

The Mountain Movers

Olgana—Earth-type, revolving around a Sol-type primary—is a backwater planet. It is well off the main Galactic trade routes, although it gets by quite comfortably by exporting meat, butter, wool and the like to the neighboring, highly industrialized Mekanika System. Olgana was a Lost Colony, one of those worlds stumbled upon quite by chance during the First Expansion, settled in a spirit of great thankfulness by the personnel of a hopelessly off-course, completely lost emigrant lodejammer. It was rediscovered—this time with no element of chance involved—by the Survey Service's Trail Blazer, before the colonists had drifted too far from the mainstream of human culture. Shortly thereafter there were legal proceedings against these same colonists, occupying a few argumentative weeks at the Federation's Court of Galactic Justice in Geneva, on Earth; had these been successful they would have been followed by an Eviction Order. Even in those days it was illegal for humans to establish themselves on any planet already supporting an intelligent life form. But—and the colonists' Learned Counsel made the most of it—that law had not been in existence when Lode Jumbuk lifted off from Port Woomera on what turned out to be her last voyage. It was only a legal quibble, but the aborigines had no representation at Court—and, furthermore, Counsel for the Defense had hinted, in the right quarters, that if he lost this case he would bring suit on behalf of his clients against the Interstellar Transport Commission, holding that body fully responsible for the plights of Lode Jumbuk's castaways and their descendants. ITC, fearing that a dangerous and expensive precedent might be established, brought behind-the-scenes pressure to bear and the case was dropped. Nobody asked the aborigines what they thought about it all.

There was no denying that the Olganan natives—if they were natives—were a backward race. They were humanoid—to outward appearances human. They did not, however, quite fit into the general biological pattern of their world, the fauna of which mainly comprised very primitive, egg-laying mammals. The aborigines were mammals as highly developed as Man himself; although along slightly different lines. There had been surprisingly little research into Olganan biology, however; the Colony's highly competent biologists seemed to be entirely lacking in the spirit of scientific curiosity. They were biological engineers rather than scientists, their main concern being to improve the strains of their meat-producing and wool-bearing animals, descended in the main from the spermatozoa and ova which Lode Jumbuk—as did all colonization vessels of her period—had carried under refrigeration.

To Olgana came the Survey Service's Serpent Class Courier Adder, Lieutenant John Grimes commanding. She carried not-very-important dispatches for Commander Lewin, Officer-in-Charge of the small Federation Survey Service Base maintained on the planet. The dispatches were delivered and then, after the almost mandatory small talk, Grimes asked, "And would there be any Orders for me, Commander?"

Lewin—a small, dark, usually intense man—grinned. "Of a sort, Lieutenant. Of a sort. You must be in Commodore Damien's good books. When I was a skipper of a Courier it was always a case of getting from Point A to Point B as soon as possible, if not before, with stopovers cut down to the

irreducible minimum . . . Well, since you ask, I received a Carlottigram from Officer Commanding Couriers just before you blew in. I am to inform you that there will be no employment for your vessel for a period of at least six weeks local. You and your officers are to put yourselves at my disposal" The Commander grinned again. "I find it hard enough to find jobs enough to keep my own personnel as much as half busy. So . . . enjoy yourselves. Go your merry ways rejoicing, as long as you carry your personal transceivers at all times. See the sights, such as they are. Wallow in the fleshpots—such as they are." He paused. "I only wish that the Commodore had loved me as much as he seems to love you."

"Mphm," grunted Grimes, his prominent ears reddening. "I don't think that it's quite that way, sir." He was remembering his last interview with Damien. Get out of my sight! the Commodore had snarled. Get out of my sight, and don't come back until I'm in a better temper, if ever . . .

"Indeed?" with a sardonic lift of the eyebrows.

"It's this way, Commander. I don't think that I'm overly popular around Lindisfarne Base at the moment . . ."

Lewin laughed outright. "I'd guessed as much. Your fame, Lieutenant, has spread even to Olgana. Frankly, I don't want you in my hair, around my Base, humble though it be. The administration of this planet is none of my concern, luckily, so—you and your officers can carouse to your hearts' content as long as it's not in my bailiwick."

"Have you any suggestions, sir?" asked Grimes stiffly.

"Why yes. There's the so-called Gold Coast. It got started after the Trans-Galactic Clippers started calling here on their cruises."

"Inflated prices," grumbled Grimes. "A tourist trap . . ."

"How right you are. But not every TG cruise passenger is a millionaire. I could recommend, perhaps, the coach tour of Nevernever. You probably saw it from Space on your way in—that whacking great island continent in the Southern Hemisphere."

