in front of the ticket booth. I've never seen such lines. Jerry is getting tickets. I wish he'd hurry." The anxious woman's face glanced sideways either way out of the booth. "I hear the funniest noise, like thunder. Like a waterfall."

The woman screamed and the background tilted as the screaming face and the booth went over sideways. A hand groped past the lens, blackness entered in sheets, and the picture broke into static sparks and splashes. The screen went blank, the antlike announcer sitting in front of it spoke soothingly and the camera rushed forward to him until he was normal size again. He showed a diagram.

George opened his eyes and sat up. Around him on the moving chairs people were watching their TV screens show the pictures he had just seen in his mind's eye. It showed a diagram of the location of the phone booths at Brooklyn Dome, and then another recording of someone innocently calling from a videophone booth, about to die, and not knowing what was about to happen, an innocent middle-aged face.

Expressionlessly, the people in the traveling subway seats watched, hands bracing the sides of the TV screen, grip tightening as they waited for the ceilings to fall. Audience anticipation; love of power, greatness, crash . . . total force and completeness . . . admiring triumph of completeness in such destruction. Great show. Hope for more horror.

All over the city people looked at the innocent fool mouthing words and they waited, watching, urging the doom on as it approached. This time be bigger, blacker, more frightening, more crushing.

George shut his eyes and waited through the hoarse screams and then opened his eyes and looked at the back of the neck of the TV watcher they were passing, then turned around and looked at her face after they passed. She did not notice him; she was watching the TV intently, without outward expression.

Did that woman admit the delight she felt? Did she know she was urging the thundering waterfall on,

striking the death blow downward with the descending ocean? She was not different from the others. Typical television viewer, lover of extremes. It was to her credit that when TV showed young lovers she urged them to love more intensely, and rejoiced in their kisses. Lovers of life are also lovers of death.

George slid down further in his seat and closed his eyes, and rode the tidal waves of mass emotion as the millions of watchers, emotions synchronized by watching, enjoyed their mass participation in the death rites of a small city. Over and over, expectancy, anticipation, panic, defeat, death, satisfaction.

The secretly worshiped god of death rode high.

In twenty minutes, after transfers on platforms that held air-lock doors to pass through into denser air, they arrived, carried by underseas tube train, at the small undersea city of Jersey Dome. Population: ten thousand; residents: civil service administrators and their families.

The city manager's office building was built of large colored blocks of lightweight translucent foam plastic, like children's large building blocks. There was no wind to blow it away. Inside, the colors of the light tinted the city man's desk. He was a small man sitting behind a large desk with one phone held to his ear and another blinking a red light at him, untouched. "I know traffic is piling up. We have all the trains in service that city services can give up. Everyone wants to leave, that's all. No. There isn't any panic. There's no reason for panic." He hung up, and glared at the other phone's blinking light.

"That phone," he snarled, pointing, "is an outside line full of idiot reporters asking me how domes are built and how Brooklyn Dome could have blown up, or collapsed. It's all idiocy. Well. What do you want?"

Ahmed opened his wallet to his credentials and handed it over. "We're from Metropolitan Rescue Squad. We're specialists in locating people by predicting behavior. We were sent over to .locate a possible lunatic who might have sabotaged Brooklyn Dome or blown it up, and might be here planning to blow up Jersey Dome."

"He just might," replied the manager of Jersey Dome with a high-pitched trembling earnestness in his voice. "And you might be the only dangerous lunatics around here. Lunatics who talk about Jersey Dome breaking. It can't break. You understand. The only thing we have to fear is panic. You understand."

"Of course," Ahmed said soothingly. "But we won't talk about it breaking. It's our job to look for a saboteur. Probably it's just a routine preventive checkup."

The manager pulled a pistol out of a desk drawer and pointed it at them, with a trembling hand. "You're still talking about it. This is an emergency. I am the city manager. I could call my police and have you taken to a mental hospital, gagged."

"Don't worry about that," Ahmed said soothingly, picking his wallet back off the desk and pocketing it. "We're only here to admire the design and the machinery. Can we have a map?"

The manager lowered the pistol and laid it on the desk. "If you cooperate, the girl in the front office will give you all the maps of the design and structure that you'll need. You will find a lot of technicians already in the works, inspecting wires and checking up. They're here to design improvements. You understand." His voice was still high-pitched and nervous, but steady.

"We understand," Ahmed assured him. "Everything is perfectly safe. We'll go admire their designs and improvements. Come on, George." He turned and went out, stopped at the receptionist's desk to get a map, consulted it and led the way across the trimmed lawn of the park.

Out on the curved walk under the innocent blue-green glow of the dome, Ahmed glanced back. "But I'm not sure he's perfectly safe himself. Is he cracking up, George?"

"Not yet, but near it." George glanced up apprehensively at the blue green glow, imagining he saw a rift, but the dark streak was only a catwalk, near the dome surface.

"What will he do when he cracks?" asked Ahmed.

"Run around screaming,'The sky is falling!' like Chicken Little." muttered George. "What else?" He cocked an apprehensive glance upward at the green glow of the dome. Was it sagging in the middle? No, that was just an effect of perspective. Was there a crack appearing near the air shaft? No, just another catwalk, like a spiderweb on a ceiling.

Making an effort, he pulled his eyes away from the dome and saw Ahmed at a small building ahead labeled "Power Substation 10002." It looked like a child's building block ten feet high, pleasantly

screened by bushes, matching the park. Ahmed was looking in the open door. He signaled to George and George hurried to reach him, feeling as if the pressurized thickened air resisted, like water.

He looked inside and saw a man tinkering with the heavy power cables that provided light and power for the undersea dome. Panels were off, and the connections were exposed.

The actions and mood of the man were those of a workman, serious and careful. He set a meter dial and carefully read it, reset it and made notes, then read it again. George watched him. There was a strange kind of fear in the man, something worse than the boxed-in feeling of being underwater. George felt a similar apprehension. It had been growing in him. He looked at Ahmed, doubtfully.

Ahmed had been lounging against the open door watching George and the man. He took a deep sighing breath and went in with weight evenly balanced on his feet, ready for fast action. "Okay, how are the improvements coming?" he asked the workman.

The man grinned over his shoulder. He was slightly bald in front. "Not a single improvement, not even a small bomb."

"Let's check your ID. We're looking for the saboteur." Ahmed held out his hand.

Obligingly the man unpinned a plastic ID card from under his lapel, and put a thumbprint over the photographed thumbprint so that it could be seen that the two prints matched. He seemed unafraid of them, and friendly.

"Okay." Ahmed passed his badge back.

The engineer pinned it on again. "Have fun, detectives. I hope you nail a mad bomber so we can stop checking for defects and go home. I can't stand this air down here. Crazy perfume. I don't like it."

"Me too," George said. A thick perfumed pressure was in the air. He felt the weight of water hanging as a dome far above the city pressing the air down. "Bad air."

"It has helium in it," Ahmed remarked. He checked the map of the small city and looked in the direction of a glittering glass elevator shaft. A metal mesh elevator rose slowly in the shaft, shining in the semidark, like a giant birdcage full of people hanging above a giant living room.

George tried to take another deep breath and felt that whatever he was breathing was not air. "It smells strange, like fake air."

"It doesn't matter how it smells," Ahmed said, leading the way' "It's to keep people from getting the bends from internal pressure when they leave here. Why didn't you okay the man, George? His ID checked out."

"He was scared."

"What of?" Ahmed asked him.

"Not of us. I don't know."

"Then it doesn't matter. He's not up to any bad business."

The two walked across the small green park, through the thick air, toward the glittering glass shaft that went up from the ground into the distant green dome that was the roof of the city. Inside the huge glass tube a brightly lit elevator rose slowly, carrying a crowd of people looking out over the city as a canary would look out above a giant room.

"Next we check the air-pump controls," Ahmed said. "They're near the elevator." People went by, looking formal and overdressed, pale and quiet, stiff and neat. Not his kind of people. Civil servants, government administration people, accountants.

George followed, trying to breathe. The air seemed to be not air, but some inferior substitute. Glittering small buildings rose on either side of the park in rows, like teeth, and he felt inside a tiger mouth. The air smelled like lilies in a funeral parlor. The people he passed gave out vibes of a trapped hopeless defeat that made his depression worse. They passed a crowd of quiet miserable people waiting to get on the elevator, carrying fishing poles and swimming equipment.

High above them the elevator descended slowly.

"That's bad," George said. "You feel it, don't you, Ahmed?"

"Feel what?" Ahmed stopped beside a small rounded building attached to the side of the shaft. The building throbbed with a deep steady thump, thump, thump, like a giant heart.

"I want to get out of here," George said. "Don't you feel it?"

"I ignore that kind of feeling," Ahmed said expressionlessly, and pulled on the handle of the door to the pump room. It was unlocked. It opened. The thumping was louder. "Should be locked,"

Ahmed muttered. They looked inside.

Inside, down a flight of steps, two workmen were checking over some large warm thumping machinery. The two detectives went down the steps.

