

WITH THE BENTFIN BOOMER BOYS ON LITTLE OLD NEW ALABAMA

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1. *Last Night in Letohatchie*

Well he didn't like it the hot dust blowing, crusting and it made him have to blink a lot standing still a gentleman doesn't move under the circus but you can blink yes by the end of the whole thing it's like sleeping too long the dust tears get caked up and make a gritty crusty blob at the corner of your eye where the nictitating eyelid would push it clear if you were a frog (too late—you're not). He knew that afterward he would have a chance rub the two places one at a time it would hurt (pull scratch) but only for a moment and the dustcrust blob would come out, get it between the last joint pad of thumb and forefinger of each hand it would roll into a nifty sphere so what?

Mean, what do you do with a perfect sphere (two in fact) 1/32-inch in diameter composition gritty dry outside (no sweat left) moist inside (tears yes) made out of 70% red cruddy N'Alabamian dust blown into your eye at parade by the hot wind 30% white man's tears (yeah) (saline content) listening to a would you *believe* it commencement address oh no!

How about that speech! Brilliant! Original! How about we gotta sacrifice to win brave sum manhood to protect pure white pussies from the nigras (ever see one who didn't slobber clutch after a white c*nt?) carry the war to the enemy put the nigra back in his place make N'Haiti pay for atrocities *and*

and

and grit in your eye. *Sheeh!*

So who ever said commencement was supposed to be fun anyhow tradition is what it is. & N'Alabama is strong for tradition good sum tradition all the way from O'Earthtime days before the furgem Jewrabs conquered the world when O'Alabama was an independent damn O'Earth *nation* bajeez with independent damn allies: O'Miss O'Jaja O'Boerepublic the nigra knew his place *then* you bet basaintgeorge.

Well he stood there attention he was a good gyrene raring to get into space into war and fight the good fight for god and planet and little baby heads of shiny golden curls (that would grow up to be a *piece* you follow? a *piece*) who ever said he needed—who ever said anybody needed—a commencement speech to tell him to blast the damned uppities out of black space back to their stinking N'Haiti till the papadocs learned their place again . . .

. . . some bigbellied senator from furgem Talladega or someplace? *Sheeh!* What if it was the furgem governor himself what could he say about the war that everybody didn't know already anyhow? That we better win it or there'd be buck nigras walking free on N'Alabama's sacred soil and before you know it some cunning black nigra kid's playing pop-o with some innocent golden-haired little N'Alabama baby and you know what happens *then!* Minority groups at the polls! Two party elections and furgem minority groups trading off damn *votes* for concessions the same thing that happened on O'Earth before the furgem Jewrabs pushed everybody else out and left the colony worlds to shift for themselves. Who needs speeches? So after it became overwith he went with Gordon Lester Wallace III and Freddie. School out, all the eager boy graduates had their diplomae and a handshake from Senator Belly from Talladega (he knuckled his eyes between mitting them) and off to barracks for fresh undustied uniforms and awayaway it's over but he was gone already by then with Gordon Lester Wallace III and Freddie to Letohatchie for a time.

Down the red rut road to Letohatchie by whining two-wheel gyrocar and Gordon Lester Wallace III and Freddie said to him—How about it sarge? —and turned waiting for an answer.

He didn't.

Gordon Lester Wallace III and Freddie grunted and looked ahead no use

bugging him that was obvious. What if he was just tired. Or grumpy. But if Gordon Lester Wallace III and Freddie had done something wrong that got him mad, ah, that was another matter and better let sleeping sleepers sleep. He knuckled his right eye it hurt (pull scratch, yes) and his left (yes) and rolled two gummy spheres 1/32-inch in diameter between the last joint pad of thumb and forefinger of each hand and threw them away dustodust they rolled whined down the red road.

Parked in a dirty alley in downtown Letohatchie (don't knock it if you've never tasted Letohatchie fried mudhen) and set a clever device on the gyrocar to set off an electric current and hold any burglar there till they got back Gordon Lester Wallace III and Freddie and he would find the bastard there maybe with a few hours of writhing first and see what they would see to do with him. Humane? Keep your nose clean and it won't get tweaked, that's what! Whose rights are you worried about, the victim or the thief, answer yes or no.

Gordon Lester Wallace III and Freddie wanted to go to a bar and no delay but lost out. —Nope—he said—round the block once first—

Gordon Lester Wallace III and Freddie got very brave: —Why?—

Lucky-lucky, no blastback. He said—Look, tomorrow we're gone maybe, yeh? Got the nice boys their bars now who needs tough sarges any more, who? Use skullpower Gordon Lester Wallace III and Freddie—direct address no less !yes!—what will we get in the morning, tasty breakfast for jesusakamitey? Maybe!

—Orders!—A long speech that for him Gordon Lester Wallace III and Freddie felt surprised. Impressed, would you say? He said more!—No sentiment in you Gee Ell Wow Three & Freddie? Round the block once first last look at Letohatchie. Tomorrow who knows deep space off to N'Haiti or someplace else.—

Gordon Lester Wallace III and Freddie shall we say acquiesced. Once around it.

Alquane was down (N'Alabama was Alquane VII dontchaknow) and the sky was a dark park for stark. No moon tonight not ever in fact except when . . . well, don't let it bug you. No moon tonight. Streets of Letohatchie no emptier than usual one fat man brushed by as Gordon Lester Wallace III and Freddie swung up cruddymuddy sidewalk *with* companion.

Fatman was short (5'2"? 2'5"? 52"? Short!), blondheaded long straggly strips of hair pasted down across his forehead a few tips jiggling delightfully before his *left* eye (not so gritty in the city) perspiration (must have been officer material, eeyems sweat) too on that noble brow helped. Fat fat he jiggled as he waddled as he walked but the sarge (not to mention GLWIII&F) didn't mind, watched his big behind, a find, they jostled for a moment feeling final fast last night In Letohatchie but only *once* around the block fatso goom-bye.

Wanna guided tour? Tag along. He knew Letohatchie inside in did he cadre get to know the towns that way. Here: corner bar (pinkred word startles: BAR) clashing red beersign pick your brand in dirty stapaglass window inside full of smoke, off duty renes sitting at fakewood tables glasses m bottle m soggy nappies all over. Other fakewoods, townies, grumpysullen pyech don't like each other comprehend?

Look: he knew this town. *Knew* it inside in, you know that now. Think he and Gilloowoo3 and Freddie went in there?

Pyech!

Next door Piggy Peggy's Pussy Parlor, big pink sign, local John Darn leaning against wooden doorway whistling sweet and low.

Pass it by sarge and companionship.

EATS next. He knew EATS from first day in Letohatchie. Bad EATS, door in back, oldest established sinking crap game in Letohatchie, run by oldest established ex-spacer in Leto, no crookeder than others, give a man a break he saw that bentfin boomer on his shirt, spacer gyrene trader all, oldest established looked out for deepmen, others beware.

He wore the fin forgot how many missions by now (sprinkled skin said a lot a lot) Gordon Lester Wallace III and Freddie had been out too but last night in Leto, last night N'Alaside, who wants to squeeze it out boning for suckerbucks eh? Mean, what goodr bucks on a hotter in deep? *T*h*e*r*e a*r*e n*o w*h*o*r*e*s a*b*o*a*r*d N'A*l*a*b*a*m*a n*a*v*y.* Commercial ships were of course a whores of a different choler. (Same color, though.)

Nice little weapons shop, self-surf washery. Ononon.

—Where we going?—asked Gordon Lester Wallace III and Freddie.

— —

Gordon Lester Wallace III and Freddie didn't know what to do to say. Don't squeeze that was good policy he was a good man an all white guy but temprous so don't squeeze but what are you going to do stand there on cracked sidewalk (fix it postwarse of course) with your thumb zup waiting —Whatcha wanna do?—:

He replied!—Mmnnph.—

Gilloowo3&F looked at him puzzled. He jerked a finger over one shoulder, moved his head—Mmnn.—Articulation supreme.

Moved down sidewalk past ugly fronts GorLesWalTriF in tow, looking at ugly town, streetlights yellowbrown (fixem postwarse) some even worked, peep in windows: military supplies (one-fourthmaster was out of stock bentfin boomers two months, three? local merchant had a-plenty, yes: old story, yes); Letohatchie Noozan Sundries selling plenty girlie piks fukfuk boox, strip strips, You Too Can, noozes.

Noozes: WARGOZWELL ENEMYFALLZBACK BLACASUALTIZ-RIEZ PAPADOCS LOZING GLORIWHITE SPACEFLEET NEET TREET.

Y Bi Noozes? Headlines allasame allagame allafine allatime. Win win win. So: Why no fixem sidewalcracks, streetlights, build some houses, kill some lowzes, and some schools? Afterwarz uvcorz.

Between Letohatchie Noozan Sundries m Leto Lower Mane St Comp Svcs Inc (kipunx, tab, 9th generation central processor you knit/Y'll U Ate Computing) he stopped *crkk!*

Turned quarter circle on crackedwalk pushed open a dirtywood door with a frosted dirtyglass panel set in its *upper* half turned knob pushed open door walked into hallway (what need to say it was *dingy?*) and started up crikkingwood stairs.

Gordon Lester Wallace III and Freddie followed.

—Going up?—

—Gordon Lester Wallace III and Freddie asked.—

— — he replied.

Gordon Lester Wallace III and Freddie did not exactly qualify for MOS +intellectual+ where else to go, hey? Open a dingydoor there are steps going uuuuup and he starts uuuuup crikking & Gleewo3+F asks—Going up?—

Pyech! Wrelse Gloowoo Threeneff slidewaze? Pyech! Up he went crikking every steppina hotdim hall crik followed crik by crik Gordon crik Lester crik Wallace crik the crikcrikcrik and um, Freddie up to the first landing second floor (first floor, European style, O'Earthtime days) reached a landing & stopped. GLW3&F2.

Nuthermuther dirtydoor loose dingy brass knob stapaglass pane in *top* half frostordirty anyway he couldn't see through (so what he knew) old overpainted mailflap slot set in wood a few inches (European style, O'Earthtime days would have said *centimeters*) below stapaglass he tapped it with starsprickled finger didn't linger door opened just a wee crack he saw a dingy brass chain smoke m people beyond no turners all good surners by their looks glasses m bottles 2 & music thumpathump bump it sounded highly encouraging *as*:

:eye in face opened wide peered through crack at him; eye *his* face peered back in slowly closed (other stayed open) shut didn't stay shut opened again (think a whink?); other eye inside shut-opened (sink a wink?) mustabin the code of the ill's door shut a moment *clattk* must be chain coming off door opened again (link a wink?) big fella stepped back let *him* in Gordon Lester Wallace III and Freddie following close behind they made their way to a nempty fakewood table pulled up chairs saddown *and*:

:over came a waiter nice looking sum boy goodpure N'Alabamian stock short though (5'2"? 4'3"? 43"? Short!) pretty yellow hair plastered flat on his skull perspiration held a few straggling locks on his forehead a few tantalizing tips toppled tepidly toward his *left* eye and fat too a find a big behind don't mind.

Waiter looked at customers.

—?— he said trippingly.

—Fine old Jack Daniels charcoal filtered slow-mellowed golden sipping whiskey please with sufficient glasses m napkins you may leave the bottle thank you here—said *he* pointing at the fakewood table top with a finely manicured middle finger (the remainder making a fist).

The waiter said—!—and departed.

He took Gordon Lester Wallace's hands in his own two for a moment, looked into GLWIII&F's eyes, then around the room, found the band (they weren't playing merely staying for the moment): One homist holding

hollowed heculan headbone horn, guava marracist, rythman with black-skin drumset taptatapa-ing quietly to himself.

Drinks came, sampled same, wartime shame *but* good booze good news.

Trues?

Emcee stood up, he looked, Gloowoo3&F dida same. Emcee a fat pee, short too, big ass, big mass, yellow hair plastered where on his forehead, couple tips of couple strips hanging over his *left* eye, spotlight spanged on him dressed in plainbuttoned war surplus grays (no bentfin boomer of course) dark gray damp patches at armpits m crotch, perspiring in spangspot waving arms up and down pointed straight to sides fingers extended (don't cough he won't take off) couple times till:

: noise level dropped couple deci damn bells emcee worked his mouth couple times perspiration on his forehead glinted in the spangspot he said —and now ladies and gentlemen (no ladies visible present but who ever really *knows*, you know?) Ueer proud to present Miss Merriass Markham (one shrill whistle) to dance our National Anthem!—applause.

Spangspot shot emcee disappears room is all dark a moment sound of rustling here m there surprising shrill giggle from one nearby table rustle too from center floor (emcee departing?) sudden drumroll from blackskin set (rythman must really love his work *pang* and a *whang!*) fanfare on heculan headbone horn and marracas rattle new spangspot *pows* on and somebody's init:

:Miss Merriass Markham a zoftic miss must be pure N'Ala blood but spangspot color is —?— bluegreen gruebleen gives her skin sheen (all glistered) unnatural coloration (bad taste that) standing at attention quivering salute.

What she wear? Tight brazeer on big big bosom, too tight, flesh welts above and below, must be shall we say, ah, uncomfortable for the poor leddy Miss Merriass Markham, cinched in back, bright bruegleen brazeer looks like rubber (!?) two highly attractive cutouts large pink (?) aureoles (howcinya *tell* in this light?) protruberent nips pazowie that must tingle it's too tite see the red (this lite?) line below nothing on her belly but a wee bit would you say protruberent (pregnant?) actually kind of voluptuous (think of that belly belly-to-belly with your belly—a navel orgasm?) and tights, shorts that is, same blue squeezing gluebreen rubberlooking oh! holdin that roundbottom Miss Merriass run your mind past that behind

my! what a lotch of crotch mmmmm! *he* liked that thought *whoeeee!*
Miss Markham he gave Gordon Lester Wallace III & Freddie a
hand-squeeze apeeze watching Miss Merriass Markham stand all a-tremble
with patriotic fervor as the three-man band struck up by damn, *suh!* *Dixie*
and in a couple beats Miss Markham *began*:

: quivering for *real* in time to that glorious tune her proud patriotic ass
slamming slidewaze in tune to
bump-bump-bump-bubu-bump-bump-bumbump feet planted proudly on
that fine N'Alabamian wooden floor knees apart m bent her arms
extended forward toward the audience and quivering quivering in time to
the stirring strains of that glorious old tune soon she began to work her
hips her hair (glorious golden waves sweeping over softwhite shoulders the
kind of tyke a soul has to like her daddy must be proud to grab a handfull
of *that* stuff) swaying too in time and rock that pelvis hey (are we
sufficiently discreet do you think?) all day.

He took a drink of golden smooth Jack Daniels sipping whiskey bless
the old land N'Alabama's soul must be in there somewhere the patriotic
air slammed to a close with Miss Merriass Markham slamming a
backbend (she was lithe) hands on floor behind her feet hot in the
spangspot allover wet salty sweat the audience cheering to a man (no
ladies *visible* in the audience but do you ever really *know?*) venting pure
patriotic fervor m appreciation of artistry. Mmm?

He took a Gordon Lester Wallace III and Freddie shoulder in each hand,
shook companionship.—Here,—he said to GLWIII&F—want know where I
take you? Here for a last night in Leto.—

Gordon Lester Wallace III and Freddie expressed appropriate
impressedness. Now, wouldn't you?

Emcee was back on the floor now waving arms up and down fingers
splayed his warsurp grays (plain buttons of course, and definitely no
bentfin boomer) looking darkwetter where they'd looked darkwet before
the spangspot had changed back no more bleegrue yellowbrown now on
him (went nicely with his plastered blond hair one might suggest)
grinning broadly his fat face but keeping his teeth clenched and making
little folding-unfolding motions at the waist and neck (bowing?
nodding?)— Thank you thank you ladies and gentlemen—he said (no
ladies visible in audience but did you *know?*)— Miss Merriass Markham
will be back momentarily I'm sure you want to see more of her much

much more (snicker) and I'm sure she wants you to see more of her so in just one moment after everyone has had a chance to refresh himself for a moment—he stopped lights came back on in the room the emcee disappeared but: *he* remained at fakewood table with Jack Daniels (reserve quality) and companionship.—That all?—asked Gordon Lester Wallace III and Freddie.—That all? Thought she was stripper. This our last night, maybe, on N'Ala, thought we'd get some satis damn faction not a tease.—

—Wait—he said.—Looko there—pointing, table across floor had four men, two sitting, two standing, standing two looked alike, short, fatties, blond hair plastered each over *left* eye, two at table, one tall, palepalepale, agitatedly moving jiggling up and down in fakewood seat, clutching at arm of companion *who*:

: medium size man dark hair lay across table arms on table wearing nondescript business (looked like) suit not moving drink spilled across table washing face in booze (o dream, dream, to bathe in JD Sippin Grade) from nondescript medium sized back covered by nondescript nocolor business suit (looked like) jacket protruded handle he was to coin a phrase turned off. Two fat shorties (blond both) lifted nondescript medium sizer carted him from table disappeared into unknown preserves trailed by tall skinny bobbing agitatedly. —So?—Getc. said.

—Tomorrow,—he replied.—Ueebee gone, orders for ... wanta guess, Gordon and so on? Try? Where? More training work? Not likely. Off-planet, hey, bye bye N'Bama hey. Where do you think?—

—?—

—Deepspace? Vacbattle papadocs ready to board? Killanigra once a day gyrene hasta earn his pay. Ready to invade N'Haiti?

—Mmn.—

—Think the warle spread? N'Anguilla? N'Azteca? N'Tonga?—

—N'Haiti probably. Deepspace on a hotter don't think sarge?—

—Mmm. Drink y'booze.—He gestured again. The empty table where the two men had sat and two stood was empty not now.—!—

Bandback *brrrm*, *c'chkkkk*, sound of heculan headbone horn, lights down spangspot on emcee again waving arms as ever moving mouth—Thank you ladies (do you *know?*), gentlemen Miss Merriass

Markham and assistant will now present a patriotic pageant in honor of N'Alabama her glorsy spacerines—sound of applause in room audible through thick smoke also sound in one corner—no no yes oh—(do you know for *sure?*) spangspot off emcee rustle movement in dark and a *pow*:

:light back on babypinkspot playing on golden curls Miss Merriass Markham strolling in center lowcut *lowcut* frilly gown tightfitting cloth begins just above nipple showing pink circle protruberence through cloth every *pore* by bang tight waist and flaring skirt hooped out and ribbons frills to furgem *floor*—Sheet!—loud voice from dark room shuff mumbles Miss Merriass Markham only smiles in circle *as*:

: second spotlight pangs on edge of floor shows a nigra brute Gordon Lester Wallace III and Freddie and even he do double take—Ha?—but no, look, he's white only daubed, daubed, could they pay *you* to trick out as a coon buck? *You?* How much? Sheeh, one never knows, does he?

Fake coon in a red red spotlight Miss Merriass Markham prances to and fro looking ever whichaway but not at him he inches up on her audience tense and silent inch there's some quiet tense music how can the headbone horner concentrate inch up on that symbol of pure sum lily lady parasol over shoulder gloves over elbows and the nigra:

:*pounces* from behind drags Miss Merriass Markham to him black black dirty she screams he bats parasol clatters Merriass Markham struggles nigra paws, claws *lookit* him drool smashes Miss Markham to the floor reaches, she screeches, nigra bends, rends, rips Miss Merriass's frilly gown *rip* down the back she rolls cloth falls away from big pink rubies round boobies nigra growls audience howls *and*:

: whimpering half-naked sum womanhood backs away from slobbering black animan backs he lunges an arm claws at hanging cloth at pure white womanhood's waist *r-i-i-p* nigra swings arm away in triumph pink and white shreds hanging from clawlike beasthand Miss Merriass Markham no longer fearing stands straight in spangspot eyes flashing bosom heaving as they say (mmm, bosom heaving) starkass naked pale white flesh pale in now-pale spangspot only spots of color her golden lox, dark eyes, red lips (open, panting, love those bodiorificesheymac?) and red nips and that curly triangle pub hair like night delight and what's that?

Curled around her jelly hip what's that black what's that? Round it goes around that sweet soft crotch that lovie V and up around her hip and and

back O Underline the Arse and back between and around and what? A handle it has she grasps and uncoils a whip (a bullwhip a buck-whip) and upraises't in the spangspot and lookit *lookit* that face that joy that maidenhood defended boyoboy o *lookit* that coon *now* willya see him cringe see him crawl he *knows* his place but she won't let him off that easy Miss Merriass swings that whip and *tchapp!* lookit that nigra roll hear him whine *phwapp!* O good O God O finefinefine O go Miss Merriass and *crack!* O look o look his back the red the people lose their mind the cheers and screams and hips, hips working, losing minds, pelvis grinds tears, cheers the nigra falls, Miss Merriass Triumphant calls defiant independent slogan: *Never!*

Lights out, rustling sighing moaning and houselights uuuup roomful of men (well . . .) sitting drained, Miss Merriass and troupe not to be seen shortfatblond emcee in centerroom waving arms up and down blinking mouth working no sound at first (but who cares? a great audience, not a dry crotch in the house!)—Thank you thank you Miss Merriass Markham thanks you please note ladies (hmm) and gentlemen that the nigra was accredited member Actor's Professional Guild qualified simulator available weddings and bar mitzvahs this is, after all, a respectable establishment drink up ladies (?) m gentlemen thank you.—

Well the Jack Daniels sippin was about done by now so he poured a few drops for Gordon Lester Wallace III and Freddie and finished up the rest himself and smacked his hand down hard on the table some money in it bills and corns made a good solid sound on the fakewood and stood up, up too Gordon Lester Wallace III and Freddie, followed him to the door past the (one might so dignify him) *maitre d'hote* a short man with the cutest blond strings crossing his pate plastered with perspiration (or sweat as they say) on his forehead and a couple strands dank dangling before his *left* eye and—Thank you sir O thank you—as they passed through the dirty door with the stapaglass panel (the extra O thank you for a sweet tweak in a sensitive spot) and onto the landing.

—Base now,—he said.

—Yes,—said Gordon Lester Wallace III and Freddie.

They scapp-scattered down dingy stairs out dingy door at bottom retraced steps past quick glimpse at Leto Comp Svcs peered into Noozan Sundries (last edns now on sale N'ALA TRIUMPH BLACKS FALLING BACK RUMOR N'DESERET TO ENTER WAR TREASON TRIAL IN

TRUSSVILLE passembly), military supplies (needny bentfin boomers?), Piggy Peggy's (eyecorner glimpse of John Darn entering establishment), and EATs and B A R.

Gyrenes back to two-wheel gyrocar and Iwhatchaknow! clever electronic device done *caught* somebody (short man and fat with platnum locks) see'm *writhe* willya?

GLWIII&F watch as he keys off clever device, writher falls, he chexm— No fun this bucketkicker—he gets in gyro, G+ in back seat, 'noff we go on the red rut road and to (but of course!) beddie.

Darkness in barracks, he listens:

—Deepspace, do you think?—

—N'Cathay?—

—N'Yu-Atlanchi bet.—

—Invade, invade N'Haiti show furgem papadocs.—

—Think we'll ever get back on O'Earth?—

Sniggers. From sarge's private (well) cubicle:—Orders tomorrow. Now Rustles and sighs.

2. From the Bizonton Pylon

The climb from the Rue Margarite to the hoverail depot was long and difficult, and for the thousandth time Christophe Belledor mourned the long discontinued vertiflot service. Discontinued, perhaps, is not the correct word. When there was not the money or manpower to perform routine maintenance, the vertiflot became increasingly erratic in its performance, carrying passengers between the street and the hoverail platform less and less reliably, until it had finally been abandoned as too dangerous to continue.

Already, many N'Haitians, Christophe among them, had had narrow escapes from too-rapid descents or from ascents that had suddenly reversed their direction. A few unlucky Bizontoniers had tried the device once too often, and had not escaped its failure.

Ah, well, such was the war effort. Someday things would be better, the

vertiflot would be repaired and restored to service, and patient, hardworking citizens would be rewarded.

Christophe stopped halfway up the pylon to catch his breath. He was no longer the young man he had once been. As well, as well. All citizens could contribute, each in his own way. Too old to serve in the starfleet, still Christophe could fill his desk at the Ministry, freeing a younger man to fight for N'Haiti. And he could bear arms at the regular drills of the Planetary Guard, ready to defend his world against invasion if it ever came. But for now . . .

Christophe shuffled forward, climbing the steps of slowly crumbling concrete, philosophically observing the tired citizens about himself, their shabby clothing patched and threadbare. Ah, another sacrifice for the great effort. When N'Haiti is free to turn her energies to peace once more, things will be better. There will be new clothing, dwellings will be repaired and new ones will be built, and the vertiflot service will function once again throughout the commuter network of the Compagnie Nationale des Chemins de Fer d'N'Haiti.

