

Let Adolf Hitler transport you to a far-future Earth, where only FERIC JAGGAR and his mighty weapon, the Steel Commander, stand between the remnants of true humanity and annihilation at the hands of the totally evil Dominators and the mindless mutant hordes they completely control.

Lord of the Swastika is recognized as the most vivid and popular of Hitler's science-fiction novels by fans the world over, who honored it with a Hugo as Best Science-Fiction Novel of 1954. Long out of print, it is now once more available in this new edition, with an Afterword by Homer Whipple of New York University. See for yourself why so many people have turned to this science-fantasy novel as a beacon of hope in these grim and terrifying times.

Other Science-Fiction Novels
by Adolf Hitler

EMPEROR OF THE ASTEROIDS
THE BUILDERS OF MARS
FIGHT FOR THE STARS
THE TWILIGHT OF TERRA
SAVIOR FROM SPACE
THE MASTER RACE
THE THOUSAND YEAR RULE
THE TRIUMPH OF THE WILL
TOMORROW THE WORLD

About the Author

Adolf Hitler was born in Austria on April 20, 1889. As a young man he migrated to Germany and served in the German army during the Great War. After the war, he dabbled briefly in radical politics in Munich before finally emigrating to New York in 1919. While learning English, he eked out a precarious existence as a sidewalk artist and occasional translator in New York's bohemian haven, Greenwich Village. After several years of this freewheeling life, he began to pick up odd jobs as a magazine and comic illustrator. He did his first interior illustration for the science-fiction magazine *Amazing* in 1930. By 1932, he was a regular illustrator for the science-fiction magazines, and, by 1935, he had enough confidence in his English to make his debut as a science-fiction writer. He devoted the rest of his life to the science-fiction genre as a writer, illustrator, and fanzine editor. Although best known to present-day SF fans for his novels and stories, Hitler was a popular illustrator during the Golden Age of the thirties, edited several

anthologies, wrote lively reviews, and published a popular fanzine. Storm, for nearly ten years.

He won a posthumous Hugo at the 1955 World Science-Fiction Convention for *Lord of the Swastika*, which was completed just before his death in 1953. For many years, he had been a popular figure at SF conventions, widely known in science-fiction fandom as a wit and nonstop raconteur. Ever since the book's publication, the colorful costumes he created in *Lord of the Swastika* have been favorite themes at convention masquerades. Hitler died in 1953, but the stories and novels he left behind remain as a legacy to all science-fiction enthusiasts.

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With a great groaning of tired metal and a hiss of escaping steam, the roadsteamer from Gormond came to a halt in the grimy yard of the Pormi depot, a mere three hours late; quite a respectable performance by Borgravian standards. Assorted, roughly humanoid, creatures shambled from the steamer displaying the usual Borgravian variety of skin hues, body parts, and gaits. Bits of food from the more or less continuous picnic that these mutants had held throughout the twelve-hour trip clung to their rude and, for the most part, threadbare clothing. A sour stale odor clung to this gaggle of motley specimens as they scuttled across the muddy courtyard toward the unadorned concrete shed that served as a terminal.

Finally, there emerged from the cabin of the steamer a figure of startling and unexpected nobility: a tall, powerfully built true human in the prime of manhood. His hair was yellow, his skin was fair, his eyes were blue and brilliant. His musculature, skeletal structure, and carriage were letter-perfect, and his trim blue tunic was clean and in good repair.

Feric Jaggar looked every inch the genotypically pure human that he in fact was. It was all that made such prolonged close confinement with the dregs of Borgravia bearable; the quasi-men could not help but recognize his genetic purity. The sight of Feric put mutants and mongrels in their place, and for the most part they kept to it.

Feric carried his worldly possessions in a leather bag which he hefted easily; this enabled him to avoid the grubby terminal entirely and embark directly upon Ulm Avenue which led through the foul little border town

toward the bridge over the Ulm by the shortest route possible. Today he would at last put the Borgravian warrens behind him and claim his birthright as a genotypically pure human and a Helder, with a spotless pedigree that was traceable back for twelve generations.

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With his heart filled with thoughts of his goal in fact and in spirit, Peric was almost able to ignore the sordid spectacle that assailed his eyes, ears, and nostrils as he loped up the bare earth boulevard toward the river. Ulm Avenue was little more than a muddy ditch between two rows of rude shacks constructed for the most part of crudely dressed timber, wattle, and rusted sheet-steel. Nevertheless, this singularly unimpressive track was apparently the pride and joy of the denizens of Pormi, for the fronts of these filthy buildings were festooned with all manner of garish lettering and rude illustrations advertising the goods to be had within, mostly local produce, or the castoff artifacts of the higher civilization across the Ulm. Moreover, many of the shopkeepers had set up street stands purveying rotten-looking fruit, grimy vegetables, and fly-specked meat; these fetid goods they hawked at the top of their lungs to the creatures which thronged the street, who in turn added to the din with shrill and argumentative cajolery.

The rank odor, raucous jabbering, and generally unwholesome atmosphere reminded Feric of the great marketplace area of Gonnond, the Borgravian capital, where fate had confined him for so many years. As a child, he had been shielded from close contact with the environs of the native quarter; as a young man he had taken great pains, and at no little expense, to avoid such places as much as was practicable.

Of course it had never been possible to avoid the sight of the sorts of mutants who crowded every nook and cranny of Gormond, and the gene pool here in Pormi appeared not one whit less debased than that which prevailed in the Borgravian capital. The skins of the street rabble here, as in Gormond, were a crazy quilt of mongrelized mutations. Blueskins, Lizardmen, Harlequins, and Bloodfaces were the least of it; at least it could be said that such creatures bred true to their own kind. But all sorts of mixtures prevailed—the scales of a Lizardman might be tinted blue or purple instead of green; a Blueskin might have the mottling of a Harlequin; the warted countenance of a Toadman might be an off-shade of red.

The grosser mutations for the most part bred truer, if only because two such genetic catastrophes in the same creature ended more often than not in an unviable fetus.

Many of the shopkeepers here in Pormi were dwarfs of one kind or another—hunchbacked, covered with wiry
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black hair, slightly pmheaded, many with secondary skin mutations—incapable of more strenuous labor. In a small town such as this, the more arcane mutants were less in evidence than in what passed for a Borgravian metropolis. Still, as Feric elbowed his way through the foul-smelling crowds, he spotted three Eggheads, their naked chitinous skulls gleaming redly in the warm sun, and brushed against a Parrotface. This creature whirled about at Feric's touch, clacking its great bony beak at him indignantly for a moment until it recognized him for what he was.

Then, of course, the Parrotface lowered its rheumy gaze, instantly gave off flapping its obscenely mutated teeth, and muttered a properly humble "Your pardon, Trueman."

For his part, Feric did not acknowledge the creature one way or the other, and quickly continued on up the street staring determinedly straight ahead.

However, a few dozen yards up the street, a familiar floating feeling wafted gently through Feric's mind; this indeed gave him pause, for long experience had taught him that this psychic aura was sure indication that a Dominator was in the area. Sure enough, when Feric studied the row of shacks to his right, his eyes confirmed the proximity of a Dom, and the dominance pattern was hardly the subtlest he had ever encountered either.

Five stalls sat on the street all in a line, presided over by three dwarfs, a Blueskin-Toadman mongrel with warty blue skin, and a Lizardman. All of these creatures displayed the slackness of expression and deadness of eye characteristic of mutants captured in a long-standing dominance pattern. The stalls themselves held meat, fruit, and vegetables in a loathsome state of advanced decay that should have rendered them totally unsalable, even by Borgravian standards. Nevertheless, hordes of mongrels and mutants flocked around these stands, snapping up the putrid goods at inflated prices without so much as a moment's haggling.

Only the presence of a Dominator in the vicinity could account for such behavior. Gormond was richly infested with the monstrosities, since they naturally preferred large cities where victims abounded; that such a minor town as this was infected was clear indication to Feric that Borgravia was even further under the spell of Zind than he had imagined.

His immediate impulse was to pause, seek out the Dom,
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and wring the monster's neck, but upon a moment's reflection, he decided that freeing a few wretched and worthless mutants from a dominance pattern was not really worth delaying his long-awaited exit from the cesspit of Borgravia a moment longer. Therefore, he continued on his way.

At last, the street petered out and became a path through an unwholesome grove of stunted pine trees with purplish needles and twisted trunks covered with cankers. Though this could hardly be described as a scene of beauty, it was certainly a welcome respite from the boisterous foulness of the town itself. Shortly, the path turned slightly to the north, and began to parallel the south bank of the Ulm.

Here Feric paused to stare northward across the wide

calm waters of the river which demarked this section of the border between the fester of Borgravia and the High Republic of Heldon. Across the Ulm, the stately, genotypically pure oaks of the Emerald Wood marched in wooden ranks to the north bank of the river. To Feric, these genetically spotless trees growing out of the rich, uncontaminated black soil of Heldon epitomized what the High Republic stood for in an otherwise mongrelized and degenerate earth. As the Emerald Wood was a forest of genetically pure trees, so was Heldon itself a forest of genetically pure men, standing like a palisade against the mutated monstrosities of the genetic garbage heaps that surrounded the High Republic.