"How did it get its name?"

"The natives call it that—or something that sounds almost like that. It's the only continent upon which the aborigines live, by the way. When Lode Jumbuk made her landing there was no intelligent life at all in the Northern Hemisphere."

"What's so attractive about this tour?"

"Nevernever is the only unspoiled hunk of real estate on the planet. It has been settled along the coastal fringe by humans, but the Outback—which means the Inland and most of the country north of Capricorn—is practically still the way it was when Men first came here. Oh there're sheep and cattle stations, and a bit of mining, but there won't be any real development, with irrigation and all the rest, until population pressure forces it. And the aborigines—well, most of them—still live in the semi-desert the way they

did before Lode Jumbuk came." Lewin was warming up. "Think of it, Lieutenant, an opportunity to explore a primitive world whilst enjoying all mod. cons.! You might never get such a chance again."

"I'll think about it," Grimes told him.

He thought about it. He discussed it with his officers. Mr. Beadle, the First Lieutenant, was not enthusiastic. In spite of his habitual lugubrious mien he had a passion for the bright lights, and made it quite clear that he had enjoyed of late so few opportunities to spend his pay that he could well afford a Gold Coast holiday. Von Tannenbaum, Navigator, Slovozny, Electronic Communications, and Vitelli, Engineer, sided with Beadle. Grimes did not try to persuade them—after all, he was getting no commission from the Olganan Tourist Bureau. Spooky Deane, the psionic communications officer, asked rather shyly if he could come along with the Captain. He was not the companion that Grimes would have chosen—but he was a telepath, and it was just possible that his gift would be useful.

Deane and Grimes took the rocket mail from Newer York to New Melbourne, and during the trip Grimes indulged in one of his favorite gripes, about the inability of the average colonist to come up with really original names for his cities. At New Melbourne—a drab, oversized village on the southern coast of Nevernever—they stayed at a hotel which, although recommended by Trans-Galactic Clippers, failed dismally to come up to Galactic standards, making no attempt whatsoever to cater for guests born and brought up on worlds with widely differing atmospheres, gravitational fields and dietary customs. Then there was a day's shopping, during which the two spacemen purchased such items of personal equipment as they had been told would be necessary by the office of Nevernever Tours. The following morning, early, they took a cab from their hotel to the Never-Never Coach Terminus. It was still dark, and it was cold, and it was raining.

They sat with the other passengers, all of whom were, like themselves, roughly dressed, in the chilly waiting room, waiting for something to happen. To pass the time Grimes sized up the others. Some were obviously outworlders—there was a TG Clipper in at the spaceport. Some—their accent made it obvious—were Olganans, taking the opportunity of seeing something of their own planet. None of them, on this dismal morning, looked very attractive. Grimes admitted that the same could be said about Deane and himself; the telepath conveyed the impression of a blob of ectoplasm roughly wrapped in a too gaudy poncho.

A heavy engine growled outside, and bright lights stabbed through the big windows. Deane got unsteadily to his feet. "Look at that, Captain!" he exclaimed. "Wheels, yet! I expected an inertial drive vehicle, or at least a hoverbus!"

"You should have read the brochure, Spooky. The idea of this tour is to see the country the same way as the first explorers did, to get the feel of it."

"I can get the feel of it as well from an aircraft as from that archaic contraption!"

"We aren't all telepaths . . ."

Two porters had come in and were picking up suitcases, carrying them outside. The tourists, holding their overnight grips, followed, watched their baggage being stowed in a locker at the rear of the coach. From the p.a. system a voice was ordering, "All passengers will now embus! All passengers will now embus!"

The passengers embussed, and Grimes and Deane found themselves seated behind a young couple of obviously Terran origin,, while across the aisle from them was a pair of youngish ladies who could be nothing other than schoolteachers. A fat, middle-aged man, dressed in a not very neat uniform of grey coveralls, eased himself into the driver's seat. "All aboard?" he asked. "Anybody who's not, sing out!" The coach lurched from the terminus on to the rain-wet street, was soon bowling north through the dreary suburbs of New Melbourne.

Northeast they ran at first, and then almost due north, following the coast. Here the land was rich, green, well-wooded, with apple orchards, vineyards, orange groves. Then there was sheep country, rolling downland speckled with the white shapes of the grazing animals. "It's wrong," Deane whispered to Grimes. "It's all wrong . . ."

"What's wrong, Spooky?"

"I can feel it—even if you can't. The . . . the resentment . . ."