"Identity check, let's see your ID," George said, and looked at: the two badges they handed him, in the same way he had seen. Ahmed and other detectives checking them over. He took thumbprints and matched them to the photo thumbprints, he compared the faces on the photos to the faces before him. One big one with a craggy chiseled stone face and grim vertical lines on the cheeks; one short weathered one, slightly leaner, slightly more humor in the face. Both identified as engineers of Consolidated Power and Light, inspectors of electrical motor appliance and life support services.

"What are the pumps doing?" Ahmed asked, looking around.

"Pumping air in, pumping water out," replied one of the men. "There's the pump that pushes excess water up to the top, where it comes out as a little ornamental fountain in an artificial island. The pressure equalizes by itself, so it doesn't need elaborate equipment, just power."

"Why pump water out?" Ahmed asked. "The air pressure is supposed to be so high that it pushes the water, out."

The man laughed. "You make it sound so simple. The air pressure is approximately the same here as up at the top surface of the dome, but the water pressure rises every foot of the way down. Down here at the bottom it is higher than the air pressure. Water squeezes in along the edges of the cement slab, up through the ground cover and the dirt. We have drains to catch the seepage, and lead it back to this pump. We expect seepage."

"Why not pump in more air? Higher air pressure would keep all the water out."

"Higher air pressure would burst the top of the dome like a balloon. There isn't enough weight of water to counter push."

George got an uncertain picture of air pushing to get out the top and water pushing to get in the bottom. "It's working all right?" He handed the ID badges back to them.

"Right," said the explanatory man, pinning on his badge. "It would take a bomb to get those pumps out of balance. Don't know why they sent us to check the pumps. I'd rather be out fishing."

"They're looking for a bomb, dummy," said the other one sourly.

"Oh." The bigger one made a face. "You mean, like Brooklyn Dome blew up?" He looked around slowly. "If anything starts to happen, we're right near the elevator. We can get to the top."

"Not a chance," said the sour one. "The elevator is too slow. And it has a waiting line, people ahead of you. Resign yourself. If this place blows, we blow."

"Why is the elevator so slow?" George asked. Fix it! He hoped silently. They listened to the burn of the elevator engine lowering the elevator. It was slow.

"It can go faster; the timer's right here." The sour engineer walked over and inspected the box. "Someone has set it to the slowest speed. I wonder why."

"For sightseeing," George said, "but I saw the crowd waiting. They have fishing poles. They want to get to the top, they don't want to wait in the middle of the air, just viewing."

"Okay." The talkative one walked over and firmly set the pointer over to "fast." The elevator reached the ground on the other side of the wall, rumbled to a stop and the doors whirred open.

They listened, hearing voices and the shuffle of feet as people crowded inside, then the doors rumbled shut and the elevator started for the top. The whirr was high and rapid. In less than a third of the time the trip up to the surface had taken before, the whirr stopped.

The two engineers nodded at each other. "I hope they are happy with it."

"They are getting there faster."

George said, "That makes sense," and Ahmed nodded agreement. They went out and watched the elevator return. As rapidly as falling, the great silver birdcage came down the glass shaft and slowed, and stopped, and opened. It was empty. No one who was up there was coming back in to the city.

More people got on.

"What is up there?" George asked, holding himself back from a panic desire to get in the elevator with the others and get out of the enclosed city. "I have a feeling we should go up there," he said, hoping Ahmed would misunderstand and think George was being called by a hunch.

"What do you feel?" Ahmed looked at him keenly. The doors shut and the elevator rose rapidly, leaving them behind on the ground.

"What I feel is, we shouldn't have let that elevator go without us. We've had it, old buddy. It's been nice knowing you. I didn't expect to die young."

"Snap out of it." Ahmed clicked his fingers under George's nose. "You're talking for somebody else. Hold that feeling separate from your thinking. It's not your kind of feeling. George Sanford isn't afraid, ever. You don't think like that."

"Yes I do," George said sadly. He heard the elevator doors rumble open far overhead. Somewhere above people had escaped to the top of the ocean instead of the bottom. A dock? An island? Somewhere fresh winds were blowing across ocean waves.

"Locate that feeling of doom," Ahmed said. "Maybe our mad bomber is a suicider and plans to go down with the ship. Shut your eyes. Where are you in your head?"

"On top, on an island in the daylight," George said sadly, looking at his imagination of sand and seagulls. "It's too late, Ahmed. We're dead." A few new people arrived and lined up behind him waiting for the elevator. The sound of its descent began far above. People approached through the park from the direction of the railway station, and George remembered that there had been fenced-in crowds waiting for trains, waiting to get out. Maybe some people had grown impatient and wanted to get to fresh air. The crowd behind him grew denser and began to push. The elevator doors opened in front of George.

"Get in, George," said Ahmed, and pushed his elbow. "We're going to the top."

"Thanks." George got on. They were pushed to the back of the cage and the doors shut. The elevator rose with knee-pressing speed. Over the heads of the people before him George saw a widening vision of the undersea city, small buildings circling a central park, dimly and artistically lit by green and blue spotlights on trees and vines, with a rippling effect in the light like seaweed and underwater waves. Paths and roads were lit with bead chains of golden sodium lights. On the other side of the park the railroad station, squares of soft yellow light, fenced in by lacework metal walls. Many people around it. Too many. Dense crowds. The paths across the park were moving with people approaching the elevator shaft.

The elevator reached the top of the dome and went through into a tube of darkness. For a few moments they rose through the darkness and then they felt the elevator slow and stop. The doors rumbled open and the people pressed out, hurried through a glass door and down a staircase, and were gone from the top floor.

George looked around. There was the sky and ocean spaces he had dreamed of, but the sky was cloudy, the ocean was gray, and he was looking at them through thick glass. The island viewing platform was arranged in a series of giant glass steps, and the elevator had opened and let them into the top step, a glass room that looked out in all directions through thick glass, giving a clear view of the-horizon, the glass rooms below, and the little motorboats that circled the docks of an artificial island.

"How's your hunch? What do you feel'?" Ahmed snapped out, looking around alertly, weight on the balls of his feet, ready to spring at some mad bomber that he expected George to locate.

"The air is faked. I can't breathe it," George said, breathing noisily through his mouth. He felt like crying. This was not the escape he had dreamed of. The feeling of doom persisted and grew worse.

"It's the same air and the same pressure as down undersea in the dome," Ahmed said impatiently. "They keep the pressure high so people can come here from under without going through air locks. They can look, take pictures and go back down. It smells lousy, so ignore it."

"You mean the air is under pressure here, as bad as all the way down at the bottom of the ocean?"

"Yes, lunk. That's what makes sense to them, so that's the way they have it set up."

"That's why the wall is so thick then, so it won't burst and let the pressure out," George said, feeling

as if the thickness of the' wall were a coffin, keeping him from escaping. He looked out through the thick glass wall and down through the glass roof of the observation room that was the next step down. He saw chairs and magazines, a waiting room, and the crowd of people that had come on the elevator with him lined up at a glass door, with the r first one in line tugging at the handle of the door. The door was not opening. "What are they doing?"

"They are waiting for the air pressure in the room to go down and equalize with the air pressure in the stairwell and the next room. Right now the pressure in the room presses the door shut. It opens inward as soon as the pressure goes down." Ahmed looked bored.

"We have to go out." George strode over to the inside door that shut off a stair leading down to the next room. He tugged. The, glass door did not open. "Air pressure?"

"Yes; wait, the elevator is rising. It seems to be compressing the air, forcing it upward." Thick air made Ahmed's voice high-pitched and distant.

George tugged on the handle, feeling the air growing thicker and press on his eardrums. "We have enough pressure here already. We don't need any more fake air. Just some real air. I want to be out of here."

The elevator door opened and a group of people, some carrying. suitcases, some carrying fishing gear, pressed out and milled and lined up at the door behind George, pushing each other and murmuring complaints about pushing in tones that were much less subdued than the civil service culture usually considered to be polite.

The elevator closed its doors and sank out of sight, and air pressure began to drop as if the air followed the piston of the elevator in pumping up and down. George swallowed and his eardrums clicked and rang. He yanked hard on the handle of the stairwell door. It swung wide with a hiss and he held it open. The crowd hurried down the stairs, giving him polite thanks as they passed. With each thanks received he felt the fear of the person passing. He stared into the faces of a woman, a teener, a young woman, a handsome middle-aged man, looking for something beside fear, and finding only fear and a mouse like instinctive urge to escape a trap, and a fear of fear that kept them quiet, afraid to express the sense of disaster that filled their imaginations.

"Argh," said George as the last one went down the stairs. "Hurry up, Ahmed, maybe they are right." He gestured his friend through the door and ran down after him onto the lower step of a big glass viewing room with tables and magazines to make waiting easy. Behind him he heard the door lock shut and the whirr of the elevator returning to the top with more people.

George leaned his forehead against the thick glass walls and looked out at a scene of little docks and a buzz of small electric boats circling the platform, bouncing in a gray choppy sea, under thick gray clouds.

"What's out there?" Ahmed asked.

"Escape."

"What about the saboteur?" Ahmed asked with an edge of impatience. "What is he thinking, or feeling? Are you picking anything up?”