As he proceeded farther up the path, the Ulm bridge

became visible, a graceful arch of hewn stone and oiled stainless steel, an obvious product of superior Helder craftsmanship. Feric hastened his stride, and was soon able to note with satisfaction that Heldon had forced the wretched Borgravians to accept the humiliation of a Helder customs fortress on the Borgravian end of the bridge. The black, red, and white building astride the entrance to the bridge was painted in the Helder colors in lieu of a proper flag, but to Feric it still proudly proclaimed that no near-man would be permitted to contaminate an inch of pure human soil. As long as Heldon kept itself genetically pure and rigorously enforced its racial purity laws, the hope still lived that the earth might once again be the sole property of the true human race.

Several paths from various directions converged on the customs fortress and, strangely enough, a sorry collection of mongrels and mutants were queued up outside the public
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portal, which was guarded by two purely ceremonial customs troops, armed only with standard-issue steel truncheons. It was a peculiar business indeed, for most of these creatures had no hope of passing a cursory examination by a blind moron. An obvious Lizardman stood right behind a creature whose legs had an extra joint. There were Blueskins and humpback dwarfs, an Egghead, and mongrels of all kinds; in short, a typical cross section of Borgravian citizenry. What deluded these poor devils into supposing that their like would be permitted to cross the bridge into Heldon? Feric wondered as he took his place in line behind a plain-dressed Borgravian with no apparent genetic defect.

For his own part, Feric was more than prepared for the thorough genetic examination he would have to undergo before being certified a pure human and admitted to the High Republic; he welcomed the ordeal and heartily approved of its stringency. Although his spotless pedigree virtually assured certification, he had, at some pains and no little expense, verified his genetic purity beforehand—or at least done so to the extent possible in a country inhabited chiefly by mutants and mutant-human mongrels, where, no doubt, the genetic analysts themselves were thoroughly contaminated. Had both his parents not held certificates, had his pedigree not been spotless for ten generations, had he not been conceived in Heldon itself, though forced by the banishing of his father for so-called war crimes to endure a birth in Borgravia, Feric would not have dared to presume to seek admittance to the spiritual and racial homeland he had never seen. Though instantly acknowledged as a true man on sight throughout Borgravia and verified as such by what passed for genetic science in that mongrelized state, he eagerly looked forward to the only confirmation of his genetic purity that really counted: acceptance as a citizen by the High Republic of Heldon, sole bastion of the true genotype of man.

Why then did such patently contaminated material presume to attempt to pass Helder customs? The Borgravian in front of him was a fair example. True his surface veneer of genetic purity was marred only by an acrid chemical odor exuded by his skin, but such an obvious somatic aberration was sure indication of thoroughly contaminated genetic material. The Helder genetic analyst would spot it in an instant, even without recourse to

instruments. The Treaty of Karmak had forced Heldon to open its borders, but only to certifiable humans. Perhaps the answer was merely the pathetic desire of even the most genetically debased mongrel to gain admittance to the brotherhood of true men, a desire sometimes strong enough to override reason or the truth in the mirror.

- At any rate, the queue was moving along quite swiftly into the customs fortress; no doubt very rapid processing and rejection of most of the Borgravians was taking place inside. It was not long before Feric passed by the portal guards, through the portal itself, and stood on what might in a sense be regarded as Helder soil for the first time in

his life.

The interior of the customs fortress was unmistakably

Helder, in sharp contrast to everything else south of the Ulm, where unfortunate circumstance had confined Feric during his growth to manhood. The large antechamber had a floor of smart red, black, and white tile, and similarly styled paintwork embellished the polished oaken walls. The chamber was brightened by powerful electric globes. What a far cry from the crudely finished, poured concrete interiors and tallow candles of the typical Bor-

gravian public building!

A few yards inside the portal, a Helder customs guard

in a somewhat slovenly gray uniform with tarnished brasswork divided the queue into two streams. All the more obvious mutants and mongrels were directed across the chamber and out through a door in the far wall. Feric approved heartily—there was no point in wasting the time of a genetic analyst with shambling quasi-humans such as these. An ordinary customs guard was quite qualified to dismiss them without further examination. The smaller number of hopefuls that the guard directed through a nearer door included quite a number of very dubious cases, such as the foul-smelling Borgravian who preceded Feric, but nothing on the order of a Blueskin or Parrot-face.

However, as he approached the guard, Feric noticed a

strange and disquieting thing. The guard seemed to nod to a good many of the mutants he guided into the reject line as if acknowledging familiarity; moreover, the Borgravians themselves acted as if they knew the drill, and, strangest of all uttered not a word of protest at their exclusion,

indeed displayed little emotion at all. Could it be that these sorry creatures were all so below the human geno-
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type in intelligence that they were incapable of retaining memories for more than a day or so and thus returned day after day ritualistically? Feric had heard that such fixated behavior was not unknown in the real genetic sinkholes of Cressia and Arbona, but he had never observed anything of the like in Borgravia, where the gene pool was constantly enriched by the exile of native-born Helder who could not quite be certified true humans, but who certainly were close enough to bring the level of the Borgravian gene pool far above that of places like Arbona or Zind.

As Feric reached the head of the queue, the customs guard addressed him in a flat, rather bored tone. "Day pass, citizen, or citizen candidate?"

"Citizen candidate," Feric replied crisply. Surely the only conceivable pass into Heldon was an official certificate of genetic purity! Either you already held Helder citizenship or you applied for certification and were found pure or you were refused admission to Heldon. What was this impossible third category?

The guard directed Feric into the smaller line with no more significant a gesture than the slack nodding of his head in the indicated direction. There was a pattern in all this, something about the whole tone of the operation, that Feric found profoundly disturbing, a wrongness that seemed to hover in the air, a deadness, a definite lack of the traditional Helder snap and dash. Had their daily isolation on the Borgravian side of the Ulm had some subtle detrimental effect on the esprit and will of these genetically robust Helder?

Wrapped in these somewhat somber musings, Feric followed the queue through the indicated doorway and into a long narrow room paneled in pine set off tastefully with ornately carved wooden trim depicting typical scenes from the Emerald Wood. A counter of black stone, polished to a high gloss and accented with inlaid stainless steel, ran down the length of the room, separating the queue from the four Helder customs officers who stood behind it. These fellows seemed fine specimens of true humanity, but their uniforms were somewhat slovenly, and a certain proper soldierliness was absent from their bearing. They looked more like clerks in a money depository or a public post office than customs troops manning a citadel of genetic purity.

Feric's uneasiness grew as the sour-reeking Borgravian

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preceding him finished his short interview with the first of the officers, wiped fingerprint ink off his hands with a rather soiled cloth, and followed the queue on down the line to the next Helder official. At the far end of the long room, Feric perceived the entrance to the bridge itself, where a guard armed with a truncheon and a pistol seemed to be passing an extremely dubious collection of genetic baggage on through to Heldon. In fact there was an insane perfunctory air about the whole operation.

The first Helder officer was young, blond, and a prime example of the true human genotype; moreover, though Feric sensed a certain laxness in his demeanor, his uniform was better tailored than most of the others Feric had noticed, freshly pressed, and the brasswork was at least untarnished, if not exactly gleaming. Before him on the shiny black counter were a pile of forms, a scribe, a blotter, a soiled scrap of cloth, and an inkpad.

The officer looked Feric straight in the eye, but the manliness of his gaze lacked a certain conviction. "Do you hold a certificate of genetic purity issued by the High Republic of Heldon?" he asked formally.

"I am applying for certification and admission to the High Republic as a Citizen and a true man," Feric replied with a dignity he hoped was sufficient to the occasion.

"So," the officer muttered diffidently, reaching for his scribe and the top form on the pile, and averting his blue eyes from Feric's person. "Let us dispose of the formalities. Name?"

"Feric Jaggar," Feric answered proudly, hoping for a flicker of recognition. For although Heermark Jaggar had only been a cabinet subofficial at the time of the peace of Karmak, there were surely those in the fatherland who still revered the names of the martyrs of Karmak. But the guard showed no recognition of the honor implicit in Feric's pedigree and wrote the name on the form in a casual, even somewhat imprecise hand.

"Place of birth?"

"Gormond, Borgravian."

"Present citizenship?"

Feric winced somewhat as he was forced to admit his technical Borgravian nationality. "However," he felt constrained to add, "both my parents were native Helder, certificate holders, and pure humans. My father was Heermark Jaggar, who, served as undersecretary of genetic evaluation during the Great War."

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"Surely you realize that not even the most illustrious pedigree can guarantee even a native-born Helder certification as a true man."

Feric's fair skin reddened. "I merely wish to point out that my father was exiled not for genetic contamination but for service to Heldon. Like many other good Helder, he was victimized by the loathsome Treaty of Karmak."