"The aborigines, you mean?"

"Yes. But even stronger, the native animals, driven from their own pastures, hunted and destroyed to make room for the outsiders from beyond the stars. And the plants—what's left of the native flora in these parts. Weeds to be rooted out and burned, so that the grapes and grain and the oranges may flourish . . ."

" You must have felt the same on other colonized worlds, Spooky."

"Not as strongly as here. I can almost put it into words . . . The First Ones let us alone."

"Mphm," grunted Grimes. "Makes sense, I suppose. The original colonists, with only the resources of Lode Jumbuk to draw upon, couldn't have made much of an impression. But when they had all the resources of the Federation to draw upon . . ."

"I don't think it's quite that way . . . " murmured Deane doubtfully.

"Then what do you think?"

"I . . . I don't know Captain . . ."

But they had little further opportunity for private talk. Slowly at first, and then more rapidly, the coachload of assorted passengers was thawing out. The driver initiated this process—he was, Grimes realized, almost like the captain of a ship, responsible for the well-being, psychological as well as physical, of his personnel. Using a fixed microphone by his seat he delivered commentaries on the places of interest that they passed, and, when he judged that the time was ripe, had another microphone on a

wandering lead passed among the passengers, the drill being that each would introduce himself by name, profession and place of residence.

Yes, they were a mixed bag, these tourists. About half of them were from Earth—they must be, thought Grimes, from the TG Clipper Cutty Sark presently berthed at the spaceport. Public Servants, lawyers, the inevitable Instructors from universities, both major and minor, improving their knowledge of the worlds of the Federation in a relatively inexpensive way. The Olganans were similarly diversified.

When it came to Grimes's turn he said, "John Grimes, spaceman. Last place of permanent residence St. Helier, Channel Islands, Earth."

Tanya Lancaster, the young and prettier of the two teachers across the aisle, turned to him. "I thought you were a Terry, John. You don't mind my using your given name, do you? It's supposed to be one of the rules on this tour . . ."

"I like it, Tanya."

"That's good. But you can't be from the Cutty Sark. I should know all the officers, at least by sight, by this time."

"And if I were one of Cutty Sark's officers," said Grimes gallantly (after all, this Tanya wench was not at all bad looking, with her chestnut hair, green eyes and thin, intelligent face), "I should have known you by this time."

"Oh," she said, "you must be from the Base."

"Almost right."

"You are making things awkward. Ah, I have it. You're from that funny little destroyer or whatever it is that's berthed at the Survey Service's end of the spaceport."

"She's not a funny little destroyer," Grimes told her stiffly. "She's a Serpent Class Courier."

The girl laughed. "And she's yours. Yes, I overheard your friend calling you 'Captain' . . ."

"Yes. She's mine . . ."

"And now, folks," boomed the driver's amplified voice, "how about a little singsong to liven things up? Any volunteers?"

The microphone was passed along to a group of young Olganan students. After a brief consultation they burst into song.

"When the jolly Jumbuk lifted from Port Woomera

Out and away for Altair Three

Glad were we all to kiss the tired old Earth good-bye—

Who'll come a-sailing in Jumbuk with me?

Sailing in Jumbuk, sailing in Jumbuk,
Who'll come a-sailing in Jumbuk with me?
Glad were we all to kiss the tired old Earth good-bye—
You'll come a-sailing in Jumbuk with me!
Then there was Storm, the Pile and all the engines dead—
Blown out to Hell and gone were we!
Lost in the Galaxy, falling free in sweet damn all—
Who'll come a-sailing Jumbuk with me?
Sailing in Jumbuk, sailing in Jumbuk,
Who'll come a-sailing in Jumbuk with me?
Lost in the Galaxy, falling free in sweet damn all—
You'll come a-sailing in Jumbuk with me!
Up jumped the Captain, shouted for his Engineer,
'Start me the diesels, one, two, three!
Give me the power to feed into the Ehrenhafts—
You'll come a-sailing in Jumbuk with me!' "

"But that's ours!" declared Tanya indignantly, her Australian accent suddenly very obvious. "It's our Waltzing Matilda!"

"Waltzing Matilda never was yours," Grimes told her. The words—yes, but the tune, no. Like many another song it's always having new verses tacked on to it."

"I suppose you're right. But these comic lyrics of theirs—what are they all about?"

"You've heard of the Ehrenhaft Drive, haven't you?"

"The first FTL Drive, wasn't it?"