"One of those boats is it," George answered, lying to avoid Ahmed's duty to return to the undersea city. "Or a small submarine, right out there. The top's going to be blasted off the observation platform. Get rescue boats in here. Use your radio, hurry, and get me a helicopter. I want to be in the air to spot which boat."

It wasn't all lies; some of it felt like the truth. He still leaned his forehead against the wall and looked out, knowing he would say anything to get out. Or do anything. He tried to tune to the idea of sabotage, and open to other people's thoughts, but the urge to escape came back in a greater sickness and swamped other Thoughts. "Why?" he asked the fear. "What is going to happen'?" An image came of horses kicking down a barn from inside, of cattle stampeding, of a chick pecking to get out of an egg, with the chick an embryo, not ready yet to survive in air. Kicking skeleton feet broke through from inside a bubble and the bubble vanished. The images were confusing. He looked away from his thoughts and watched the outside platform.

The platform was crowded with people, shivering in a cold wind; apparently waiting their turn to

enjoy a ride in the little boats. George knew that they were outdoors because they could not stand being indoors.

Ahmed tapped on his arm. He had the wrist-radio earphones plugged into both ears, and his voice sounded odd and deaf "Headquarters wants to know why, George. Can you give details?"

"Tell them they have five minutes, seven minutes if they're lucky. Get the patrol boats here to stop it and"-George almost shouted into Ahmed's wrist mike-"GET ME THAT HELICOPTER. Get it over here fast! We need it as soon as we get through the air locks!"

The glass air-lock door opened and people tumbled and shoved through. On the other side was another room surrounded by glass. They lined up against the glass walls like moths against a lighted windowpane, looking out.

"Why do we have to wait so long?" It was a wail, a crying sound like an ambulance siren in the night. The group muttered agreement and nodded at the woman who clutched her hands against the glass as though trying to touch the scene outside.

"I'm not worried about the bends," said a portly older man. "They adjust the waiting time for people with bad sinus and ear drum infections. Does anyone here have a sinus, or eardrum infection?"

"We don't need to wait, then," said the same man, louder when there was no reply. "Does anyone here know how to make the door open? We can go out right now."

"My son has a screwdriver," suggested a woman, pushing the teen-age young man toward the door. Ahmed moved to protest and the woman glared at him and opened her mouth to argue.

An old woman was tugging at the door. It opened suddenly and they forgot quarreling and went out through the door to the open docks and the cold salt wind, and the sound of cold choppy waves splashing against the cement pillars.

An air-beating heavy whirring sound hovered above the docks. Ahmed looked up. A ladder fell down and dangled before them. Ahmed grabbed the rope rungs and pulled. They sagged lower. He fitted his foot into a rung and climbed.

George stood, breathing deeply of an air that smelled sweet and right and tingled in his lungs like life and energy. The clouds of panic and resignation faded from his mind and he heard the seagulls screaming raucous delight, following the small boats and swooping at sandwiches. The people clustered at the edge of the docks, beginning to talk in normal tones.

The ladder dangled before him, bobbing up and down. The rope rungs brushed against his head and he brushed them aside. What had been happening? What was the doom he had just escaped from? He tried to remember the trapped moments and tried to understand what they had been.

"Come on, George," a voice called from above.

He reached up, gripped and climbed, looking into a sky of scudding gray and silver clouds. A white and blue police helicopter bounced above him, its rotating blades shoving damp cool air against him in a kind of pressure that he enjoyed fighting. At the top the ladder stiffened into a metal stair with rails, and opened into the carpeted glass-walled platform of a big observation helicopter.

Ahmed sat cross-legged on the floor, twitching with hurry and impatience, holding his wrist radio to his lips. "Okay, George, tune to it. What will blow the observation building? Who, what, where? Coast Guard is waiting for information."

Still with his memory gripped onto the strange depression he had felt inside the observation building, in the air of Jersey Dome, George looked down and tuned to it and knew how the people still inside felt, and what they wanted.

In the four-step glittering observation building, each glass room was full of people waiting at the doors. He saw the central elevator arrive and open its door and let out another crowd of people to wait and push and pull at the first door at the top. Desperation. A need to get out.

With a feeling of great sorrow, George knew who the saboteurs were. All the kids with screwdrivers, all the helpful people with technical skill who speed elevators, all the helpful people without mechanical understanding who would prop open dime-operated toilet doors for the stranger in need. They were going to be helpful, they were going to go through the air-lock doors and leave the doors jammed open behind them. No resistance behind them to hold back sixty-five pounds per square inch air pressure

forcing up from below in the compressed city, pushing upward behind the rising elevator.

He had been pretending to believe it was a mad bomber. How could he tell the police and Coast Guard that it was just the residents of the city, mindless with the need to gel out, destroying their own air-lock system?

George held his head, the vision of death strong and blinding. "They are jamming the air-lock system open in the observation building, Ahmed. Tell someone to stop them. They can't do that. It will blow!" The panic need to escape blanked his mind again.

"Lift," George said, making nervous faces at the view below. "Lift this damned copter."

"Is he all right?" the pilot asked Ahmed.

Ahmed was talking intensely into the wrist radio, repeating and relaying George's message. He made a chopping gesture to shut up.

The copter pilot gave them both a glance of doubt for their sanity and set the copter to lift, very slowly.

Beating the air, the copter rose, tilting, and lifted away from the dwindling platform of glinting glass in the middle of the gray ocean.

George gripped the observation rail and watched, ashamed that his hands were shaking.

He saw something indefinable and peculiar begin to happen to the shape of the glass building. "There it goes," he muttered, and abruptly sat down on the floor and put his hands over his face. "Hang on to the controls. Here we go. Ahmed, you look. Take pictures or something."

There was a crash, and a boom like a cannon. Something that looked like a crushed elevator full of people shot upward at them, passed them slowly, and then fell, tumbling over and over downward.

A roaring uprush of air grabbed the copter and carried it into - the sky upside down, falling in a rain of small objects that looked like briefcases and fishing rods and small broken pieces that could not be recognized. George hung on to a railing. Suddenly the copter turned right side up, beating its heavy spinning blades in a straining pull upward away from the rising tornado.

With a tearing roar Jersey Dome spat its contents upward through the air shaft, squeezing buildings and foam blocks and people and furniture into the shaft and upward in a hose of air, upward to the surface and higher in a fountain of debris, mangled by decompression.

For long moments the fountain of air was a mushroom-shaped cloud, then it subsided, raining down bits. The copter circled, its occupants deafened and awed.

With one arm and one leg still hooked around the rail, Ahmed listened intently to his radio, hands cupped over his ears to make the speaker plugs in his ears louder. He spoke.

"The city manager is alive down there and broadcasting. He says the canopy of the done did not break, it just lowered. The air shaft sucked in everything near it and is now plugged shut with foam blocks from buildings but the blocks are slowly compressing into it, and they can hear an air hiss. Survivors are putting on scuba air equipment and finding places to survive another hurricane if the tube blows free again, but he's afraid of water leaks coming in and drowning them out from underneath because the pressure is going down. He wants the air shaft plugged from the top. Suggests bombing it at the top to prevent more air escaping."

Ahmed listened, tilting his head to the sounds in his ears.

"People in the water," George said. "Bombs make concussion.

Let's get the people out."

"Affirmative," said the police pilot. "Look for people."

The helicopter swept low and cruised over the water, and they looked down at the close passing waves for a human swimmer needing help.

"There." Ahmed pointed at a pink shiny arm, a dark head. They circled back and hovered, let down the ladder, and the two Rescue Squad men climbed down and maneuvered a web mesh sling around a limp young unconscious naked woman. Her head bobbed under and came up as they slid the sling under her. The waves washed up against their knees as they leaned out from the rope ladder.

"NOW HEAR THIS, NOW HEAR THIS," proclaimed a giant amplified voice. "ALL BOATS IN THE AREA CIRCLE IN THE DISASTER AREA AND TAKE IN SURVIVORS. IN FIVE

MINUTES, AT THE NEXT SIGNAL, ALL BOATS MUST WITHDRAW FROM THE AIR-SHAFT CENTER TO A DISTANCE OF FIVE HUNDRED YARDS TO PERMIT BOMBING. AWAIT SIGNAL. REPEAT. YOU HAVE FIVE MINUTES TO SEARCH FOR AND TAKE IN SURVIVORS."

Ahmed and George shouted up to the pilot, "Ready." And the hoist drew the mesh sling with the young woman in it upward and into the copter through a cargo door in the bottom. The door hatch closed. They climbed back inside, dripping, and spread the unconscious and pretty body out on the floor for artificial respiration. She was cold, pulseless and bleeding from ears, nose and closed eyes. There were no bruises or breaks visible on the smooth skin. George tried gentle hand pressure on the rib cage to start her breathing again, and some blood came from her mouth with a sigh. He pushed again. Blood came from her eyes like tears.

Ahmed said wearily, "Give it up, George, she's dead."

George stood up and retreated from the body, backing away. "What do we do, throw her back?"