But today, ah, Christophe Belledor reached the platform at last, made his way to the rear of the crowd waiting at the edge of the flatbed for the hoverail to take them to N'Porprince. Christophe recognized several of his fellow commuters but did not try to strike up conversations. Soon, if there had been no breakdown, perhaps at Bahon or St. Marc, the train would arrive. Then there would be a rush to get aboard, for trains did not run as frequently as once they had and those who missed one sometimes could not wait for another, and had to walk to work.

When the hoverail finally arrived Christophe was fortunate—he managed to crowd into the front car and stood wedged between a fat man he had seen many times but never spoken to, and the attractive daughter of his neighbor Leclerc, Yvette. She smiled at him as the sway of the car moving from the Bizonton pylon forced their bodies together for a moment. Christophe felt flustered, tried to look away and pretend he had not noticed the young girl or her reaction to their accidental contact, then grinned in embarrassment as she giggled at him.

After the hoverail had halted in N'Porprince and the crowd of workers had forced their way off, he relived the brief and wordless exchange as he walked through the stuffy passageways connecting the central hoverail pylon with the Ministry. He stopped at the stall of Maurice in the lobby of

the ministry, looked at the morning's *Hatian* and almost purchased a copy.

First, though, he counted the few plastic sous in his trousers pocket and decided that someone in the office would have a copy.

He took his hand back from his pocket, walked past the wooden stall with a shamefaced, "Bonjour, M. Maurice."

M. Maurice's reply was a snarl which Christophe did not quite manage to avoid hearing as he started up the stairs. Eh, even the Ministry of Military Manpower Procurement could not obtain repairs for its vertiflot in wartime. The scurrying about that had taken place, the shouted commands and helpless shrugs that had been exchanged when word arrived that none other than the Premier was planning a visit to the Ministry, and would have to climb wooden stairs to reach the office of the Minister!

The Premier had reacted surprisingly. No vertiflot, he exclaimed, well, in wartime we must all sacrifice. And, taking the trembling arm of the Minister he had walked up flights of stairs to confer. Word had spread and with it relief—the Premier had not complained of the broken vertiflot. The Minister's neck was saved. Department heads were spared expected tongue-lashings. Employees breathed easier throughout the Ministry. Such was war, and such was the operation of the Government.

But this day was another day, and with it there came another problem. As Christophe contemplated the staff study he was to complete editing for the Deputy Minister he clucked in his mouth and shook his head with worry. The pleasant thought of Yvette was eradicated by the stern problems of manpower procurement and the folly of the Deputy Minister's plan.

With the study, the promising career of Marius Goncourt would come to a sudden end as the Minister came to realize fully the nature of M. Goncourt's proposal, and with M. Goncourt would fall his staff, including—most emphatically including—Christophe Belledor.

Winded and perspiring, Christophe reached the landing of his department. He leaned against the door-jamb for a moment and wiped his forehead with a tattered pocket-kerchief, then entered the large room. Most of the others had arrived ahead of him. Madame Bonsard, the secretary and receptionist, greeted him with an unpleasant smile and,

"Bonjour, M. Belledor. Madame Belledor, she failed to waken you this morning?"

Christophe tried to smile as he walked past the desk of Madame Bonsard, but did not speak to her. He glanced at the clock as he passed beneath it. Eh, 0700 hours already, he was late once again. He turned to speak: "The hoverail, Madame Bonsard, there is nothing that one can do, you know. Perhaps you will not . . ." He caused his voice to trail off in quiet hope, but already he could see that Madame Bonsard was marking the hour of his arrival on the weekly personnel report.

"Wartime, M. Belledor," she said. "We must all do our bit, eh? Surely you would not wish me to falsify an official report of the Ministry."

Christophe shook his head and made his way to his desk. His day, he could tell already, would not be a good one. Another lateness ticked on his card, and the way he felt, eh, this day would be a hot one. But chiefly, there was the study of the Deputy Minister to be grappled with. Christophe fumbled in his pocket, drew out a group of keys, sorted them until he found the one he wanted and bent to unlock the drawers of his wooden desk.

Again he paused to wipe perspiration. Ah, when the war was over there would again be air conditioning in the offices of the Ministry. Such a pleasure it would be then, to arrive at work on a steaming day and perform his duties in the cool air of the machines now standing idle for lack of service and parts, and for lack of power to make them function even if service and parts were available. On such a day, to go home cool and refreshed to Marie-Auedda, on a hoverail not so crowded as they now were, and down a vertiflot. Well, one must wait for peace.

He reached into a locked drawer, removed a brown pasteboard folder and placed it on his desk. From the next desk a voice asked, "Is that the famous report of M. Goncourt, Christophe?"

"The very one," he replied. "When M. the Minister sees this, we are all finished. Deputy Minister Goncourt, Belledor the staff assistant, Madame Bonsard, all of us. You also, Phillippe." Christophe nodded sadly.

"Come now," Phillippe teased. "It is not all that bad. How can it be, Christophe?"

M. Belledor sat for a moment, his eyes fixed on the cover of the report. Then he turned his chair to face Phillippe. He leaned forward. "You do not

take me seriously," he said, "but I will tell you what M. Goncourt is proposing. Then you will not think so lightly of it."

Phillipe looked with mock alarm. "Christophe, is the report of the Deputy Minister not marked with a security level? How can you discuss it then?"

"I am sure that you are a spy, Phillipe. Everything you know goes directly to N'Montgomery, of course." He snorted. "You have the same clearance as I or you would not be in your position one hour! Now, do you wish to know what the Deputy Minister has in mind?"—he tapped the folder with the fingertips of one hand—"or do you not?"

The other nodded. "Yes, yes, tell me what he proposes," he said, a supercilious look crossing his face.

Christophe paused. Then, "You know, Phillipe, the manpower demands of the war and the general effect it is having on our economy. We must support not one but three national efforts at once. To fight the enemy we must man our ships with spacemen of every sort—officers, gunners, maintenance crews, boarding brigades, communications men, medical, supply clerks, cooks, everything!"

"Yes, yes," said Phillipe, "we all know that. So what?"

Christophe continued, undisturbed. "To support that direct effort of war requires a whole economy. Spaceship yards to repair battle and supply ships damaged by the enemy and to perform normal maintenance, as well as to build new warcraft to carry the battle to the *blancs* of N'Alabama.

"Weapons manufactories. Ammunition plants. Training and supply bases for our forces. Medical facilities for wounded. Transportation and supply systems. A constant stream of replacements and support. Do you know, Phillipe, there are between six and seven N'Haitians in and out of the planet's military force to support each space soldier actually in combat?"

Phillipe showed impatience. He grunted a bored yes. "Well then," Christophe went on, "that is still not all. For beneath our military effort and all that goes to support it, N'Haiti must still maintain its own basic economy. We sacrifice such luxuries as the vertiflot and the comfort of cool air in the Ministry, but essential functions must be maintained or there will be no economy to support the economy that supports the

military!" He placed his hands conclusively on his knees and leaned back, looking triumphantly at the younger man.

"Eh," shrugged Phillipe, "I still say, so what? You only mouth the commonplace. Everyone knows this. Is this the sensitive report of the Deputy Minister? It is the weekly project of the sixth-year school child. Christophe, you disappoint me. Deputy Minister Goncourt disappoints me."

"No, no," interrupted M. Belledor, "you are always so impatient, Phillipe! Now wait. M. Goncourt sets forth the obvious in his report, true enough, but it is necessary as background for the Minister. M. Antoine-Simone is not too clever, do you think?" Phillipe conceded.

Christophe went on: "N'Haiti must support three complete economies then. M. Goncourt designates these the pure military, the military support, and the civil support economies. Each requires finance, planning, control. Each requires its share of our planet's resources. Most of all, each requires the efforts of the people. A farmer on La Gonave—"

"What has the moon to do with it?" Phillipe interrupted. Christophe brought his fist into the palm of his hand angrily. "All of N'Haiti has to do with it! Do not interrupt! A man who is farming on La Gonave is not working in the factories of Miragoane! A munitions worker in Miragoane is not serving on board the *Toussaint l'Ouverture*! A marine aboard the *Dessalines* is not tending crops on La Gonave!" Panting, M. Belledor slumped back in his swivel chair.

Solemnly his companion said, "The profundity of M. Goncourt does not fail to astound me. Christophe, we are indeed fortunate to be in the department of the Deputy Minister." He leaned forward and slapped Christophe on the shoulder, roaring with laughter. The office turned and stared. Madame Bonsard clucked disapprovingly and jotted a note.

Christophe fumed angrily. Finally he spoke. "Phillipe, you, an employee of the Ministry above all citizens, should have an understanding of the biggest problem of the war. We lack manpower to support three demands at once. The fleet of Grand Admiral Gouede Mazacca suffers terrible losses. So do the cursed *blancs*, but you know the *blancs*, Phillipe, they breed like beasts.

"Gouede Mazacca demands new troops, La Ferriere does not delay to provide them. The pool is dry, Minister Antoine-Simone is called upon.

Ah, well, all the strong men of the planet are at work in the war economy. Out they go, off to Grand Admiral Gouede Mazacca on the *Jean Christophe*, off to fight the *blancs*, off to become casualties. But the military support economy cannot be neglected, eh? Ships, weapons, power plants, ammunition—they must continue to flow! So—where do the workers come from? From the civil economy!

"Have you seen the reports of Governor Faustin, Phillipe?" Christophe went on without waiting for an answer: "He is running the great agricultural stations of La Gonave with old men, women, school children. No wonder food is short. Without a strong civil economy, the war supplies will not long flow. Then ..." Christophe shrugged.

Phillipe said, "And Deputy Minister Goncourt has a solution?"

Christophe picked up the pasteboard-covered report. "He thinks he has. I think he is perhaps mad."

Obviously interested at last, Phillipe said, "And his plan?"

Christophe leaned back once more, luxuriating in his advantage over the younger man. "You take me seriously at last, eh? Well then, answer me some questions and then I will answer yours."

Phillipe leaned forward. Christophe said, "Do you know who is Dangbe? Ayida-Oueda? Have you heard of Papa Legba, of Ayizan, Tokpodu, Zo, Heviyoso, Kpo, Agone, Gbo?"

Phillipe sat mystified, silent.

"None of them?" Christophe asked. "Not one?" The other shook his head. "Have you never visited the Gran Houmfort Nationale, Phillipe?"

Again, a shake of the head. "Christophe, I do not know what you are speaking about. Those names. But I have visited the Gran Houmfort from time to time. It is the great museum of N'Haiti. What is the relation of all this to the war?"

"Phillipe, Phillipe, ahh." Christophe paused for dramatic effect; a plain man, still he did not mind the moment of suspense, the attention of an audience of even one person.

"Surely, the Gran Houmfort is a museum. Obviously you have not visited the wing devoted to O'Haitian culture. You have never heard of the great *vodus* of O'Haiti, of O'Earth. You have never heard of Gbo, great *vodu* of war, of Heviyoso, *vodu* of storm, of Legba, *vodu* of fertility. And

you have never heard of Dangbe, *vodu* lord, king of all.

"Phillipe, you do not know that in O'Haiti the *houmfort* was the shrine of the *vodus*. You never heard of the rites of *vodu*, the sacrifice of the black rooster, the ouanga bag, the danse calinda, the zombie?"

The younger man broke in. "This is madness, Christophe! Does Goncourt think to provide Gouede Mazacca's fleet with crews of *zombies*? He is insane! It is all insane!"

Christophe sat quietly. He waited for the excitement to pass from the other. At last Phillipe sat quietly, also. "Tell me it is not so, Christophe. The Deputy Minister cannot be so mad. He does not seriously propose this insane magic."

Christophe tapped the pasteboard on his desk slowly. "Yes," he said at last. "Deputy Minister Goncourt believes that he can make the ancient legends real. Not by magic. He calls upon no *vodu* spirits. He works with the Department of Medical Science, He proposes to use resuscitated space casualties from both our own fleet and the enemy's to fill our needs.

"He claims he can do this by implanting a small sea creature found on an undisclosed planet at the base of the cortex of the casualty. And, Phillipe . . ." He gazed directly into the eyes of the other man. ". . . Phillipe, he has initiated a pilot study of this madness. The parasitic creatures are already being harvested."

Christophe leaned back once again. After a few moments, Phillipe turned away, to his own work. Christophe opened the pasteboard folder on his desk, drew a blue pencil from the top drawer, and began marking punctuation and spelling changes for Madame Bonsard, who would mech-write the final version of M. Goncourt's report to Minister Antoine-Simone. Christophe sighed as he wrote, and his mind wandered to the earlier encounter he had had with Yvette Leclerc.

3. The Bright Sea of N'Yu-Atlanchi

Ch'en-Tch'aa-Zch'awn writhes slowly, drifting supine in the shallow saline fluid that covers and penetrates all of N'Yu-Atlanchi. Her extended limbs, little more than vestigial after forgotten generations of weightlessness, retain still sufficient muscularity to guide

Ch'en-Tch'aa-Zch'uwn from eddy to eddy as the heat-currents and multilunar tides of N'Yu-Atlanchi carry to her endlessly varied sensations. At times, she turns soft, cartilagenous hands, like rudders, directing herself, choosing to be carried by this stream or that, occasionally meeting a current sideways-on, rolling, the alternation of refracted sky and shallow sea-bottom creating a whirling spiral of visual sensation upon which she meditates long after its cessation.

Ch'en-Tch'aa-Zch'uwn is small for a S'tscha. Her large, flat eyes have seen the chief moon of N'Yu-Atlanchi die three times, the lesser moons no fewer than twice nor more than four score times. Like all S'tscha, she emerged from the womb of the All-Mother a living speck, little more than a blastula devoid of limb, the many nerve endings which now permeate her epidermis then more sparse in distribution and fewer in number.

She does not know how long she spent in the sea-filled, glowing crystalline caverns and grottoes of N'Yu-Atlanchi. She does not know of the seemingly inexhaustible parthenogenetic fertility of the All-Mother. She does not know of the crippled high-speed traveler of metal that bore her distant, giant, human ancestors to N'Yu-Atlanchi.

Certainly Ch'en-Tch'aa-Zch'uwn does not think of herself as human. It is debatable whether she thinks of herself at all, or whether she thinks at all. She senses.

Touch, odor, flavor, these are no longer differentiated. The skin of Ch'en-Tch'aa-Zch'uwn is populated with nerve-endings. She feels through her skin, feels the warmth of NGC 7007 the sun of N'Yu-Atlanchi, feels the comforting buoyancy and saline intimacy of the nutrient waters upon and to an extent within her body at every point. It is, in a sense, very like sexual intercourse, but endless, except as her life will some day end, and without beginning, except as sensation began for Ch'en-Tch'aa-Zch'uwn at the instant that she quickened, a fatherless zygote, within the womb of the All-Mother in the buried, drowned centermost grotto of N'Yu-Atlanchi. Her role is confused. Ch'en-Tch'aa-Zch'uwn is female, at least in the sense, and to the extent, that the offspring of the parthenogenetic All-Mother inherit all their chromosomes from that undeniably female parent. Is this three-centimeter-long child of the All-Mother then a living yoni, somehow inverted, presenting all of the moist, sensitive membrane of its calling passages to the total caress of the universally-penetrating sea? Or is she a living lingam, male though female, enveloped in the perfectly and wholly

receptive sea? Her role is confused.

On the chief satellite of N'Yu-Atlanchi, often visible to Ch'en-Tch'aa-Zch'uwn, a miniscule blemish marks the soil of one small area that would assay an iron content slightly on the high side of normal, were there an assayer present, which there is not. One of the lesser moons of N'Yu-Atlanchi sustains upon its otherwise barren face a machine that is broken and does not function. The machine has been there as long as the iron has been on the greater moon of N'Yu-Atlanchi, but as the lesser moon is without atmosphere the machine has neither rusted, nor corroded, nor been torn by the green fingers of patiently indomitable vegetation, nor been pulverized by rain, nor crushed beneath snow, nor squeezed by ice.

It will not last forever. It is battered daily by photons from NGC 7007 the sun of N'Yu-Atlanchi. Radiation from more distant luminaries pushes it down into the unyielding rock of the lesser satellite of N'Yu-Atlanchi. It is, really, a race, were a sufficiently patient observer present to appreciate the competition. Perhaps God watches. Perhaps he has placed an illegal bet at the corner bookie shop.

Consider: radiation batters relentlessly at the functionless machine, the relic. Will it pulverize the metal, powder the glass, crush the crystal, demolish the circuits, cause implosion, dismemberment of molecules, disorganization of atoms? Or will the lesser moon of N'Yu-Atlanchi interrupt the slow, relentless process; will the airless satellite draw close to its primary, closer and yet more close until it disintegrates, hurling its dead burden into the sea of N'Yu-Atlanchi, or, perhaps, into orbit?

More competitors in the race. Will meteoroid arrive, make smithereens of the machine before nature removes it from independent being? Will new intelligence arrive, driven by agonized matter, to retrieve the prize? Will NGC 7007 spoil the sport by flaring all to a crisp?

God had best place his wager carefully. It is a perilous race. Think about that. Ch'en-Tch'aa-Zch'uwn does not. It is debatable that she thinks at all. She senses.

Touch, odor, flavor, these senses are now one. She has no distinguishable nose. Long ago her ancestors discarded nostrils, lungs; their bodies learned to terminate ontogeny at that point which features gill-slits. Long ago, this was even before the All-Mother came to her

fruitful rest in the centermost grotto. Given enough time, perhaps between cocktails and dinner on some non-N'Yu-Atlanchian scale, these too were abandoned. The omnipresent sea of saline warmth could provide oxygen as well as protein. Some distant ancestor of Ch'en-Tch'aa-Zch'uwn had learned to draw total sustenance directly from the enveloping wet.

With that went the mouth also.

Only remained the eyes of the S'tscha, the large, flat eyes placed proportionately far apart on what was once, ancestrally, a face, eyes that, too, were slowly becoming undifferentiated from the surrounding tissue, their photosensitivity becoming distributed, rods and cones appearing now here and there among the crowding nerve-endings that made up the skin of each S'tscha, and ears, the sensitivity remaining still to an extent in vaguely distinguishable spots to either side of the head, but this function too becoming spread, increasingly with each generation, across the surface of the skin of the S'tscha.

Thus the All-Mother, refining her product, or, perhaps, the opposite of refining.

Ch'en-Tch'aa-Zch'uwn drifts slowly beneath NGC 7007, sensing visually upward. The star visible above her is green, blazing strongly through a sky of yellow. This Ch'en-Tch'aa-Zch'uwn has seen many times. There are many clouds, yes; the rich sea of N'Yu-Atlanchi is not exempt from the law. God has decreed that water, bathed in strong sunlight, shall vaporize and ascend sunward. Humbly the waters of N'Yu-Atlanchi obey.

They vaporize, they rise, they recondense, accumulate into clouds. Clouds are not everyday occurrences on N'Yu-Atlanchi, but Ch'en-Tch'aa-Zch'uwn has seen them many times. She has seen the major satellite die thrice. She has seen, heard, felt/tasted/smelled rain. That is even more unusual on N'Yu-Atlanchi. It is not wholly unknown.

The rain on N'Yu-Atlanchi is fresh. The salts, the proteins, the free amino acids that characterize the sea of N'Yu-Atlanchi do not vaporize with the water; the clouds are pure, the rain is clear. To any S'tscha, rain is life's major peril. Cold it is, vapid, without the warm salinity to which the S'tschai are accustomed from the moment of quickening, without the nourishing impurities which are for the S'tscha life.

Once has Ch'en-Tch'aa-Zch'uwn known rain thusly. Drifting, caught in the lifelong surrender of her kind to her kindly environ, caught this day

beneath a concatenation of clouds, the glare of NGC 7007 obscured, the warming rays interrupted, refracted, diffused, lost, suddenly cold despite the kindly warmth about her, Ch'en-Tch'aa-Zch'uwn knew something that might have been fear had her nervous system, surely thoroughly developed but so narrowly experienced, held any encoding identifiable as that emotion, or any other than a mindless content.

Then the drops had begun to fall. The water close above the eyes of the S'tscha was altered, its visual function revised from that of a faithfully planar semi-reflector through which the S'tscha viewed equably the calm sky and luminary of her accustomed day. Now the surface flickered, pulsed, broke into innumerable constantly shifting forms.

Concavities appeared, spread, overlapped, flattened; drops of rain created sudden moments of impact; the sound of individual strikings of raindrops as they violated the plane of juncture between sea and atmosphere impinged upon Ch'en-Tch'aa-Zch'uwn her ears, discrete explosions yielding to a patter, then a roar as the number of drops per surface unit per time unit grew from the discernible to the indeterminable.

Ch'en-Tch'aa-Zch'uwn her eyes lost their appearance of calm contemplation of the sky as their view was shattered and confused by the close-falling drops. She felt cold, the withdrawal of nurturing comfort at one with the new absence of nourishment in the sea water about her; in a state conceivably identifiable as desperation the S'tscha flailed about the vestigial centimeter-long limbs left her by distant inheritance.

Unthinkingly flitting through the unfamiliarly cold and characterless fluid she spun one hundred eighty degrees about her unrecognized longitudinal axis, her sight whirling away from the darkened and broken sea surface, distant images spinning too rapidly for identification past her widened flat eyes, her attention arrested at last by the refractile crystalline sea bed she now faced.

Light from NGC 7007 the sun of N'Yu-Atlanchi, green, returned sky color from the dome of N'Yu-Atlanchi, yellow, cloud tone, gray, menacing, sea coloration, aquamarine tint, rich, brilliant, darkened now by cloud and rain, reflected still and refracted also from the multiple surfaces of partially transparent crystal. Ch'en-Tch'aa-Zch'uwn, accustomed to the sight of light dancing from the crystals of the sea bottom, now, despite the vastly increased multiplicity of apparent sources caused by the increased

diffraction of the rain-broken sea surface, grew more calm amidst the shifting shafts and glares of turquoise, aquamarine, blue, blue-green, yellow, gray; the movements of the limbs of the S'tscha desisted from their frantic quality, subsided to the calm, stabilizing sway more usually their characteristic motion.

Still, Ch'en-Tch'aa-Zch'uwn was imperiled by the growing concentration of chill and flavorless water produced by the continuing downpour of rain. That she thought is a dubious proposition at best; she was only vaguely self-aware, hardly distinguishing her body from her surroundings, her identity from her environment, her sensations from their sources.

That she determined, as the end product of logical process, to flee the menacing new element that altered her bath, that already was dimming her senses and sapping her vitality, is unlikely. Yet, flight was her course. Fluttering her weak and rigid legs to propel herself forward through the hostile environment, turning the tips of her forelimbs, once ancestrally hands, now soft, paddlelike, unmarred by differentiated digits, holding her gaze on the multiplanar refractive sea bottom she moved, seeking a break in the crystalline surface that would yield escape from the rainwater, entry to a lower grotto of the honeycomb crystal that formed the multiple shells and shorings of N'Yu-Atlanchi, that held the warmer, familiar, comforting fluid of Ch'en-Tch'aa-Zch'uwn her accustomed medium.

This way and that swam the S'tscha Ch'en-Tch'aa-Zch'uwn, the roar of falling rain assaulting her ears with its menacing fullness, the cold and deprivation of its waters stiffening the weak musculature of her limbs, slowly inhibiting the function of her countless nerve-endings as it replaced the usual warm fluid interpenetrating epidermal tissue, numbing sensors, shorting out neural synapses as messages to the proportionately large central nerve cluster of Ch'en-Tch'aa-Zch'uwn grew fewer and fewer.

Ahead at last the S'tscha detected the small nonrefractive patch, the dull absence of reverberating crystal light that must indicate an opening through the sea bottom. Energies flagging, senses growing dim, she struggled forward, drew near, drew at last over the small opening. She turned the paddlelike flexible spatulates that tipped her forelimbs to brake her thin forward momentum, hovered momentarily over the small opening, roughly circular, in the crystal floor of the sea.

Beneath she could see more dimly, her eyes adjusted to the light of the uppermost surface of the planet, relatively brilliant as compared to the

secondary grotto despite the dimming influence of cloud and falling drops. Hesitating only briefly as if to grasp needed resolution, she reached downward with forelimbs, down toward the sea-bottom opening, reaching as if to embrace the very fluid core of the sphere, then drew back, upward, simultaneously scissoring her legs, pushing against the coldly invading water as against a brace or truss, forcing her body into a position perpendicular to the concave surface of the planet, her head downward, and moving, now, with strokes of her forelimbs pulling downward, of her legs, pushing, moving down from the new cold world of grayness, of hostile unnourishing fresh water, downward toward the relative darkness, the warm and nourishing salinity of the inner grottoes, like a breach delivery reversed, the neonate longing to return to the protective interior darkness, to become unborn, a foetus, clutching itself, globular, inward turned, safe, unaware, untouched, unknowing, unquickenened.