"I suppose you could call it that. The Ehrenhaft generators converted the ship, the lodejammer, into what was, in effect, a huge magnetic particle. As long as she was on the right tramlines, the right line of magnetic force, she got to where she was supposed to get to in a relatively short time. But a magnetic storm, tangling the lines of force like a bowl of spaghetti, would throw her anywhere—or nowhere. And these storms also drained the micropile of all energy. In such circumstances, all that could be done was to start up the emergency diesel generators, to supply electric power to the Ehrenhaft generators. After this the ship would stooze along hopefully, trying to find a habitable planet before the fuel ran out . . ."

"H'm." She grinned suddenly. "I suppose it's more worthy of being

immortalized in a song than our sheep-stealing Jolly Swagman. But I still prefer the original." And then aided by her friend, Moira Stevens—a fat and cheerful young woman—she sang what she still claimed was the original version. Grimes allowed himself to wonder what the ghost of the Jolly Swagman—still, presumably, haunting that faraway billabong—would have made of it all

That night they reached the first of their camping sites, a clearing in the bush, on the banks of a river that was little more than a trickle, but with quite adequate toilet facilities in plastic huts. The coach crew—there was a cook as well as the driver—laid out the pneumatic pup tents in three neat rows, swiftly inflated them with a hose from the coach's air compressor. Wood was collected for a fire, and folding grills laid across it. "The inevitable steak and billy tea," muttered somebody who had been on the tour before. "It's always steak and billy tea"

But the food, although plain, was good, and the yarning around the fire was enjoyable and, finally, Grimes found that the air mattress in his tent was at least as comfortable as his bunk aboard Adder. He slept well, and awoke refreshed to the sound of the taped Reveille. He was among the first in the queue for the toilet facilities and, dressed and ready for what the day might bring, lined up for his eggs and bacon and mug of tea with a good appetite. Then there was the washing up, the deflation of mattresses and tents, the stowing away of these and the baggage—and, very shortly after the bright sun had appeared over the low hills to the eastward, the tour was on its way again.

On they drove, and on, through drought-stricken land that showed few signs of human occupancy, that was old, old long before the coming of Man. Through sun-parched plains they drove, where scrawny cattle foraged listlessly for scraps of sun-dried grass, where tumbleweed scurried across the roadway, where dust-devils raised their whirling columns of sand and light debris. But there was life, apart from the thirsty cattle, apart from the grey scrub that, with the first rains of the wet season, would put forth its brief, vivid greenery, its short-lived gaudy flowers. Once the coach stopped to let a herd of sausagekine across the track—low-slung, furry quadrupeds, wriggling like huge lizards on their almost rudimentary legs. There was a great clicking of cameras. "We're lucky, folks," said the driver. "These beasts are almost extinct. They were classed as pests until only a couple of years ago—now they've been reclassified as protected fauna . . ." They rolled past an aboriginal encampment where gaunt, black figures, looking arachnoid rather than humanoid, stood immobile about their cooking fires. "Bad bastards those," announced the driver. "Most of the others will put on shows for us, will sell us curios—but not that tribe"

Now and again there were other vehicles—diesel-engined tourist coaches like their own, large and small hovercraft and, in the cloudless sky, the occasional high-flying inertial drive aircraft. But, in the main, the land was empty, the long, straight road seeming to stretch to infinity ahead of them and behind them. The little settlements—pub, general store and a huddle of other buildings—were welcome every time that one was reached. There was a great consumption of cold beer at each stop, conversations with the locals, who gathered as though by magic, at each halt. There were the coach parks—concentration camps in the desert rather than oases, but with

much appreciated hot showers and facilities for washing clothing.

On they drove, and on, and Grimes and Deane teamed up with Tanya and Moira. But there was no sharing of tents. The rather disgruntled Grimes gained the impression that the girl's mother had told her, at an early age, to beware of spacemen. Come to that, after the first two nights there were no tents. Now that they were in regions where it was certain that no rain would fall all hands slept in their sleeping bags only, under the stars.

And then they came to the Cragge Rock reserve. "Cragge Rock," said the driver into his microphone, "is named after Captain Cragge, Master of the Lode Jumbuk, just as the planet itself is named after his wife, Olga." He paused. "Perhaps somewhere in the Galaxy there's a mountain that will be called Grimes Rock—but with all due respect to the distinguished spaceman in our midst he'll have to try hard to find the equal to Cragge Rock! The Rock, folks is the largest monolith in the known Universe—just a solid hunk of granite. Five miles long, a mile across, half a mile high." He turned his attention to Tanya and Moira. "Bigger than your Ayers Rock, ladies!" He paused again for the slight outburst of chuckles. "And to the north, sixty miles distant, there's Mount Conway, a typical mesa. Twenty miles to the south there's Mount Sarah, named after Chief Officer Conway's wife. It's usually called 'the Sallies,' as it consists of five separate domes of red conglomerate. So you see that geologically Cragge Rock doesn't fit in. There're quite a few theories, folks. One is that there was a submarine volcanic eruption when this was all part of the ocean bed. The Rock was an extrusion of molten matter from the core of the planet. It has been further shaped by millions of years of erosion since the sea floor was lifted to become this island continent."