"It's none of my affair," the officer replied, inking Feric's fingertips and applying them to the proper boxes engraved on the form. "I'm not much interested in politics."

"Genetic purity is the politics of human survival!" Feric snapped.

"I suppose it is," the officer muttered inanely, handing him the odious ink rag, contaminated by the fingers of the mongrel in the queue before him—and by fate only knew how many others before that. Feric gingerly removed the ink from his fingers as best he could with a small unsoiled corner of the rag, while the young officer passed his form along to the Helder on his right.

This officer was an older man with trimly cropped gray hair and a dignified waxed mustache; obviously he had been an impressive figure in his prime. Now his eyes were red and rheumy as if from fatigue, and his shoulders stooped as if with the actual physical weight of the tremendous responsibility they metaphorically bore, for on the shoulder of his tunic was the red caducous in the black fist emblematic of the genetic analyst. The analyst glanced at the form, then spoke in a diffident voice, without looking directly at Feric.

"Trueman Jaggar, I am Dr. Heimat. It will be necessary to perform certain tests before issuing you a certificate of genetic purity."

Feric could scarcely credit his ears. What sort of genetic analyst was this that would so state the obvious while implicitly granting him the honorific of "Trueman" beforehand? Where was their sufficient cause to explain the

slackness and incredible lack of rigor in the bearing and manner of the men manning this customs fortress?

Heimat passed the form to the underling at his right, a somewhat slender, fair young man with chestnut hair bearing the ensign of a scribe on his uniform. As the paper was handed over, Feric's attention was momentarily drawn to this scribe, and his puzzlement was instantly resolved in the most horrifying manner conceivable.

For although the scribe appeared genetically pure to all
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but the highly sensitized eye, Feric knew for a certainty that this was a Dom!

He could not have precisely specified the characteristics of the scribe which marked him as a Dominator, but the total gestalt of the creature's presense fairly shrieked Dom at him through all his known and perhaps several unknown senses: a certain rodential gleam in the creature's eyes, a subtle smugness about his bearing. Perhaps there were other guideposts that Feric perceived on an entirely subliminal level: a wrongness in the body odor detectable only to the back reaches of his brain, an actual broadcast of electromagnetic energy subtle enough to arouse his suspicion even though the dominance field was not being directed at his own person. Perhaps it was simply that Feric, a true man isolated for- the most part among mutants and mongrels in a land heavily influenced by the Doms, had developed a psychic sensitivity to their presence that Helder who dwelt among their own kind lacked. At any rate, though constantly exposed to Dominators throughout his life, Feric had never been snared in a Dom's mental net, though at times his will had been severely taxed. This continuous exposure certainly enabled him to sniff out a Dom, whatever the subtleties of his method might be.

And standing there before him with scriber and form in hand at the very shoulder of a Helder genetic analyst in a most critical position was one of the loathsome creatures! It explained everything. The whole garrison must be ensnared in varying degrees in the dominance pattern that this seemingly insignificant scribe had no doubt slowly and painstakingly constructed. It was monstrous! But what could be done? How could men trapped in the dominance net themselves be convinced of the presence of their master?

Heimat had a small panoply of his science's paraphernalia out before him, but it seemed a paltry display; the Borgravian quack he had been forced to settle for in Gormond had employed a broader spectrum of tests than the Helder had equipped himself to perform.

He handed Feric a large blue balloon. "Breathe into this, please," he said. "It's been chemically treated so that only the biochemical breath-profile associated with the pure human genotype will turn it green."

Feric exhaled into the balloon, knowing full well that this was one of the most basic of tests; innumerable

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mongrels had been known to have passed it, and, moreover, it was totally ineffective in weeding out Doms.

Presently, the balloon turned a bright green. "Breath analysis—positive," Heimat called out, and the Dominator scribe, without looking at either of them, made the appropriate mark on the form.

The analyst handed Feric a glass vial. "Expectorate into this, please. I will subject the composition of your saliva to chemical analysis."

Feric spat into the vial, wishing fervently that it were the face of the Dominator, who now looked up and stared at him with an infuriatingly feigned mildness.

Dr. Heimat diluted the saliva with water, then pipetted a bit of the liquid into each of a rack of ten glass tubes. From a series of bottles, he decanted various chemicals into the tubes, so that the clear liquid in each turned colors: black, aqua, yellow, brick-orange, aqua again, red, once more yellow, yet again aqua, purple, and opaque white.

"Saliva analysis—one hundred percent perfect," the genetic analyst called out. This test, taking ten separate characteristics of pure human saliva separately as genetic criteria rather than merely testing the total biochemical gestalt, had perforce a much greater precision. However, there were dozens of mutations from the true human norm that were in no way linked to the composition of saliva or breath, including the Dominator mutation itself, which could not be smelled out by somatic tests at all.

Feric glared at the Dominator, daring the creature to test his will and reveal his true colors. But of course the scribe directed no psychic energies in his direction. Why should he expose himself to a passing stranger and thus

risk the dissolution of his dominance pattern, when circumstances foreclosed the possibility of adding him to the string?

Dr. Heimat affixed the twin electrodes of a P-meter to the skin of Feric's right palm with a gummy vegetable adhesive. The P-meter consisted of a device for detecting the minute changes in bioelectricity generated by psychic responses, and a pen-and-drum apparatus for recording the resultant psychic profile. Its adherents claimed that, properly used, it was efficacious in the detection of Doms. But it was impossible to be certain that the Doms had no conscious control over their psychic discharges and, there-
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fore, could not feign a genotypically human profile by carefully calculated acts of will.

"I'm going to make a series of statements and record your psychic responses," Heimat informed Feric diffidently. "You need not react verbally; the instrument is designed to measure your inward reaction."

He then reeled off a set of stock statements quickly, mechanically, and without apparent emotion. "The human race is doomed to certain extinction. The human genotype is the best true breed of sapient animal yet evolved. No genetic material could have passed through the Time of Fire entirely uncontaminated. The highest instinct of any sapient species must be to perpetuate its kind at the expense of all other sapient species. Love is a cultural sublimation of sexual lust. I would sacrifice my own life for a comrade or lover." And so forth; a list of stimuli designed to elicit different patterns of psychic response from true men than from mutants and mongrels, especially Doms. Feric was quite dubious of the test's total validity, for a Dominator who could anticipate the order of statements by inside information or other means might very well be able to tailor his responses appropriately by filling his mind with thoughts calculated to produce the "human" galvanic response proper to the various statements. Still, when combined with a battery of more rigorous tests, it had considerable use; all but the most dominantly human mongrels, and perhaps the Doms, would be

weeded out.

Upon completion of the statements, Heimat glanced perfunctorily at the pattern encribed by the pen on the drum and announced: "P-meter profile—positive."

The Dominator scribe handed the analyst the form. This the fellow signed, proclaiming: "Trueman Jaggar, I

hereby certify you a pure example of the uncontaminated human genotype and verify your right to citizenship in the High Republic of Heldon."

Feric was aghast. "That's all?" he demanded. "Three superficial tests and you grant me a certificate of genetic purity? This is an outrage! A quarter of the rabble of Zind could weasel past this farce!"

As he uttered these words, Feric felt a certain pressure against the ramparts of his mind, a lightning thrust of psychic energy aimed at the core of his will. For an instant, the vain and foolish nature of the fuss he was raising seemed glaringly apparent: a reasonable man did
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not rave like this in public; to continue in this way would vex any number of pleasant and harmless beings. Much the best course would be to melt into the ebb and flow of cosmic destiny and eschew the fruitlessness of resistance to the will of one's betters.

But even as the psyche of the Dominator reached out to sap his will, Feric, out of long experience, recognized the will-less pleasant drifting feeling for what it was: a Dom attempting to draw him into his net. Feric determinedly stoked the fires of his formidable will with the torch of righteous hate for these soulless creatures who would displace the supremacy of true men with their own obscene reign, whose highest emotion was the desire to exterminate their genetic superiors, who sought to turn the earth into their own squalid pigpen. Although the scribe showed no outward sign of either his attempt at domination or of its successful repulsion, Feric felt the horrid will-less moment dissolve in the fires of his fierce hate.

"Surely I, as a genetic analyst, am more capable of judging genetic purity than you are as a layman," Heimat had been saying while the psychic contest was fought and won.

"With three tests?" Feric said. "An evaluation of proper rigor would involve at least several dozen tests including tissue, blood, urine, tear, feces, and semen analysis."

"Such an examination would consume too much time to be practical," the analyst said. "Few men with contaminated genetic material can pass these simple tests, and those who can are human for all practical purposes anyway, aren't they?"

Feric could contain himself no longer. "The creature beside you is a Dom!" he shouted. "You are enmeshed in

a dominance pattern! Exert your will and free yourself at once!"

Those behind him in the queue looked alarmed; even some of the clearly dubious mongrels seemed dismayed, as well they might. For a moment, the room was on the verge of uproar; then the faces of all seemed to dissolve into bland blankness as the Dom acted to preserve himself.