She did not lose consciousness. It is debatable that she was conscious at all. She sensed and reacted. As Ch'en-Tch'aa-Zch'uwn plunged through the bung in the outermost crystalline crust of N'Yu-Atlanchi in flight from the pursuing chill and deprivation of the fresh water her senses were dimming; as she penetrated to deeper levels the warmth and nourishing ingredients of N'Yu-Atlanchi its sea replaced the rainwater, pressing against the S'tscha, shallowly interpenetrating her tissues, restoring, repairing, comforting; the child of the All-Mother grew calm, her sensors returned to full receptivity and acuteness, her musculature to its usual vigor and strength. Here in the uppermost refractive grotto of the world, soothed by warming moisture, Ch'en-Tch'aa-Zch'uwn floated, passive, the final kinetic residue of her escape converted now to a gentle horizontal rotation that yielded a slow twirling movement to her body, the images of crystal above and crystal below alternating with broad corridors, sea-filled, crystal floored and crystal roofed, wall-less, infinitely lengthy, stretching in all directions. From the sky descended daylight, filtered first by rare N'Yu-Atlanchian rain clouds, further tinted and diffused by sea-water, then broken, scattered, thrown in violently varying directions by the uppermost crystal layer of the planet, beneath which floated the S'tscha, turning slowly, escaped from the rain.

Through other orifices in the crystal other S'tschai had escaped downward. Those caught by the rare downfall far from bung-holes, those whose reflexive responses to menace had failed them, they now were

already returning their chemistry, in dissolution, to the waters, whence it would nourish other children of the All-Mother. Conceivably, borne by the vagaries of currents, blocked or guided as chance might have by the topology of the ptolemaicly layered globe, some salt, some acid, some slowly decomposing organic molecule might reach the deeply buried All-Mother herself, might become absorbed into her fecund protoplasm, might, in course, be born again, a S'tscha renewed, resurrected, reincarnated, immortal.

And the S'tschai of the uppermost grotto, those uncounted neoaquatics accustomed to the glittering lights of sky-refracted crystalline glare above, faceted radiant below, and new S'tschai arriving, nearing the end of their long, leisure-paced migration upward from the grotto of the All-Mother, reaching this last warm ice-cave, short so little of that dumb and uncomprehending flat-visioned sight of the day-star and the night-stars, the major moon and the lesser moons, the home and the graves of unknown collaterals, and the quick refugees Ch'en-Tch'aa-Zch'uwn she and her fellows, these shared this liquid shell.

Recollection stirred. The grotto, recognized by Ch'en-Tch'aa-Zch'uwn, she had been here before, an unknown time ago, but long enough for her to see the greater moon die thrice. That had been as she neared the surface of N'Yu-Atlanchi, had neared the end of her own journey to the top of the sea, of the world.

Drifting, sensing, slowly revolving, the lights above and below endlessly alternating before her large eyes, Ch'en-Tch'aa-Zch'uwn is the unappreciating beneficiary of random occurrences. Floating, her gaze distracted by crystalline flashes, she encounters a small floating creature: longer than it is wide, vaguely cylindrical, quadrapoidal, soft, carrying a head at one end, flat-eyed, almost earless, densely nerved, floating, emblissed, unaware, it is a S'tscha.

The two observe each other. Ch'en-Tch'aa-Zch'uwn wavers gently her limbs, propels herself unurgently and without positive intent toward her sister. Likewise the other, easing through sea-water, propelled by cartilagenous spatulates, flows vaguely forward. The two approach each other, align themselves to congruence, drift slowly each toward the other, sense softly epidermal contact, the cylindrical torsoes pressing together with a pressure almost inconceivably slight, the legs pressing, gently twining, the forelimbs, first maintaining the positions of the two, then, as

body contact becomes increasingly firm, as legs hold to legs, the forelimbs are lowered, unaccustomedly, slowly working themselves into the semblance of mutual embrace, holding closer each S'tscha to the other.

Slowly there follows a mitosislike process; the neural cells of each S'tscha divide, polarize, but, meiotically, producing no diploid chromosomes, spreading themselves, developing spiremes, threads piercing cell walls, crossing, sharing, passing coded memories each to the other, two S'tschai share experiences. Clutched in neural union, bathed in nutrient moisture, twin sister S'tschai renew identical heredity, add now identical lives.

To her sister gives Ch'en-Tch'aa-Zch'awn her pilgrimage from All-Mother to the sky, her sensations of day-star, night-stars, moons, her quiet days and nights, the coming of clouds, of rain, its results visual, aural, tactile/aromatic/sapid, her return through the bung-hole, her recovery.

To Ch'en-Tch'aa-Zch'awn her sister gives her own life, similar, yet adding a sight uncomprehended: a figure, vaguely, vaguely S'tschaoid, resting upright, the ends of its legs planted seemingly on the upper side of the uppermost crusting of N'Yu-Atlanchi, seemingly made neither of such stuff as are S'tschai nor of crystals nor of liquid, perhaps of the stuff of the satellites of N'Yu-Atlanchi, distorted by the sea, twirling, casting about a thing strange, large, flat, of close-placed lines, into the sea, then retrieving it, again, again, now plucking at it, removing, placing in a protuberance upon its trunk, casting again the thing of close-placed lines, then moving off, not swimming as swim S'tschai but upright, balancing somehow on its legs, and beyond the senses of the child of the All-Mother, the sister of Ch'en-Tch'aa-Zch'awn.

The spiremes retract, the cell walls are restored, the neural union of the S'tschai ends; forelimbs unbend, legs untwine, slowly the two drift side by side until a stray movement of water pulls one away, they sense each the other still, drift, make small random movements of the limbs, become separated by greater and greater distances, are lost to each the other.

Ch'en-Tch'aa-Zch'awn drifts supine beneath the uppermost crystalline crust of N'Yu-Atlanchi, her eyes absorbing sensory data, new memory now stored in her neural center but not analyzed. She neither wonders nor fears nor is pleased. She senses.

She does not seek a bung-hole above or below her but in time she arrives beneath one. Dimly through rich sea-water she sees lights above: night-stars and moons. Vaguely she arches her form closer to the perpendicular, strokes languidly upward, levels again and drifts.

In time rises NGC 7007 the sun of N'Yu-Atlanchi, brightening the sky, reflecting and refracting off sea and crystal. In time, floating supine, Ch'en-Tch'aa-Zch'uwn senses almost with startlement the strike all about her of the thing of lines, feels herself drawn, lifted, carried for a moment beyond the waters of N'Yu-Atlanchi. She is flooded for a moment by new and unprecedented data, as of being removed totally from her world. Her senses flash confused messages to her neural center. She hears sounds she has never before heard, sees visions unknown and ununderstood, feels/smells/ tastes as never before she has.

All briefly.

She is plunged, uncomprehending, into yet another environment: close, warm, salt-moist, yes, but dark, totally for the first time in the life of Ch'en-Tch'aa-Zch'uwn dark, and yet with a tang of a new ingredient, a new sensation, and the feeling of other S'tschai about, more S'tschai than she has ever before encountered, but all quiet, and Ch'en-Tch'aa-Zch'uwn her own senses become less acute, less vivid, and she becomes less aware and she ceases to sense and to react

4. Aboard the Starship Theodore Bilbo

'Namorning, Alquane up, gyrenes up, N'Alabama redinwhite "colors" up the ole pole, sarge up, shine up, fix up, dress up, twenty-thirty push-up, goodnup, oak-hay, time to break the (reasonably) fast. Gyrenes line up, shape up, count off, march off, couterments off, bow down, chow down:

: grits, lard, corn bread, dawntime lightning (a mere drap), little little talk—passamuffins—mm—jug—mm—mm. Cadre here only, hung a many a man over this dawn this mawn and a bleary eye here or there, one enda bencha rutha seems distracted would you say, or ab-etc., thinking mayhap of a Miss MM or maybe futha nutha bench some gyrene shifting his sore ass thinks of Piggy's. Maybe?

Well get it down sarge, get it down, make a plite little belch and grab

another something to swag or swig, it's the whole batch down the hatch act and a sniggery smirk at thought of old John Darn last at Piggy's well sloppies is better as none at all old John, none at all, but then why when better stuff is at hand (if you catch).

Follow up that delightful culmination with a quick (but non-optional) visit to the old chapel for a dose of God's own. Shall we be epigrammatic and say mass after mess? No, we shall not.

Nonethenever Alquane that lucky ole sun pushing his rays through stained glass winders depicting heart-rending scenes in the Shrine of St. Lurleen McQueen illumine soul-thrilling ranks of congregators in pew, pew, pew as chaplain heaves into view tew, mounts his pulpit (whatever turns you up) with visible risibles, gazes across gray-clad all spat and polished rows, officers' section shall sit upon thy rite ham, enceeyos upon thy lafi and klenz the ole soul.

Sermon today, same subject as usual. Good to know God is on our side. Thanks, chap old chap, crikies, think of going to war with Him in the ranks of *them*. How many divisions does he have, buy the weigh? Sing a few good old hymns (officers melody, eeyems harmony) like *The Old Ragged Cross* or *I'm Dreaming of a White Kiss, Miss*. Dear chaplain does a couple of costume changes to melloharp and drums, comes out for his big finale in golden robes and pistol belt to introduce—Singing and Dancing His Way into Your Hearts—the ajjerant bird.

Bird stanz up to deliver orders of the day. Ptowie! Thus—This old fort this campa spacers gotcher marching orders here, See-O says to thank the cadre for a splennid job-well-dun, finest bunch of gyrene shavetails ever seed, pride utha fled, mission over, staff reduced, here you go boys yule delighted to get back into the mysterious interstellar void and slap some punks for the glory of the N'Alabamian Weigh-a-life.—

—Waddeezay, wa-wa-wa?—axes crabby old esseffsee (reserve warrant O 'nee doesn't let anybody forget same you can bet) setting aside our sarge. Our sarge snarls—Deep, man, we-all gonna gettanutha hotpot on the old bentfin boomer.—

—Oh,—exudes crabby. Not to go uncomprehended he repeats—oh.—

—Y'all find your list of duty stations posted on the company (just as one might anticipate, hath one but possession of the correct background) bulletin board right after Divine Observances,—sez the bird.

—Dis,—beloved chaplain commands unto his flock—missed!— Cleansed of soul, lightened of heart, filled in the head with thoughts of God and Planet, our old sarge he looks at him's orders on the bulletin (right!) board after kirkey, seize a long row of names, ranks, serial twiddles, along upside of each bespeach a ship of the Crimsy Wabe, new duty stations for most of cadre, ship names m sine means for each gyrene O m NCO lissed, restum must be stain on as cadre, 'll maintain post facilities pending renoola OCS program.

Our old sarge he looks, maybe not quite with twenny-twennies (no sprig chicken he no more but he keeps in good shape rest assured) but he gets buy with spectacles at leased. There's old friend Gordon Lester Wallace III gonna be a gunnery sarge upboard the old *James O. Eastland*. Our sarge once served upboard the *Jimmie-O*. He muses of nice times there. Yas. Goody, Gordie. Fun for fine. Other cadre buddies here and there doing this and that now and then. Freddie now, he's to be seen on the list nowhere, must be stain on as permy party. Owell, he'll blast no blacks that way, but it's a soft berth.

Sarge himself? Where's he to go? He won't be on the *Jimmie-O*. No. Sarge looks on list, fines him's name at last. Zippidie-doo-dafa, sarge, you gonna be a weapons squad leader upboard the starship *Theodore Bilbo*.

[Aside: howcame smenny N'Ala ships barin' O'Missa names? Ponder that.]

Welleetsee, welletsee, who is gonna be in that squad? And who is gonna be the platoon sarge? Squad leader worth his stripes, he *cares*.

Our old sarge he heads for the *TeeBee* stoppin by cadre barracks only long enough to pack a couple parsimonious suitcases [suitcases? well, call em duffles ef you like to] for space duty, grab a military gyrocar, fling him's *Bilbo* bags in, scuddle uccer tarmac to the *TeeBee*, cline upboard m finiz_ berth. Spacerine hammock's none 2 comphy, one must admit, but like rubbery jello, it'll do.

Sarge stoze gear, check sin, finezeez first man in from his section and dis*TeeBeez* to wait for others. He paces tarmac, gazes back m up at the *Theodore Bilbo* she's a fine figure of a ship. Tall, rounded shaft glisters in Alquane's pretty morning rays. Up at the top and instrument ring girds fuselage and atop that the conical command module replete with tippy-top cat's-iris command viewing station. Master ruby laser station

there too, firing stream of hot singeing light to bathe foe when *TeeBee's* aroused.

Crew quarters in the shaft, gun modules in the skin, and down at ground level mounted to the base of the shaft two giant globular fuel modules glistening m gleaming in the warming rays of happy old Alquane light, their contents of supercold liquified compmatter bubbling over surplus through safely valves, it hisses and steams in the Alquane warmth looking like clusters and curlicues of angel's hair around the globular modules and the base of the old *Theodore B.*

Finally sarge's squad trickle in. Nice boys, nice all, from fine ole pure-blooded sum fammies O yes. Sweet blond hand laserman from Echola, articifer's mate from Eutaw, couple pincer-axemen from Coxheath m Salitpa, glow-mortannan from Gasque and a sissant sarge outen Suggsville Center. A good crew all. That's important.

Our old sarge, he checked round summat, found altogether a fine bunch in that platoon of his except maybe one or two. Didn't like a zaprifle squad sarge alongside nohow. Fella name of Raff Slocomb. Knew him from cadre. Basserd wunt drink around, wunt whore around, *mean* SOB if you follow. Gotta watch for Slocomb.

Not too sure of the platoon leader too. Bad situ that, a good leader, he got confidence in the next layer too. An the next leader (platoon sarge was an ok, thank you) bein a shavetail just outen OCS. One of our boys no less sarge ponders (very thinky today wouldn't you say?), and he didn't like to toe too much for me. Mmm. Now he's platoon shavetail. Shavetail Snarp. Oak hay, will get on somehow.

Our sarge he lines up his men m inspexem good. Then alla board upside the starship *Theodore Bilbo*. Everybody checked in, gear stowed, strapped down, ready for deepspace.

Supercold, superdense fuel flows from those big hairy balls of the starship *Theodore Bilbo* into painboxes. Molecules are energized, atoms are squeezed, electrons are sheared from their primaries, crammed m jammed m slammed, whammed m bammed, shaped, scraped, raped, nuclei ripped apart, smashed into one another, forces whirling and driving madly, something becoming something else, something less, part of that something becoming nothing, energy produced, screams out propulsion tubes crying to the echoing deaf cosmos for relief, release, dying in an

attenuating blaze of hyperenergized exhaust, thrusting the *Bilbo* away from N'Alabama into the dark vacuum that surrounds Alquane, thrusting, heaving, hurling her upwards.

Theodore Bilbo heads outward, outward, driven along the planetary plane away from Alquane, shuddering, screaming as she goes.

This is propulsion by agonized matter.

On O'Earth furgem Jewrabs rule the world. Descendants of the citizens of that long-ago Federated Republic of Israel and Jordan ["Dinner in the diner, nothing could be finer, than to have your lox m eggs in Palestine," er, it was a big tourist attraction, that] that grew into a Pan-Semitic Empire, that Neo-Shem that spread and conquered and took. Growing population, *lebensraum* the Jewrabs echoed some forgotten hack politico of earlier times.

Great powers to stop 'em? Who?

The former United States of, uhh, where was that? Well, anyway, they quarreled too much with the old CCCP. Almost blue us *all* up. Happily the old Third Force powers woolen stand 4 that, disbanded them mothers back into independent units. Nation of Iowa, say, inn't rilly 2 scarifying. Nor, oh, Mountain Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast.

Czecho you can bet Slovakia sure breathed easlier. Also Iceland. Who's afraid of the big bad Georgians (Murrican *or* Sophie's wet)? Bunchezza farmers both.

Rest easy for a while. Neo-classical Cathay no problem; Innier too busy feeding starving millions for far'n ventures; Japan's new motto "Make money not enemies." Alla little guys rested easy for a while. Then the furgem Jewrabs took over. O'Earth, ta-ta.

Nameanwhile, howzabout colony worlds? Agonized matter goes fast.

No, you don't dig, man. Like, *fast*.

Like, think of what fast means to you. Now pretend that means *slow*.

NOW what's fast mean? Oak hay? Now, *that's* slow. *Now* what's fast? You still there? Still following? Oak hay, now you have some idea of what's agonized matter driven spaceships fast

So: colony worlds. Nation can't feed its people, can't pave its streets, can't school its kids, can't medicate its sickies, can't solve its problems ...

can always do the prestige things. Once upon a time, could have a jet airline. Once upon a time could have nukie-bombs. Now: everybody who's anybody, he got agonized matter driven spaceships. He got ships, what's he got next? Right! He got worlds.

So we got: N'Afghanistan, N'Albania, N'Andorra, N'Argentina, N'Australia, N'Austria, N'Belgium, N'Bhutan, N'Bolivia, N'Brazil, N'Bulgaria, N'Burma . . . yuwanna be bored, read an atlas. Also, we got N'Alabama, N'Alaska, N'Arizona, N'Arkansas and 49 more.

Also we got worlds colonized by religious nuts, diet faddists, hobbyists, political fanatics, sado-masochists, alcoholics, lotus-eaters and a few hundred other kinds of loonies.

Also we had a few worlds colonized by homosexuals of both types, but they didn't breed true in captivity and they died out.

Also we got colony worlds carrying on the electromagnanimous traditions of their ancestors including their loyalties and their hatreds.

And when the furgem Jewrabs finally take over poor O'Earth en its tirely, them colony worlds is left on their own. *With* agonized matter driven fast spaceships. So N'Alabama hates N'Haiti?

Our old sarge is on his way to war raght now!

5. Into the Exoneurobiology Section

"M. Goncourt, we cannot obtain the technical and fiscal support required to effectuate specified mission parameters!' *Merde!*" shouted Goncourt, pounding his fist on the grimy woodsn desk top. "Nobody can get the support he needs, Trudeau! You know it and I know it. We're functioning in a bureaucracy and the trick is to do your job without the official backing you need. *I* give you my support and I'm your chief. I don't want to hear that officialese double-talk. Let's save that for Antoine-Simone and the rest of the clods upstairs. Let's speak plainly to each other."

Trudeau winced at Goncourt's outburst.

Goncourt said, "Well?"

Trudeau said, "I'm sorry, sir. I read and write so many tech reports that

I'm afraid I'm beginning to talk like one. I take it you want it straight."

Goncourt grunted an affirmative. "I want a straight report on your specimen, and it had better be good. Manpower is breathing down Antoine-Simone's neck, and he has to produce on this boondoggle or he's in bad, bad trouble, eh? That means *we* had better produce or we're *all* going to find out what the far side of La Gonave looks like."

Trudeau gestured with his brown hands to express his thoughts. "The specimen seems to be operating properly. The control organism has been implanted in a fully thawed composite cadaver. Healing is taking place at an encouraging rate. I think I can get a response to aural stimuli now."

Goncourt rose from behind his desk, took his subordinate by the arm and propelled him through the doorway of the office. "Good! Let us see what wonder you have wrought, Trudeau. We may yet come out on top of this thing."

The two officials passed Goncourt's secretary, marched down drab corridors past frosted-glass lab windows and around corners. They paused before a door marked Exoneurobiology. Trudeau reached over and opened the door and they entered.

"Before viewing the specimen, M. Goncourt, I suggest that we view a film of the surgical procedures already followed." Trudeau rolled a screen down one wall, flicked a switch and the screen began to flicker. On it appeared an operating theater and surgical team. A rolling pallet was brought into the room, a sheet-covered form lifted from it onto an operating table. Throughout the scene the viewing room remained silent. When the sheet was drawn back a cadaver was revealed. The left arm and shoulder and half of the chest were missing, a jagged outline indicating the place where the body had been ripped apart.

Now the camera cut to the doorway of the room, showing another cart. As it was wheeled into position the scene cut back to the overhead view. The body already on the table now showed a clean edge in place of the former rags of flesh marking the extent of its wounds. "This is later, of course," Trudeau said. "The procedure takes several hours at present. That is one of the drawbacks that we hope to overcome with mass techniques."

Goncourt reached into a pocket in his sagging jacket, drew out a small pipe and charged it. "I want to see this fully," he said. Trudeau struck a match for him. Through blue-gray clouds the image continued to change.

"The second cadaver has been prepared as you see," said Trudeau. "The skin is contoured to match the extent of the first cadaver, with sufficient overlap to promote rapid growth. Internal organs are undivided—each is taken fully from one subject or the other." On the screen the two partial cadavers had been fitted together like parts of a jigsaw puzzle. Surgeons were adjusting bones, stitching nerve and muscle connections, attaching blood vessels like plumbers matching water supplies. The camera cut, cut, indicating repeated time lapses.

Finally the obvious chief surgeon waved two assistants to the task of suturing the skin of the massive pseudo-incision. After a few more minutes the screen became blank and Trudeau flicked on the room lights.

"Very well," Goncourt said, "a clever piece of surgery, a logical extension, however, of standard techniques."

"But the difference," Trudeau exclaimed, "the difference is that we are not merely moving a particular organ from a donor to a patient. We are actually combining parts of two nonviable cadavers to produce a complete individual."

"And he will live? He will function? Will this new patchwork man you have created be able to perform military duties? This is not an academic research grant, you know. We are supposed to contribute to the manpower problem, to the war effort."

Trudeau stood and looked Goncourt in the face. Goncourt's eyes were fixed on the bowl of his small pipe, which had gone out and which he was trying to puff back into life.

Trudeau said, "In the case of space casualties, this surgery is insufficient. When they are wounded in battle, when they are mortally wounded, the wall of the ship and the protection of their space suits both violated, the sudden vacuum and absolute cold produces a double effect."

Trudeau looked again at Goncourt. He had got his pipe going again, was looking into his subordinate's face with apparent rapt attention. Trudeau went on:

"The sudden physiological effects are terrific. At zero-pressure the lungs are instantly exhausted. Vomiting and evacuation occur. The bladder empties. There is danger of damage to the eyes, ear drums, blood vessels, all pressure-sensitive organs.

"But simultaneously the body is plunged toward absolute zero. In vacuum there is of course no conduction cooling, but radiant dissipation occurs at a fantastic rate. Even before pressure damage occurs, the body is quick-frozen. That is how we can obtain cadavers in such good condition."

Trudeau stopped speaking as Goncourt waved him to silence.

Goncourt said, "All very well, but what of the central nervous system? Can the revived cadaver function?"

"Not independently. The shock of death does something to the individual—we do not fully understand it, although we have tried attaching graphic readout devices to various CNS points in subjects and obtained astonishing results. They are apparently conscious of sensory input and probably capable of essentially normal mentation, but no voluntary functions take place.

"For this reason we have experimented with the creatures from NGC 7007. They seem to have evolved extremely complex and sensitive nervous systems, widely distributed generalized sensors, and yet to be without will or resistance. Also, they are small enough to be implanted at the base of the brain. They acclimate quickly, attaching filaments into the spinal column and brain. The bloodstream provides nourishment.

"Because these organisms are constructed as they are, they can be used as master controls for the subjects. By implanting one in a subject's skull, we can revive him and use him as a quasi-automaton for military or industrial duty."

"A quasi-automaton," Goncourt repeated. "Or a zombie." Goncourt sucked futilely at his pipe, knocked out its dead ashes and returned it to his pocket. He rose from his chair, said, "Very well, now let us see this laboratory wonder of yours."

In the next room the patchwork man lay on a hospital bed, breathing slowly. Clad only in pajama pants, the body showed its livid scar from neck to sternum, turning a neat ninety degrees to disappear behind the rib-cage. The flesh of the attached arm and shoulder was a different shade of brown from that of the rest of the body. From the temple of the still man an electrode fed a thin wire leading to a communication interface. A small computer, fed through the interface, controlled a graphic display screen, its surface a neutral green-gray across which moved sluggish waves of varying density.

At the footsteps of the two men the figure lying on the bed opened its eyes. The display screen flickered. On it appeared the forms of Goncourt and Trudeau. They were approaching the viewpoint from across a rolled-down bedsheet. Goncourt stopped, placed his arm in front of Trudeau to stop him. In the screen the figures seemed to advance an additional fraction of a step. The image fragmented, shuddered back into form to show them standing as they were.

"You see," Trudeau said.

From an audio device Trudeau's voice distortedly repeated, "You see ... "

Trudeau stopped speaking. The device paused, then repeated a higher-pitched, "You see." Higher, "You see." Higher, "You see, you see—" Trudeau took quick steps, switched off the audio output.

"You see," he said again, "whatever the subject views or hears, we can read back out through the devices. We have a feedback problem with the audio, although there is no problem if we move the speaker to another room.