As he spoke, the Rock was lifting over the otherwise featureless horizon. It squatted there on the skyline, glowering red in the almost level rays of the westerling sun, an enormous crimson slug. It possessed beauty of a sort—but the overall impression was one of strength.

"We spend five full days here, folks," went on the driver. "There's a hotel, and there's an aboo settlement, and most of the boos speak English. They'll be happy to tell you their legends about the Rock—Wuluru they call it. It's one of their sacred places, but they don't mind us coming here as long as we pay for the privilege. That, of course, is all taken care of by the Tourist Bureau, but if you want any curios you'll have to fork out for them. See the way that the Rock's changing color as the sun gets lower? And once the sun's down it'll slowly fade like a dying ember"

The Rock was close now, towering above them, a red wall against the darkening blue of the cloudless sky. Then they were in its shadow, and the sheer granite wall was purple, shading to cold blue . . . Sunlight again, like a sudden blow, and a last circuit of the time-pocked monolith, and a final stop on the eastern side of the stone mountain.

They got out of the coach, stood there, shivering a little, in the still, chilly air. "It has something" whispered Tanya Lancaster.

"It has something . . ." agreed Moira Stevens.

"Ancestral memory?" asked Deane, with unusual sharpness.

"You're prying!" snapped the fat girl.

"I'm not, Moira. But I couldn't help picking up the strong emanation from your minds."

Tanya laughed. "Like most modern Australians we're a mixed lot—and, in our fully integrated society, most of us have some aboriginal blood. But . . . Why should Moira and I feel so at home here, both at home and hopelessly lost?"

"If you let me probe . . ." suggested Deane gently.

"No," flared the girl. "No!"

Grimes sympathized with her. He knew, all too well, what it is like to have a trained telepath, no matter how high his ethical standards, around. But he said, "Spooky's to be trusted. I know."

"You might trust him, John. I don't know him well enough."

"He knows us too bloody well!" growled Moira.

"I smell steak," said Grimes, changing the subject.

The four of them walked to the open fire, where the evening meal was already cooking.

Dawn on the Rock was worth waking up early for. Grimes stood with the others, blanket-wrapped against the cold, and watched the great hulk flush gradually from blue to purple, from purple to pink. Over it and beyond it the sky was black, the stars very bright, almost as bright as in airless Space. Then the sun was up, and the Rock stood there, a red island in the sea of tawny sand, a surf of green brush breaking about its base. The show was over. The party went to the showers and toilets and then, dressed, assembled for breakfast.

After the meal they walked from the encampment to the Rock. Tanya and Moira stayed in the company of Grimes and Deane, but their manner towards the two spacemen was distinctly chilly; they were more interested in their guidebooks than in conversation. On their way they passed the aboriginal village. A huddle of crude shelters it was, constructed of natural materials and battered sheets of plastic. Fires were burning, and gobbets of unidentifiable meat were cooking over them. Women—naked, with straggling hair and pendulous breasts, yet human enough—looked up and around at the well-clothed, well-fed tourists with an odd, sly mixture of timidity and boldness. One of them pointed to a leveled camera and screamed, "First gibbit half dollar!"

"You'd better," advised the driver. "Very commercial minded, these people . . ."

Men were emerging from the primitive huts. One of them approached Grimes and his companions, his teeth startlingly white in his coal-black face. He was holding what looked like a crucifix. "Very good," he said,

waving it in front of him. "Two dollar."

"I'm not religious . . ." Grimes began, to be cut short by Tanya's laugh.

"Don't be a fool, John," she told him. "It's a throwing weapon."

"A throwing weapon?"

"Yes. Like our boomerangs. Let me show you." She turned to the native, held out her hand. "Here. Please."

"You throw, missie?"

"Yes. I throw."