"You are clearly in error, Trueman Jaggar," Dr. Heimat said with utter mildness. "Lance Corporal Mork is a certified true man; surely you can see that if this were not so he would hardly be wearing the uniform of Heldon."

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"Perhaps Trueman Jaggar is simply unfamiliar with the ways of Heldon, sir," Mork suggested with an irony audible only to himself and to Feric, the only man in the room who shared his grim secret, and who apparently could do nothing to harm him. "No doubt had any of us been forced to grow to manhood surrounded by mutants, mongrels, and God-knows-what, we too might be seeing Doms in every nook and cranny." Mork stared at Feric without a trace of a smile on his face or a hint of emotion in his eyes, but Feric could well imagine the satanic glee with which he was enjoying this moment.

Dr. Heimat returned Feric's form to Mork, who passed it on to the final officer behind the counter. "You have now been certified a true human, whether you think the tests were adequate or not, Trueman Jaggar," he said. "You may accept citizenship or not as you please, but in any case, you are holding up the line."

Furious, but knowing that further conversation with Heimat or the treacherous Mork would prove pointless, Feric stalked down to the last official. The man who stood glancing at his form was a square, hard, bluff true man in prolonged late middle age, with iron-colored hair and a trim beard to match. The ribbons on his tunic announced that he was no peacetime soldier, but an old warrior who had seen honorable action in the Great War. Nevertheless, the diffidence in his bearing and the slight lack of proper manliness in his eyes betrayed the sad fact that he, too, was enmeshed in the dominance pattern. Still a fellow such as this might well be encouraged to exert his will and fracture the pattern.

"You, sir," Feric said crisply, "do you not detect a certain slackness in your will, an unmanly readiness to go

along with the flow of events? Surely an old soldier such as yourself must realize that all is not well in this garrison."

The officer placed Feric's form in the orifice of a complex duplicating device. "Please look straight ahead at the red dot above the lens of the machine," he said.

Feric froze automatically for a second during which the officer threw a switch on the side of the duplicating machine. There was a very bright flash of light of extremely short duration; then a soft humming sound began in the bowels of the machine.

"You have been certified a genotypically pure human, Trueman Feric Jaggar," the officer said mechanically. "In 26

a moment I shall present you with your certificate. This must be displayed upon demand to any police, customs, or military official. Any tradesman may refuse your custom if you do not display your certificate upon request. You may not marry without it. Is this understood?"

"This is ridiculous!" Feric snapped. "Don't you realize that a river of contaminated genes must be gushing through this border crossing?"

"Do you understand the conditions of citizenship?" the officer repeated doggedly.

"Of course I understand! Don't you understand that you're under the influence of a Dominator?"

For a moment, the officer looked Feric square in the eye. Feric channeled every ounce of will he could muster into his gaze. A spark from his steely blue eyes seemed to jump the gap for a moment and glow fitfully in the pupils of the Helder officer.

"Surely ... surely," the fellow muttered with a certain uneasiness, "surely you must be mistaken? . . ."

At that moment, a chime rang inside the duplicator, and Feric's certificate dropped into the hopper. The sound caused the Helder officer to look away from Feric's eyes and Feric could sense that the fragile effect of the psychic counterforce he had been so strenuously projecting had been shattered by this caprice of circumstance.

The officer took the certificate from the hopper and handed it to Feric. "By accepting this certificate, Trueman Jaggar," he said with perfunctory ceremony, "you accept

all the rights and responsibilities of a citizen of the High Republic of Heldon and a certified true man. You may participate in the public life of Heldon, vote for and hold office, serve in the military forces of the High Republic, leave and enter the fatherland at will. You may not marry or propagate without the written permission of the Ministry of Genetic Purity, under pain of death. Knowing this, and of your own free will, do you accept citizenship in the High Republic of Heldon?"

Feric stared at the certificate which lay hard and smooth and glossy in his hand. On its clear plastic surface was engraved his name and date of certification, his fingertip patterns, his color photograph, and the signature of Dr. Heimat. This elegant artifact was suitably embellished with ornate scrollwork and swastikas in red and black which lent it a proper dignity of appearance. For years, even before his coming to manhood, Feric had
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dreamed of the moment when this sacred document would be his proudest possession. Now his appreciation of this moment was ruined by the defilement of the stringent genetic standards without which the certificate became a meaningless bit of plastic and pigment.

"Surely you are not going to reject Helder citizenship at this point?" the Helder officer said, displaying for the first time a hint of emotion, albeit nothing nobler than petty

bureaucratic annoyance.

"I accept citizenship," Feric muttered, tucking the

document carefully into his strong leather wallet which was firmly secured to his horsehide belt. As he strode toward the bridge entrance, he vowed that he would cling to this sacred privilege with more tenacity than this lot of sorry specimens had. He would avenge this outrage a thousandfold before he would let go of the Doms. A millionfold would still be insufficient.

2

A cool breeze swirled Feric's blue cloak about him as he stepped out onto the uncovered bridge over the Ulm. The bridge bed consisted of wooden walkways on either side of a stone roadway, both wood and stone worn to polished smoothness by the passage of countless leather soles and latex wheels. The gentle wind blew across from Heldon, carrying the pleasant odor of the Emerald Wood to Feric's nostrils, helping to clear away the stink of the customs fortress and, for that matter, of all Borgravia.

With powerful strides, Feric set out across the bridge toward his destiny in the High Republic. A few steamers passed by him roaring smoke, clanging iron, hissing steam, but otherwise traffic seemed quite light, and the only pedestrians visible were perhaps a hundred yards ahead of him up the walkway. As a consequence, Feric was able to wrap himself in solitude as he walked, and contemplate

what lay before him.

What lay before him was, in short, all that really

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mattered in the world: the High Republic of Heldon, in which the future of true humanity resided, if the true human genotype were to have a future at all. The states bordering the fatherland were comparatively rich in human genetic material, but since mongrels and mutants formed the vast bulk of their populaces, and had held political sway since the failure of the High Republic to crush their hold during the Great War, the likelihood that such governments would pass the stringent racial laws necessary to breed such debased gene pools back to the pure human genotype seemed nil. It had taken Heldon several centuries of rigorous enforcement of just such laws to purify the gene pool to the present degree, and even so Heldon had started with a clear majority of genotypically pure human stock, unlike the states around it, which at present swarmed with mutants and mongrels of the most obscene sort. Beyond these states were such total cesspits as Arbona and Cressia where even the mutants themselves did not breed true from generation to generation, and to the east the vast Dominator-ruled pestilence of Zind. Beyond that in all directions, naught but reeking contaminated wildlands with astronomical geiger counts, where nothing could live beside stomach-turning things resembling ambulatory carcinomas, animal and human stock mutated beyond all hope of recognition. No, only Heldon was the bastion of true humanity, and if the world were to one day be genetically pure again, it would have to be done by force of Helder arms.

Feric pondered his place in the common human destiny as his long, powerful strides carried him closer to the dozen or so figures on the walkway ahead of him. As a young man in Borgravia, he had easily mastered several areas of endeavor: the art of motive mechanics, the science of sloganeering, the crafts of interior and exterior design, clothing design, and pamphleteering. He had secured a livelihood from each of these sources at one time or another. Moreover, his pride in his true humanity, and the encouragement of his father, had caused him to study

deeply the subjects of history, genetics, and military art for their own sakes. It seemed to Feric that a man of his varied skills would never lack for gainful employment.

His deepest desire, however, was not to enrich himself but to serve the cause of true humanity to the best of his ability. To this end, two choices seemed open to him in this new life in Heldon: embark upon a military career or

enter politics. The choice was a difficult one. On the one hand, a military career promised the quickest road to concrete patriotic action, but only provided that the political leadership of the High Republic developed the will to properly employ its armed forces. On the other hand, politics was an avenue by which he might gain access to the very circles in which such decisions were made, but only by a tedious and deadening process of accommodation, wrangling, and weaseling, which struck Feric as essentially unmanly.

He resolved that he would not make such a momentous decision until destiny gave him a clear sign, one way or the other.

While he pondered these weighty affairs, the natural reflexes of his superb body and his consequent rapid gait had carried him to within a few strides of his fellow immigrants on the bridge, and when he chanced to look up at them, his jaw fell open in amazement and dismay.

For there on the Ulm bridge, shuffling toward the bastion of genetic purity, was an incredible gaggle of the most blatant and disgusting mutants and mongrels imaginable! Here was a Parrotface whose mutated teeth formed an unmistakable beak. Here was a female Blueskin, and three humpbacked dwarfs, one with the Toadman warted skin as well. And a manlike being whose gait clearly revealed two extra joints in his legs, alongside an Egghead with a grossly warped ellipsoid skull. This was a sight common enough to the streets of Gormond, but on the bridge to Heldon, in a sense Helder territory itself, it was an inexplicable phantasm of horror.

Furiously, Feric broke into a near run, and caught up with the gristly menagerie in a few quick strides. "Haiti" he shouted. "What is the meaning of this?"

The collection of mutants came to a shambling halt and regarded Feric with a mixture of fear, befuddlement, and awe, which nevertheless seemed to him to have a hint of surliness.