"At any rate," he continued, "sensory functioning is just the half of our achievement. Watch this."

He stood close by the hospital bed. "Raise your hand," he commanded the figure on the bed. It raised a hand. "Sit up!" The thing on the bed slid its legs over the edge of the mattress, pushed its torso upright with unmatched hands, waited.

"Stand," Trudeau said. The thing pushed itself off the bed, stood swaying beside it. On the graphic screen Goncourt could see himself, Trudeau, the room shifting back and forth as the dead-alive eyes moved. "Enough," said Goncourt.

"Down," Trudeau commanded. Clumsily, the thing folded itself back onto the bed, guided by Trudeau's hands. When it was again supine the screen showed the ceiling of the room momentarily, then went back to gray-green as the eyelids slid shut.

Walking back to his own office, Goncourt said to Trudeau, "Very impressive. I'll have to strip someone else to do it, but I will get you some people and some money."

"Thank you," Trudeau said. "I'm sure this thing will work, sir."

"I'm sure it will," Goncourt replied.

Completing the trip to his office alone, Goncourt again drew the pipe from his pocket.

6. *Into the Great Hall*

Flip calendar pages.

Things happen.

Gordon Lester Wallace III (a sarge himself, you know) scuffs red dust dirt dragging drearily drawn-faced outen the orderly office. —Okay, buddy, —he says to topper,—see you later.—

Gordie-boy m iz pal Adam A. Aiken amble crossen reddish dusty sward of Fort Sealy Mae, Letohatchie Township, Independent Planet of N'Alabama, Eugene Youngerman, Governor, ambling aimlessly around toward the NCO Club, kickin pebbles, spittin casionally and hummin under their respective breaths the Fort Sealy Mae strictly unofficial alma mater.

Adam, he sed—Gord, wappenta *Jimmie O?* Wuntcha peseta join the star fleet, go knock hell outen them nigra pigs on N'Haiti?—

Gord, he sed—Wuhmm—or approximately that, pickin up the taciturn speech habits of a certain friend of his who shall remain nameless (seen as how he's been that to this point).

Gord, hez not sech a bad gyrene you know, ef you like gyrenes, ef you don't then close yer eyes for a while and mebbe hill go away. With Adam A. Aiken. Least ways, Gordie been pickin up some of the speech patterns of his buddy that other guy and he don't say so much at first but Adam he persists—Well, Gordie, well? Off you go, now you're back, wappen? Big space battle? Ja kill any nigras? Ja getta see N'Haiti? Ja getta fuck any nigra broads?—

Gord, hez got that other guy's tendencies now but he don *persist*. —Wuhmm—that was a good answer but now Gord, he gives in, that's iz weakness, he gives in and he sez—Yeh, we went up, yeh the *Jimmie O*, and the rest, we seen some nigra ships, we seen some and we zapped some. They zapped us. Wir back.—

Pretty good, Gordon Lester Wallace III. Not as good as that other fellow would do, but good.

Gord stops walkin and looks at the dirt (some grass too, some grass, not enough to keep a mowing crew busy much of the year but you know how manpower is on a gyrene post, all those guys around to keep busy and not much to do so maybe the topper senzem out to mow the dirt—you get on a dirt-mowing detail you think it's senseless never mind, just mow and keep your mouth quiet about it).

Gord don't say no more right now.

Adam A. Aiken he sez—We make out *bad*, Gord?—

Gord he don't answer but take a look in his face now, look in his eyes they don't look so great.

Now Adam he presses, very very deftly.—Hah?—he sez.

Gord, he sez—It was pretty bad, Adam, I think we lost. Least, we broke off and come home. M now Ole Gene he called in all the friendly planets for that palaver over to Leto. You pull that guard detail too?—

Adam sez yez.

They sprawl up the steps of the NCO Club and smarmily float inside the screen doors, find a table and set down.—Flipia 4 a Stonewall—sez Adam. Out of his grays comes a fine anglo-saxon-blooded hand holding a fifty-boll piece. He flips it in the air, it lands on the table top with a depressing clunk m spins a couple times there, flops over with a boll a cotton m a supered numeral 50 up.

Gordy triziz luck, gets a smiling portrait of some olden time fart iookin up and goes to buy two foamies.

Good many foamies later, Gord m Adam they float smarmily back out through the doors of the NCO Club. One um belches m neither's sure which it was.

Two good purebred sum N'Alabamian spacerine corps nonconditioned officers stumble m clutch at one another back to barracks and into sacks.

Whichever one belched before, t'other one does now so they even. That's good, nobody ahead nobody behind.

Lights off, eyes closed, snores m wheezes m N'Alabama whirls about that old axis.

Clock hands spin.

Alquane zaps brightness through screened stapaglass windows Gordon

needs no waker bettern Alquane. He gets everybody up & eaten their breakfast & back to barracks & spat & polished & into pressed new grays & outside & assembled & lined up & counted off & dressed right & marched around & interposition & reported in.

Captain Cal Koberly commanding, everybody onto the bus & they head down the red rut road, gyros twirlin, into Leto.

Letohatchie Town Hall, meeting place of the interplanetary conference. Wow! Neo-neoclassic architecture, gabled & porticoed, columned & terraced & stepped, & in front a (would you believe this, it's a test) Confederated Worm-morayeel, some old bearded jackass ridin an old hoarse carrying an old flag into some old battle on some old planet who knows where or what for?

N'Alabama spacerines line up making an honor guard, double ranks facing one another (sheee-*eeet* lookit that ugly bassur across from Gord!) all in fine old traditional grays with glistry brass buttons & a crowd of rednecked townies (see that fat old fellow follow a filly fondly facing for a feelup) held back by town po-leese.

Town po-leese, madgin that! White crash helmets m glistry green oneway eyemurrs, chin straps so you can't swipt that old pretty helmet from that old, that pretty po-leese boy. Sideburns m black leather jackets with studs spellin out patriotic mottoes (Rise Agin! No mongrelization! ((That'n barely fits.)) Never! Lawnorder! . . . and other patriotic slogans) silver studs for troopers brass for sarges gold for brass.

Tite pants, real real tite & big shiny boots, flying gloves & billy clubs & cans of insect repellent (or *something*). Why, those boys can't even move without creaking.

Well cops to keep the redneck townies (in their civvies & a large but expectable proportion of plainbutton warsurp grays) off en the gyrenes and the gyrenes to keep whoever in hell offen the backs of the official plenipotentiary ambassadorial representatives of the *friendly* planets.

First delegation rolls up in a siren-howlin jeescout gyrocar, red lights flashin, two-way radio cracklin & that jeescout slews round in the red dirt tween the Worm-morayeel & the Town Hall & the ambassador de-mounts. Hez tall & pale wearn white flannel civvies & a broad-brim planter's hat & he waves t'the gyrenes & the town cops & the redneck townies & he starts up the steps follerd by couple flunkies dressed alike unto him & carryin a

briefcase & some other stuff & scurryin about in his dust & up the steps they start 2.

Halfway up Town Hall doors open & out comes Mayor Milburn Mitchum & a couple *his* flunkies looking summat flustered & Mayor he dances delightingly down the steps & seizes thambassador by the hand & turnin around he links up his arms like he proolly saw someone do it oncet in some ole newsclip & heen thambassador clompin up the ole steps & in the doors & outen sight jes quick enough as the ole jeescout soops off through red dirt dust (don't they never think of them poor honor guards standing there stranglin?) along comes another siren-blastin light-blinkin howler-hootin hooter-howlin jeescout with another ambassador & a couple more flunkies & it just keeps *up* like that, poor honor guards, poor town cops, seemin to be like all *morning* till everybody's there in the Leto Town Hall there near unto the Confederated Worm-morayeel (unless you deciden you wunt *bleeve* that, it's your option, buddy) & then something else happens.

Firstall, Gord & t'other honor guards, they haven seed no sine nor cosine of their *own* pure surn N'Alabamian planetary delegation septin for ole Mayor Milburn Mitchum m *shee-eet* who pays any tendon to *him* anyhow. Muss be they own delegation may been snuck in the back door r summin. Whose there, secastate, secawar, secacom, who knows mayen the Governor hissself (not so as to mention mayn't been some old senator from Talladega or someplace).

Let ole Gord wonder about that, you, now, you just relax & follow along, okay? Come on!

Last official plenipotentiary ambassadorial representative delegation piles outen dust-churnin jeescout gyrocar (see that arready, right?) & marches up steps of Town Hall ambassador arm-narm with Mayor Milburn Mitchum & into the Town Hall & the twin ranks of gray-uniformed shiny-brassed spacerine honor guards starten to peel off from the farthest end two steps forward right angle turn & marchen to the old Letohatchie Town Hall themselves marchin now in a double line splittin at the base of the Confederated Worm-morayeel (maybe it's just a big outdoor garbage bin ef you'd ruther bleeve that) & up the old Town Hall steps to the double doors & some civvy suburbs flunky opennin the doors form & they marchen right into the Hall & into the Great Hall meetin chamber & range theirselves around the room (as rehearsed—you

weren't thar) and standin at pray rest as honor guards (not to mention skeweritty) durin the meeting itsel. Which is very handy for Gordon Lester Wallace III ef he cares to hear what happens at the meeting, which who knows whether he does or not, hes just a spacerine sarge doin his duty as he seen it, right? But maybe hez interested anyhow.

There's a speaker's table in the front & there's a man settin in't & a couple flunkies around him & facing the speaker's table's a bunch of leetle tables & chairs & things like that & every one's got somebody settin in't & they're all buzzin & burbling around & everybody looken pretty grim spitin' a casional laugh hearn there & each leetle table gotten a pitcher ont fulla something & some glasses & there being a big one on the speaker's table & a glass for the fella settin there & some for *his* flunkies & the poor spacerine honor guards standing around the room, *they* dryeran all hell & nobody gives them no drinks but then who's this meeting 4, the meeters or the greeters?

Fat florid-faced fella at the main place he standen up now & he leanin ford close to a amplifier microphone inconspicuous stuck in fronna his place & he sez firstoff—Ahem!—

Or summin like that. Not really *Ahem*, no, but more of a throat-clear m call torder he'da done better rappen a gavel only nobody brought one (a head will roll for that as if an excuse were needed) so he says instead, approximately at least,—Ahem!—

Everybody looken up, & he sayin—Arr, weccum to N'Alabama & weccum t'Leto, a ben Eugene Youngerman, Governor this planet, & am dlited twelcome you.—

Polite hums and humphs.

—A hopen yall ben enjoin the hospitality, traditional surn hospitality, of N'Alabama m this lovely town of Letohatchie, hopen yall found our commodations satisfactory, little presents to your liking, bedmates cozy & friendly and alla that.— Polite humphs and hums.

—Now we got serious business to transact. You all know the glorious past history of our peoples, fine surn traditions & practices of the past. No need to remind you of fine glorious past of our ancestors on O'Earth before the furgem Jewrab takeover.—

(No need but he reminded them for a longish while. Well.) —What we asked everybody here to talk about is this little problem we got with, uh,

them black bassurds, uh, N'Haiti. Now any fool knows a white man can lick a nigra in a fair fight, of course, it's natural. Innate superiority. We all learn that from first grade onward. Even O'Earth sociologists knew that. Pahneers like Audey Shooey, Henny Gart, Jawny Kimball, they knew that the human race was the highest creation of nature and that the purebred white man was the highest form of humanity.

—Now we got this little problem going with N'Haiti, & I can well imagine how some of you—Ole Guv Youngerman, he looken around to see who's pain attention & who's more intersted in studyin his fingernails—how some of you—Ole Guv resumes—matt wonder how come we can't smash them nigra brutes with proven superiority of our kind.—

He stops for a smallish swig (depending on your measuring cup of course) of that nice fluid from the jug, looks around, ambassador from N'Missa seems to be asleep, ambassadors from N'Transvaal plane some kind of under-the-table hands-game with the ambassador from N'Maddoxia, ambassador from N'Eensmyth maybe pain attention or maybe just staring abstruccionously ahead. Ole Guv, he shaken a mane of white hair (worth many a vote, that, long hair bein okay if it's white one might guess) an resumes (or might we say reresumes):

—Way, lookitit like so: now no one would argue that a man in't superior to a varmint, whetherts a snarlin mean cuayo-peen biggerna plow-horse or a teeny varse. But a cuayo-peen, he gettin a man outen the open, he'll rip him up but good with his tushes & his spines. Or a varse, you get some varse *inside* you, you might be a goner too. That don't make no cuayo-peen nor no varse the equal of a man, but an inferior order a creation can be given special parz to overcome a superior order a creation.

—Now these nigras, you know no nigra never made nothing worthwhile in all of history, not on O'Earth, no, old Jawny proved that sentries ago, nor noplac else neither. Just nature's mistake, tryin out ideas, how to make something superior to the beasts of the field, old nature messed up once with the black man then got it right on the second try.

—But nigras, they got a natural instinct to kill & destroy, and I'll be perfectly frank with yall,—Ole Guv, he looken almost fit to cry now—we taken a thorough *whompin* in this war, and unless yall willing to see a sovereign planet of your own flesh and blood, a world of pureblooded surn white manhood, taken a whipping from a bunch of flat-nosed woolly-haired black nigra *savages* . . .—

Ole Guv, he flailin his hands now but he still in control & he pauses dramatically to let that last word sink in,— . . . yall *have* to give us some help. Now that's all there is to it.—

That's no shit, that's his bit, he done spoke and a down he sit.

Well how long you want hang around some dumb-ass diplomatic conference listening to speeches? You can guess what happenin after that. Alla them ole ambassadors, they expressin sympathy for the sacred blood cause of the independent planet of N'Alabama, maken speeches all day long about solidarity and Them Nigras Cain't Be Permitted to Get Away with It.

But the ambassador from N'Missa, he say (summat sheepishlike)—Yall know we with you one hunnerd per cent, Gene, but we get most of our heavy machine tools from N'Ghana. *They* stain outen this war, *we* stain outen it & we get along fine, but if *we* gettin inter it, then *they* gettin inter it, *you* no better off as before and *we* in bad trouble.—He go on like that for quite a while, but you gettin the message by now no doubt.

Ambassador from N'Transvaal, he rise in place, teetern a bit (that jug in front on his table been pretty down by now) and he say summin like this:—You cause is one of destiny, Governor Youngerman, and the white sum-blooded people of your planet have the unquestioning and unlimited support of the white bore-blooded people of N'Transvaal. As you know we haven a little problem of our own in gettin on with N'Kaffirstan. Now nothin we can't handle ourselves, understand. Ole Chaka CVII he a markable smart man for a nigra & we get along all right. And you know ole N'Kaffirstan, they happen to have the biggest & fastest space fleet in the entire N'Afrikaans sector.

—But I'll tell you the honest truth, Governor Youngerman, wud really rather not tread on ole Chaka's sensitive toes. Besides, now, we haven full faith and confidence in the ability of N'Alabama, proud, free m white as she is, to hole her banner unstained & her purity unmixed.

—A thank you.—And he sitten down and everybody kind of looken at him and applaud a teeny bit, and then looken at Ole Gene Youngerman and blushen a teeny bit and then the room getten to be pretty quiet once again.

Ole Gene, he don't give up but all he gets from anybody is expressions of solidarity (how much JD sippin quality will *that* buy you?) & maybe a

half-headed pledge of some financial credits, which are nice but that's not what Gene was really tryen 4.

Well they marchen back out past the Confederated Worm-Morayeel (or garbage bin, whichever you prefer to believe ... if you don't like either, how about a bicycle rack?) & gettin back into their jeescout gyrocars & Gord-3 & the rest of the gray-uniformed brass-buttoned spat & polished up honor guards, including their commander Captain Cal Koberly (soon to be lieutenant) and GLW's pal Adam Aiken, they marchen back to Fort Sealy Mae bus & out to the fort & take the night off boys.

Gordon Lester Wallace III m Adam A. Aiken stain grays, they two bentfin boomers burnished, Gord haven a new hotspot on his boomer courtesy *James O. Eastland's* recent (albeit unhappy) encounter with nigra spacefleet; they climb into Gord's gyro & head down that beloved ole red rut road to Leto, past familiar places, seen familiar faces, parken in the street where the elite meet feat (or EAT, that's near the B A R the longer-recollected set will recall). Gord puts a chumly arm around A. A. Aiken's gray-covered shoulders m takes him up that certain staircase & they get t'the dirtyfrested doorway Gord winks conspiratorily at Adam & goes: *:a-rap-a-tap-tap, a-rap-a-tap-tap, tap-tatty-rap-rap, rappy-tappy-tap*: :or something like that. Anyway, it don't really matter none because nothing happens. He repeats the tarradiddle-de-de survural thymes, summat as he recalls his "erstwhile guru" (heh!) and friend, our ole sarge, having done, but is it a false recollection? Is it some smuggled half-bole dreadful Gord read behind the barn manly years ago rising t'cloud his mind with memories of unoccurred experiences? Leave us not spectorate on that subject too much.

Adam doubting, Gordon Lester he attempts to laugh it all off, maken a fist and on the wooden frame of the door pounden: *:ker-whumph*: (twicet)

:m footsteps inside, door opening a crack (chained) m thoo the crack peeren out a face, not holy unfamiliar, fat, cornsilky colored hair pasted flat to forehead wid perspiration, huffin in his plainbutton warsurp sweat-stained grays,—What can I do to be of service to you two obviously fine gentle, uh,—his eyes flicker down Gord, across at shuhite, up Adam A., lite on A's face, smiles, cuts horizontally to Gordon's mug, m he completes syncopated word—men?—

Gord speaking:—Wanna show my buddy here your fine floor show, haven't seen Miss Merriass Markham in a long while, off in space fighten

nigras, now I'm back . . .—Gord does rattle.

Blond feller:—I'm really sorry, sir, I don't know you and this is a private club.—

Gord:—Whadaya, etc.—

BF: (in essence)—Amscray before I call the uzzfay, oysbay!—

Adam A. Aiken: (not in these words)—Let's blow, Gord.—

Gord gives assent grumpily & down the creakies they creak.

Adam:—Howzabout a visita Piggy Peggy's Pussy Parlor, GL?—

So they do, picking respective ways through crapped-up broken sidewalk & crossen rotten busted streets beneath busted streetlights (Letohatchie has *not* been bombed). Outsiden the good ole 4P Gord sees that same ole Letohatchie town John Darn plain with his can of insect repellent (or whatever), leaning as usual against a (n even nonfunctional) lamppost.

Inside, G&A are greeted by Piggy herself in finest old tradition of sum hospitality.

—Mighty busy night, boys, alla these visiting firemen in town for the big meet over ta Town Hall,—Peggy sayen, fixin her little-girl blonde curls (they been slippin all around her face as she talks, noddin her head continually)—but we aim to please. What's your pleasure, boys or girls, S or M, plain or fancy, twosomes or whosomes, now or later, lesser or greater, front or back, top or bottom, bed or board, anal oral or genital, thin or fat, this or that, etc.—

(Peggy, she always tries to provide her customers with what they want, that's her formula for a successful retail enterprise.)

Gord, aside to Ad—Leave this to me, Ad.—To Piggy Peggy:—Just a dark room, PP, a soft floor, open the door & a pleasant surprise.—

Gord & Adam shortly lyen side-by-side, stark naked & all up for excitement (assisting one another in the preparations). Lights low, door opens slow, in comes someone maken a show.

She's a biggish lady, you bet; Gordon Lester's eyes at the moment are somewhat shut but he hears appreciative noises from Adam; Adam he says —Willya lookit that, Gordon.—But Gordon bein capable of delayen gratification he squeezesis eyes shut m says—I wanna feel it first.—

Gordon waits in his homemade darkwomb & in a minute he feels something very surprising doing something very surprising someplace very surprising. He sayen something very original like (these are not his precise words)—What the fucken shitmother's going *on* here?—

From Adam Aiken an unexpected bit of inarticulation.

Gordon opens his eyes and speaks with shock:—Miss Markham!—

All hell breaks loose in which Gordon Lester Wallace III, Miss Merriass Markham, Adam A. Aiken, and one or more surprising objects are variously tangled & tied, conjected complected & connected, interspersed interjected & interspected, banged balled blowed & throwed, socked cocked & knocked, rolled cold & holed, dabbed grabbed & jabbed, permutated germutated & spermutated, dipped tipped crippled & whipped.

But no details. If you think this is a story off over which to get your rocks you're mistook.

Anyway, in the morning Gordon puts in for space duty again.

7. To the Nation We Know

Marius Goncourt personally verified the completeness of each conference kit shortly before the arrival of the first invited participant. Each had the usual lined pad and short pencil, the conference folder, the report of the preliminary taskforce on the experimental manpower resuscitation project, the meeting agenda and the departmental chit good for one free meal at the ministry executive cafeteria. Seating was carefully arranged, nameplates present at each place, refreshments at hand.

After checking arrangements Marius waited in the hallway for the early participants. The first to arrive was Mme. Laveau. Goncourt greeted her, then asked a question: "Your superiors at Propaganda are willing to see this through? No last-moment hesitation?" Madame nodded.

Goncourt continued: "As long as it's just talk, they like to sound creative, aggressive, open to new ideas, radical thinking, but when it comes down to committing to action, you know how they are. Suddenly they go with the tried and true."

"Bureaucrats," Mme. Laveau said. Goncourt nodded.

"Then what are we?" Madame asked.

Goncourt grinned ruefully, took her arm to guide her into the conference room. "Of course, of course," he said. "But N'Haiti is starting to fall apart. If some plan doesn't get us past this manpower crisis the *blancs* will be in N'Porprince within 18 months!"

"What makes you think they are any better off than we?"

"Perhaps they aren't," he agreed. "But then, shall we fight the N'Alabamians until both planets collapse from sheer exhaustion? Be assured, Mme. Laveau, I lose no sleep worrying over the fate of the poor enemy, but I also take no comfort from envisioning N'Porprince and N'Montgomery equally in ruins, both planets decimated, both worlds in chaos, unable to raise and distribute food even, for inability to put workers where they are needed.

"A modern planetary society is a complex and delicate structure. You cannot just remove a few pieces and say, 'Well, most of it is still there, it should keep running nearly as well as it has.' That won't work. Take away too many of the skilled people who make the economy, the government, the law continue to function, and the whole thing won't just slow down a little or go a little out of kilter.

"We're pressing our luck now, both we and the *blancs*—they *are* human beings, you know. We have to get this thing cleaned up and return our attention to developing our planet and its trade and cultural relationships with others, or we're going to find ourselves back in some kind of hunting and gathering society. Well, maybe not quite that bad but . . ." he permitted his voice to trail off.

"I know all that, Marius," Mme. Laveau said. "Whose side do you think I'm on? It's just that resuscitation is such a radical solution, it's hard for people to accept. And our plan for selling it is even more radical. But ... as you say, we are approaching a state of affairs where only a radical solution can save us. I think it can work, I have the backing of my Ministry, and if we can get through this committee, we're in business."

"The man who invented committees," Goncourt said, "should have been contraceived."

As he spoke the remaining participants in the meeting arrived:

Goncourt's own deputy for Exoneurobiology, Trudeau; representing Grand Admiral Gouede Mazacca, Captain J. P. Girard; from the office of Governor Faustin of La Gonave, Deputy Governor Laurence.

At last, Jean-Jacques Adolphe Antoine-Simone, Minister of Military Manpower Procurement. Short, balding, round-faced, huffing as he strode to the front of the room self-importantly.

All rose. M. the Minister gestured them to be seated once again. He spoke: "Madame, gentlemen—you are all aware of the problem. Captain Girard can tell us how badly the space fleet of N'Haiti is in need of additional men. Space warfare produces casualties in alarming numbers. For obvious reasons we cannot rob the munitions industries of workers to meet the military needs, so farmers are drawn away. Now M. Laurence can tell us that La Gonave is stripped to the bone. Agriculture on N'Haiti itself is equally as bad off.

"M. Goncourt tells me that Doctor Trudeau and his people in exoneurobiology have devised a method of reviving space casualties and returning them to duty. Now I am only a simple man, a simple servant of the government and the people of N'Haiti, but even I can see that such a program, if it is successful, will still have very serious overtones in the area of, ah, let us say public relations. So I have asked M. Goncourt to work with the Ministry of Propaganda to prepare a strategy for gaining public acceptance of this use of, ah, let us say reanimated corpses. Goncourt?" He waved a hand at his deputy and seated himself.

Marius said only, "Madame Laveau has represented Propaganda in this project. I will let her present our plan."

The five men followed with their eyes as Mme. Laveau walked to the front of the room. She looked about, smiled slightly as her eyes locked with those of Goncourt. Then she began to speak, at first hesitantly, then less so as she worked into her presentation.