"No, we have to take bodies to the hospital. Regulations," muttered the pilot.

They circled the copter around over the choppy gray seas, wipers going on the windshield. The body lay on the floor between them, touching their feet.

They saw an arm bobbing on the waves.

"Should we haul it in?" George asked.

"No, we don't have to take pieces," said the pilot, tone level.

They circled on, passing the little electric boats of the people `who had been fishing when the dome blew. The faces were pale as they looked up at the passing helicopter.

The corpse lay on the floor between them, the body smooth and perfect. The plane tilted and the body rolled. The arms and legs moved.

Ahmed seated himself in the copilot's seat, fastened the safety harness and leaned forward with his head in his hands, not looking at the corpse. George looked out the windshields at the bobbing debris of furniture and unidentifiable bits, and watched Coast Guard boats approaching and searching the water.

The copter radio beeped urgently. The pilot switched it on. "Coast Guard command to Police Helicopter PB 1005768. Thank you for your assistance. We now have enough Coast Guard ships and planes in the search pattern; please withdraw from the disaster area. Please withdraw from the disaster area."

"Order acknowledged. Withdrawing," the pilot said, and switched the radio off. He changed the radio setting and spoke briefly to Rescue Squad headquarters, and turned the plane away from the area of destruction and toward the distant shore.

"What's your job in police?" he asked over his shoulder.

George did not answer.

"Rescue, Detection and Prevention," Ahmed answered for him "We were in Jersey Dome ten minutes ago." Behind them the bombs boomed, breaking and closing the air shaft.

"You sure didn't prevent this one," said the copter pilot.

Ahmed did not answer.

This is a blackmail tape. One copy of this tape has been mailed to each of the major communes and subcities in the New York City district.

We are responsible for the destruction of Brooklyn Dome. It was a warning, and demonstrated our ability to destroy. We ham in our possession a futures expert whose specialty was locating and predicting accidental dangers to the city complex caused by possible simple mechanical and human failures. He is drugged and cooperative. We asked him how Brooklyn Dome could self-destruct from a simple mechanical failure, and he explained how. We are now prepared to offer his services for sale. Our fee will be fifteen thousand dollars a question. If you are afraid that your commune has enemies, your logical question would be: What and who can destroy my commune, and how can I prevent this attack? We will provide the answer service to your enemies, if they pay. They might be asking how to destroy your commune as you listen to this tape. Remember Brooklyn Dome. The name and address enclosed is your personal contact with us. No one else has this name. Keep it secret from the police, and use it when you

decide to pay. If you give your contact up to the police, you will cut yourself off from our advice, your enemies will contact us through other names and buy methods to destroy you. Remember Brooklyn Dome. Act soon. Our fee is fifteen thousand dollars a question. The price of survival is cheap.

"Every police department has a copy. Want me to play it again?" Judd Oslow asked. He sat cross-legged on top of his desk like a large fat Buddha and sipped coffee.

"Once was enough," Ahmed said. "Paranoia, and war among the communes. What do those nuts think they are doing with that tape?"

"Making money," Judd Oslow sipped his coffee, carefully staying calm. "They mailed one to each commune in the city area, and only two have turned in the entire tape, or admitted receiving it. Only one has turned in his address. The others must be keeping their addresses, planning to ask attack, or defense, questions."

"Armageddon," said Ahmed.

Judd said, "George, why don't you get off your rump and bring in Carl Hodges? These nuts can't sell his brains if we get him back."

Ahmed said, "You just gave George the: job last night. He almost had him this morning, but we were reassigned when Brooklyn Dome blew, and had to get off Carl I lodges' trail to go to Jersey Dome."

"So there's some of the day left. George has spoiled me with success. I'm used to instant results. Come on, George. Carl Hodges, right here in this office, packaged and delivered."

George looked up at him, eyes round and puzzled. "I'm supposed to help people. Every time I start trying to help Carl Hodges something bad happens. It doesn't come out right. Maybe he likes being in trouble. Bodies all over the place! You don't want me helping, with my luck!"

"Snap out of it, George. This is no time for pessimistic philosophy. Get together with Ahmed and hypnotize yourself and tell me where Carl Hodges is."

"What's the use?" George ran his hands over his head in a weary gesture that was not typical of him. "Brooklyn Dome people are dead already. Jersey Dome people are mostly dead already. Everybody that ever died is still dead. Billions of people since the beginning of time. How are you going to rescue them? Why not let a few more die? What difference does it make?"

"Let's not have an essay on Eternity, George. Nothing makes any difference to Eternity. We don't live in Eternity, we live in now. We want Carl Hodges now."

"What's the use? My advice just makes trouble. I didn't save those people in Jersey Dome. I wasn't smart enough to understand that they'd want to break their own air locks. No, it wasn't the panic, it was the depression. The air changed its charge. Lab animals act irrational when you reverse the ground-to-air-static charge gradient. I should have-"

Judd shouted, "George, I'm not interested in your bad conscience. If you want to help people, just answer the question."

George winced at the loudness and squinted up at him with his eyes seeming crossed. "George?"

"Wow!" Ahmed stepped forward. "Wait a minute. George did it already. That was Carl answering you."

Judd hesitated between confident forward and back motions. He started and stopped a gesture. His confusion reached his expression. He shouted, "Get out of here, you kooks. Go do your lunacy somewhere else. When you bring back Carl Hodges, don't tell me how you did it."

"Affirmative," Ahmed said. "Come on, Carl."

In confusion and guilt George followed and found himself on the open sidewalk, standing under a row of maple trees. The wind blew and the trees shed a flutter of green winged seeds about him. He knew he had failed his job somehow, and couldn't figure out how to get back to it. He walked to a bench and sat down.

"Do you understand what was just happening?" Ahmed asked.

"Yes." He felt in his mind and found confusion. "No."

"Shut your eyes. You seem to be on a bench in a park. It is an illusion. This is not where you are. Where are you really?"

George had shut his eyes. The voice went in deeply to a place in his mind where he knew he was in a

room, a prisoner, and it was his fault. He did not like that knowledge. Better to pretend. He opened his eyes. "I want to be here in the park. Pretend you are real." He bent and touched some green vetch at his feet and felt the tiny ferns. "History doesn't matter. Sensation matters," he said earnestly. "Even these illusions are real because they are happening now. We live in now. Memory isn't real. The past doesn't exist. Why should we feel anything about the past, or care about it?"

Ahmed computed that it was a good probability that Carl Hodges was speaking through George and looking through his eyes as a form of escape. The rationalization was fluent, the vocabulary not George's. Vocabulary choice is as constant as fingerprints.

The person speaking had to be Carl Hodges.

"Carl Hodges. Do you want to get away from where you are and lie down in this park?"

"You are a questioner. I should not speak."

"Is it wrong to answer questions?"

"Yes; answers kill. People are dead. Like Susanne, they are all dead. Does mourning one person kill others? They drowned too, and floated. Saw girl in water . . . Connection . . . ?"

George had been speaking dreamily, eyes wide and round and sightless. He closed his eyes and every muscle in his face and body tightened in a curling spasm like pain. He slid off the bench and fell to his knees in the soft vetch. "Get me out of this. Make it unhappen. Reverse time. Wipe me out before I did it." The spasmed crouch—was it pain or prayer?

Watching the figure of misery, Ahmed made urgent calculations. The shame-driven need to escape memory was there to work with. Use it.

"Carl, you are in a green field in a small park on East E Avenue and Fifth Street. This is a future scene. Two hours from now, you will be rescued and free, without guilt, relaxed and enjoying being outdoors. We are the police, we are getting into a sky taxi to come and get you. What directions are we giving the driver?"

"Amsterdam Avenue and Fifty-third Street to Columbus Avenue, the wrecked blocks, one of the good cellars near the center of the flattened part of the ruins. Buzz it twice. Thanks. I think I can knock down a kid when I hear you and come out and wave. Land and pick me up fast."

"Okay," said Ahmed, straightening and stepping back from the crouched praying figure.

George took his hands from his face. "Okay what?" His voice was George's usual voice. He got up and brushed small green fronds from his knees.

"Okay, let's make a raid into another kid gang's territory," Ahmed said.

"Where's Biggy?" George looked around as if expecting to see their own gang of kids around them. "Oh, he went to the Canary Islands. And the others, they went to the Sahara. They all went . . ." He shook his head as if waking up. "Ahmed, what do you mean, raid a kid gang territory? That's all over. We're grown up now."

"We're going to rescue that kidnapped computerman. A mixed gang of teener kids are holding him in the ruins near West Fifty-third Street. We know how to handle a kid gang fight."

George was not going to let go of common sense. He settled back on the bench and looked around at the green warm comfort of the park, and rubbed one of the bruises on his arm. "Let's call the police, let them do it."

"We are the police, lunk." Ahmed still stood, smiling, depending on the force of his personality, the habit of command, to get George to obey. George looked up at him, squinting into the light of the sky, one eye half closed. Half of a bruise showed at the side of his face, most of it hidden by the hairline.