"Your pleasure, Troeman?" the Parrotface croaked hoarsely in a vile voice which, however, seemed basically free of guile or malice.

"What are you folk doing on the bridge to Heldon?"

The quasi-men stared at him in what seemed to be genuine incomprehension. "We are traveling to the town of Uimgam, Trueman," the female Blueskin finally ventured.

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Were these creatures totally incapable of comprehending the impossibility of the situation? "How were you allowed on this bridge?" Feric demanded. "Surely creatures such as yourselves will not presume to tell me that you are Helder citizens!"

"We travel on the customary day passes, Trueman," the Parrotface said.

"Day passes?" Feric muttered. Lord, were they actually issuing passes of entry to mutants? What treason to true humanity was this? "Let me see one of these passes," he commanded.

The Egghead reached into a greasy oilskin pouch which hung on a ragged thong about its neck and handed over a small red card. The card was made of cheap paperboard rather than plastic; nevertheless, it bore the Great Seal of Heldon and an engraved border of tiny locked swastikas, the traditional motif of the Ministry of Genetic Purity. In simple block lettering of a rather inelegant design, the card proclaimed: "Day pass good for ten hours sojourn in Uimgarn only on the date of May 14, 1142 A.F. Transgression of these terms punishable by death."

Thoroughly disgusted, Feric handed the card back. "Is this common practice?" he asked. "Are non-citizens commonly admitted across the river for limited stays?"

"Provided there is a job to be done that true men, such as yourself, deem beneath their proper station," one of the dwarfs said.

So that was it! Feric had heard that Universalism was gaining popularity among the masses of Heldon, but he had scarcely imagined that the insidious doctrine promulgated by the Doms had sufficient influence to actually weaken the stringency of the genetic purity laws. The Universalists demanded the breeding of mindless slave creatures to perform menial tasks, the sort of perversion

of protoplasm that the Dominators practiced in Zind. They were not yet powerful enough to achieve this unspeakable end, but apparently they had stirred up the slothful masses to the point where the craven government was actually permitting mutants to work in Heldon as a sop to this tendency.

"Revolting!" Feric muttered, and with a dozen long strides, he put the wretched quasi-humans behind him. What he had seen thus far had deeply disturbed him. He had not yet entered Heldon proper, and already he had observed a customs fortress under the sway of a Domina-

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tor and a shocking relaxation of the genetic purity laws that could only be traced to the influence of Universalists. Was the High Republic rotten to the core or merely contaminated around the edges? At any rate, his duty as a true man was clear: to exert his powers to the utmost to restore the rigor of the genetic purity laws, to work for their stringent, indeed fanatic enforcement, and to make full use of whatever opportunity destiny granted him to further this sacred cause.

With new determination and a growing sense of mission, Feric quickened his pace and fairly loped along the walkway toward the town of Ulmgarn and the great reaches of Heldon stretching majestically beyond.

The Ulm bridge debouched directly onto the main street of the town of Ulmgarn: an enameled sign atop a slim cast-iron pillar informed Feric that this substantial boulevard was known as Bridge Way. Before him was a spectacle that warmed his soul, burning away both the off-river breeze and the deeper chill of his encounters in the customs fortress and on the bridge. For the first time in his life, he beheld a town built by true men on uncontaminated soil and inhabited by healthy specimens of the pure human genotype; what a difference from the sordid squalor and decay of Gormond!

In Gormond, the streets and walkways were naught but rude rocks pounded into the earth with hammers, on which one might expect to find the foulest of ordure and muck. The streets of Ulmgarn were paved with smooth, perfectly maintained concrete, and the walkways, too, were of concrete artfully decorated with inlaid glazed bricks in yellow, gold, and green, and both were spotless. In Gormond, the ordinary buildings were of sheet metal and timber, and the larger ones of unadorned poured concrete. Here the ordinary buildings were of glazed brick in a multitude of colorful hues, set off with lushly modeled wooden facings; the more majestic edifices were of rich,

dark, polished stone, embellished with ornate brasswork facades and heroic statuary. Swarming on the streets of Gormond was a mongrel horde of Blueskins, dwarfs, Eggheads, Parrotfaces, Toadmen, countless other varieties of pure mutants and mongrelized crosses, and human-mutant hybrids; a random collection of bits and pieces of dozens of different species cobbled together piecemeal and dressed for the most part in reeking rags. In grand con-

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trast, the streets of Ulmgarn were graced by fine specimens of true humanity wherever the eye might fall:

tall fair men with blond or brown hair, blue or green eyes, and all their parts of the proper order and in the right places, handsome women of the same coloring and configuration, and all dressed in a rich variety of garments of leather, nylon, linen, and silk, furs and velvets, adorned with silver and gold jewelry and many-colored embroidery.

The whole generated a psychic aura of genetic and somatic health, a spirit of racial purity and high civilization, that uplifted Feric's soul and overwhelmed him with gratitude for and pride in his genetic good fortune. These beings were the crown of creation—and he was one of them!

Squaring his shoulders, Feric set off down the street in search of a meal, and thence to the roadsteamer station, for he planned to set off for the great southern Helder metropolis of Walder which lay just north of the Emerald Wood directly after an early dinner. There, in the second grandest city in the fatherland, he would perhaps tarry a while before traveling further to the capital of Heldhime, deep in the heart of the industrial center of Heldon. Surely his destiny lay in one or another of the great metropolises of the High Republic, rather than in the towns bordering the Ulm or the Emerald Wood.

Feric sauntered past shops offering all manner of riches and wonders. Here were stalls offering the bounty of the land, and shops purveying the finest of clothing for men and women. On Bridge Way, one could purchase the latest and most carefully crafted mechanical and electrical devices: steam engines for the home and the slave mechanisms they powered—clothes washers, wood-working tools, grain mills, pumps and winches of every conceivable sort. Other emporiums offered richly carved furniture, outer garments of leather or synthetic rubber of the highest quality and gloss, paints and turpentines, medicines and remedies famous even in Borgravia for their potency—every manner of civilized product one might

imagine or desire.

Scattered among these shops were sundry eating houses and taverns. Feric paused outside several of these in turn, sniffing the aromas which wafted out into the street and observing the clientele. Finally, he selected a large tavern called the Eagle's Nest, which was housed in a red brick

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building whose facade was embellished with painted scenes from the Blue Mountains. The central motif expressed in graphics the legend written above it: a large black eagle landing on its nest atop a snowcapped mountain. The doors to the tavern were opened wide, the smells drifting through them were pleasant enough, and from within came the vague sounds of some sort of fervent discussion. All in all, the place seemed appetizing to Feric's hunger, and the hubbub within piqued his curiosity.

Upon passing through the tavern door, Feric found himself in a large vaulted common room filled with sturdy wooden tables and benches. Perhaps forty men or more were scattered about the room sitting at the tables and drinking beer from large ceramic mugs upon which the Eagle's Nest motif had been painted. The attention of perhaps half the men in the room was focused on a slight figure in a trimly cut green tunic who perched on the edge of a table against the far wall haranguing a small group clustered about him; the rest of the customers conversed with each other and were quiescent.

Feric chose an empty table well within earshot of the slim, intense speaker, but somewhat outside the commotion that surrounded him. A waiter in a brown uniform with red piping approached him even as he seated himself.

"The present leadership of the High Republic, or more accurately the deadheads and simpletons who profane the seats of the Council Chamber with their unclean buttocks, has not the vaguest notion of the true threat to Heldon," the speaker was saying. Though there was a faint trace of superciliousness about his lips and a light hint of mockery in his voice, there was something about the very sardonic humor of his bright black eyes that drew Feric's attention and approval.

"Your pleasure, Trueman?" the waiter inquired, diverting Feric's attention momentarily.

"A mug of beer and a salad of lettuce, carrots, cucumbers, tomatoes, onions, and whatever other vegetables you may have at hand that are fresh and uncooked."

The waiter gave Feric a somewhat arch look as he departed. Meat was, of course, the traditional staple in Heldon as elsewhere, and upon occasion Feric indulged himself with this questionable fare, since fanatic dedication to vegetarianism seemed to him both impractical and perhaps a bit unwholesome. Nevertheless, he knew full well that progress up the food chain from ' 'getable mat-

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ter to meat concentrated the level of radioactive contamination of foodstuffs, and he therefore eschewed flesh as much as possible. His genetic purity was not his to squander on the indulgence of his appetite; in a higher sense it was the common property of the community of true men and demanded to be guarded as a racial trust. A peculiar look from a waiter now and then was not enough to keep him from sticking to his racial duty.

"And of course your buttocks would better grace the seat of power, eh Bogel?" bellowed a bluff fellow whose face was somewhat reddened by overconsumption of beer. His comrades showed their appreciation of this remark with crude, albeit good-natured, laughter.

The speaker Bogel seemed to have been brought up short for a moment. When his reply came, Feric sensed that it sprang not from inborn instinct but from a sharp, if somewhat cold and mechanical, intellectualization.