"We have all seen the remarkable work of M. Trudeau and his staff. Although his first subjects were only crudely animated, later experimental resuscitees have proved capable of performing routine military and industrial duties under supervision of normal persons. A certain percentage of space casualties, we have found, can be returned to useful assignments by the application of M. Trudeau's implantation procedure. A far larger number can be reclaimed by the application of salvage

techniques.

"Our surgeons have long held that there is no reason for an otherwise healthy person to expire when the implantation of an artificial organ or the transplantation of a natural one to replace a single nonfunctional organ could return him to health. We have now applied this principle more radically. Providing only that the size and general tissue structure matches, and with the application of anti-rejection techniques, we can take extremities, trunk, head, internal organs, from any number of casualties, recombine them, implant one of the NGC 7007 organisms—and have an effective soldier or worker. These resuscitated individuals—" she stopped as Laurence interrupted her sentence with a single word:

"Zombies!"

"Yes," Madame Laveau resumed. "Zombies. Sooner or later everyone associated with this project comes to that. Zombies. And that is our problem in public relations. Will N'Haitians accept this seeming return to O'Earthian primitivism? My Ministry has studied this question, and we have reached conclusions in three areas, leading to a proposed course of action.

"First, we must consider the reaction of our own general citizenry. The war is less than overwhelmingly popular as it is, and a major program which was rejected by the public would place the government in an untenable position.

"Second, the reaction of the workers and military personnel who will be in regular contact with the resuscitees. Because the subjects seem to manifest no will or personalities of their own, we have concluded that it would be best to isolate them into units of their own—field crews, industrial work gangs, even complete space ship crews, with only normal humans as supervisors. The latter will of course have to be selected for special psychological makeups facilitating this type of assignment.

"Third, the effect on the enemy. This is probably the most difficult aspect of the problem to consider, and yet potentially the most significant. If the enemy regards this program as evidence of desperation on our part, it will only encourage his war effort. But we believe that if we approach the resuscitation program from the right direction we can actually convert it into an effective psychological warfare weapon."

Madame paused. From his chair Minister Antoine-Simone, squirming with eagerness, called out, "Zombies, yes! Tell them the plan!"

Mme. Laveau gestured placatingly. "Very well," she said. "Yes, after long consideration we believe that this aspect of the procedure should be neither denied outright nor downplayed, but should be the main focus of our entire publicity campaign regarding resuscitees. We propose the full-scale revival of the O'Earth traditions of *vodu*, with public ceremonies emphasized, to gain support for the program as an authentic Haitian tactic. Further, we propose to broadcast information on the resuscitations—omitting, of course, clinical data of potential value to the enemy. We contend that this will make the space ships manned by resuscitee crews, which will carry special markings to make them visible to the enemy, objects of such terror that there will be a significant advantage to our forces."

M. Antoine-Simone said, "You think there will be full acceptance of this, Madame? Intellectuals, philosophers, the religious minority . . . they will all go along with this?"

"Perhaps not without difficulty, but all can be convinced. The intellectuals are aware that our war with N'Alabama is of the enemy's making, not of ours, that we are at war for our survival. They and the philosophers support the war, except for the total pacifists, who are opposed to it anyway, so their attitude toward the resuscitation program does not matter. We plan to emphasize the cultural and nationalistic aspects of *vodu*, the ties to O'Haiti. This should gain us their support as well.

"As for the religious, the problem may be more severe, but we must again emphasize the cultural ties to our O'Earth heritage. We may have to permit a few trappings of other mythologies to be grafted onto our *vodu* rites, but my ministry's researchers assure me that in the historic practice of *vodu* there was a cross-mythologic flow anyway. The old *vodu* cult was based on a pantheon of nature gods originally found in a country called Senegal on O'Earth.

"*Blanc* slavers raided Senegal and its surrounding states to capture workers, and transported them to the nation we know as O'Haiti, our ancestral home. The slaves wished to retain their religion but to fool their masters they adopted some of the forms of the slavers' religion, and grafted them onto their own rites. So you see—" she paused and looked

about the room like a lecturer making a point in an undergraduate class "—*vodu* was a mix from the start, and we can use the same tactic as the O'Haitians to make *vodu* live again, serve again as the tool and focus of our national struggle against the descendants of the Christian slavers."

Circling the green luminary NGC 7007 deep in God's tri-di toy (called "The Universe" by the clerk down to Plenum's Fine Toy Emporium where God's fat old Uncle Dudley bought the thing for his sometimes bratty nephew), several pieces of junk. Dirt, slime, plasm and protoplasm, assorted fluids and gases and the rest of the crap God built with his tri-di toy. (Boy, did mama and papa let fat old Uncle Dudley have it after he gave their kid *that* little present ... in the privacy of their connubial slime-vat, of course.)

One of those hunks of crap, remember, the shiny one. Ahh, N'Yu-Atlanchi. Or so its first human inhabitants had called it when they found the place a while ago. Of course their descendants don't remember that. They don't even remember their names, either singly or as a race. God does, though. Hey, otherwise who could have told you that Ch'en-Tch'aa-Zch'uwn, that was her name?

Blessing be upon thee, Uncle Dudley.

Circling *that* piece of crap (the shiny one where the S'tschai live) two more. On the lesser one, something metallic stands, complex, involuted, circuitously formed within, lands and grooves of micromolecular thickness woven into patterns of incomprehensible function, power inputs ready to accept any available energy source, radiant, material, nucleic, chemic kinetic, telepathic, monatomic relays awaiting their signal to perform tiny tricks, flip-flops ready to flip (or flop), storage arrays in order, functional capacitances at the ready, with only a crimp here, a gap there to show that something not intended had once happened to the metallic something. Daily the metallic something is bombarded by (on the average) maybe four or a thousand cosmic rays, no or some micro-meteoroids, some light, a spectrum of other radiation; it is pulled and pushed (simultaneously) by tidal gravitation; blown (when facing in the right direction) by solar wind; and maintained, as a figment of the imagination of old Uncle Dudley's pet

nephew.

Moving in a complex orbital dance with that piece of crap is a similar but larger one. Large enough to retain an atmosphere of sorts. Once it too had a magical mystery machine on its surface but you know you pay a price. Take the air for a while (fifteen pico-seconds or some aeons, what's the difference?) and all that nice shiny metal turns to red dust. Ah me, and so it has.

But in that atmosphere walks our old friend from the N'Haitian Ministry of Military Manpower Procurement, Phillipe. Now chief clerk, reclamation section, S'tschai harvest project, planet of N'Yu-Atlanchi, NGC 7007. Office of the chief clerk is located on the greater moon of N'Yu-Atlanchi. The planet, fer Dudley's sake, would be too *wet* for a comfy working space.

Phillipe checks his weekly report to the Ministry back on N'Haiti, thinking, Oh, why did I ever leave beautiful downtown N'Porprince? Actually he left because his boss told him he was leaving. That's life in the ministry. But he got a better job code out of it, so it wasn't a total loss.

The weekly report indicates the continuing high yield of S'tschai is holding up. Apparently the All-Mother (although Phillipe has never met the, uh, "lady" himself) has some kind of built-in mechanism for increasing her own production rate to meet the ecological balance required by the planetary chemistry of N'Yu-Atlanchi. Somebody comes along and harvests a few thousand S'tschai a week, All-Mother just gears up a little more, produces a few thousand more S'tschai a week, balances her little family neatly.

Phillipe and his superiors know enough not to push the All-Mother too hard. That would be killing the goose that lays the golden egg, if you'll just take your superelectronic stylo and go back and change a few nouns and verbs around.

Phillipe is far from overjoyed with this assignment, but it's all right. For the war effort, you know. Only temporary.

8. Aboard the Starshlp Jimmie-O

An NCO's bunk in a N'Ala starship is bigger than a breadbox, smaller

than a phone booth (laid on end), shaped a little bit like a condom for a giant about 70 feet tall with a teeny-weeny baby bonnet attached to the open (or "non-business") end. You slide into it (if you're an NCO aboard a N'Ala starship) as if your feet were the head of said 70-foot-tall giant's dork and your head its base; then you put on your teeny-weeny baby bonnet.

This is all worked out because gravity is a variable rather than a constant in a starship. No matter how you mounted that bunk, sometimes it would hang you like a hammock, sometimes like a salami in a kosher delicatessen back on O'Earth. (You'd be surprised how many of those there are in these days of the furgem Jewrab hegemony, Yitzak ben El-Makesh, prexy.) Sometimes "up" is relative to the head of the starship, sometimes to its tail, sometimes to its longitudinal axis and sometimes to its skin.

Sometimes it's in free-fall. Those bunks work regardless.

Gordon Lester Wallace kept his three V's and top-rocker when he gave up shore duty and went back on board the *James O. Eastland* with the spacerine detachment, but he lost his position—no squad leaders were needed and he wound up assistant squad leader in Lt. Jimmie Rainie's platoon, working for Sarge Bo Fallen. It wasn't a bad squad or a bad platoon, and what the hell, gyrene casualties do tend to get a bit heavy so there was a good chance that there'd be an opening for an experienced squad leader one of these days.

Mean, not that Gloowoo *wanted* to see Bo dead. Hale, a leetle wound would do it, providing it wasn't *too* leetle. Bo out of action for a while, Gord would be squad leader again, then when Bo came back from sick bay *he'd* be out of work! That was the way to do it.

There hung Gord sumpin up in the sack (bonnet tied neatly neathiz chin) merrily dreaming away of some nifty N'Alabama baby (Miss Merri-ass Markham perhaps or then again perhaps not) not too many hours outen Fort Sealy Mae Spaceport, chowed down, settled round, gear stowed, weapons checked out, checked in with CO, leader Bo, ship's records, chaplain, quartermaster, company clerk & a necessary minimal few others, happily snoring up a storm much to annoyance of a few early risers (?) when an eyeball-smiting beam filled the gyrene embunkment where he was embunked and poor old Gord he flinched away, eyelids squeezing together trine to make that light stop only it wouldn't and then a let's call it sound started & worked its way up into his ears from a point

so low he more felt it in his teeth (danged back molars needed some dental attention but the N'Ala spacerines were a mought short of dental talent these days) vibrating his whole danged skull & working its way up into his crany danged um and shaken the whole thing until he felt almost as if the whole banging noise was pouring *out* of his ears instead of in and he shook his head nearly like a dragonfly nicking sideways through some summery sunlit air and even in that tied-on teeny-weeny baby bonnet he somehow managed to whomp hissself upside the haid on some kinder stanchion or beam anna *wham* he donged hissself unpleasantly, clicked his teeth, flung defiantly wide those previously tight-clenched eyelids staring into the damned ultra-blue reveille light and mumbled unintelligibly something to the effect that tough is tough but you'd think they'd find some gentler way of waking the spacerine detachment aboard the goddam *James O. Eastland* when it was time for chow in the goddam standard ship's time morning.

After chow they had a shape-up in the troop-marshaling area and the detachment commander, Colonel-General "Pissfire" Pallbox, addressed the men.

—Umen—Colonel General "Pissfire" Pallbox (his real first name was not spoken allowed in the N'Alabama spacerines, you can bet your *ss)
—Umen— (being somewhat repetitious)—are the finest fighting force in the N'Alabama spacerines.—

Up went bajeesus & saintgeorge a loud cheer.

—M the N'Alabama spacerines bein the finest fightin force in the en dammit tire planetary military establish fuckin ment—He spit on the deck. Some swabby wone like that!

(Prolonged & stormy applause.)

—M the N'Alabama planetary military establish fuckin ment—his voice rising—being the finest fightin force among the pure sum white planets under God & His Son Jesus George Christ!—

—Yay!—everybody said to that, loud & with enthusiasm.

—M the pure sum white planets—ole Pissfire hollern rantin now, snappin his official spacerine issue galluses m turnin from side to side—bein the toughest, meanest, wild-spit-in-the-eye-&-kick-em-hi-the-nuts bunch of ball-barren *men* in the entire furgem galaxy!—He jumped up & down with a red face &

shoutin.

All the spacerines likewise.

Gord, he like to piss his pants when he heard that speech. That old Piss-fire, now there was a leader bajeez, none of this weakwater and julep-jippin wheezes like you got from Milburn Mitchum or Eugene Youngerman or them other pansy-assed parlor ticians. Gord, he just stood there hoping to hear more.

Pissfire, he said—Now these here swabbies—and he paused for reaction, being a man who knew how to play to an audience, even of enlisted men—now these here swabbies, they got a certain technical competence, we gotta hand them that much.—he said, then paused again while a titter (pardon) swept the ranks.

—An ole Admiral Yancy Moorman, he tellin me this morning that these swabbies spotted some blips on their lookin glasses. Now some of them blips, we know what they are. I can tell you men now—he leanin forrard conspiracarily & emphasizin that word now—that we haven a general fleet mobilization & rendezvous today, m we been plannin, right, we been plannin what we all been trainin for m hopin for for all these years, we going to land on goddam N'Haiti m teach the nigra papadocs oncet m frail they *place!*—

Spacerines cheerin an whoopin an huggin each the other (sometimes with a leetle more hug than you might think for spacerines, but what the hell, they wuz a long way from Leto) when they hear *that*, you can bet your sweet a*s. But then Colonel General "Pissfire" Pallbox, he had summin else to add:

—But those *other* blips ole Yancy's boys seen—he let that *other* sink in a little bit—those *other* blips, they a bit farther off, m they straight on ahead, m unless ole Yance, he fooled mightily, he says he thinks they bein the N'Haitian damned space fleet! Now you men, you know what that means. —He stoppen & looken around once more.

—You know what that means! We can't go pissin away our military cream on their bap-a-lousy two-bit crummy planet m let their cruvvelin damned forces have a free pass at our sacred homes! Nossir! No cruvvelin black animan nigra goin lay one filthy paw on some innocent defenseless little golden curly-headed sum baby while Pissfire Pallbox draws breath. Are you with me?—

Oh, he played a audience well. They been howlin yet if he didn't raise his hand for quiet.

—Oak hay, men—Pissfire wrapped it up—we goin rendezvous as planned, but then we goin head straight at them cruvvelin black papadocs m smash the daylights out of that bunch of floating tin they call a space fleet. Before another sun sets—(he was talken meta damn phorically you realize of course, out there in the big glittery dark)—ole Goody Mazaccy'll wish he been a waiter or summon else a nigra's fit to be, an not play-act at bein a admiral.—

He finished up his speech & walked off & the lesser brass took over & made speeches & then the damned company grade officers took over & *they* made speeches & finally the NCO's took charge & got everybody to fixing up their packs & spacesuits & practicing battle stations & calling out raider detachments & boarding parties & making sure they had their weapons at hand & ready to go & ammunition supplies okay & the chaplain went around & prayed over everybody & gave em all a tweak below the belt & finally everybody had chow again & grabbed a little sack time cause you never know when you'll get a chance once a battle starts.

By late afternoon (according to standard ship time, you can never tell in space of course except on a civil liner where they keep dark & light hours but on a military ship it's light all the time & ready to go) Gord was "up" again, everybody was giving his lase-axe a final cleaning, everybody was talking in a kind of nervous undertone & Gord kind of quietly drifted off (one of the advantages of being a 3V & rocker without the responsibility of command) & headed for a window hoping to see the fleet rendezvous (he was still that much of a boy at heart & loved to watch space ships land & take off & all that stuff) & kind of hoping that the swabbies would be trying out their holo projectors in preparation for fooling the poor stupid apes in the impending battle & at the same time wondering if he'd be fooled himself & not be able to tell the projos from the rest of the real fleet. Well, one thing for sure, if he saw another goddam *James O. Eastland*, agonized matter exhaust pouring out her asshole & red lase streaming out her slit & gun ports zapping & bapping, at least he'd know that *that* was a projo, that was for sure.

Found himself a nice window, part of a big old gun blister right there in *Jimmie O's* flank. Gun crew'd been there & everything was all clean m polished nice the emplacement was a big ole bapper, Gord figgered it for a

60 megapower go-go mounted right there to the deck & emplaced into the blister for better sighting & maneuverability, plugged in & charged up & ready to go when the whistle blow. Gun crew must all been in their bag-m-bonnets trynta grab a last nap m only one guard was left at the blister, nice chubby blond boy with a perspirey complexion & a tendency for his hair to get plastered onto his forehead name of Leander Laptip.

Gord he walked up m Leander said—See them points Gord?—m Gord nodded m grunted m Leander said—Ain't stars.—m Gord made a kind of grumpy noise m Leander said—They *ours* Gord!—

Gord he crawled into the blister with Spacerine Corporal Leander Lap-tip brushing maybe not nearer than necessary to get past and get a good look at those points and he said, full of patriotic fervor and enthusiasm —You right, Leander, they our fleet oak hay.—

Arms around each other and holding mutually onto that 60 megapower all shined up & ready for action go-go bapper for steadiness there in the stapaglassene blister & their heads close together four wondering eyes perceived the assembly (weren't they lucky to be on the right side of the *James O. Eastland!*) of the en just about tire N'Alabama military space defense force, swabbies & gyrenes alike.

How many ships? Gord, Leander they tried pointing out & keeping count, calling out names when they knew em m types when they didn't know names: sleek m speedy hit-m-runners darting ahead, destroyers, bigger, heavier armed but still light m maneuverable, tenders, communication ships, supply ships built like giant plasmetal balls:

:m sister ships of the *James O. Eastland*, giant elongated shafts bearing instrument rings m command modules at their heads, giant fuel balls at their bases: *Orval Faubus*, *Theodore H. Bilbo*, *Lester Maddox*. Gord picked out *Voerward*. Leander picked out *Goebbels*.

Forming up, forming up, commo beams crackling almost audibly, data sensors humming, circuits m generators throbbing, troops preparing for the battle to come: *Long*, *Lee*, *Davis*, *Perez*, on they came. The pod-bearing *States Rights*, her bulging belly packed with daughter ships ready to spring into battle, gnats that would spread havoc among the enemy fleet. The space ram *Jackson*, N'Alabama's weapon of last resort, a space-flying shaft of almost solid plasmetal, crew quarters buried deep inside macrometers of padding m protection, if all else failed, lasing m

zapping m bapping, *Jackson* could smash, headfirst, into any enemy ship, nothing in space could survive that impact m the *Jackson's* crew padded m strapped inside there would just wait for a retrieval team if they could make it outside themselves, m the flagship of the N'Alabama fleet, pride of a planet, painted pure glistry white with a giant portrait six decks high m a hundred meters long:

:*Lurleen McQueen*, flying out of N'Montgomery spaceport, proud m pure m altogether sure, bearing the finest of the finest, armed to the hilt, surrounded by a swarm of tenders almost audibly buzzing m bounding at her every move. Oh, that ship she was proud of her ass! —What you think that ship cost, Gord?—asked Leander. Gord looked, shrugged (nibbing up a little bit on Leander as he done so, but unavoidably let's be quick to note) m didn't say nothing. —What you think this *fleet* cost?—asked Leander.

Gord took his free hand off the go-go bapper for a moment m rubbed his head, then he said—Dunno. Must be close on three thousand ships here, big ole battlebottoms down to those little pizmaiers zoopin around out there. Them damn parlor ticians planetside (he liked to pick up space talk when he got off the ground, being a boy at heart) surely know how to squeeze the ole taxes out of us, but they hardly do nothing with all the money but build ships, buy zappers m bappers, train soldiers m the like, for about as long as I can remember. Lemme see now . . .—he got deep in thought but didn't get through it cause the ship rocked: *:kerwhup!:*

: alike to send him m Leander sprawling m struggling if they didn't have a good secure grip on the bapper m onto one the other. Then they heard a ship's siren sounding m in a minute ole Admiral Moorman's voice a-whipping through the ship's voice system:

:—Moorman here tention crew stations medially furgem papadocs clearly got some kind of longer range weapons as we calculated still beyond pickup gear but they gotta be northeast quadrant between 30, 34 degrees, holos *on*, gunners ready m I turn command over to section CO's.—:

:m off he goes m there's bumping m bitching sounds m voices, noises, thumps m sommon sounding like a *urrkh!* m a familiar voice coming on:
:—Pallbox here listen all spacerines we gettin moren we an fuckin ticipated soonern we ex hubbadubba pected everybody to assembly areas goddam *now* by ee-vee-ay detachments we gonna augment firepower ex

shittin ternally till the nigras get close m then we gonna go across m take the furgemothers assail!—

He shudden up, voice system crackled a couple-three times m shudden off, feet pounding, whistles sounding, people shouting, Leander he yell at Gordon—My crew coming now m you gotta go ole buddy.—he given G. Lester one sweet tonguing m away Gilwoo swooped coming round a corner passed Leander Laptip's gun squad pounding down the plasmetal corridor m Gordon Lester he making his way at top speed past his condbunk picken his pack m on his way fastern you can say Jackie Robinson m he going so furgem fast m he so sucken scared he don't know whether he mess his pants or just let a little nervous gas but he knows it smells bad in that sealed-suit but he's in place for a quick tense countoff.

Lt. Jimmie Ramie he's zoopin around in front checking who's there (everybody is) m all the squad leaders are dancing up & down making sure everybody's got his equipment, no use being present if you don't have your gear right, weapons ready, sealed-suit proper; everybody's okay though spacerine drill being what it is they've been through this beau coup times in barracks on drill field in the boondocks bivouaced away from camp and you can bet every time they ever hit black deep space. *:kerwhup!:*

:that ship gives another shake, gyrenes jarred but everybody keeps his feet Lt. Rainie he hollers, his voice comes out crackly-plasmetally in everybody headphones—You all oak hay? Stand fast men!— They do.

Ship starts to buckle across her beam, ole *James O.* being in bad trouble, in perilous shape and those poor white boys they haven't even *seen* no black-as* papadoc ships yet but now everybody standing in unsteady slowly liltin ranks wobbling m wavering as gravity slips around up goes down m heavy-light swapping around m only grabboots holding those gyrenes steady to the deck but leaning m swaying m Gordon Lester Wallace the one two three he looks up m:

:Great Balls of Fire!:

:the core dinged ceiling/wall/hull utha ship's got a rent in her up there thirty feet above his wondering head half a football diamond long m nearly as wide m on the other side of it up/down/out there [Gord he feel like he falling/flying/swooping out/up/down into that hole/flat black pool/sky/plane m he swooping in circles his head wobbling on his suddenly rubbery neck m his stomach sending up sour warnings of the

taste of things to come meanwhile churning/burning inside m a humming in his ear (phone)s as Lt. Ramie's voice hollering (to be continued)]:

:gigant shapes huge glistry another *Jimmie O.* beside the *James O.* beside a ghosty wavery *Eastland* behind a bigabigabiga battlewagon oozy fat letters honor prow proclaiming *James O. Eastland* uptop a glowing gleaming phanty *J. O. Eastland* surrounded by a clustra *James James James O.O.O. EastlandEastlandEastland* some solid some lucent m beyond Gord can see a *Bilbo*, another, another, waving, dancing, bapping m zapping away m *Longs* m *Lees* m *Faubuses* m *Maddoxes* m one *Lurleen*, two, three, wheel m:

:faway, faway, way way past the holos visible at last the shiteaten N'Haitian nigra fleet:

ships m ships m ships

ships m ships m ships

ships m ships m ships

ships m ships m ships

firing, firing

swooping m dodging

rays, missiles, rams, coming from the nigras' ships, coming from the N'Ala ships,

noises in the headphones, sum um words, sum um not, loud m *Creesa-cappery* screaming m now a break, now a second unscreaming m now coming across the headphones Lt. Jimmie Rainie's (continued now!) voice —You gyrenes, you sum men, nowsa time, on the hull, weapons up, now, now, up, lezgo!—in command still, Gord he's trained, he obeys, kicking his grabboots, shloop! off the deck, up, outen that hole, ee-vee-ay time, out/ up/down onto/into black deep/flat swoop/tumble m a quick spin, most a mini-orbit m clank! splank! onto the hull, onya belly, look up, through holos (*you men bin trained!*) m a one-man lase-axe ready to augment ship's firepower, looking up at nigra ships, *Creeso!* how many they must have holos too but even so how many they must have us five-to-four, four-to-three, three-to-two m now the two fleets they intermingling m:

:zapper m bapper fire crossing, singing m zinging, singeing m twinge-ing the ether itself, lighting streaks red, yellow, orange, glaring

magenta, blood colors, flesh colors, missiles barreling by, striking wsships, *them*-ships, silent glarey detonations, impact demolishments m:

:*kerwhup!*:

:the *Eastland* took another shot someplace Gord didn't see where only felt the whole sucken hull buck m thud beneath him m just as she settled down a might Gordon he readying his lase-axe once more there's the most incredible:

:B-L-O-O-M-I-N-G:

:as the *Lurleen McQueen* she musta taken a direct full-force blow right to the vitals m she goes *splowen* in all directions, plumes of fumes m chunks of guts m hull m hardware, guns m control gear, power plants m fuel supplies (that lady she had the biggest damn balls in the whole furgem fleet packed *full* of agonized matter!), sealed-suited spacerines blown out, twirling m snapping through blacuum some clearly dead, some not so, some clearly holed, some still looking sealed m now:

: sliding silently upside the *Eastland* Gord sees a shape, a hardlooken plasmetally thing, huge, biggern the *Eastland* even, close even to the blowed *Lurleen* m she's a clearly she's he knows he can identify her from Fort Sealy Mae dayroom ID posters she's a she's no doubt about it a a gigantic damn nigra ship she's in fact that superwagon *Oh! Oh!* N'Ala spacerines call her, the *Annie Eyes*, the *Oginga Odinga* m on her hull Gord sees vast rectangular pullbacks inside battle-dressed armor-glinting star-shine-lit black-suited black-skinned N'Haiti colleagues-in-arms Gord's co-pro's no mistakenem nigra spacerines m with a helmet-shaking common *roar*:

Lt. Jimmie Rainie's spacerine platoon kick off from the hull of the *Eastland*, grabboots shloop up off the hull, that blattering bunch of old Pissfire's finest, lase-axes light-lining m illuminated only by multi-originned stars-light m the glints of their own lase-axes they see black-suited nigras leap fly/fall from that pullback opening in the *Oh! Oh!* sweeping up/down/out to meet them m with a crash the first two foes meet, lase-beams missed, chest-plates giving a radioed *clank*, pants m gasps of *Creeso* can you tell the sounds of killing from those of coitus!