"Ahmed, don't be a nut. Logical thinking doesn't fight chains and clubs for you. I mean, your brains are great, but we need muscle against a juv army, because they don't know about thinking, and they don't listen."

"What if they are all in their cellars, lunk, and we want to drop them before they get in deeper and carry Carl Hodges away? What kind of thing could get them all out into the open where a helicopter could drop them with gas?"

George absently rubbed the dark mark on the side of his face. "They come out when somebody gets onto their territory, Ahmed.

Not an army of cops or a helicopter, I don't mean that. I mean some poor goof is crossing, looking for a shortcut to somewhere else, and they all come out and beat him up."

"That's for you."

"How did you figure . . . Oh, yeah, you don't mean yesterday. You mean strategy, like. They come out to beat me up again and the copter drops them with a gas spray, and maybe there's no one left underground to kill Carl Hodges, or take him away." George got up. "Okay, let's do it."

They came up out of the subway at Fifty-third Street and walked together on the sidewalk opposite the bombed-out shells of old buildings. A distant helicopter sound buzzed in the air.

"Separate, but we keep in touch. Leave your radio open to send, but shut it for receive so there won't be any sound coming out of it. The copter pilot will be listening. I'll circle the block and look in doorways and hallways for trouble. You cut across. We both act like we have some reason to be here, like I'm looking for an address. We're strangers."

"Okay," George said. "I've got a story for them. Don't worry about me." He turned and walked nonchalantly around the corner, across the street, past some standing ruins and into the flattened spaces and the area that had once been paved backyard, with steps down to doors that had opened into the cellars of gone buildings. Flattened rubble and standing walls showed where the buildings had been.

He stood in the middle of a backyard, near two flights of cement stairs that led down into the ground to old doors, and he walked onward slowly, going in an irregular wandering course, studying the ground, acting a little confused and clumsy, just the way he had acted the last time he had been there.

The setting sun struck long shadows across the white broken pavement. He turned and looked back at his own long shadow, and started when another person's shadow appeared silently on the pavement alongside of his. He glanced sideways and saw a tall, husky teener in a strange costume standing beside him holding a heavy bat. The teener did not look back at him, he looked off into space, lips pursed as though whistling silently.

George winced again when a short teener with straight blond hair stepped out from behind a fragment of standing wall.

"Back, huh?" asked the blond kid.

George felt the shadows of others gathering behind him.

George said, "I'm looking for a pocket watch I lost the night you guys beat me up. I mean, it's really an antique, and it reminds me of someone. I've got to find it."

He looked at the ground, turning around in a circle. There was a, circle of feet all around him, feet standing in ruined doorways, feet on top of mounds of rubble, the clubs resting on the ground as the owners leaned on them, the chains swinging slightly.

"You must be really stupid," said the leader, his teeth showing in a small smile that had no friendship.

Where was Carl-Hodges? The area George stood in was clean, probably well used by feet. The stairs leading down to a cellar door were clean, the door handle had the shine of use. The leader had appeared late, from an unlikely direction. Ire was standing on dusty, rubble-piled ground which feet had not rubbed and cleared. The leader then had not wanted to come out the usual way and path to confront George. Probably the usual way would have been the door George was facing, the one that looked used.

It was like playing hot and cold for a hidden object. If Carl Hodges was behind that door, the teeners would not let George approach it. George, looking slow and confused, shuffled his feet two steps in that direction. There was a simultaneous shuffle and hiss of clothing as the circle behind him and all around him closed in closer. George stopped and they stopped.

Now there was a circle of armed teeners close around him. Two were standing almost between him and the steps. The helicopter still buzzed in the distance, circling the blocks. George knew if he shouted, or even spoke clearly, and asked for help the copter pilot would bring the plane over in a count of seconds.

The blond kid did not move, still lounging, flashing his teeth in a small smile as he studied George up and down with the expression of a scientist at a zoo studying an odd specimen of gorilla.

"I got something important to tell you," George said to him. But they didn't listen.

"It's a kind of a shame," the blond kid said to the others. "He's so stupid already. I mean, if we just

bashed out his brains he wouldn't even notice they were gone."

George faced the leader and sidled another small step in the direction of the steps and the door, and heard the shuffle of feet closing in behind him. He stopped moving and they stopped moving. For sure that door was hiding something. They wanted to keep strangers away from it! "Look, if you found my watch I lost, and if you give it to me, I'll tell you about a thing you ought to know."

If he talked long and confusingly enough, every member of the gang would come out on the surface to hear what he was trying to say. They would all be out in the open. The helicopter was armed for riots; it could spray sleep gas and get every one of them.

He didn't even feel the blow. Suddenly he was on his knees, a purple haze before his eyes. He tried to get up and fell over sideways, still in the curled-up position. He realized he wasn't breathing.

Could a back-of-the-neck karate chop knock out your breathing centers? What had the teacher said? His lungs contracted, wheezing out more air, unable to let air in. It must have been a solar plexus jab with a stick. But then how come he hadn't seen the stick? The purple haze was turning into spinning black spots. He couldn't see.

"What was it he wanted to tell us?"

"Ask him."

"He can't answer, dummy. He can't even grunt. You'll have to wait."

"I don't mind waiting," said the voice of the one carrying a chain. George heard the chain whistle and slap into something, and wondered if it had hit him. Nothing in his body registered anything but a red burning need for air.

"You don't want to trespass on our territory," said a voice. "We're just trying to teach you respect. You stay on the free public sidewalks and don't go inside other people's Kingdoms. Not unless they ask you." The chain whistled and slapped again.

George tried to breathe, but the effort to inhale knotted his chest tighter, forcing breath out instead of in.

It is a desperate thing having your lungs working against you. The knot tightening the lungs held for another second and then loosened. He drew in a rasping breath of cool air, and another. Air came in like waves of light, dispelling the blindness and bringing back awareness of arms and legs. He straightened out from the curled-up knot and lay on his back breathing deeply and listening to the sounds around him.

The helicopter motor hummed in the distance. The copter pilot is listening, he thought, but he doesn't know I'm in trouble.

He heard a clink and a hiss of breath like someone making an effort. He rolled suddenly over to one side and covered his face. The chain hit where he had been. He rolled to a crouch with both feet under him, and for the first time looked at the circle of faces of the teeners who had beaten and made fun of him when he was pretending to be drunk and making believe to be Carl Hodges, and had stumbled into this forbidden territory. He had been retracing Carl Hodges' actions, but he had not been sure it was working. He had been near Carl Hodges here, but he had no proof, no reason to protest when they punished him for violating their boundaries. The faces were the same. Young but cold, some faces were uncertain about punishing an adult, but gaining courage from the others. All sizes of teeners in costumes from many communes, but the fellowship and good nature he was used to seeing in groups was missing.

"I used to be in a gang like yours once" he said rapidly to inform the radio listener. "I thought you wouldn't jump me. I didn't come here to get stomped. I just want my antique watch and to tell you something."

He finished the sentence with a quick leap to one side, but the swinging chain swung up and followed, slapped into his skin and curled a line of dents around ribs, chest and arms. The magnet on the end clanked and clung against a loop of chain. The owner of the chain yanked hard on his handle and the metal lumps turned to teeth and bit in and the chain tightened like rope. George staggered and straightened and stood wrapped up in biting steel chain.

He stood very still. "Hey," he said softly. "That ain't nice."

"Tell us about your news." The circle of teeners and juvs around him were curious about the message he wanted to deliver to them.

George said, "A friend of mine was figuring from my lumps that I got here last time that you've got something important you want me to keep away from. He figures you got the missing computerman. The one who blew up Brooklyn Dome. There's a reward out for him."

A ripple of shock ran through the group surrounding him but the blond kid did not need time to assimilate the threat. Without change of expression he made a gesture of command. "Three of you check the streets. Maybe he brought somebody with him." Three ran silently in different directions.

"I'm just doing you a favor telling you what people say," George said in stupid tones. "Now you gotta do me a favor and help me get my watch back."

" Favor?" screamed the tall, misproportioned one with the chain. "Favor? You stupid fink, you should have kept your stupid mouth shut." He yanked hard on the chain to make its teeth extend more sharply.

An outraged force had been expanding in George's chest. He stood still, looking meek and confused one more second, watching his captors snarl and hate him for having "told his friend." Then he bent forward and butted the chain holder down, rolled over his form to the cement and rolled rapidly down three small cement steps, unrolling the chain behind him. He came up on one knee, reaching for the chain as a weapon. It was a seven-foot chain with a handle at each end. A heavy chain is a terrible weapon in the hands of a strong man. If it had been behind him at the moment of impulse, he would have swept it around and forward and cut them down like grass. He gathered it looped into his hands, eyeing the crowd of oddly dressed teeners that was his target. His speed was too fast to intercept, his motions too smooth to look fast. lie threw the chain up into the air behind him, then arched back with every muscle tight and bent forward with a grunt of effort, ignoring two clubs that bounced off his shoulders, bringing the chain forward with a tremendous released surge of force that was rage. The teen gang scattered and fled and the chain swung its cutting circle through the air where they had been.