"I seek no personal power for myself," Bogel said impishly. "However if such a fine specimen as yourself urges a Council seat upon me, what an ingrate I would be to thwart your desires!"

This drew somewhat pallid laughter. Feric directed closer attention to the men attending Bogel. They seemed divided up into two rough classes: those few who were paying serious and rapt attention, and those in the majority who seemed to regard the dapper little man with his bright eyes and thin saturnine features as some sort of comic entertainment. Nevertheless, both groups seemed to be composed of the same sort of fellow by and large:

middle-aged, two-fisted beer drinkers, shopkeepers, craftsmen and farmers by the look of them—plain honest folk whose understanding of affairs of state could hardly be deemed profound. It seemed to Feric as if this Bogel overestimated his audience, putting on, as he did, an air of intellectual sarcasm and superiority in a public tavern.

"Thus might a Dominator speak!" another fellow roared. There was more loud laughter, but this tune tinged with a certain uneasy quality.

For the first time, a certain fire became evident in Bogel's eyes.

"Thus might speak a Universalist sympathizer or a man enmeshed in a dominance pattern," he said. "The Human Renaissance Party is the deadly enemy of the Dom and his Universalist dupes and lackeys; no one denies this, least of all the scum themselves. Ridicule of the Party or
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its leadership therefore serves the interest of the Dominators. How do we know that such words were not put in

your mouth by an inhuman master?"

With this Bogel smiled, indicating that this was meant as jest. However this subtlety seemed totally lost on the poor fellow's audience; countenances darkened and a certain surly atmosphere began to build. Clearly this Bogel, while obviously possessed of a keen mind, had no instinct for moving men in the desired direction with oratory.

"You dare suggest that I am on a Dominator's string, you pathetic wretch!"

Bogel seemed somewhat lost; certainly he had not wanted to provoke anger against himself, but just as certainly that was rapidly becoming the result of his words. At this point, the waiter arrived with Feric's salad and beer. Feric sipped diffidently at the beer and picked at the food, intent now, for some reason he barely understood, on studying the drama being played out before him.

Bogel smiled somewhat weakly. "Come, come, my friend," he said. "Don't be so solemn and serious-minded. I accuse no one here of being on a Dominator's string. Though, on the other hand, how can any of us ever be sure that anyone else is not enmeshed in a dominance pattern? That's the insidious horror of the creatures: true men such as ourselves cannot fully trust each other as long as one wretched Dom still lives within the borders of

Heldoni"

This seemed to mollify the crowd somewhat, at least to the point where Bogel was allowed to continue.

"This bickering among us is an object lesson in the depths to which Heldon has sunk under the present limp-wristed regime," he pointed out. "I'd stake my life on the

fact that there isn't a true man here who wouldn't reach out to wring a Dom's neck if such a creature were to make itself apparent. Yet you shrink at supporting a party dedicated to ruthlessly rooting these vermin out. There isn't a true man here who would not slay his own offspring should that child betray the human race by mating with a mutant or a hybrid. Yet, tempted by sloth, you go along when the Council, under Universalist pressure, relaxes the genetic purity laws in order to allow foreign mutants to enter Heldon to do work that the lackeys of the Doms .have convinced you is beneath your station. Surely in a town such as Ullgam, in such close proximity to the Borgravian pestilence, good Helder such as yourselves
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would be up in arms and ready to flock to the standard of the Human Renaissance Party in droves, once I proclaimed our dedication to the preservation of the racial purity of Heldon and the ouster of the fools on the Council who to curry favor with slackers and rabble would betray the iron rigor of our genetic purity laws!"

"Well spoken!" Peric felt constrained to utter aloud. His voice, however, was lost in the general cheering, for suddenly Bogel had touched his audience in their simple yet noble sense of racial pride. Others in the tavern now gave over their private conversation and turned their attention to the slim, dark-haired speaker.

"Or so I in my naive musings imagined when I decided to journey from Walder to these border regions in search of support for our cause," Bogel continued after the ovation had subsided. "But instead of a righteously enraged citizenry, what did I find? Slothful slaggards too bemused by the prospect of having lesser beings take their tasks upon themselves to protest this outrage! Naive bumpkins who believe that all Doms have been driven out of Heldon because a government of fools and racial eunuchs tells them so!"

It was too much for Feric to bear. This Bogel obviously spoke out as a true patriot. His speech had cogency, his cause was just and more than worthy of support, he had momentarily captured the hearts of his audience, and yet now he had thrown away his moment by indulging in tortured self-pity instead of building to a roaring demand for concrete and ruthless action. Instead of cheers, he was drawing renewed hostility. The man was a good speaker as such, but a clear failure as a political agitator. Perhaps, though, the situation could be saved. ...

Feric leaped to his feet and shouted in a bold, clear voice:

"There are those of us here who are neither slaggards nor naive bumpkins!" This voicing of the crowd's own hostility instantly drew all attention to him; Bogel himself did not attempt to interfere, since Feric's words had revealed to his sharp mind the foul situation he had put himself in. All waited anxiously to hear Feric's next words—would he attack the speaker or speak in his defense?

"There are those of us here to whom your words are a ringing challenge!" Feric continued, noting that Bogel's eyes had brightened, his thin lips creased in a smile.

"There are those of us here who will not tolerate the impudence of mutants or the contamination of human soil

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by one instant of their unclean presence. There are those of us here who are ready to rip Doms apart with our bare hands when we see them. True men! Pure men! Men fanatically dedicated not merely to the preservation of the racial purity of the present High Republic of Heldon but to the extension of the absolute rule of true men to every humanly habitable spot on the surface of this sorry earth! In the heart of even the most slothful slaggard lives this hero willing to take up arms to preserve the pure human genotype! Our very genes cry out—exclude the mutant! Drive him before you! Slay the Dom wherever you find

him!"

The audience broke into hearty prolonged cheers. As

the cheering went on, Feric observed that every pair of eyes in the tavern was upon him; lines of psychic energy seemed to connect the center of his being with the heart of every man in the room. It was as if the wills of the audience fed their full power into his own will, which in turn returned their fervor to them magnified tenfold, in an ever-building spiral of psychic power that flooded and enlarged his being, a massive racial force that was his to direct where he willed. A sudden inspiration struck him:

he would give this energy a concrete outlet, a target.

"And a Dom may be found not far from this very place," Feric continued when the cheering had lapsed.

"Yes, there is a Dominator in your midst, and in the most monstrous place conceivable! This creature is within the reach of your fists at this very moment!"

A silence descended upon the room into which Bogel spoke: "It's men like you that the Party needs, Trueman! Tell us, where is this hidden Dominator? I warrant there

isn't a man here now not ready to rip him to pieces!"

Feric was quite pleased that Bogel had caught the spirit of the moment. His cause had merit, it was the cause of true humanity; his efforts deserved reward.

"Incredibly enough, a Dominator has secreted himself in the heart of the customs fortress on the Ulm bridge entrusted with protecting your genetic purity," Feric said. "He holds the entire garrison in a dominance pattern!"

A horrified gasp issued from the men in the tavern. Instantly, Feric went on. "Think of the horror of it! This stinking monstrosity has secured certification and serves as a scribe to the genetic analyst empowered to grant certification to prospective citizens. From this citadel, he saps the will of the garrison and the analyst so that a veritable

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river of contaminated genes may gush into this area like the contents of a sewer to poison the posterity of your sons and daughters! Further, there is no one in the garrison not enmeshed in this pattern, no one able to dislodge the foul beast or smash his net!"

A din of angry muttering filled the tavern now. They were clearly ready to carry out the racial will as he directed. Their deepest instinct had been fully aroused—the iron determination to protect the human species. A fire had been ignited which could only be quenched in Dominator blood.

"What are we waiting for?" Feric bellowed. "We have our hands, and some of us are armed with truncheons! Let us march to the bridge and free our racial comrades! Death to the Dominator!"

So saying, Feric made his way quickly to Bogel's side and fairly dragged the smaller man to his feet. Feric threw his great arm around Bogel's shoulders and cried:

"Death to the Dominator—on to the bridge!"

The crowd answered with a feral roar of approval, and Feric, with Bogel at his heels, marched resolutely out of the tavern without looking back, confident that the aroused mob was more than willing to follow where he led.

Down Bridge Way the mob swept like avenging angels, thirty or forty outraged Helder, with Feric and Bogel at their head. Every citizen on the street stopped in his

tracks with amazement at the stirring sight; a few of the bolder souls fell into line.

Soon they had reached the bridge; Feric led the mob out upon it, walking straight down the center of the roadbed so that the entire width of the bridge was blocked by sturdy men, marching shoulder to shoulder in righteous wrath. "You're an amazing orator, whoever you are," Bogel told Feric, huffing and blowing in his efforts to keep up with Feric's heroic strides. "The Human Renaissance Party has need of a man like you. I myself am, alas, no rabble-rouser."

"You must tell me about your party when this is over," Feric replied tersely.

"With pleasure. But how do you mean this business to end? Your goal seems beyond my comprehension."