Now too late, forget that interlocked murdering pair, Gord too flying up/down a blacksuited papadoc falling up to meet him, Gord sends a lase-beam, *sppssp!* across meters of blacuum, papadoc keeps coming but

starts to fold, spindle, mutilate, Gord takes a good two-hander on his lase-axe, feels his own chest heaving, deep breaths demanded, adrenaline spurting through hot moist vasculs, sweeps his weapon overhead in two hands, feels null-weight trained habits acting unconsciously, hips jerking into involuntary thrusts and a:

:whap!:

: Gord's lase-axehead comes down on the nigra's back armor with a pacifying thucky noise, armor m bone conducted right up Gord's arms to two much-gratified ears m Gord wrenchesiz 1-a free m kicks papadoc's body spinning infinitely away m Gord looks around for new worlds to conquer m comes face to face with another nigra spacerine m:

:he brings an axe around m:

:he brings an axe around m:

:he opens his mouth in a silent shriek m:

:he opens his mouth in a silent shriek m:

:the axe, blooded m starlit, swings gracefully m:

:the axe, blooded m starlit, swings gracefully m:

:smashing, m blood gushing, m a sound:

smashing, m blood gushing, m a sound:

:a scream too loud too shrill m:

:a scream too loud too shrill m:

:red:

:red:

:black:

:black:

::

::

9. Aboard the Starship Oginga Odinga

::

::

:*black*:

:red:

:*red*:

:a scream too loud too shrill and:

:*a scream too loud too shrill and*:

:smashing, and blood gushing, and a sound:

:*smashing, and blood gushing, and a sound*:

:the axe, blooded and starlit, swings gracefully and:

:*the axe, blooded and starlit, swings gracefully and*:

:he opens his mouth in a silent shriek and:

:*he opens his mouth in a silent shriek and*:

:he brings an axe around and:

:*he brings an axe around and*:

The inside of his black space-armor stinking of terror and his own vomit, Christophe Belledor recovered from momentary unconsciousness. The body of the *blanc* marine had gone into a mad binary orbit with him, the two of them, the live and the dead, holding captive millions of tiny red glinting globules. More globules continued to pour from the axe-rent in the armor of the dead N'Alabamian.

Christophe kicked away the corpse, as he had been trained, using the equal-but-opposite force to drift back toward the main concentration of troops, his comrades and their foe, struggling and hovering between the *Oh! Oh!* and the *Eastland*. Corpses hung balanced in the small gravitational fields of the two great ships, or swung in long elliptical orbits away from the battle. Survivors on both sides dodged frenetically, alternately seeking to assure themselves that they were not about to be attacked and seeking enemies to attempt to beam down or axe.

Of the hundreds of N'Haitians and N'Alabamians who had entered the

battle, only the untouched and the dead remained—non-fatal wounds were all but unheard of in a vacuum-environment battle. Self-contained resealant systems in space-armor could handle the occasional micrometeoroid strike that might occur in hard vacuum, or might even close off a tiny puncture from a glancing beam or point, but any significant hole in space-armor produced quick death from decompression and fast freezing.

Christophe, circling in free fall, found himself again startled, face to face with another enemy marine. He valved slightly, thrusting toward the enemy. The enemy remained stationary, as if not knowing what to do. Christophe aimed his lase-axe, fired at the enemy's chest. He missed.

By now they were very close. The enemy raised his own lase-axe; as he did so Christophe saw the jagged shards at the laser end, where some blow must have been blocked, saving the *blanc's* life but also destroying his laser. Too close to beam again, Christophe raised his weapon to port, blocked the enemy's swing, attempted to come under it and jab to the pelvis but the N'Alabamian twisted and Christophe's blow landed harmlessly on the man's flank, sending a ringing vibration through his armor.

The *blanc* leaned sharply backward, spinning on his own axis, checked and started forward and down again, his axe a gleaming streak of white starshine as it sped murderously toward Christophe's helmet. Christophe tried to get his own lase-axe handle above his head to block the blow but he miscalculated and his mass slid "downward" leaving an open target. The gray-dull chestplate of his opponent's armor splashed into sudden glory, glowing momentarily rust-red, then scarlet, yellow-orange, then back with equal speed through the spectrum. Even through his own insulated plasmetal suit Christophe felt the heat of the radiant energy. The enemy now floated away, performing a series of graceful back somersaults, lase-axe still strapped to one wrist, arms thrown backward and knees spread and buckling. With each revolution of the body Christophe could see the circular black opening where the laser had seared away the N'Alabamian's armor.

Too late to counter an attack upon himself—if one was coming—Christophe whirled to face the unquestionable source of the laser beam, but saw no possible origin of it.

He shrugged, checked his weapon, valved again toward the mass of

space-armored figures that floated between the *Oh! Oh!* and the *Eastland*. For him the battle was over. For thousands of cubic kilometers around N'Haitian and N'Alabamian ships maneuvered and fired, rammed and dodged, disgorged miniature hornet-ships to harass the enemy and marines to board or to place skin-charges on enemy craft.

If this battle ended like most, it would go on for hours, even for ship-standard days. Then each fleet would withdraw, the well ships guarding the withdrawal of the crippled, towing away what salvage they could scour from the wreckage of those ships, both their own and the opponents', that were too far gone even to stagger away under partial power and post-combat conditions.

One difference this time.

The *Oh! Oh!* was little damaged. *Eastland*, a hulk. Her command module had taken a partial ram. It lay crushed and opened against the instrument unit, itself hanging against the distant stars with one chord sheared completely away, the remaining ring lifeless, data-acquisition circuits silent, storage banks dead, processing modules hopelessly fused by fantastic overloads of random heat and power surges produced by monstrous laser rakes.

The long shaft was crumpled, drooping where some surface charge had blown in a jagged section, orbiting flotsam circling the equator of the ship. At the base of the hull one huge fuel tank was torn away, flung out of sight by the residual energy of whatever force had torn it from the shaft—an internal explosion, perhaps, set off by intense heat from a N'Haitian beam, or a ram where the globe was seamed to the cylindrical hull of the *Eastland*.

Dead. Perhaps salvageable. Whichever force was stronger in this sector, whichever fleet retained sufficient strength to board *Eastland* with a salvage crew, make fast for towing, protect their prize from the opposition until they had withdrawn out of range, would return to its home base with whatever weapons and equipment, engines and communications gear, intelligence data and flight-and-battle records as she contained.

The hulk itself would be examined and evaluated. If reparable—she would spew her exhaust once more between the stars. As the *Eastland* if salvaged by N'Ala, as something else, *Duvalier* perhaps, or perhaps *Cleaver* or *Newton* or *Seale*, if by N'Haiti. And if *Eastland* should prove to

be beyond repair, then still the plasmetal of her hull would be rendered and recast and emerge someday as something new, to lance down the stygian star-tracks and fight again for the eternal glory of N'Alabama. (Or N'Haiti, as the case might be.)

But one difference in this salvage operation.

Not merely the hulks of battered starships this time. Not merely the metals and esters and silicones. Not merely the fabricated goods. This time the men.

Between the star-glinting *Oginga Odinga* and the dead and crumpled *Eastland* the unit of Christophe Belledor was beginning once again to form. Christophe moved toward his place in ranks, noting the gaps in the disc-shaped free-fall formation. Far, far in the distance he could see other salvage-ready situations, illuminated ships nestled triumphantly near to dead hulks like triumphant beasts of prey near the dead bodies of their victims. Here Belledor could recognize the form of a N'Haitian victor, there a N'Alabamian. In the aftermath of interstellar battle a strange truce seemed to fall as the survivors, gratefully wonder-struck by the fact of their own survival, concentrated only on their own withdrawal and on the rape of their own victims. They did not choose to jeopardize their status as survivors with any foolish picking of fights with other survivors, of the other fleet. Belledor gazed into the distance: N'Haitian plundered N'Alabamian; N'Alabamian plundered N'Haitian. One hulk swung about and for an instant, by some odd trick of optics, her name, marked in huge letters, caught a glint of light and became visible for the briefest instant: *Bilbo*, then was lost.

Inside Christophe Belledor's helmet the voice of his commander spoke, synchronized with the movement of the commander's arm. The instructions were clear. In company with his fellows, Christophe set to work gathering the shattered and frozen cadavers of the two space marine detachments. White and black, burned and axed, he collected them all. Those with only punctures in their armor to let in the drowning ocean of nothing, and those with organs roasted, and those with torn-away limbs and heads and chunks of torsoes.

What could be salvaged would be used or banked. The remainder, well, at least would not remain behind to leave a cluttered battlefield.

For a moment, Christophe entertained a stray wonderment: Now that

the battle was ended, who had won? But then, the admirals and the captains, the generals and the intelligence staffs, were paid to determine such abstruse mysteries. He, Christophe, was paid to do as he was told, and to try to stay alive until such time as he could return to his comfortable desk, his comfortable wife, and his occasional pleasant encounters with the daughter of Leclerc. Meanwhile, Grand Admiral Goude Mazacca probably knew who had won the battle.

10. *At the Gran Houmfort Nationale*

Perhaps as Papa claimed it was all nonsense. Still, Yvette would not miss the great ceremony. A row at dinner, Mama trying ineffectually to mediate, shouts, angry gestures, and Yvette sent to her room. All for the best, all as if she had herself made the plan.

She locked her door from the inside, vowing to answer no question or plea that penetrated its heavy wood, and flung herself onto the bed to fume. The more she thought of the argument the angrier she became. Did they think her a child? She was a young woman, her days of pigtails, pinafores far behind. She looked at herself, her figure. She had seen how men looked at her—grown men, not merely the coltish boys at the *ecole*, half-eager and half-timid in their own new hungers, but grown men. Even their neighbor M. Belledor, before he had been called to military service.

Yvette rose from her bed, turned on a small light. She drew the shade of her window and stood before the mirror, slowly removing her school dress. If Papa forbade her to attend the *danse calinda*, she would go anyway. He might think the newly revived *vodu* mere nonsense, but all of her friends at the *ecole* knew better. No boy or girl in Yvette's class was without some macandal, caprelata, vaudaux dompredere, or ouanga. She herself had an ouanga of goat's hide, filled with the ingredients of the ancient prescription: small stones, a vertebra of a snake, black feathers, mud, poison, sugar, tiny wax images. Normally it was kept hidden in her room. Tonight she would wear the ouanga.

Out of her dress now she stood naked in the center of her room, feet spread, arms raised, breathing deeply in anticipation of the ceremony to take place at the houmfort. Ah, such a fool as Papa deserved his ignorance. Again Yvette looked down, studying her own form: the graceful

breasts and sharply pointed nipples so admired by the boys at school; the slim waist, the swelling pelvis and thickly curled, glossy arrow of black pubic hair pointing unerringly toward its precious goal. She ran her hands once over her smooth sienna-colored skin, feeling alternately waves of hot and cold at the thought of the hours ahead.

Still naked she removed the ouanga from its hiding place, for a moment held the rough skin bag against her cheek, then kissed it and placed the leather thong about her neck so the bag hung between her breasts. Standing again before the mirror Yvette crossed her arms beneath her breasts, forcing her breasts together so that the ouanga bag, between them, was held tightly, the protruding evidence of the objects within pressing and rubbing on her sensitive flesh, exciting her so that she ran one hand down her belly, threading her pubic hairs and kneading her labia for a moment.

Then she whirled, ran barefoot to the closet and removed her clothing for the *danse*. A satiny blouse of brilliant stripes, yellow, green, blue; tight trousers of white, cut low to come beneath the navel. She slipped her arms into the blouse, drew it about herself, leaving the front open to reveal her talisman, then drew on the pants and tied them at the front. Sandals now, and now she turned out the light in her room and raised the window shade.

In a moment she had the window open and had eased herself through it, slipped softly to the grass outside and moved quietly away from the house. She ran through dark streets, silently, a light mist in the air coating her skin, each droplet seeming to stimulate her further. At the appointed spot near the house of her friend Celie she looked around, found Celie waiting beneath a tree.

She hissed for silence and the two of them dashed off silently toward the hoverail depot. Once away on the train they would reach the hounfort without interference.

At the hounfort Yvette and Celie found a crowd assembled already. Great torches ringed the open plaza before the hounfort; above them in the black sky La Gonave hung huge and dully glowing, adding its light. In the misty air the light of La Gonave was fractionated, making tiny nocturnal rainbows when Yvette looked toward the sky. The torches wavered in the night air, the orange-red flickerings making the shadows of the people dance even though they themselves as yet merely stood

awaiting the commencement of the ceremony or milled about seeking friends or positions from which better to see the proceedings of the night.

On the low portico of the houmfort, backed by the scrollery and pillars of the building, the carven serpents and gourds, crucifixes and thorn-pierced hearts stood row on row of low catafalques, each surmounted by a long shrouded unmoving manlike figure. Before these stood the three great drums, the boula, the maman, the papa. At either side of the plaza stood other drums. In the center, an altar.

From within the houmfort was heard a drumming and chanting. Lights flickered and figures advanced from the building. Papa Nebo, the hermaphroditic guardian of the dead, a silken top hat ludicrously perched on his head, his black face solemn, solemn, then cracked by the rictus of a tic, shirtless but wearing a tattered black dinner jacket and a ragged white skirt, his bare feet held alternately off the ground, wavering as if undecided before plunging ahead with each step. In one hand he held a human skull, in the other a sickle.

Behind Papa Nebo, reeling and staggering, robed and turbaned, in one hand a glittering bottle, in the other a silvery flute, Gouede Oussou, his eyes dull, his face flaccid, ready to perform the role of the Drunken One. Finally the woman Gouede Mazacca the Midwife, her traditional garb trimmed with naval decor in honor of her namesake the grand admiral, the Midwife's serpent-staff in one hand, her bag of charms and implements in the other.

More figures, robed, hooded, turbaned, followed from the houmfort bearing torches and bags; some moved. They made their way to the drums at the sides of the plaza, three others accompanied Papa Nebo, Gouede Oussou, the Midwife Gouede Mazacca to the three great drums, then retired. They began to beat the drums rhythmically, supported by chanting and the tapping of the smaller drums. Then they began to chant, the deep voice of the Drunkard, the high voice of the Midwife, the contralto of the Oracle blending as they repeated over and over:

Legba, me gleau, me manger:

Famille ramasse famille yo:

Legba, me gleau, me manger.

Over and over the three chanted, drumming, shuffling their own feet as they drummed; before them in the plaza the crowd began to respond; Yvette began to move her feet and her hips, and to join in the chant to Legba, *Legba, food and drink are here, family gathers with family, Legba, food and drink are here*, over and over, at first self-consciously, almost giggling at herself and her friend Celie, then more confidently, moving her body in the torchlight until perspiration began to mingle with the droplets of mist on her skin, her voice rising in the chant, *famille ramasse famille yo*.

From somewhere a young man had appeared, very black, very strong, wearing only sandals and trousers so tight that his genitals showed as a graceful swelling in the flaring torchlight; around his neck an ouanga hung, swaying against his chest as he danced. He stood facing Yvette; together they moved, together they chanted, *Legba, me gleau, me manger*.

From the hounfort came a fresh clamor. The chanting and drumming changed to a new rhythm, a new chant. Acolytes bearing giant black tapers descended the steps of the hounfort, passing between the rows of catafalques on the marbled portico, then came others bearing each a black rooster, the birds strangely silent, then a black goat led on a rope halter; at last, bearing cups of hollowed gourd, the mamaloi and papaloi.

Papa Nebo, Gouede Oussou and Gouede Mazacca continued their chant. The crowd now stood silent, waiting. Yvette Leclerc felt a thrill jolt through her body as the black dancer took her hand; she leaned against him, feeling his sweaty skin against her face.

Papa Nebo greeted the mamaloi, took a black rooster from an acolyte, bowed to the mamaloi and whirled about, the drumming starting again as he did so. Papa Nebo held the rooster by its feet, stretched his arms to their full length, threw back his head and spun, spun, toward the mamaloi, toward the drummers, toward the crowd, around, around. The rooster flapped its wings impotently trying to escape; Papa Nebo spun more and more rapidly; finally the rooster, its head filled with the blood pushed there by centrifugal force, gave a piercing, jarring cock's crow, an instinctive scream of terror and despair.

Papa Nebo stopped, held the rooster above his head where all could see,

grasped its head in one hand and its neck in the other and pulled and twisted. Again the rooster crowed, crowed, then stopped. With a convulsive jerk Papa Nebo tore the black head from the black neck. Blood gushing from the rooster's neck onto his ludicrous dress, Papa Nebo ran to the mamaloi and the papaloi, offered each a drink of the hot spurting blood directly from the rooster's neck, then began filling the cups.

A new chant sprang up, wild, frantic:

Eh! Eh! Bomba hen hen!

Canga bafie te

Donga moune de te

Canga do ki li!

Canga li!

Chanting, dancing, shuffling, the crowd moved forward, each kneeling in turn before the mamaloi or papaloi, receiving the chalice of hot, fresh blood. Papa Nebo took rooster after rooster from acolytes, tore the head from each to replenish the supplies of the two gourds. Yvette danced impatiently, holding the man she had danced with, moving slowly forward toward the sacrament.

At last they reached the head of the line. Yvette knelt before the papaloi. She looked upward, her arms spread to the sides. Papa Nebo had just refilled the chalice. The papaloi held it forward for her, steam rising from the hot blood into the night air, the rippling surface of the blood throwing back flickering glimmers of torchlight as the drums throbbed on all sides.

The cup came forward. Yvette clutched her ouanga bag with her two hands, plunged her face into the steaming blood, drank once, deeply, then rose from her knees. She felt hot exaltation flooding her body. She danced, danced, the drumming filling her brain, turning it to a single, throbbing tambour that resonated in a steady, compelling beat.

She turned back to see her black partner rising from before the papaloi, a triumphant look in his eyes that must match that of her own, blood streaming redly from his lips to drip from his chin onto his naked chest.

Yvette ran to him, kissed the gleaming red, licking the blood eagerly from his chest as he held her crushingly in massive arms.

Giddy with eagerness, she flung herself with the man onto the hard ground, vaguely aware that scores of couples were duplicating their act all around them in the torchlit plaza. Yvette wriggled from her brilliant blouse, struggled to open the front of the man's pants as he tore hers from her hips. Unable to wait even for him to claim her she managed somehow to push the man onto his back, crouched above him, felt his hands grasping her hips, pulling her down onto him as he thrust, thrust up into her.

The taste of the fresh hot blood still in her mouth, the feel of the man inside her body, she writhed forward and back, eagerly, excitedly, feeling him filling her, stretching her until she thought to burst with the size of him in her, then clamped convulsively to him as his two hands on her back brought her helplessly forward and down onto him, meeting a final mighty heave that filled her loins with a bursting, screaming ecstasy.

She fell forward, lay with her breasts warmed against his chest, her legs still spread wide to hold him, her lungs heaving great breaths in and out as the drums still throbbed in her head and the man's arms held her to him. Now Yvette became aware that the drumming and chanting had changed yet again. The drumming was no longer abandoned but solemn, powerful. Yvette rolled off the man, sat up, felt him beside her. She saw others all around them sitting now, looking back toward the houmfort. Once more a torch could be seen, once more someone was emerging. The chant rose again, now a single line, repeated over and over:

L'Appe vini, le grand zombi!

L'Appe vini, le grand zombi!

Carrying a flaring torch, advancing slowly from the houmfort, came the bloody god-figure Ogoun Badagris, dressed in traditional mock-military jacket, huge tasseled epaulets glistening, beret mounted rakishly, high-collared, his skintight trousers pure white, his jackboots a gleaming jet black.

Before him the others fell back: the acolytes, Papa Nebo, Gouede Oussou, Gouede Mazacca, the mamaloi, the papaloi. The chanting ceased, only the drumming continued.

Ogoun Badagris advanced to Papa Nebo, took from him his sickle. Ogoun Badagris seized the still-tethered goat, severed its rope with a single stroke of the sickle. The beast seemed paralyzed with fear. Ogoun Badagris lifted the goat in mighty arms, walked with it to the end of the rows of catafalques, lifted it high in one hand. With the other he flicked the sickle lightly, gracefully, so quickly that Yvette could hardly tell what had happened.

Even the beast gave but a single exclamation, a half-bleat, half-moan. Then its life-blood was pouring from its opened jugular. Ogoun held the spurting corpse over the first catafalque, then stepped to the next, the next.

At each bier, as the drops of hot blood struck the still form that had lain unmoving throughout the *danse*, there was a stirring. The shrouded figure rose, first to a sitting position, throwing the grave-cloth from itself. Then, body after body, they rose, stood dumbly beside their biers. Yvette stared in chilled fascination. Each body was a patchwork of black, white, brown. Here a face of pale white flesh rested on a neck of ebony, pale yellow hair cropped short on the scalp only adding to the bizarre sight. Here a hand of black on an arm of white. Here a torso neatly divided by a vertical line, one side dark, the other pale, as if two bodies had been blown in half, the ragged edges of each trimmed neatly away and the remaining halves sewn back together.

As Ogoun Badagris reached the end of the rows he threw the drained corpse of the goat to waiting acolytes, then turned back to face the rows of motionless zombies.

"After me!" he commanded them. "Into the hounfort!"

He did not look back to see that they obeyed, but turned and advanced once more into the building. Behind him, after a moment of hesistancy, the zombies began to move forward, forward.

Behind the last of them the doors of the hounfort closed with a monstrous reverberation. Yvette Leclerc forgot her black man, the blood, the chants and the *danse*. Wearing only her leathern ouanga bag she rose and ran frantically from the plaza.

11. *Across the Cislunar Vacuum*

Yellow stragglebangs pasted across his sweaty forehead Gunner Corporal Leander Laptip tried to figure out how she'd got alive into a mini-ship away from the *Jimmie-O* when she'd got creamed by that big futhermucker nigra ship in the battle of whatever it was. Shorzell be called the battle of something someday. Those big ones always did get names in smartass light commanders or gyrene majors were always reconstructing them and fighting them over and writing books about what this commander did right and what that one did wrong that made the battle come out the way it did.

M bajeez in bageorge that was one *hell* of a battle!

How many ships had N'Alabama lost in that battle? Leander couldn't even begin to calculate, but there must of been a hell of a lot. And the nigras must of lost a hell of a lot too, from what Leander could see from his go-go-bapper blister. Even counting off for projos.

M then something had got *him*. Something that . . . Leander tried to remember. Not a beam. No, that would be sudden and silent and. . . And not a ram. No. He'd seen it coming, seen it but not in time to do anything about it. A projectile. A miniature, self-propelled, unmanned thing like a ship. Coming, coming at him, a black shaft in front of a burning behind, coming straight at him and his bapper and before he could try to knock it down—*krunk!*

Krunk, and then what?

Lucky for Leander that battle stations meant space armor, or he'd of been a vacuum quick-freeze case on the spot. Instead, somehow, in the mess and the tumble that followed . . . *Jimmie-O* must of took some worse hits than that little smack on the blister . . . Leander was into a miniship and away. Unconscious or hysterical. Out of sight of the fleet. Lost.

Headed at random for anyplace. Low on food and air.

Phillipe looked up from his endless paperwork at the sound of the

opening door. He recognized his friend Raoul and gestured him to a wooden chair.

"How is production?" the visitor asked.