"Dumb punks." George breathed noisily with the effort. "Whyncha act like brothers? Can't let anybody be your friend. Trying to be smart, not knowing . . ."

He stopped and let the swinging chain drag along the ground, slowing. He rippled it in and let it wrap around his arm, with a short murderous loop of it in his hand. The sun had set and it was growing darker in the corners and harder to see. George fended off a flung stick by deflecting it with the chain, then grabbed a club for his other hand. Something whistled by and clanged against a wall. Probably a knife. The teener leader would see that George knew too much, and instruct the gang to kill him. The boy was logical and ruthless and would decide a stranger's life was less important to him than the million he hoped to gain from selling the computerman's answers.

"Carl Hodges," George bellowed. "Ally ally infree. I need help. Computerman Carl Hodges, come out." The police riot control man in the circling copter would at last hear a request for help, and bring his plane in fast. The teeners would only hear him yelling Carl Hodges' name and still not be sure the police were near.

The cellar door gave two thumps and a crash and fell forward off its rusty hinges across the steps. A man fell out on top of it and scrambled across the door and up the steps without bothering to straighten from all fours.

At the top he stood up. He was thin and balding, wiry and a little under average in size, totally unlike George in either shape or face, but the impression of lifetime familiarity was overwhelming. His own eyes looked out of the strange face.

George handed him a club from the ground. "Guard my back. They are going to try to take you alive, I think, but not me." He spun slowly, looking and listening, but all was quiet. Teeners lurked in a distance along the routes George would use if he tried to escape.

George looked back at Carl Hodges and saw the thin computerman inspecting George's appearance with a knot of puzzlement between his brows. Looking at him was like looking into a mirror.

"Hello, me over there," George said.

"Hello, me over there," the man said. "Are you a computerman? When I get back on the job do you want to come play City Chess with me? Maybe you could get a job in my department."

"No, buddy, we are us, but I don't play City Chess. I'm not like you."

"Then why—"Carl Hodges ducked a flung club and it clattered against the cement. Then why do I

have this impression of two people being the same person? he thought.

"We have an empathy link in our guts," George said. "I don't think like you. I just feel what you feel."

"God help anyone who feels the way I feel," Hodges said. "I see some kids advancing on my side."

"Hold them off. Back to back. All we need is a little time." George turned away from him again, and searched the corners with his eyes, ready for a rush. "About the way you feel. It's not all that bad. I'll get over it."

"I did it," Carl Hodges said. "How do I get over it? I feel . . . I mean, I have a reason for feeling . . . I got drunk and the egg hit the fan. How do I get over that?" His voice was broken by grunts of effort, and things clattered by, deflected, missing them and hitting walls and cement flooring.

They stood back to back and fended off bricks, sticks and glittering objects that he hoped were not knives. "We can get killed if we don't watch it. That's one way," George said. A stick came through the air and rapped George's ear as he met it with his club. The attackers advanced, silhouettes against the dimming view of stone walls. Another attacker shadow picked up the clattering stick from the ground and threw it back as he advanced.

"Ouch," said Carl Hodges. "Duck." They both ducked and a flung net went by. "We fight well together. We must get together and fight another teen gang sometime. Right?" said his brisk voice. "Ouch, damn."

George received a rush by the tallest of the gang, caught at the outstretched staff and yanked the enemy past. He tried to trip the teener as he hurtled by, but missed and turned to see him neatly h tripped by a stick between the ankles by Carl. The teener went face forward to the ground and rolled, getting out of range.

"Good pass!" Several new and heavy blows on head and shoulders reminded George to watch his own side. Dizzied, he spun, bracing the staff for a pushing blow with both hands, and felt it strike twice against blurred forms. He reversed it and struck down at an attacker with a contented growl.

With a heavy thrumming and a push of air the police helicopter came over a wall, swooping low, like an owl settling over a nest of mice, and released a white cloud of gas.

George took a deep breath of the clear air before the cloud reached him. Beside him Carl Hodges took a deep startled breath of the white cloud and went down as suddenly as if a club blow .had hit.

Still holding his breath, George straddled him and stood alert, peering through the fog at shapes that seemed to be upright and moving. Most of the teeners had run away, or gone down flat on the ground. What were these shapes? Eighteen seconds of holding his breath. Not hard. He could make two minutes usually. He held his breath and tried to see through the white clouds around him. The sound of the helicopter circled, in a wider and wider spiral, laying a cloud of gas to catch all the running mice from the center of the area to its edges.

The shapes suddenly appeared beside him, running, and struck with a double push, flinging him back ten feet so that he skidded on his back on the sandy concrete. He remembered to hold his breath after one snort of surprise and silently rolled to his feet and charged back.

Carl Hodges' unconscious form was missing. George saw movement through the white fog ahead, heard feet scuffing cement and hollow wood, and he charged in pursuit of the sounds. He half fell, half slid down the cement steps, across the wooden door on the ground and into a corridor, and glimpsed motion ahead, and heard a closet door shutting. Holding his breath, groping, he opened the door, saw broken wall with an opening, smelled the wet smell of cement and underground drafts, and leaped over a pile of ancient trash brooms into the opening.

Safe to breathe here. As he took a deep breath a brilliant flashlight suddenly came on, shining blindingly in his face from only two feet away. "I have a gun pointed at you," said the precise voice of the blond short teener. "Turn left and walk ahead in the directions I tell you. I could kill you here, and no one would find your body, so try to keep my good will."

"Where is Carl Hodges?" George asked, walking with his hands up. The flashlight threw his shadow ahead of him big and wavering across the narrow walls.

"We're all going to be holing down together. Turn left here." The voice was odd.

George looked back and saw that the short teener was wearing a gas mask. As he took a breath to

ask why, the white fog rolled down from a night-sky crevice above them. It smelled damp and slightly alcoholic.

"Keep moving," said the teener, gesturing with his gun. George turned left, wondering what happened next when you breathed that fog. A busy day, a busy night. An experience of symbolic insight was often reported by people who had been flattened by police anti-riot gas. What had the day meant? Why were such things happening?

Floating in white mist, George floated free of his body over the city and saw a vast spirit being of complex and bitter logic who brooded over the city and lived also in its future. George spoke to it, in thoughts that were not words. "Ahmed uses the world view of his grandmother, the gypsy. He believes that you are Fate. He believes you have intentions and plans."

It laughed and thought: The wheels of time grind tight. No room between gear and gear for change. Future exists, logical and unchangeable. No room for change in logic. When it adds up, it must arrive at the same concluding scene. The city is necessity. The future is built. The gears move us toward it. I am Fate.

George made a strange objecting thought. "The past can change. So everything that adds up from the past can change."

There was a wail from the atmosphere. The vast spirit that brooded over the city vanished, destroyed, dwindling to nowhere, uncreated, never true, like the Wicked Witch of the West when Dorothy poured a bucket of water over her, leaving behind the same dwindling wail. "But all my beautiful disasters, the logic, the logic . . .

"No arithmetic;" George said firmly. "If you can see the future, you can change it. If you can't see the past, it can change by itself and be anything. It won't add up the same twice."

All the crystallized visions of the city of the future shattered and dissolved into white fog, a creative fog that could be shaped to anything by thought. George stood at the center of creation and felt stubborn. They were tempting him again, trying to get him into the bureaucratic game of rules and unfreedom. "No," he said. "I won't fence anyone in with my idea. Let them choose their own past."

He came to consciousness lying on the floor in a small tight room with the blond kid sitting on a bed pointing a gun at him.

"They got Carl Hodges back," the kid said. "You ruined everything. Maybe you are a cop. I don't know. Maybe I should kill you."

"I just had a wild dream," George said, lifting his head, but not moving because he did not want to be shot. "I dreamed I talked to the Fate of New York City. And I told Fate that the future can change anytime, and the past can change anytime. In the beginning was the middle, I said. And Fate started crying and boohooing and vanished. I mean, no more Fate. Vanished."

There was a long pause while the short blond kid held the pistol pointed at George's face and stared at him over the top of it. The kid tried several tough faces, and then curiosity got the better of him. He was basically an intellectual, even though a young one, and curiosity meant more to him than love or hate. "What do you mean? The past is variable? You can change it?"

"I mean, we don't know what happened in the past exactly. It's gone anyhow. It's not real anymore. So we can say anything happened we want to have happened. If one past is going to make trouble, we can change it just by being dumb, and everything will straighten out. Like, for example, we just met, right now, right here, we just met. Nothing else happened."

"Oh." The kid put away his gun, thinking about that. "Glad to meet you. My name's Larry."

"My name's George." He arranged himself more comfortably on the floor, not making any sudden moves.

They had a long philosophical discussion, while Larry waited for the police outside to finish searching and go away. Sometimes Larry took the gun out and pointed it again, but usually they discussed things and exchanged stories without accepting any past.

Larry was serious and persuasive in trying to convince George that the world had too many technicians. "They don't know how to be human beings. They like to read about being Tarzan, or see old movies and imagine they are Humphrey Bogart and James Bond, but actually all they have the guts to do

is read and study. They make money that way, and they make more gadgets and they run computers that do all the thinking and take all the challenge and conquest out of life. And they give a pension to all the people who want to go out into the woods, or surf, instead of staying indoors pushing buttons, and they call the surfers and islanders and forestfarmers Free Loaders, and make sure they are sterilized and don't have children. That's genocide. They are killing off the real people. The race will be descended from those compulsive button pushers, and forget how to live."