"My goal is simple enough," Feric told him. "The death of the Dominator in the fortress. If you seek to gain men's

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fanatical devotion you must allow them a baptism in blood."

Across the bridge the mob marched resolutely, ten across, five ranks deep, a motly group of tavern loungers converted into a temporary storm troop of warriors by one man's will. It was a deeply satisfying feeling for Feric to march at the head of the column of men; it was everything he had imagined when he entertained the notion of a military career, and more. He could feel the power of the massed formation of men at his command course through his being, filling him with a sense of absolute faith in his own destiny. He was a leader. When he spoke, men would listen; when he commanded, they would follow. This without any formal training or official authority; his superiority in these matters was a quality other men could not help sense as intrinsic, no doubt graven in his genes themselves. Just as a herd of wild horses recognizes the supremacy of the lead stallion or as a wolf pack acknowledges the strongest animal as the natural leader, so these men whom he had never before seen were carried along in his van by the authority inherent in his voice and person alone.

It was an awesome and terrible power that must be used only for patriotic and idealistic ends. Indeed the very strength of his will was no doubt partly the result of his complete dedication to the cause of genetic purity and the final triumph of true men everywhere. Only the ideal marriage of idealism and ruthless fanaticism could gener-

ate such an overpowering will.

Soon the mob had reached the customs fortress. The soldier guarding the entrance portal drew his truncheon as Feric and his followers approached and brandished the weapon aloft, but there was fear in his eyes and a quaver in his voice as he challenged the troop of aroused men:

"Halt! What is this?"

In reply, a bluff red-faced blond fellow stepped out of the press of men and slammed the unfortunate guard over the skull with a beer mug. The guard fell in a heap clutching his gashed head. Someone snatched his truncheon from him, and with a great roar, the vanguard of the mob stormed into the fortress, immediately followed by Feric, Bogel, and the rest of the impromptu shock troop.

The mob surged into the examination room, rudely
• pushing aside the prospective citizens queued up along the black stone counter,, confronting the four officials behind it with a solid phalanx of sturdy bodies and reddened
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outraged faces. The three true men displayed as much astonishment as fear at this peculiar behavior; the loathsome Mork feigned stolidity, but Feric could sense him wildly and desperately attempting to throw his net of dominance over this new and clearly menacing press of Helder.

"What is the meaning of this outrage?" the bearded old officer demanded. "Remove yourselves from this area at once!"

Feric sensed a sudden slackness in the fervor of the mob; Mork's psychic onslaught had been aided by the firmness of the gallant old warrior and the resolution of Feric's troop was shaken.

Feric pressed his way through the throng and reached the counter. Reaching across the black stone with his powerful right arm, he clasped the Dominator Mork about the neck, cutting off the creature's breath with the grip of his hand, and pulled the wretch half over the counter. Mork's face purpled from lack of oxygen, and Feric could sense his psychic powers waning.

"This is the foul creature!" Feric shouted. "This monster is the Dom that holds this fortress in thrall!"

"... drown in your own bile, human filth!" Mork managed to gurgle at Feric, seeing that the game was up.

Feric tightened his grip and the babblings of the Dom became a hoarse choking sound. A great feral roar went up from the mob. Innumerable arms reached across the counter, clutching Mork by the shoulders, hair, and arms, and, with a communal effort, the men pulled the semi-conscious Dom off his feet, dragged him across the counter, and dashed him to the floor in their midst.

Mork was too weakened by lack of breath to attempt any serious defense; moreover no Dominator could hope to subdue the communal will of more than two-score Helder fully aware of his noxious identity and aroused to righteous wrath.

"One day you will all bow down to Zind and follow our command, worthless animals!" the Dom wheezed as he attempted feebly to struggle to his feet.

At once, half a dozen stoutly booted feet caught the miscreant in the rib cage, knocking the wind out of him, and more. Another kick, this one to the head, rendered the Dom unconscious. As he fell limply on his back, a great roar went up, and his body disappeared in a forest of feet and fists and impromptu clubs.

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In a minute or two, Mork was naught but a bloody sack of crashed bones lying in a heap on the tiled floor of the customs fortress.

Feric turned his attention to the three Helder standing mutely behind the counter. Slowly their dazed expressions became masks of horror.

The youngest officer was the first to fully recover his wits. "I feel as if I have just emerged from a long horrible dream," he muttered. "I feel a man again. What happened?"

"A Dominator happened, Rupp!" the old soldier said. He reached across the counter and seized Feric firmly by the shoulder. "You were right, Trueman Jaggar!" he exclaimed. "Now that the filthy vermin has been crushed and his dominance pattern broken, I realize that we have all been less than true men since Mork arrived here. We owe you our manhood!"

"You owe your manhood not to me, but to the sacred cause of genetic purity," Feric told him. He half-turned so as to face the troop of townfolk. "Let this be a lesson to us all!" he declared. "See how easily even customs guards were ensnared in a dominance pattern. The Doms are everywhere and nowhere; you can rarely see or sense

them, and you are powerless to extricate yourself if you fall into their web. But when you observe others acting as if they are trapped in the tentacles of a nominator's mind, you can free them as easily as you wring the neck of a scrawny chicken. We are all our racial brothers' keeper! Let this small victory bum as a beacon in your hearts. Death to the Dominators! Long live Heldon! Let no true man rest until the last Dom is ground into the dust, the last habitable inch of soil on earth under the iron rule of true men! Drown all Dominators and mongrels in a sea of their own blood!"

A great cheer went up; customs troops and even prospective citizens joined the troop of townsfolk in fervent celebration. Feric felt strong hands on his body, and before he quite knew what was about, he was aloft on the shoulders of the cheering men. Still cheering and shouting, the good Helder bore him in triumph out of the customs fortress and onto the bridge.

Thus did Feric Jaggar make his second and true entrance into Heldon: not as an anonymous supplicant for certification, but as a triumphant hero on the shoulders of his followers.

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After their comrades of the afternoon's work had celebrated their victory and gone their various ways, Feric and Bogel, at Bogel's suggestion, repaired to the Forest Glen Inn. In addition to a large public room similar to that of the Eagle's Nest, this establishment boasted a series of three smaller and more intimate salons. A headwaiter in a forest green uniform trimmed with brown leather piping ushered them into an oak-paneled room with a low, vaulted ceiling of natural, rough-cut brick. Electric globes on the individual tables cunningly crafted to simulate torchlight were the sole source of illumination. The tables themselves were slabs of gray granite separated from each other by the high backs of the upholstered benches which faced each other across them, effectively dividing up the salon into a series of private booths. Here they could converse in private.

Bogel ordered a bottle of white wine and plates of sausages and red cabbage. Feric did not protest the nature of the fare to be set before him; there were times when one had earned the right to eat meat, and this was certainly one of them.

"Well now, Feric Jaggar," Bogel said when the waiter

had departed, "just who are you, and what is your intent in life, and where are you going now?"

Feric told him of his pedigree and of the story of his life to date, which hardly made a tale of complex nature or inordinate length. The food had barely arrived when he informed Bogel that his immediate destination was Wald-er. But his intent in life, he realized, had become a subject of nearly cosmic vastness since the events of the afternoon, as if he had awoken from a slumber in which he had lain all his life. For the first time, he had experienced the full grandeur of his own being, the extent of the power inherent in his mighty will. His mission in life had always been clear: to serve in whatever way he might

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serve best the cause of Heldon, genetic purity, and true humanity. His quandary had been to discover how he might further this sacred cause to the maximum. Now his thoughts were as to how he might achieve the final triumph of Heldon and true humanity through his own personal destiny. It was a problem of daunting vastness and complexity, yet within him Feric felt the inner certainty that fate had chosen him alone to perform this ultimate feat of heroism.

This he tried to explain to Bogel while the dapper little

man nodded and smiled knowingly as if Feric's words were simply confirming some already-formed inner conviction on his own part.

"I, too, feel this aura of destiny about you," Bogel said. "I feel it all the more keenly because it is clearly a quality which I myself lack. We serve the same noble cause with the same patriotic fervor, and I flatter myself that I am your intellectual peer. Moreover, I have built a small group of followers who look to me as their leader. Yet, once hearing you speak and seeing your words stir strangers to action, I find it ludicrous that the Human Renaissance Party should have as its Secretary-General anyone but you. I can plan and theorize and organize well enough, but I do not have the mantle of destiny that you so obviously possess, my good Feric. I have the ability to rule, but you have the power to inspire."

Feric pondered Bogel's words, perhaps with more depth than the fellow had intended. Bogel was clever enough, but his major weakness was that he thought himself cleverer still. The inner meaning of his words was clear: he intended Feric to lead while he ruled behind the scenes. But he had misread one of the great lessons of history. A

man might rule without being a true leader, but no true leader need fear domination by such a lesser being. Knowing this, Feric knew that Bogel would always be his vassal and never the reverse; thus the fellow could never be other than useful to him, and even in the midst of this transparent scheming, he was put at ease.