Watched by the tourists and the natives she held the thing by the end of its long arm, turned until she was facing about forty-five degrees away from the light, morning breeze, the flat surfaces of the cross at right angles to the wind. She raised her arm, then threw, with a peculiar flick of her wrist. The weapon left her hand, spinning, turned so that it was flying horizontally, like a miniature helicopter. It travelled about fifty yards, came round in a lazy arc, faltered, then fell in a flurry of fine sand.

"Not very good," complained the girl. "You got better? You got proper one?"

The savage grinned. "You know?"

"Yes. I know."

The man went back into his hut, returned with another weapon. This one was old, beautifully made, and lacking the crude designs that had been burned into the other with red-hot wire. He handed it to Tanya, who hefted it approvingly. She threw it as she had thrown the first one—and the difference was immediately obvious. There was no clumsiness in its flight, no hesitation. Spinning, it flew, more like a living thing than a machine. Its arms turned more and more lazily as it came back—and Tanya, with a clapping motion, deftly caught it between her two hands. She stood admiring it—the smooth finish imparted by the most primitive of tools, the polish of age and of long use.

"How much?" she asked.

"No for sale, missie." Again the very white grin. "But I give."

"But you can't. You mustn't."

"You take."

"I shouldn't, but . . ."

"Take it, lady," said the driver. "This man is Najatira, the Chief of these people. Refusing his gift would offend him." Then, businesslike, "You guide, Najatira?"

"Yes. I guide." He barked a few words in his own language to his women, one of whom scuttled over the sand to retrieve the first fallen throwing weapon. Then, walking fast on his big, splayed feet he strode towards the

rock. Somehow the two girls had ranged themselves on either side of him. Grimes looked on disapprovingly. Who was it who had said that these natives were humanoid only? This naked savage, to judge by his external equipment, was all too human. Exchanging disapproving glances, the two spacemen took their places in the little procession.

"Cave," said Najatira, pointing. The orifice, curiously regular, was exactly at the tail of the slug-shaped monolith. "Called, by my people, the Hold of Winds. Story say, in Dream Time, wind come from there, wind move world . . . Before, world no move. No daytime, no nighttime . . ."

"Looks almost like a venturi, Captain," Deane marked to Grimes.

"Mphm. Certainly looks almost too regular to be natural. But erosion does odd things. Or it could have been made by a blast of gases from the thing's inside . . ."

"Precisely," said Deane.

"But you don't think . . . ? No. It would be impossible."

"I don't know what to think," admitted Deane.

Their native guide was leading them around the base of the Rock. "This Cave of Birth. Tonight ceremony. We show you . . . And there—look up. What we call the fishing net. In Dream Time caught big fish . . ."

"A circuit . . ." muttered Grimes. "Exposed by millennia of weathering . . ." He laughed. "I'm getting as bad as you, Spooky. Nature comes up with the most remarkable imitations of Man-made things . . ."

So it went on, the trudge around the base of the monolith, under the hot sun, while their tireless guide pointed out this and that feature. As soon as the older members of the party began to show signs of distress the driver spoke into his wrist transceiver, and within a few minutes the coach came rumbling over the rough track and then, with its partial load, kept pace with those who were still walking. Grimes and Deane were among these hardy ones, but only because Tanya and Moira showed no signs of flagging, and because Grimes felt responsible for the women. After all, the Survey Service had been referred to as the Policemen of the Galaxy. It was unthinkable that two civilized human females should fall for this unwashed savage—but already he knew that civilized human females are apt to do the weirdest things.

At last the tour came to an end. Najatira, after bowing with surprising courtesy, strode off towards his own camp. The tourists clustered hungrily around the folding tables that had been set up, wolfed the thick sandwiches and gulped great draughts of hot, sweet tea.

During the afternoon there were flights over the Rock and the countryside for those who wished them, a large blimp having come in from the nearest airport for that purpose. This archaic transport was the occasion for surprise and incredulity, but it was explained that such aircraft were used by Lode Jumbuk's people for their initial explorations.

"The bloody thing's not safe," complained Deane as soon as they were airborne.

Grimes ignored him. He was looking out and down through the big cabin windows. Yes, the Rock did look odd, out of place. It was part of the landscape—but it did not belong. It had been there for millions of years—but still it did not belong. Mount Conway and Mount Sarah were natural enough geological formations—but, he thought, Cragge Rock was just as natural. He tried to envision what it must have looked like when that up-welling of molten rock thrust through the ocean bed.

"It wasn't like that, Captain," said Deane quietly.

"Damn you, Spooky! Get out of my mind."

"I'm sorry," the telepath told him, although he didn't sound it. "It's just that this locality is like a jigsaw puzzle. I'm trying to find the pieces, and to make them fit." He looked around to make sure that none of the others in the swaying, creaking cabin was listening. "Tanya and Moira . . . The kinship they feel with Najatira . . ."