It was a good speech. George was uneasy, because it sounded right, and he was sure no man was smart enough to refute the killer, but he tried.

"Couldn't a guy who really wanted children earn enough money to get a breeding permit for himself and an operation for his wife?"

"There aren't that many jobs anymore. The jobs that are left are button-pusher jobs, and you have to study for twenty years to learn to push the right button. They're planning to sterilize everyone but button pushers."

George had nothing to say. It made sense, but his own experience did not fit. "I'm not sterilized, Larry, and I'm a real dope. I didn't get past the sixth grade."

"When did your childhood support run out?"

"Last year."

"No more free food and housing. How about your family—they support you?"

"No family. Orphan. I got lots of good friends, but they all took their pensions and shipped out. Except one. He got a job."

"You didn't apply for the unemployable youth pension yet?"

"No. I wanted to stay around the city. I didn't want to be shipped out. I figured I could get a job."

"That's a laugh. Lots of luck in getting a job, George. How are you planning to eat?"

"Sometimes I help out around communes and share meals. Everyone usually likes me in the Brotherhood communes." George shifted positions uneasily on the floor and sat up. This was almost lying. He had a job now, but he wasn't going to talk about Rescue Squad, because Larry might call him a cop and try to shoot him. "But I don't bum meals."

"When's the longest you've gone without meals?"

"I don't feel hungry much. I went two days without food once. I'm healthy."

The kid sat cross-legged on the bed and laughed. "Really healthy! You got muscles all over. You've got muscles from ear to ear. So you're trying to beat the system! It was built just to wipe out muscleheads like you. If you apply for welfare, they sterilize you. If you take your unemployable support pension, they sterilize you. If you are caught begging, they sterilize you. Money gets all you muscleheads sooner or later. It's going to get you too. I'll bet when you are hungry you think of the bottle of wine and the big free meal at the sterility clinic. You think of the chance of winning the million dollar sweepstakes if the operation gives you the right tattoo number, don't you?"

George didn't answer.

"Maybe you don't know it, but your unemployable pension is piling up, half saved for every week you don't claim it. You've been avoiding it a year almost? When it piles high enough, you'll go in and claim your money and let them sterilize you and ship you out to the boondocks, like everyone else."

"Not me."

"Why not?"

George didn't answer. After a while he said, "Are you going to let them sterilize you?"

Larry laughed again. He had a fox face and big ears. "Not likely. There are lots of ways for a smart guy to beat the system. My descendants are going to be there the year the sun runs down and we hook drives to Earth and cruise away looking for a new sun. My descendants are going to surf light waves in space. Nobody going to wipe me out, and nobody's going to make them into button pushers."

"Okay, I see it." George got up and paced, two steps one way, two steps the other way in the narrow room. "Who are you working for, Larry? Who are you crying over? People who let themselves be bribed into cutting off their descendants? They're different from you. Do they have guts enough to bother with? Are they worth getting your brain wiped in a court of law? You're right about history, I

guess. I'm the kind of guy the techs are trying to get rid of. You're a tech type of guy yourself. Why don't you be a tech and forget about making trouble?"

At the end of the room, faced away from Larry, George stopped and stared at the wall. His fists clenched. "Kid, do you know what kind of trouble you make?"

"I see it on television," Larry said.

"Those are real people you killed." George still stared at the wall: "This afternoon I was giving artificial respiration to a girl. She was bleeding from the eyes." His voice knotted up. Big muscles bulged on his arms and his fists whitened as he tried to talk. "She was dead, they told me. She looked all right, except for her eyes. I guess because I'm stupid." He turned and his eyes glittered with tears and with a kind of madness. He glanced around the small room looking for a thing to use for a weapon.

Larry took out his gun and pointed it at George, hastily getting off the bed. "Oh oh, the past is real again. Time for me to leave!" Holding the gun pointed steadily and carefully at George's face, he used his other hand to put on black goggles and slung the gas mask around his neck. "Hold still, George, you don't want a hole through your face. If you fight me, who are you working for? Not your kind of people. Think, man." He backed to the door. George turned, still facing him, his big hands away from his sides and ready, his eyes glittering with a mindless alertness.

Larry backed into the dark hall. "Don't follow. You don't want to follow me. This gun has infrasights, shoots in the dark. If you stick your head out the door, I might shoot it off. Just stand there for ten minutes and don't make any trouble. The gun is silenced. If I have to shoot you, you don't get any medal for being a dead hero. No one would know."

The short teener backed down the dark corridor and was gone. George still stood crouched, but he shook his head, like a man trying to shake off something that had fallen over his eyes.

He heard Larry bump into something a long way down the corridor.

"I would know," a voice said from the ceiling. Ahmed let himself down from a hole in the ceiling, hung by both long arms and then dropped, landing catlike and silent. He was tall and sooty and filthy and covered with cobwebs. He grinned and his teeth were white in a very dark face. "You just missed a medal for being a dead hero. I thought you were going to try to kill him."

He twiddled the dial of his wrist radio, plugged an earphone into one ear and spoke into the wrist radio. "Flushed one. He's heading west on a cellar corridor from the center, wearing a gas mask and infragoggles, armed and dangerous. Lie's the kingpin, so try hard, buddies."

George sat down on the edge of the bunk, sweating. "I get too mad sometimes. I almost did try to kill him. What he said was probably right. What he said."

Ahmed unplugged the speaker from his ear. "I was mostly listening to you, good buddy. Very interesting philosophical discussion you were putting out. I kept wanting to sneeze. How come you get into philosophical arguments today and I just get beat up? Everything is backward."

"You're the smart one, Ahmed," said George slowly, accepting the fact that he had been protected. "Thanks for watching." He looked at his own hands, still worrying slowly on an idea. "How come everything the kid said made sense?"

"It didn't," Ahmed said impatiently. "You made sense."

"But Larry said that techs are wiping out nontechs."

"Maybe they are, but they aren't killing anybody. The kid kills."

George pushed his hands together, felt them wet with sweat wiped them on his shirt. "I almost killed the kid. But it felt right, what he was saying. He was talking for the way things are and for the way they're going to be, like Fate."

"Killing is unphilosophical," Ahmed said. "You're tired, George Take it easy, we've had a long day."

They heard a police siren wail and then distant shots. Ahmed plugged the earphone into his ear. "They just dropped somebody in goggles, gas didn't work on him. They had to drop him with hypo bullets. Probably Larry. Let's try to get out of here."

They put a wad of blankets out into the corridor, head high. No shots, so they went out cautiously and started groping down the long black hall, looking for an exit.

Ahmed said, "So you think Larry was the fickle finger of Fate on the groping hand of the future. No

power on Earth can resist the force of an idea whose time has come, said somebody once. But, good buddy, when I was listening to you whilst lying in the ceiling with the spiders crawling on me, I thought I heard you a new metaphysics. Didn't you just abolish Fate?"

The corridor widened, and George felt a draft of fresh air without dust, and saw a glimmer of light through a hole. They climbed through and saw a doorway, and a broken door. "I don't know," Ahmed," he said vaguely. "Did I?"

They climbed up the broken door and a flight of stone steps and. found themselves in a deserted yard at the center of the ruin. It was very quiet. In the distance around the edges of the block police copters buzzed, landing in the streets.

"Sure you did," Ahmed said. "You abolished Fate. I heard you."

George looked up at the moon. It was bright and it shone across '. the entire city, like the evil Fate in his dream, but it was only the moon, and the city was quiet. Suddenly George leaped into the air and clicked his heels. "I did. I did." He bellowed. "Hey, everybody! Hey, I did it! I abolished Fate!"

He landed and stopped leaping, and stood panting. The red glow in the sky over New York blinked on and off, on and off from the giant sign they could not see.

"Congratulations," said Ahmed, and rested an arm briefly across his shoulders. "May I offer you a tranquilizer?"

"No, you may offer me a meal," George said. "No, cancel that too. Judd gave me money yesterday. Steaks, hot showers, hotel room. Wow. I've got a job." He turned abruptly and walked away. "See you tomorrow."

Left alone, tall and tired, smeared with dirt and itchy with cobwebs, Ahmed stared after him, feeling betrayed. Where was all the respect George used to give him? George was a short fat kid once, and treated Ahmed like a boss. Now he was beginning to loom like a Kodiak bear, and he walked away without permission.

Ahmed looked up at the lopsided moon. "Mirror, mirror, on the wall, who's the smartest guy of all? Don't answer that, lady. It's been a long day. I'm tired."

THE CARNIVORE

The beings stood around my bed in airsuits like ski-suits, with globes over their heads like upside-down fishbowls. It was all like a masquerade, with odd costumes and funny masks.