"Well enough. Harvesting continues. The supply seems to be holding up also. As long as we do not attempt to go too fast, I think this planet will continue to meet our needs. But I think we would all rest easier, both here and at home, if we could find some secondary source of the creatures." Phillipe leaned back and edged his shoulders once up and down the back of his chair, then folded his hands on his slight paunch and looked at Raoul.

Raoul lifted a trinket from Phillipe's desk and toyed with it silently. Several times he appeared about to speak but each time stopped short of the first room.

Phillipe hummed.

Raoul cleared his throat.

Phillipe said, "Well."

Raoul said, "Mmm, yes."

Phillipe said, "And how are things over at the site?"

"No progress," Raoul said. "You know the vacuum over on Vache has preserved the artifact nicely. Here on Cayamitte it wouldn't have lasted very long—you know Captain Bonsard thinks that stuff the metal detectors picked up on Cayamitte might once have been a similar device."

Phillipe nodded.

"If he is right, though, there is nothing left that could possibly be salvaged. Now the Vache artifact . . ." he trailed off with a pregnant gesture of the two hands.

"Is Bonsard at the site now?" Raoul grunted an affirmative.

"I knew his aunt back in N'Porprince," Phillipe volunteered. "She worked in my section at the ministry. Grumpy middle-aged woman. Liked nothing better than giving unfavorable reports on everyone. Like a child tattling on his fellows. M. Caneton dozed at his desk this afternoon. M. Belledor arrived late again this morning. Well, it must have an effect. See, here I am on this little moon, and poor Belledor found himself drafted. Can you imagine Christophe as marine?" He chuckled ruefully.

He recovered from the moment's reverie. "Raoul," he resumed, "why all the fuss anyway, over the artifact? Ancient objects have been found before. Is this one so special? Why do we not ship it back to N'Haiti if it is?"

Raoul rose from his chair and began to pace about the office. "Credit the clever Captain Edouard Bonsard for that. He thinks it is a weapon. He thinks that it can be repaired and used as a defense in case the enemy attack us here."

Phillipe rose, dismayed. "But the whole N'Yu-Atlanchi operation depends on stealth. Everyone agrees that we cannot fortify that entire planet. The conditions there—the crystal barely sustains the weight we place on it now. If we brought in weapons—" he shook his head.

"Right. So we have some weapons here on Cayamitte and on Vache, but mainly we rely on stealth. The *blancs* are busy defending their own world and trying to attack N'Haiti, as long as they do not know about the N'Yu-Atlanchi project, it should be reasonably safe."

"So?"

"So, still Bonsard wants more defense. And he believes that he can repair the Vache artifact and that it is a weapon."

"And you think—what?"

"I think he is right!"

"Then why do you oppose him?"

"Because, first of all, I am not *sure* he is right. The artifact might prove to be—anything—once it is repaired. *Probably* it is a weapon. But what if it is a beacon that will communicate with someone incredibly distant and alien who left it there on Vache? Or a vehicle? Or some sort of automatic manufactory? Or—" again "—anything? It should be studied with the utmost caution, by qualified researchers. And Captain Bonsard has just taken it upon himself to try to repair it.

"Second, if it is a weapon, what kind of weapon? Does it fire projectiles? Beams of some sort? What if it is a bomb, a dud, and once repaired it will blow itself up and half of Vache with it? Bonsard is risking too much!"

Alone in its miniship coffin, the dessicated corpse that had once been Gunner Corporal Leander Laptip of the N'Alabama spacerines floated serenely among the stars. An automatic pickup beacon in the miniship broadcast its distress call, but with limited power and at mere light speed, it was unlikely ever to be picked up by a potential rescuer. And if it were, what good would that do?

Leander Laptip didn't care if he *ever* was rescued.

But the beacon went out, and the ship continued to float, coasting along in a more-or-less straight trajectory as it had on its small self-contained power charge. Too small for an agonized-matter system, the miniship couldn't get either the speed or the powered range of a big starship, but coasting it could go forever.

It might have headed anywhere. Leander Laptip didn't care that his body happened to be headed toward the star designated NGC 7007.

Captain Bonsard accepted the micro circuit-layer from the ordnance sergeant and bent over the last remaining gap in the circuitry of the artifact. His eyes felt tired and his fingers trembled from the fine work, and to relax he hunkered back on his heels and looked up at the sky.

"Good to be rid of those overcautious busybody civilians, eh, Sergeant?" he said.

Agreement crackled back through his helmet radio.

"Now, we'll get this thing finished and see about testing it out," the captain went on.

The sergeant said, "Yes, sir."

Captain Bonsard stretched his arms to get out any kinks. Overhead he could see the tiny blob of Cayamitte and huge globe of N'Yu-Atlanchi, glowing and glittering, turquoise and sunflower, as always a beautiful sight against the black sky. Distant NGC 7007 glinted dull green.

Bonsard returned to the artifact. A tiny line, clearly a circuit running between two nodules that projected slightly from a rounded, glazed cylinder, had had a gap gouged in it, how long ago, probably (Bonsard

thought) by some glancing micrometeor. Now he, Edouard Bonsard, would repair the tiny bit of cosmic mischief. He flicked on the circuit-layer, adjusted its tip to a tiny aperture and applied it to one broken end of the ancient circuit.

The tool adhered to the micro-circuit. Bonsard drew the tool slowly, meticulously, toward the other severed end. The circuit extended in the path of the tool, moving slowly toward the other end. Finally only the tool itself separated the ends of the circuit. Carefully Bonsard withdrew the circuit-layer, waiting until the two threads of material were joined before turning it off and handing it back to the ordnance sergeant.

Only then did he heave a huge sigh of relieved tension. "Finished!" he said.

"When will we test it, sir?" the sergeant asked.

Uncle Dudley, after a period of near-ostracism, was being readmitted into mother and father's good graces, and this afternoon, while they visited old acquaintances in a place (the term is used loosely, more to suggest a concept than to represent a specificity) really quite, *quite* distant in terms of space, time, and, uh, "fnedge," Uncle Dudley was left in charge of Junior, who would only have grown bored and unruly during a long ride and a dull visit.

Uncle Dudley was prepared to bribe Junior into good behavior with something nice he'd bought down to Plenum's, that mother and father didn't know about and if Junior wouldn't tell neither would Dudley.

Junior accepted the gift.

Uncle settled on the parlor couch for a nap.

Junior used the new toy to diddle with his last gift from Plenum's. ("The Universe.") It was great fun, and Uncle Dudley slept soundly, poor old simp. You know how kids are when their parents are away and they sense that the baby-sitter isn't too sharp about discipline.

Captain Bonsard looked into the black sky above Vache, his hands still on the now-repaired Vache artifact. Suddenly he pointed in the direction of Omicron Sigma XXIVa. "Sergeant!" he croaked. "Look!"

The ordnance sergeant turned to follow the captain's gesture. "It's a ship, sir! One of theirs!"

After only a moment's stunned hesitation Captain Bonsard said, "There's your answer, Sergeant. We test the Vache weapon now! I don't know how those white devils ever found out about the N'Yu-Atlanchi project, and they must be total idiots to send a single ship against us, but this is our chance to prove the worth of the Vache artifact!"

The N'Alabamian ship was approaching the zenith of the sky over Vache. A miniature dart, graceful, pointed at its fore end, bulging and then tapered again to a wasplike waist, then flared tail fins, the miniship was silhouetted against the glowing, sparkling disk of N'Yu-Atlanchi itself, N'Yu-Atlanchi where black men labored in warm saline seas to harvest S'tschai.

Captain Bonsard knelt beside the Vache artifact, sighting through devices built untold ages ago, his hand inside its articulated armor indirectly setting control devices of equal antiquity.

At last it was done. The artifact may have vibrated gently; Bonsard could not be sure whether the slight tremor that gripped him was the product of the artifact's restored life or of his own excitement. He watched the interloper coasting silently, intercepted by invisible forces across the cis-lunar vacuum that separated the small moon Vache from its primary N'Yu-Atlanchi. The ship seemed to vibrate in its course, then slowly to fade, as if disintegrated outright, or as if shaken into pieces too small to be seen at this range.

The resonations of the Vache artifact continued at light speed until they reached the surface of the planet, working their silent and unseen changes until ...

A bit of crystal chipped away. A hairline crack appeared, lengthened, opened wide. A bung hole was enlarged. A lazily flowing current of saline fluid turned into a churning, roaring flow.

A tide arose, sweeping outward in a circular path, growing rather than attenuating as it advanced. Behind its heightening front naked crystal was exposed for the first time since the planet's strange equilibrium had been attained.

Larger and larger areas of crystal shook, cracked, crumbled. More fluid was exposed. The huge wave grew larger and larger. More crystal, new

layers exposed, destroyed, swept away before newer waves of gloriously sparkling enriched sea-water.

Hundreds of black workers were swept before the flood or plunged into the shifting, crumbling crystal.

Billions of tiny unthinking homunculi died.

Deep within the centermost crystalline shell of the planet a great, fecund, bloated travesty of womanhood was rent by shifting, violent forces.

Millions of miles away NGC 7007 shone on its baleful green. In due course it would feel the great resonation.

Somewhere else (loosely speaking) Uncle Dudley dozed contentedly while his nephew was barely able to restrain his shrieks of glee.

12. A Distant Pearl-Tinted Horizon

Marius Goncourt picked his way carefully through the rubble on the Henri-Bourassa, peeped around the corner onto the Rue Cote Vertu. It seemed clear. He slipped around the pockmarked edge of the building and started up the last few score paces to the Ministry, attache case in hand. He was well up the street when it happened.

From above there came the crackle of superheated ozone. Marius flung himself into an opening, not stopping to see what it was. The Rue Cote Vertu was suddenly filled with crackles, hisses of steam where laserifle beams struck late standing puddles of water, occasional snaps and crashes of broken glass when window panes were suddenly heated to a thousand degrees.

Marius looked cautiously from his hiding place, trying to detect the source of the laserifle fire. The beam which had nearly burned a sudden hole in him must have come from a window high across the Rue Cote Vertu. Fire had been returned from several points in and around the Ministry.

Again the air crackled and a circle of cement sidewalk near Marius' hiding place charred and crumbled. The fire was returned—two, three laserifles were discharged into the window. From across the thoroughfare

came a sound between a gasp and moan. A form appeared in the window, tumbled forward into the morning sunshine, somersaulted into the air, spun downward toward the sidewalk spinning and twisting with surrealistic slowness until it struck with a solidly satisfying thump.

Two soldiers started forward, running across the Rue Cote Vertu toward the body. Marius rose and started from his own position. Again the air crackled as a second sniper took up the work of the first. One soldier fell to the pavement, black smoke curling upward from a wound, neatly drilled and cauterized by the laserifle beam. A second beam struck Marius' attache case. As he dropped it and flung himself flat on the macadam he saw the second soldier fall to one knee, raise a laserifle to his shoulder and hurl a beam at the window. Again came the sound of a man pierced by sudden white heat. A laserifle tumbled from the window and clattered onto the street below, but the body of the sniper fell this time back into the upstairs room.

Marius and the surviving soldier ran first to the soldier's comrade, then to the sniper on the sidewalk. Both were dead. The two men looked at each other, the surviving soldier recognizing Marius from the Ministry. "M. Goncourt, were you hit?"

Ruefully Marius held up his case. "It was close, but he missed me. Can you summon the guard and check out the other sniper? I thought this area was cleared!"

The soldier said, "We thought so too, M. Goncourt. It cost us a man. Yes sir, I will attend to this."

Marius turned away and entered the Ministry. Past the self-service vending stand where Maurice had formerly held court, up wooden stairs now cracked and shaky, he reached the office of Minister Antoine-Simone. Marius entered the room. The Minister looked up from a table surrounded by representatives of government departments.

"M. Goncourt, you are late, you know. Punctuality is the hallmark of the efficient man. We have already started."

Marius said, "I am sorry, sir. There was a sniper incident—."

The Minister cut him off. "No excuses, please. To business. Captain Girard was briefing us on the current balance of forces against the enemy. Please resume, Captain." He waved toward the naval officer.

Girard, neat in undress khaki, spoke wearily. "I was nearly finished anyway, M. le Minister. To summarize, then, the deep space battle of Omicron Sigma XXIVa left both fleets, the enemy's and our own, severely decimated. We believe that the enemy is in even worse condition than we.

"However, the surprise invasion of La Gonave and N'Haiti proper further complicates the problem. Our counterattack from the bastions at La Ferriere and Dajabon has been highly successful. We have retaken all major population centers on the planet, and only scattered bands of *blancs* wandering the back country remain."

The naval officer looked sheepishly at Marius, then said, "Of course there will still be isolated incidents here and there until we have cleared the enemy completely from the planet, but they are to be expected."

M. le Minister broke in. "Very well, Captain Girard. We have full faith in Admiral Gouede Mazacca and the rest of the military. We know that N'Haiti itself is being secured. But what of La Gonave? We cannot survive without the agricultural imports for very long."

"Ah, very good, yes." Captain Girard ran a finger around the inside of his uniform collar. "Well, as you know, the N'Alabamian attack on La Gonave succeeded because we did not have sufficient forces to defend the moon. Governor Faustin is a prisoner of the enemy. They are apparently using him to force the populace to remain docile. Deputy Governor Laurance has set up a resistance capital at Jacmel, using the authority of the traditional queen of La Gonave, Ti Meminne, to counter orders that the enemy puts out in the name of Governor Faustin."

He stopped. Antoine-Simone said, "When can we get a force onto La Gonave?"

"The fleet is in good condition again. There was plenty of salvage after Omicron Sigma XXIVa. The only problem is manpower. That is why we are appealing to your Ministry, m'sieu. What has become of the resuscitee program?"

Marius opened his attache case and removed a sheaf of papers. They were marked by a neatly bored hole in one corner, surrounded by a narrow charred area. Using the papers as notes he spoke briefly.

"The resuscitee program is completed, as far as we are able to determine. The experimental phase of the program was completely successful. Large-scale operations were inaugurated at N'Yu-Atlanchi,

with a harvest rate of approximately 6,000 S'tschai per local day. This rate would supply us with controls for salvaged casualties as rapidly as we could use them.

"Unfortunately, as you are aware, the N'Yu-Atlanchi disaster occurred before the full harvest rate had been effective very long. One of the military personnel assigned was responsible for the disaster." He looked at Captain Girard, who looked the other way.

"We can supply a sufficient force of resuscitees to outfit a full-scale assault on La Gonave in hopes of recapturing it. But there will be no further resuscitees after that. Once the present supply is expended, no more. At least, our people have not been able to achieve resuscitation without S'tschai, and we have not found S'tschai anywhere beside N'Yu-Atlanchi."

Minister Antoine-Simone looked to Captain Girard once more. The captain spoke. "M. Goncourt's assessment of the situation agrees with our own. Since our fleet's recovery from Omicron Sigma XXIVa we have set up a picket line and prevented the enemy from reinforcing their garrison on La Gonave. We believe that the tide of battle has turned and that we shall be able to invade the enemy's home world. But first we must regain our own food supply. We will use the resuscitee troops to mount a counter-invasion and retake La Gonave.

"Further, let me say that the N'Yu-Atlanchi disaster was not a disaster entirely. The Vache artifact—let me call it the Vache resonator—is being duplicated. Our fleet is being equipped with resonators and they should prove highly useful in the attack on N'Alabama. We do not wish to use them against La Gonave for obvious reasons, but if we take out some large chunks of the enemy's home planet it should do much to encourage him to make peace."

He stood in line with the others, R troops stretching to left and right in checkboarded ranks, clad in combat jeans and boots, each R trooper carrying weapons and spare charge-paks, helmeted and infra-goggled. Before each platoon stood a black NCO. Somehow, deep in his mind, there was an awareness of who and where he was, a pride in military bearing and readiness, but these were buried deep beneath a thick layer of indifference.

The NCO was facing away from the R troopers, toward a N'Haitian spacerine officer who stood farther away. The trooper heard the N'Haitian officer shout a command to the platoon NCO's. He saw his own NCO face about toward the R troopers. The NCO shouted a command. The R trooper, ego remote and tranquil, sensed a momentary delay, then felt a control cut in. His body turned ninety degrees. As it did so his eyes saw the R troopers about him do the same.

There was another command from the NCO. Again the control operated. The trooper felt his arms and legs begin to move with a rhythmic regularity as he and the rest of the unit marched forward.

There was no point in trying to override the control, whatever it was. This he had long since learned. Avoiding the hopeless struggle he was content to stay, an observer in his own body, feeling the rush of air in and out of his lungs, feeling the movement of his marching body, hearing the unison tramp of hundreds of feet, seeing the backs of the R troopers ahead of him as the control marched his body, swinging his neatly spliced arms so that the unmatched hands swung into the bottom of his field of vision with each pace—left, right, black, white, left, white, black, right, black, white . . .

More commands, turns, halt and wait, then face and march again, all at the commands of the N'Haitians, all at the control of something other than his ego, he watched and experienced but did not act.

The R troopers sat now on benches in the hold of an ill-smelling ship. On command, controls moved hands to clamp safety hooks around feet and waists. Whichever way the ship pointed, wherever the gravity of the moment dictated was up, the troopers would keep their seats.

For a seemingly long time—he had no way of measuring it—the ship remained unmoving, as did the R troopers on their benches. Their N'Haitian commanders were not to be seen. He wondered impersonally why they were on the ship, where they were to be transported and for what purpose, but then it was not really very important.

He looked through his eyes at the trooper ahead of him. His own hands were again in his field of vision, clasped near the muzzle of his weapon, black fingers and white fingers interwoven to steady the weapon against takeoff and gravitational irregularity. The back of the head his eyes were fixed upon showed white skin and longish blond hair. At the base of the

skull a long and livid scar was visible. The trooper was sitting stationary, as stationary as he himself. Beyond the blond trooper he could see another and another. Each one, regardless of skin color or pattern, bore the same long scar at the base of the skull.

After unmeasured time the bench and floor beneath him seemed to shake gently. A bass rumble filled his ears and the image in his eyes jiggled before returning to normal. Again it happened. This time the rumble grew to a roar and the shaking of the bench and floor turned to a steady vibration. The bench and floor pressed upward against him for a long time, then the roaring ceased, the room became still, the floor and bench ceased to press upwards and he felt himself trying to float this way or that, held in place by the straps at his feet and waist. He floated against the straps.

His eyes saw backs, a wall beyond, an occasional gray slab of floor or ceiling.

His ears heard ship noises, breathing, creaking.

His body felt weight, pressures, textures.

In time his body felt the spinning gravity of a gyro maneuver, then there was the rumbling and vibration again.

The NCO stepped into his field of vision and issued a command. He felt his body responding to control by loosening straps, rising, proceeding with his fellow R troopers through the narrow aisle between benches, through a port, down a corridor. On command his hand reached out to take hold of an extensile cable, hooked it into a ring on his battle pack.

On command the file of R troopers moved past a bin of oxymasks. On command his hand took one and fitted it to his face. On command the file of R troopers moved into a ready crouch. His eyes saw a space door slide back. His eyes saw that they were in night, high above land but within an atmosphere that twinkled the lights of distant stars.

On command the bodies of the R troopers moved forward, through the space door, leaping out one by one, the extensile cable playing out behind them. In his turn he leaped into the blackness. Falling, tumbling, his eyes saw far below small concentrations of city lights. As the extensile cable jerked against his battle pack his head snapped upwards and his eyes saw a distant pearl-tinted horizon, then tracked upward and saw blackness, blackness sprinkled with millions of points of light. At the edge of his field

of vision his eyes caught a brief glimpse of the planet from which the ship had come.

His skin felt air shrieking past as the cable lowered the R troopers deeper and deeper into the atmosphere. Finally his ears began to hear the sounds of troopers landing—thumps, involuntary exclamations. Now a voice as some NCO landed and began issuing commands. Then footsteps and sounds of R troopers moving about under control.

With a jolt his own feet struck ground. Momentum pitched him forward into a rolling tumble. When he stopped his ears heard an NCO's commands. Then the control brought him back to his feet, raised his hand to disconnect from the extensile cable, checked out his equipment. On command his eyes found the nearest trooper, his legs walked to him and their hands checked each other's condition.

Quickly under command the platoons of R troopers formed up. His unit spread into battle formation, moved forward with others toward a nearby farming village. As they approached the village his eyes saw the glare of laser fire. He heard NCO voices issuing commands, felt his body obeying. Watching through his eyes he was distantly aware that there were heavy casualties. R troopers fell, fell, but more continued to move up from the rear. Always there seemed to be NCO voices, always the control moving hands and feet, eyes aiming, fingers firing, and again moving forward.

Now they were into the village, and from somewhere he saw that there was heavy weapons fire. Houses were exploded, streets blocked, fronts of buildings ripped away. His eyes saw bright objects flashing overhead, followed by sounds of roars and whooshes followed by explosions.

Through the night they moved and fought. By dawn R troopers occupied the town. His eyes saw incredible numbers of R trooper casualties lying about. Far fewer corpses of N'Alabamian occupiers, but no live prisoners.

For days the bodies of the R troopers fought the N'Alabamian occupiers. No reinforcements came for the occupiers. R troopers came, came, fell in hideous overproportion to N'Alabamians but came, came. Finally the trooper's mind, distantly and without involvement, analyzed what his eyes and ears had observed.

La Gonave was in N'Haitian hands. N'Alabamian forces were wiped out. Perhaps, his mind speculated, a few N'Alabamians might have escaped

into rural areas. For years to come, perhaps, there would be occasional skirmishes between local nigras and leftover blancs. But no matter really.

On NCO command surviving R troopers dug long trenches. Under control they dragged to them bodies of dead N'Alabamians, N'Haitians, R troopers, began filling the trenches and covering them over. When all the corpses had been attended to there remained some R troopers and some trench space.

On NCO command and under control the R troopers filed along the remaining trench space, their legs pitching their bodies into the trenches. Following R troopers covered them over. At last the trooper reached open space. On NCO command and under control he pitched his body in. As it tumbled and struck the side of the trench it twisted so that it lay at the bottom of the trench facing upward.

Distantly and without involvement he watched with his eyes as another trooper pitched in upon him, then another and another until only a few gleams of light penetrated between the piled-up R troopers. There was a gentle tap from above as still other troopers, following along behind in the line under NCO command and controlled, covered over the trench.

At last all was dark and the sounds of tumbling troopers and tamping soil moved beyond range of his ears. Distantly and without real concern the trooper's mind wondered how long it would be supplied with oxygen and blood. But no matter really.

13. The Lower Half of Hir Face

After enough nothing Gh'en-Gordon began to achieve a fullness of aware. Not any longer a pink vermiform sea-dwelling post-hominoid monstrosity, not merely a S'tscha. And not, oh absolutely not a man.

Something new.

Ch'en-Gordon could feel the clamminess and slight pressure of unpacked shallow soil, the press of other abandoned R troopers around hir torso and limbs. Se tried to open hir eyes, found them held shut by hir own arm, flung across them, perhaps reflexively, before the dirt had begun to fall.

With an effort se was able to raise hir arm sufficiently from hir eyes to

open them, but was met only with utter blackness. Se strained upward with both arms, then with hir knees. Se was able to move hir four macrolimbs sufficiently to clear a small space above most of hirself, and thereafter to move hir macrolimbs at will, although for a short distance only, before encountering the dirt above.

Hir breathing was difficult but not dangerously so. Se was clearly close enough to the surface that sufficient air penetrated the loose dirt to permit breathing.

Straining once more to obtain additional free space around hir hands, se clutched the hand of another immobile R trooper, felt it respond to hir touch with a desperate grasping, tugging of its own. Ch'en-Gordon ceased hir pulling but continued to hold the hand. As if assured that se was not to be abandoned by hir new discoverer, the R trooper also abandoned hir frantic activity, but continued to grasp Ch'en-Gordon hir hand.

Ch'en-Gordon took as deep a breath as se could, then began to work hir way upward through the soft and crumbling soil. To do so se released hir grip on the hand of the other R trooper, who seemingly understood Ch'en-Gordon hir purpose. Almost immediately Ch'en-Gordon could hear the other struggling, digging along with hir.

Se used hir macroknees, pounding them again and again upward into the loose dirt, striving not merely to pack it tighter above hir and gain a little more room, but to lift it, to raise the dirt above hir, eventually to break through the surface to the free air above. Hir hands too, aided vastly by the strangely unfamiliar fingers of the macroappendages, relying on the Gordon portion of hir personality for the right neural connections and commands.

Dirt jammed beneath hir fingernails, entered and pained hir external eyes until se was forced to hold them squeezed closed against the crumbs and grains; when se gasped for air it filled hir mouth and se struggled with hir only Gordon-familiar tongue to push the dirt back out, shoving with hir tongue, blowing and spitting before most of the dirt was cleared, forming a gritty mud that plastered the lower half of hir face and neck.