"Why don't you ask them about it?" Grimes suggested, jerking his head towards the forward end of the car, where the two girls were sitting. "Is it kinship, or is it just the attraction that a woman on holiday feels for an exotic male?"

"It's more than that."

"So you're prying."

"I'm trying not to." He looked down without interest at Mount Conway, over which the airship was slowly flying. "But it's hard not to."

"You could get into trouble, Spooky. And you could get the ship into trouble . . ."

"And you, Captain."

"Yes. And me." Then Grimes allowed a slight smile to flicker over his face. "But I know you. You're on to something. And as we're on holiday from the ship I don't suppose that I can give you any direct orders . . ."

"I'm not a space-lawyer, so I'll take your word for that."

"Just be careful. And keep me informed."

While they talked the pilot of the blimp, his voice amplified, had been giving out statistics. The conversation had been private enough.

That night there was the dance.

Flaring fires had been built on the sand, in a semi-circle, the inner arc of which faced the mouth of the Cave of Birth. The tourists sat there, some on the ground and some on folding stools, the fires at their backs, waiting. Overhead the sky was black and clear, the stars bitterly bright.

From inside the cave there was music—of a sort. There was a rhythmic wheezing of primitive trumpets, the staccato rapping of knocking sticks. There was a yelping male voice—Najatira's—that seemed to be giving orders rather than singing.

Grimes turned to say something to Tanya, but she was no longer in her place. Neither was Moira. The two girls must have gone together to the toilet block; they would be back shortly. He returned his attention to the black entrance to the Cave.

The first figure emerged from it, crouching, a stick held in his hands. Then the second, then the third . . . There was something oddly familiar about it, something that didn't make sense, or that made the wrong kind of sense. Grimes tried to remember what it was. Dimly he realized that Deane was helping him, that the telepath was trying to bring his memories to the conscious level. Yes, that was it. That was the way that the Marines disembarked on the surface of an unexplored, possibly hostile planet, automatic weapons at the ready . . .

Twelve men were outside the Cave now, advancing in a dance-like step. The crude, tree-stem trumpets were still sounding, like the plaint of tired machinery, and the noise of the knocking sticks was that of the cooling metal. The leader paused, stood upright. With his fingers in his mouth he gave a piercing whistle.

The women emerged, carrying bundles, hesitantly, two steps forward, one step back. Grimes gasped his disbelief. Surely that was Tanya, as naked as the others—and there was no mistaking Moira. He jumped to his feet, ignoring the protests of those behind him, trying to shake off Deane's restraining hand. "Let go!" he snarled.

"Don't interfere, Captain!" The telepath's voice was urgent. "Don't you see? They've gone native—no, that's not right. But they've reverted. And there's no law against it."

"I can still drag them out of this. They'll thank me after." He turned around and shouted, "Come on, all of you! We must put a stop to this vile performance!"

"Captain Grimes!" This was the coach driver, his voice angry. "Sit down, sir! This sort of thing has happened before, and it's nothing to worry about. The young ladies are in no danger!"

"It's happened before," agreed Deane, unexpectedly. "With neurotic exhibitionists, wanting to have their photographs taken among the savages. But not this way!"

Then, even more unexpectedly, it was Deane who was running out across the sand, and it was Najatira who advanced to meet him, not in hostility but in welcome. It was Grimes who, unheeded, yelled, "Come back, Spooky! Come back here!"

He didn't know what was happening, but he didn't like it. First of all those two silly bitches, and now one of his own officers. What the hell was getting into everybody? Followed by a half-dozen of the other men he ran

towards the cave mouth. Their way was barred by a line of the tribesmen, holding their sticks now like spears (which they were)—not like make-believe guns. Najatira stood proudly behind the armed men, and on either side of him stood the two girls, a strange, arrogant pride in every line of their naked bodies. And there was Deane, a strange smile on his face. His face, too, was strange, seemed suddenly to have acquired lines of authority.

"Go back, John," he ordered. "There is nothing that you can do." He added softly, "But there is much that I can do."

"What the hell are you talking about, Spooky?"

"I'm an Australian, like Moira and Tanya here. Like them, I have the Old Blood in my veins. Unlike them, I'm a spaceman. Do you think that after all these years in the Service I, with my talent, haven't learned how to handle and navigate a ship, any ship? I shall take my people back to where they belong."