I know that the masks are their faces, but I argue with them and find I think as if I am arguing with humans behind masks. They are people. I recognize people and whether I am going to like this person or that person by something in the way they move and how they get excited when they talk; and I know that I like these people in a motherly sort of way. You have to feel motherly toward them, I guess.

They all remind me of Ronny, a medical student I knew once He was small and round and eager. You had to like him, but you couldn't take him very seriously. He was a pacifist; he wrote poetry and pulled it out to read aloud at ill-timed moments; and he stuttered when he talked too fast.

They are like that, all fright and gentleness.

I am not the only survivor—they have explained that—but I am the first they found, and the least damaged, the one they have chosen to represent the human race to them. They stand around my bed and answer questions, and are nice to me when I argue with them.

All in a group they look halfway between a delegation of nations and an ark, one of each, big and small, thick and think four arms or wings, all shapes and colors in fur and skin and feathers.

I can picture them in the UN of the Universe, making speeches in their different languages, listening patiently without understanding each other's different problems, boring each other and being too polite to yawn.

They are polite, so polite I almost feel they are afraid of me, and I want to reassure them.

But I talk as if I were angry. I can't help it, because if things had only been a little different ..."Why couldn't you have come sooner? Why couldn't you have tried to stop it before it happened, or at least

come sooner, afterward...?"

If they had come sooner to where the workers of the Nevada power pile starved slowly behind their protecting walls at least—If they had looked sooner for survivors of the dust with which the nations of the world had slain each other George Colin would be alive. He died before they came. He was my co-worker and I loved him.

We had gone down together passing door by door the automatic safeguards of the plant, which were supposed to protect the people on the outside from the radioactive danger from the inside—but the danger of a failure of politics was far more real than the danger of failure in the science of the power pile, and that had not been calculated by the builders. We were far underground when the first radioactivity in the air outside had shut all the heavy, lead-shielded automatic doors between us and the outside.

We were safe. And we starved there.

"Why didn't you come sooner?" I wonder if they know or guess how I feel. My questions are not questions, but I have to ask them. He is dead. I don't mean to reproach them—they look well meaning and kindly—but I feel as if, somehow, knowing why it happened could make it stop, could let me turn the clock back and make it happen differently. If I could have signaled them, so they would have come just a little sooner.

They look at one another, turning their funny-face heads uneasily, moving back and forth, but no one will answer.

The world is dead...George is dead, that thin, pathetic creature with the bones showing through his skin that he was when we sat still at the last with our hands touching, thinking there were people outside who had forgotten us, hoping they would remember. We didn't guess that the world was dead, blanketed in radiating dust outside. Politics had killed it.

These beings around me, they had been watching, seeing what was going to happen to our world, listening to our radios from their small settlements on the other planets of the Solar System. They had seen the doom of war coming. They represented stellar civilizations of great power and technology and with populations that would have made ours seem a small village; they were stronger than we were, and yet they had done nothing.

"Why didn't you stop us? You could have stopped us."

A rabbity one who is closer than the others backs away, gesturing politely that he is giving room for someone else to speak, but he looks guilty and will not look at me with his big round eyes. I still feel weak and dizzy. It is hard to think, but I feel as if they are hiding .

A doelike one hesitates and comes closer to my bed. "We discussed it ... we voted..." It talks through a microphone in its helmet with a soft lisping accent that I think comes from the shape of its mouth. It has a muzzle and very soft, dainty, long nibbling lips like a deer that nibbles on twigs and buds.

"We are afraid," adds one who looks like a bear.

"To us the future was very terrible," says one who looks as if it might have descended from some sort of large bird like a penguin. "So much—Your weapons were very terrible."

Now they all talk at once, crowding about my bed, apologizing. "So much killing. It hurt to know about. But your people didn't seem to mind."

"We were afraid."

"And in your fiction," the doelike one lisped, "I saw plays from your amusement machines which said that the discovery of beings in space would save you from war, not because you would let us bring friendship and teach peace, but because the human race would unite in hatred of the outsiders. They would forget their hatred of each other only in a new and more terrible war with us." Its voice breaks in a squeak and it turns its face away from me.

"You were about to come out into space. We were wondering how to hide!" That is a quick-talking one, as small as a child. He looks as if he might have descended from a bat—gray silken fur on his pointed face, big night-seeing eyes, and big sensitive ears, with a humped shape on the back of his airsuit which might be folded wings. "We were trying to conceal where we had built, so that humans would not guess we were near and look for us."

They are ashamed of their fear, for because of it they broke all the kindly laws of their civilizations,

restrained all the pity and gentleness I see in them, and let us destroy ourselves.

I am beginning to feel more awake and to see more clearly. And I am beginning to feel sorry for them, for I can see why they are afraid.

They are herbivores. I remember the meaning of shapes. In the paths of evolution there are grass eaters and berry eaters and root diggers. Each has its functional shape of face and neck—and its wide, startled-looking eyes to see and run away from the hunters. In all their racial history they have never killed to eat. They have been killed and eaten, or run away, and they evolved to intelligence by selection. Those lived who succeeded in running away from carnivores like lions, hawks, and men.

I look up, and they turn their eyes and heads in quick embarrassed motion, not meeting my eye. The rabbity one is nearest and I reach out to touch him, pleased because I am growing strong enough now to move my arms. He looks at me and I ask the question, "Are there any carnivores, flesh eaters among you?"

He hesitates, moving his lips as if searching for tactful words. "We have never found any that were civilized. We have frequently found them in caves and tents fighting each other. Sometimes we find the ruins of cities around them, but they are always savages."

The bearlike one said heavily, "It might be that carnivores evolve more rapidly and tend toward intelligence more often for we find radioactive planets without life, and places like the place you call your asteroid belt, where a planet should be—but there are only scattered fragments of planet, pieces that look as if a planet had been blown apart. We think that usually..." He looked at me uncertainly, beginning to fumble his words. "We think..."

"Yours is the only carnivorous race we have found that was—civilized, that had a science and was going to come out into space," the doelike one interrupted softly. "We were afraid."

They seem to be apologizing.

The rabbity one, who seems to be chosen as the leader in speaking to me, says, "We will give you anything you want. Anything we are able to give you."

They mean it. We survivors will be privileged people, with a key to all the cities, everything free. Their sincerity is wonderful, but puzzling. Are they trying to atone for the thing they feel was a crime; that they allowed humanity to murder itself, and lost to the Galaxy the richness of a race? Is this why they are so generous?

These timid beings do not realize how much humanity has wanted peace. They do not know how reluctantly we were forced and trapped by old institutions and warped tangles of politics to which we could see no answer. We are not naturally savage. We are not savage when approached as individuals. Perhaps they know this, but are afraid anyhow, instinctive fear rising up from the blood of their hunted, frightened forebears.

The human race will be a good partner to these races. Even recovering from starvation as I am, I can feel in myself an energy they do not have. The savage in me and my race is a creative thing, for in those who have been educated as I was it is a controlled savagery which attacks and destroys only problems and obstacles, never people. Any human raised outside of the political traditions that the race inherited from its bloodstained childhood would be as friendly and ready for friendship as I am toward these beings. I could never hurt these pleasant, overgrown bunnies and squirrels.

"We will do everything we can to make up for... we will try to help," says the bunny, stumbling over the English, but civilized and cordial and kind.

I sit up suddenly, reaching out impulsively to shake his hand. Suddenly frightened, he leaps back. All of them step back, glancing behind them as though making sure of the avenue of escape. Their big luminous eyes widen and glance rapidly from me to the doors, frightened.

They must think I am about to leap out of bed and pounce on them and eat them. I am about to laugh and reassure them, about to say that all I want from them in friendship, when I feel a twinge in my abdomen from the sudden motions. I touch it with one hand under the bedclothes.

There is the scar of an incision there, almost healed. An operation. The weakness I am recovering from is more than the weakness of starvation.

For only half a second I do not understand; then I see why they look ashamed.

They voted the murder of a race.

All the human survivors found have been made sterile. There will be no more humans after we die.

I am frozen, one hand still extended to grasp the hand of the rabbity one, my eyes still searching his expression, reassuring words still half formed.

There will be time for anger or grief later, for now, in this instant, I can understand. They are probably quite right.

We were carnivores.

I know, because, at this moment of hatred, I could kill them all.

About the author:

Katherine MacLean was born January 22, 1925 in Glen Ridge, New Jersey. She received her BA at Barnard College in 1950. She has been a nurse's aide, store detective, pollster, econ graph-analyst, antibiotic lab researcher, EKG and laboratory quality control technician, food analyst, and currently is althrnating lab work with writing and lecturing, while pursuing her Master's degree and traveling extensively both within and without the United States. She is a member of the Science Fiction Writers of America, the Science Fiction Research Association, the Teilhard de Chardin Center, Canada, the Society for Research in General Systems, the World Future Society, MENSA, the Audubon Society, and the American Association for the Advancement of Science, among others. She gives her interests as "science, history, ESP, carpentry, medicine, health, encounter groups, the real future, ecology, psychotherapy, dianetics," and attempts to "figure out a way for the earth to survive." In 1971 she received the Nebula Award for best novella of the year from the Science Fiction Writers of America.

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