Straining upward, clawing through the cold dirt, grunting and heaving with effort se managed finally to thrust one dirt-crusting hand out of the all-grasping soil. Se braced hir weight on hir other elbow, gathering hir strength for another thrust that might bring hir arm and shoulder above

the ground. Instead se felt hir hand grasped, felt a powerful pull. Se pushed upward with all hir remaining strength, aiding hir unknown rescuer, felt hirself rising, the flesh all but torn from the bones of hir macrobody, then with an intensely painful wrench felt hirself rise from the mass grave of the R troopers.

Se stood in the cool night air of La Gonave, swaying slightly. The field in which se had lain was lighted to nearly daylight intensity by the brilliant glow of N'Haiti, hanging monstrously huge in the dark sky, its heavy mass threatening as if at any moment it would fall to the ground of its own moon, obliterating all that existed there, perhaps disintegrating the body of the satellite itself.

Ch'en-Gordon was shaken by the grasp of another R trooper. Hir gaze dropped to be met by that of hir fellow, who moved hir head sideways, gesturing forbiddingly at the bloated globe in the sky. Ch'en-Gordon moved hir head also, as if to give assent. The other R trooper removed hir hands from Ch'en-Gordon hir shoulders. Se pointed at the tumbled earth which rustled and heaved as hands, feet, faces, brown, black, white, poked upward.

They returned to the nearest furrow, together seizing a death-white foot that protruded from the mass grave, pulled at it until a complete patchwork corpse was exposed. They dropped the leg and the body rose, slowly and painfully, from the soil. The new figure gazed about as in wonderment, then stood staring skyward as hir eyes were captured by the giant bulk of the planet. Again the charade of shaking and gesturing was performed, and the three R troopers set about freeing comrades from their mutual tomb, their graveclothes R trooper uniforms, new but covered with the soil of La Gonave.

Those corpses which failed to move of their own power, they left.

Ch'en-Gordon looked around, seeking the faces of the patchwork troopers around hir. At last se advanced to another, one whose body was huge, a uniform, glistening, muscled black. Hir face was a mottle, the eyes a glazed blue, the hair a lank, straggling yellow, the skin a sickly white except for a masklike swath of black taking in what was left of the nose, the lower cheeks, mouth and jaw.

Ch'en-Gordon tried to speak. Se moved hir mouth, hir throat trembled, se heard hirself produce a gravelly moan.

The other R trooper made the same attempt, achieved no more success.

All around hir Ch'en-Gordon saw R troopers attempting to speak but succeeding only in uttering painful inarticulations.

Ch'en-Gordon stood with macroarms hanging at hir sides. The dual nervous system, interconnected by spiremal filaments penetrating the medulla oblongata of the larger brain, their almost monomolecular acid-chains stretching throughout the nervous system of the patchwork corpse, strained to devise some way of communicating with the other R troopers.

At last Ch'en-Gordon advanced to hir mottled fellow. Se opened hir mouth, gestured the other to do likewise. Se stepped forward, grasped the other with hir palms on the cheeks of the other, tilted hir head to the side using Gordon-synapses to control the movement, and clasped hir mouth onto that of the other.

Se thrust hir tongue into the mouth of the other, feeling the cold moisture therein. Within Ch'en-Gordon's tongue the millions of spiremal threads writhed, snakelike; like feeding medusae they plunged into the icy tongue of the other R trooper, growing micro-inches downward into the wet flesh, contacting spiremal nerve filaments, exchanging data, telling, learning, planning, feeling the cold breath of the two as it rasped from throat to throat.

At last se felt that se had learned and told enough. The filaments detumesced. Se drew hir mouth from that of the other R trooper, turned and shambled across the field to find others with whom to share the plan. By the time N'Haiti had passed its zenith, decades of R troopers had received the plan.

By the time N'Haiti had reached a point halfway down the sky toward the horizon of La Gonave, the R troopers were moving on the Jacmel tarmac.

By the time the Jacmel tarmac was fully alight, the brilliance of true daylight replacing the murky glare of N'Haiti, the R troop landing ship *Lumumba* had left behind a seared and scarred concavity.

By the time N'Haiti again glared down on Jacmel, the gigantic fleet of Grand Admiral Gouede Mazacca had been augmented by the addition of the R troop landing ship *Lumumba* and her cargo of patchwork corpses.

In the sky of the Independent Planet of New Alabama the R troop landing ship *Lumumba* took position in a N'Haitian picket line. In stationary orbit *Lumumba* effectively hovered, day and night, the glare of NGC 7007 alternately appearing and disappearing from behind the red dirtball constantly below. On board, R troopers alternately watched watches and slumbered, nourished by minute quantities of hyperconcentrated food modules. Ch'en-Gordon during one watch opened hir mouth to another R trooper, then a third, a fourth.

Hours later a glittering dart dropped from formation in the black sky over N'Alabama. Lower and lower its orbit dropped, the planetscape below slowly beginning to move forward as it rose and grew toward the *Lumumba*. At an appropriate height above ground the *Lumumba's* pro-pulsors spurted briefly; her descent leveled off. An orifice appeared in her hull and the familiar extensile cable, smooth, rounded and gray, dropped toward the surface of the planet.

At a selected point an R trooper hooked onto the cable, slid downward, halted momentarily just above the surface of N'Ala, then dropped silently into a nighted field.

The *Lumumba* continued across the planet, R troopers checking invasion maps against familiar landmarks, returning, returning to familiar farms, to villages and cities in every semi-autonomous megacounty on the planet, to Abbeville and Albertville, Boaz and Bay Minette, to Citronelle, Carbon Hill, Dixiana, Eufaula, Goodwater, Huntsville, Jasper and Lipscomb and Letohatchie.

Ch'en-Gordon climbed down the cable at Letohatchie.

The first N'Alabamian Ch'en-Gordon approached looked once, double took, exclaimed—What the shee-it!—and drew a revolver. Ch'en-Gordon, hir reflexes slowed by the double consciousness of S'tscha and Man, was taken. Halfway to town, se found hirsself riding the rest of the way in a whining patrol gyrocar. In the Letohatchie town jail se gazed out a barred window into a dusty square, contemplating something that might not have been a multiple-slot bicycle rack.

Interrogations produced no answers.

Se was locked up for the night, fed a bowl of slop and guarded by a

deputy who slept in a chair at the end of the sparsely populated cell block. Hours later Ch'en-Gordon lay on his cell floor, face to the bars, mouth open, tongue lolling on the cement floor. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, filaments grew, spiremes were thrust through the surface of his tongue.

The sleeping guard snuffled in his sleep; his jaw dropped onto his chest as he began softly to snore.

Ch'en-Gordon's fair spiremes lengthened. He did not smile, but his spiremes lengthened.

Before the guard awakened he betrayed his trust. Then he did not awaken after all.

Ch'en-Gordon stepped past the dead guard, let himself quietly out of the Letohatchie town jail, walked unhurriedly past the perhaps bicycle rack, making quietly for the less lighted and less frequented portion of Letohatchie familiar to the Gordon portion of his personality.

Over the weeks that followed he lived unobtrusively in shadows, sleeping days in abandoned shacks, prowling nights in ill-lit alleys, preying on occasional stray citizens. From sleeping derelicts he learned, via filaments provided by his fair Ch'en component, of the progress of N'Haiti's siege of N'Alabama. The Gordon component of his duality was not pleased by what he learned.

Still, the Ch'en component remained aloof, unmotivated, devoted only to life and to experience, striving only at the command of some unobliterated instinct, to survive.

And Ch'en-Gordon's his N'Haitian conditioning settling over the two components, the S'tscha and the human, the spell of the *vodu*, the influences of the Goncourt treatments, the blended ancient memories of sparkling blue-green seas and red rut roads, nourishingly pervasive warm salinities and spacerine training, blended to produce a creature whose craft assured that survival, at least for the time being.

14. *His Sweetheart's Loving Arms*

Freddie checked his plaingrays, okays, some days anyways, brass buttons plain too (no starz m barz) buddy had his bentfin boomer on, polished up,

proud of that, still a sign of exclusive prestige, helped a bit clearing dinner dishes, gave his roommate a farewell hug na little peck on full soft lips, a nice cheery friendly helpmeet, slightly chubby m perspirey blond Bayou La Batre boy, turned m got a nice cheery friendly little goose in response m started for work.

He closed the door behind him, gave it a quick locking, heard dear roomie do same inside, plus a slide bar latch, m started downstairs. Outside thugly wooden pile Freddie tooka looka either side tillie spied all clear (no fear), no gangies tubie scene. Offie stepped along the cracked m pitted sidewalk, lookina round, no gangies found, notta sound, flishing his hand-cranked flishlite. (Few anteek lampposts still standing, but who remembered what they were once for? Fyadone like dark carry a flishlight, bebay.)

Past pinkred BAR past Pigpeg's Pusspar (John Darn all gam) past EATS. Weapons shop close to stock-out, got only stickers left m hoppers. Any what zaps, baps or whaps sold out just about. Self-wash surfery. Ononon. Military supplies gotta lotta craponie.

Letohatchie Noozan Sundries still there selling plenty boyboy books, prixpix, nookies bookies. Nooz? Few. Not so big now, lookin like mimeo work: NIGRA GO HOME PAPADOCS GET OUT R SKY PISS-FIRE WHERE R U NOW?

Y Bi Noozes? Headlines allasame allagame allasize allalize. Stick stick stick. So: Why nigra picket fleet up there constantly? How cum spacerines demobed? Wassamatta Pissfire Pallbox, wassamatta Yancey Moorman, wassamatta Eugene Youngerman, things ben going from worse to worst laylyn Leto.

—Yech!—sayn Freddie napproachesIz place of employment. Up the old ricketycricketys, through the old wooden with the cracked m taped stapaglass, into the back room m—Ello emcee.—Ello Freddie.— Ello emem.—Ello Freddie.—Ello boyzm band.—Ello Freddie.—in outen plaingrays m into costume m drinkadrink (not such great stuff these days but who was any more?) m peek out at the floom see cussomers coming in now mostly chubby blond boys (no ladies visible but who could notarize that?) m soon very soon to work. == SHOW TIME! ==

After, out back door (avoid hostility, plate safe, mister emcee's disclaimer should work but who can be certain?) m stroll a bit (dangerous

that but wudda hake, a man (mmm) garra live). Past PPPP couple times, tempin, tempin, but who got the price m besides, is that nice? Thinka sweet chubby little tubby from Bayou La Batre waiting at home, all snug in bed m waggin that head waiting for Freddie.

He takes a couple looks at the old pickets up there, first making a big circle with his eyes (many a fellerz fallen prey to desperadoes while gaping at the skies with his eyes) m then looking at them shipfeeding papadocs if looks could kill beggars would be risers you new.—Yech!—he sayn m goes tizzome.

A little fun there okay but shortish before sunrise poor old Bayou La Batre boy he's awakened by Freddie yobbeling in iz sleep. Freddie he yobbels for somebody, some old gyrene buddiepal Bayou La Batre boy don't catch no name m a little snubbelin m bubbelin m more yobbels from Freddie for this time Gordon somebody m poor Bayou La Batre boy he gets jealous. Freddie wakens up alone in bed, puzzled. That's a mought distressing.

And the morning and the evening were the (so who's counting?) day. Freddie he worked nightly, wept slightly, kept sprightly up with B La B boy, bebay, so don't you surlymouth him, leesee stayed outen Pigpeg's (beside he couldn't afford it).

Manother night Freddie gets to work late. Late? Wait! Almost not at all. Crowds in Mane Street! Rumors! Shouts m fistfights! Summony crashes by accident (mmm?) threwa store front. Sullenly everybody—spoosh!—into the store, onto the floor, back out the door m everybody got a new pair shoes, blue jeans, sweatshirts, wotnot.

Look! Uppina sky! Issa turd! Issa crane! Iss nigraships! They been there too long. Nobody gets onta N'Alabama, nobody gets offa N'Alabama. Nigra pickets. Protest, protest! To (let us be correct, m?) whom? N'Ala's allies don't want to get involved. Hey gang, we all faw you! Zokkituum & Rossaruck! But we stain clean!

Rumors, rumors, yoladywarez bloomers! Where's old Pissfire Pallbox these days, where's old Yancey Moorman? Finally somebody pops outen City Hall wiffa nounce meant. It's, now this is serious, bebay, Leto's own beloved mayor, the white honorable Milburn Mitchum. Zez:

—Sizzens, sizzens, gotta make a big announcement. Word comen from N'Mongummy just now, just now. Old Gene Youngerman—Mayor Mitchum he turned his head m spat in the red dirt—been thrown out m placed under arrest for badfeasance m treason. Comma be on trile right away. Meanwhile we gotta temporary provisional interim acting transitional gumt. Old Admiral Moorman, hez temporary provisional and et cetera governor of the independent planet of New Alabama. Old General Pallbox, hez tempo cetera principal executive.

—Troops comen from old Fort Sealy Mae to help us keep order. Ah asken all sizzens telp, keep calm, maintain law norder. Now remember we got a primary election coming up in a few months so you all just remember who saw you through these trying days. Ah thank you.—

And he bowed, arms spread, yellow hair flopping over sweat-sticky forehead, and he turned around m went back into City Hall. (Near the old wormy moray eel.)

Crack your back, mac, who wouldn't be late for work! They lucky anybody even showed up to work, but customers were plentiful you can be certain, those Letohatchie sizzens weren't sure what was coming but they weren't going to let this night get past without a little fun just in case there wasn't any left to have later on.

Freddie, he was lucky to get out alive that night, so home to old tubby yellow-hair from Bayou La Batre m Freddie cried himself to sleep in his sweetheart's loving arms. (Look, bebay, you don't like that stuff, you go do it with an alligator or somebody, just make sure she's a lady, and Freddie m his pal, just leave them hi the privacy of their bed.)

—Trust Yancey.—

—It only gets worse. Gangs m riots, nota nuffood.—

—Pissfirell do summon.—

—What so far?—

—Welleez . . .—

—Tooken a whompin. Spacefleet's shot. Lost all them men.—

—Hey, you a . . .—
—Realist—
—. . . nigrasucker!—
—Face facts!—
—Traitor! !—
—Face facts!—
—Lynchiz ass!!!—
—Face facts!—
—Get a rope!!!!—
—Face facts!—
—Over that, uh, wuchacallet, um, lamppost!—
—Face facts!—
—Uppy goes!—
—Fae *urk!*—
—Nigrasucker!—
— —
—Traitor!—
— —
—Right!—

Up, up goes a ragtag fleet of leftovers m rejects, cripples m trainers, cargo ships m normally unarmed couriers m whatever the hell old Moorman can scrape up carrying whatever the hell old Pallbox can scrape up and down it comes again in chunks & cinders & anybody survived the zap-bap crap uppa high turns to jelly when he hits ground as fast as those poor bastards hit it.

Couple hours later some old town shakes m breaks m that's the end of it. Probably it was Bayou La Batre but no matter really.

New gumt.

Up goes the leftovers of the leftovers, rejects of the rejects, spastics &

amputees & idiots & tiny tots m down comes jussst dussst. Fssssss!

—Think we otter ask for terms?—

—What, knuckle under to the papadocs?—

—Ida lykit but face facts.—

New gumt. They face facts.

Freddie wakened crying as usual. Somehow they missed him in both combouts but old Bayou La Batre boy, he didn't do so well, not so well, one day troopers rang the bell, oh hell, ta-ta B La B b.

Now Freddie wakened crying. Well, nobody ever said it was all Jack Daniels and cheesecake. Into the old plaingrays m off to work.

M now the old emcee was introducing the act. Boyzna band made a big thing plane Dixie, heculan headbone hornist givena wow-wow-wow heren theren marracas brrrpin m drummer whanging m banging on the old whiteskins m now Freddie listened fruck you.

—Ladies m gentlemen, ladies m gentlemen—(some familiar faces m some unfamiliar out there tonight)—mespecially our honored guess from offworld—he made a little bow m fluttery movements wivviz hands, Freddie saw—zmai great pressure to welcome you to our little show, the finest in Leto m we believe sincerely one of the best on the whole (ahahaha) of N'Alabama.—

He taken a little swing around the floor looken at customers. Then—Mnow folks, sgreat pressure present the star are show, dancing for your sthetic ratification, Miss Merriass Markham!—

Rowna plause. Lights down. Music up.

Miss Merriass prances onstage to marraca scrucks m headbone honks, Freddie watches her through misty-dim eyes, sniffles a snuffle or two. Ah, Miss Merriass, she's a beauty as ever, maybe a few pounds heavier (most everybody else is lighter these days) but she still got that old swaying grace.

Those blond locks they're a tiny wee darker now, proximately space black one might sight, m that beaches m clean complexion getting fashionably otherwise these days, what with lossa sunning m certain pills thatter not exactly talked about too much but very very popular. Miss Merriass she's hardly no darker than most of the grinning tourists ringside, mind, but fashionable, fashionable, N'Ala ladies (don't split no hairs bebay) mostly all looking a wee bit suntanned these days to say the leastest.

Miss Merriass she stands there in her old costume, summat weather-beaten m ragged but still worth looking at m serviceable (that's the costume) (also Miss Merriass) m that stretchable halter with the cutouts *wooeee* how that must cut in but it does, it does draw the eye to those two openings wherein Miss Merriass demonstrates her devotion to the Way Things Are Today.

And panties, well, just dwell, rivet your attention on that lovely third dimension Miss Emem displays. Nudity? She's got it licked all holler, has Miss Merry.

Well she starts inta moving m the band starts inta zowwing m vooming m she starts inta swinging her shoulders around m they matcher in sound m Miss Merriass gizzema little bump m a snicker circles the dark audience m she gizzema little grind, watch that behind, m they find that sommenta cheer over m Miss Merry she calls out a couple squeaky-high questions (surprising still to sweet Freddie but what) m back come a couple answers, accented a bit yesss, but comprehensible enow m Freddie (doesn't this surprise?) actually blushes there backstage m Miss Merriass:

:gr-r-r-i-i-n-n-d-sem another grind, swinging those hips around m around, knees bent m spread m hands out somehow managing to gimma-little titshow simultaneous m:

:*w-h-a-m!*:

: comes the bump you can see the heads jerk back like she smackedem every one square between the eyes with that old precious thump m before they recover Miss Merriass is turned around m doin something m *splook* that halter's gone m she's facingem again somehow bedecked m doing the ancient tassel trick a swinging m a swirling m the old tassels a twirling m up goes a big cheer (generous these tourists, with their praise; their money's another matter) m Miss Merriass keeps doing that trick for a

while m then she somehow slips outen the tassels m tosses m to a couple front row Pierres clearly making do with local talent m lights off m music up m Merriass offstage m emcee on m intermission m trine sell some cazzappie booze m make a few rupees.

Nabackinna room behind patrons tables Miss Merriass spots as she's headed offstage one of them bloodcurdling weirdoes you see nowna gain since the New Thing began: standing silent, lankblank hair hanging down, pasty-faced with dead-looking eyes m one hand, she can see, black as the space of aides and the other like the face m a spot of chest another shade, is this thing even a spade? It don' talk, it don' spend. But the New Visitors (to euphemize not excessively) have made it known, leave em lone.

She does.

Ch'en-Gordon slowly turned hir head, causing hir Gordon eyes to scan the room. Se moved slowly now, carefully: hir seams were sore, sore, movement was difficult, Gordon parts were slow to obey Ch'en commands, lying at times almost as if dead. At times Ch'en-Gordon had to swing a shoulder to move an arm and hand, flailing them as virtually inanimate extensions of himself.

In the dimness and wafting smoke se saw tables of black men and women, those farthest to the front of the room, and couples mixed, the white, whether man or woman, seeming subservient, eager to curry favor of the other, and in the back, farthest from the show space, a few, few tables of N'Alabamian natives nervously darting glances at the backs of the blacks.

At one table in the front row a N'Haitian in casual dress leisurely draws a small pipe from one pocket, a small glassine envelope from another and begins to pack the bowl of the pipe with fine greenish shreds from the glassine envelope.

His companion, a black girl in fashionable striped trousers, a rough leathern bag hanging between her glistening breasts, reaches forward and touches his hand. He spurts a flame into the bowl of his pipe, in a moment Ch'en-Gordon sees gray-blue cloudlets rise; the man holds the pipe for the black girl who bends to draw on it, her naked breasts resting on his arm.

She leans back smiling; both looking around the room, expressions of

scorn appearing as their eyes encounter the N'Alabamians in the rear.

Ch'en-Gordon, pain and weakness in every seam, locks eyes for an instant with the man. Transfers attention to the girl. Back to the man. Something se sees, something se recognizes.

Pain crying from every part, Ch'en-Gordon lurches between tables, falls to macroknees, elbows resting on the table of the two blacks. Se looks into eyes of the man, hir mouth opens and shuts trying to cry for aid, for aid from him who alone can provide it. He looks pityingly, uncomprehendingly. Se turns to the girl, mutely appealing. She draws back.

Se falls forward, hir head lolls on the fakewood table. Se moans, hir mouth falling open, tongue lolling, spiremes emerging, writhing, screaming mutely to speak, to be understood, to be aided.

Rejection antibodies dance, swirl, rush joyously.

Ch'en-Gordon falls from the fakewood table, clatters onto the floor, seams opening, dark fluids rushing out and spreading under the table.

The man shoves his pipe into his pocket, takes his companion, her face buried in his coat, quickly from the room.

Backstage Miss Merriass pisses m moans a little m starts into her other costume, Freddie helping. Half-dressed Miss Merriass sits down m supplements her pills with a little body makeup m Freddie checks himself all out m he's ready m now Miss Merriass finishes with her costume m now theykn hear the music coming up again m listen, listen, here's Mister Emcee's voice:

:—A dramatic interpretation ladies m gentlemen, music m drama m dance combine to present a traditional reenactment m again we prowly present Miss Emem—:

:plite plaws m a drumroll m Merriass she steps onstage again m a pure-brite spangspot spangs onta her, dark tresses swaying m shining, dark skin soft looking m ladylike in a somewhat revealing dashiki red m blue m yellow m green m out she strolls m around she rolls, music clipping m pipping m Miss Merriass she makes it look fine m then it's Freddie's cue m he:

: slithers onstage wearing traditional N'Alabamian dress m wivviz hairnskin a bit lightern natural m Miss Merriass she struts about m Freddie he slinks after hern suddenly:

:wham!:

: Freddie springs m Miss Merriass she shrieks m Freddie grabs m Miss Merriass struggles m Freddie he gets a hand down the backa Miss Markham's special breakaway costume m:

.rip!:

:it does, m Miss Markham she struggles shamedly to cover up her big fat boobs but Freddie:

:(on cue) growls m slobbers m rips m suddenly, music thumping m roaring, spangspot bobbing m audience throbbing they freeze in a tableau:

:Miss Merriass Markham standing there feet apart hands on hips naked m black in the spotlight, head thrown back, black hair glistening (light roots showing just a little) here m there, wherever one wishes to point the orbs, bare ass aquivering waiting for the tableau to break while:

: Freddie, plane his role to the hilt, the N'Alabamian animan crouched m slobbering, fingers like claws reaching for the pure black flesh of that noble figure m the only sound in the deathy club is now Freddie:

: sobbing:

:m *crack!* goes the drummer m *mrow-wow-ow* the heculan headboner joins m the tableau breaks as Freddie leaps forward but Miss Merriass has something startling what is it what can that be something lookie, lookie, curling around one leg, follow with your eye bebay around, around the sweet soft fleshy thigh, making a thick underline for that classy ass of hers, around through the crotch (ooh, that's smart!) m around the leg ontce more, looping around, ass-crotch-thigh-ass-crotch-thigh m after a certain number of revolutions coming from behind sozeta protrude horizontally forward from that delightful lady's pubes this *handle*, some half a foot long give or take a couple centimeters m about as thick as a baby's ankle m made of hard rubber m ridged, sozeta offer a good grip:

:m Miss Markham stares down that crouching beast for the few seconds as it takes to unwind that thing from around her leg m pulling forward on the handle it follows from between her legs m she raises it high in the

spangspot m there's another roll of drums m Freddie: *yowls!*:

:m the drummer gives a loud *Ktakk!*:

:m Miss Markham's whip gives a *crack!*:

:m Freddie *howls* (it's part of the act, right, but Miss Merriass do you gotta make it so *real!*) m grovels m:

:the whip comes m:

:Freddie writhes m:

:the whip comes m:

:Freddie screams m:

:the whip comes m:

:Freddie falls tooz knees m:

:the whip comes m:

:Freddie grovels m:

:Miss Merriass gizzin just one nice thunk wivver naked foot m:

:stagelights down, houselights up, actors off, emcee on, waiters move, business goes, music plays, money circulates m:

:life is sure not much fun for Freddie, but what the hell, the boy hasta earn a living.