And then Grimes knew. The knowledge came flooding into his mind, from the mind of Deane, from the minds of the others, whose ancestral memories had been awakened by the telepath. But he was still responsible. He must still try to stop this craziness.

"Mr. Deane!" he snapped as he strode forward firmly. He brushed aside the point of the spear that was aimed at his chest. He saw Tanya throw something, and sneered as it missed his head by inches. He did not see the cruciform boomerang returning, was aware of it only as a crashing blow from behind, as a flash of crimson light, then darkness.

He recovered slowly. He was stretched out on the sand beside the coach. Two of the nurses among the passengers were with him.

He asked, as he tried to sit up, "What happened?"

"They all went back into the cave," the girl said. "The rock . . . The rock closed behind them. And there were lights. And a voice, it was Mr. Deane's voice, but loud, loud, saying, 'Clear the field! Clear the field! Get back, everybody. Get well back. Get well away!' So we got well back."

"And what's happening now?" asked Grimes. The nurses helped him as he got groggily to his feet. He stared towards the distant Rock. He could hear the beat of mighty engines and the ground was trembling under the monolith. Even with the knowledge that Deane had fed into his mind he could not believe what he was seeing.

The Rock was lifting, its highest part suddenly eclipsing a bright constellation. It was lifting, and the skin of the planet protested as the vast ship, that for so long had been embedded in it, tore itself free. Tremors knocked the tourists from their feet, but somehow Grimes remained standing, oblivious to the shouts and screams. He heard the crash behind him as the coach was overturned, but did not look. At this moment it was only a minor distraction.

The Rock was lifting, had lifted. It was a deeper blackness against the

blackness of the sky, a scattering of strange, impossible stars against the distant stars, a bright cluster (at first) that dimmed and diminished, that dwindled, faster and faster, and then was gone, leaving in its wake utter darkness and silence.

The silence was broken by the coach driver. He said slowly, "I've had to cope with vandalism in my time, but nothing like this. What the Board will say when they hear that their biggest tourist attraction has gone I hate to think about . . ." He seemed to cheer up slightly. "But it was one of your officers, Captain Grimes, from your ship, that did it. I hope you enjoy explaining it!"

Grimes explained, as well as he was able, to Commander Lewin.

He said, "As we all know, sir, there are these odd races, human rather than humanoid, all through the Galaxy. It all ties in with the Common Origin of Mankind theories. I never used to have much time for them myself, but now . . ."

"Never mind that, Grimes. Get on with the washing."

"Well, Deane was decent enough to let loose a flood of knowledge into my mind just before that blasted Tanya clonked me with her boomerang. It seems that millions of years ago these stone spaceships, these hollowed out asteroids, were sent to explore this Galaxy. I got only a hazy idea of their propulsive machinery, but it was something on the lines of our Inertial Drive, and something on the lines of our Mannschenn Drive, with auxiliary rockets for maneuvering in orbit and so forth. They were never meant to land, but they could, if they had to. Their power? Derived from the conversion of matter, any matter, with the generators or converters ready to start up when the right button was pushed—but the button had to be pushed psionically. Get me?"

"Not very well. But go on."

"Something happened to the ship, to the crew and passengers of this ship. A disease, I think it was, wiping out almost all the adults, leaving only children and a handful of not very intelligent ratings. Somebody—it must have been one of the officers just before he died—got the ship down somehow. He set things so that it could not be re-entered until somebody with the right qualifications came along."

"The right qualifications?"

"Yes. Psionic talents, more than a smattering of astronautics, and descended from the Old People . . ."

"Like your Mr. Deane. But what about the two girls?"

"They had the old Blood. And they were highly educated. And they could have been latent telepaths . . ."

"Could be." Lewin smiled without much mirth. "Meanwhile, Lieutenant, I have to try to explain to the Olganan Government, with copies to Trans-Galactic Clippers and to our own masters, including your Commodore

Damien. All in all, Grimes, it was a fine night's work. Apart from the Rock, there were two TG passengers and a Survey Service officer . . ."

"And the tribe . . ."

"The least of the Olganan Government's worries, and nothing at all to do with TG or ourselves. Even so . . ." This time his smile was tinged with genuine, but sardonic, humor.

"Even so?" echoed Grimes.

"What if those tribesmen and women decided to liberate—I suppose that's the right word—those other tribespeople, the full-blooded ones who're still living in the vicinity of the other stone spaceship? What if the Australians realize, one sunny morning, that their precious Ayers Rock has up and left them?"

"I know who'll be blamed," said Grimes glumly.

"How right you are," concurred Lewin.