"You are offering me the leadership of your party, Seph Bogel?" Feric said with a certain calculated incredulity. "I whom you met in a tavern only this afternoon? This makes me somewhat skeptical of the troop you are calling . upon me to lead!"

Bogel laughed, and sipped at his wine. 'To tell you the truth, your skepticism is justified," he admitted. "The
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Human Renaissance Party boasts no more than three hundred names on its roles."

"You ask me to lead a joke! Unless, of course, your membership represents the elite of the nation."

"Frankly," Bogel said, "the Party members are for the most part simple workers, farmers, and craftsmen, with a few military and police officers thrown in."

"This is outrageous!" Feric declared, truly puzzled at the tack of Bogel's admissions. The man asked him to lead this party, and then as much as admitted that the whole thing was a pallid farce.

But Bogel suddenly became intensely earnest. "Consider the true situation. Today Heldon is in the hands of men to whom the Great War is a dim memory, who would sell out our genetic purity to appease the desires of the slothful lumpenproletariat for a life of indolent ease, to whom the borders of Heldon are lines on a political map, not the front trenches of a genetic holy war. Most of the populace slumbers under these misconceptions; the fanatic idealism that built our great citadel of genetic purity through centuries of iron determination and heroic struggle is fading into squalid individualism. Moreover, the so-called best elements of society are willfully blind to the danger. Only a handful of men, many of them simple folk responding out of deepest racial instinct, see the situation for what it is. Does this not make your blood boil?"

Bogel's face gleamed with passion, and the synthetic torchlight on his features turned his visage into a mask of righteous anger that struck sparks in the core of Feric's soul.

"Indeed it does!" Feric exclaimed. "But what does that have to do with the fate of your little party?"

"Consider someone like myself," Bogel said with unconcealed bitterness, "who sees the deadly danger menacing Heldon, and who therefore determines to devote his life to carrying out his racial duty. And who can accomplish nothing more than the building of a tiny party with no more than three hundred members! Would that not make your blood boil?"

Feric was deeply moved; although he had judged Bogel's personal ambitions correctly, he had underestimated the strength of the man's idealism. Personal ambition and fanatic idealism were the mightiest of allies when yoked together in the service of a cause that was just. Bogel would be a magnificent servant indeed.

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"I see your point," Feric said simply.

"Together we can mold the course of history!" Bogel exclaimed passionately. "We both understand the danger, we both agree that Heldon must be ruled by men of iron conviction and utter ruthlessness who know what must be done to annihilate the Doms and subdue the quasi-men and who will not shrink from doing it. I have built the nucleus of a national organization, which I now lay at your feet. Will you accept? Will you lead Heldon to final victory, Feric Jaggar?"

Feric could not help but smile a bit at Bogel's grandiosity. The man spoke as if he were offering the Imperial Sceptre, the long-lost Great Truncheon of Held, rather than the leadership of a squalid little party. Moreover, he could not help feeling that Bogel was putting it on a bit for his benefit. Still, on the highest level, Bogel was perfectly sincere, and his call was one that no true man could refuse. Besides, out of small beginnings, great things could flow. He had entered Heldon alone and friendless; he would arrive in Walder as the leader of a small group of followers. Surely destiny had placed this opportunity in his path as an indication of his mission; just as surely, it behooved him to accept fate's challenge.

"Very well," he replied. "I accept. We will take the roadsteamer to Walder together in the morning."

Bogel beamed; he seemed as buoyant as a small child with a new toy. "Wonderful!" he exclaimed. "I'll radiotype party headquarters before we retire to prepare for your

arrival. This is the beginning of a new age for Heldon and the world. I feel it in my soul."

It was a wonderful crisp blue morning in Ulmgam as Feric and Bogel boarded the roadsteamer to Walder;

Feric felt refreshed and filled with vigor. Moreover, in contrast to the shorter ride from Gormond to Pormi, the two-day steam to Walder promised to be a most pleasurable experience. The Borgravian roadsteamer had been a dingy old danker which gave the impression inside of an instrument of torture as it jounced along the barely extant roads on wheels that scarcely seemed round. He had been shoehomed into this unsavory conveyance with a veritable barnyard of the rankest mutants and hybrids and, moreover, the whole stank like an open sewer. The Emerald Zephyr, on the other hand, was a gleaming new machine

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with the latest in pneumatic tires made practical by the legendary perfection of Helder roadways.

The outside of the cabin was a flawless emerald green set off with modest brown striping, and the iron of the boiler and control cab was gleaming and totally free of rust. Inside, the cabin was done up in pine planking, the window glass was spotless, the fifty seats were upholstered in plush red velvet and filled with soft down, and only half of them were occupied, these moreover by fine-looking specimens for the most part. This magnificent roadsteamer was a stirring tribute to Helder craftsmanship and technology. Further, much of the road to Walder lay in the winding dells and forest groves of the Emerald Wood, a country famous for scenic beauty. Finally, he would be traveling not alone in a gaggle of mongrels, but with his newfound protege Seph Bogel, in the company of Helder. It promised to be a pleasant journey indeed!

Feric and Bogel took up seats near the center of the cabin, equally removed from the noise of the steam engine in front and the exaggerated jouncing of the rear; choice seats of the sort preferred by seasoned travelers, Bogel assured him. Bogel graciously insisted that his new leader occupy the seat next to the window.

When all the passengers had boarded, a hostess in green-and-brown livery emerged from the small chamber between the front of the passenger cabin and the rear of the woodbin, introduced herself as Truelady Garth, and distributed cushions to those desiring them.

The cabin door was closed, the brakes released in a great hiss of steam; then the engine began to send a

steady, low, powerful, altogether pleasant throb through the cabin, and the roadsteamer moved slowly out of the station yard.

The steamer gathered speed steadily as it moved through the streets of Ullgam, and by the time it reached the edge of town and the open highway, it was making a good thirty-five miles an hour, and was still accelerating. Nothing in Borgravia had ever moved this fast, and Feric found himself exhilarated by the physical sensation of the heady speed. The steamer did not stop accelerating until its speed had reached nearly fifty miles an hour as it barreled down a long straight stretch of road that arched through neatly cultivated green farmland toward the margin of the Emerald Wood, which loomed closer and closer like a wall of forest greenery.

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"Look at that!" Bogel suddenly cried, interrupting Feric's reverie. Feric turned and saw that Bogel was pointing out the rear window of the roadsteamer cabin at something (that was overtaking the steamer with incredible speed. "A gas car!" Bogel exclaimed. "TU wager you've not seen its like in Borgravia!"

Feric knew of this marvel but had never seen one. Unlike roadsteamer engines, which burned readily available wood, the gas car was powered by a so-called internal combustion engine, which required petroleum as fuel. This black liquid had to be brought by armed and shielded ship convoy from the wildlands far to the south, or purchased from the foul inhabitants of Zind; both involved enormous expense. The result was a vehicle capable of incredible speeds approaching one hundred miles an hour, but consuming a fuel of great rarity and expense. In Borgravia, such engines were employed only in the half-dozen aircraft the country owned, or for vehicles of the highest officials. Feric had heard that such gas cars were more numerous in the higher civilization of Heldon, but counted himself fortunate to encounter such a sight so early in the journey.

In a few moments, the gas car had overtaken the roadsteamer and swung wide around it to pass. Feric got a short clear look at the vehicle and saw a conveyance a quarter the length of the roadsteamer, a third its height, and half its width, with a long cowl in front, then an open cab with a driver in gray-and-black government livery, and finally a small closed cabin in which no more than six passengers could have ridden. The whole was brightly enameled in red trimmed with black, and made a truly magnificent sight as it pulled easily abreast of the road-

steamer, sounded a horn, then quickly sped ahead with a smooth roar up the road to disappear from sight where the roadway entered the Emerald Wood.

"Someday soon we must have one of those for transportation," Feric told Bogel. "That's how a leader should travel! In fact, that's how any elite group should travel—with speed, and style, and dash!"

"Petroleum is monstrously expensive," Bogel pointed out ruefully. "As things now stand, it would bankrupt the Party treasury to run one gas car for a year."

"Not if we controlled the oil fields of southwestern 'Zind," Feric muttered to himself. "What?"

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Feric smiled. "I am thinking of the future, Bogel," he said. "A future in which all Heldon is bound together by magnificent roadways and even Helder of modest means can afford to drive gas cars, a future in which the great oil fields of southwestern Zind are our private reservoir of petroleum."

Bogel goggled slightly at this. "You dream heroic dreams, Feric Jaggar!" he said.

Replied Feric: "The New Age will be heroic beyond even my present dreams, Bogel. We must become a race of true heroes to bring it about. And when we have, we will live in the manner appropriate to such a race of demigods."

Soon the roadsteamer had entered the Emerald Wood. Here the roadway ran along the right bank of a clear, rapid stream which meandered its way in gentle curves through the bosky groves of the forest lowlands. Thus the driver of the roadsteamer was constrained to lower the speed to the vicinity of thirty miles an hour in order to assure that the vehicle remained on the road around the sharper turns. This more stately pace afforded Feric a fine and leisurely look at this fabled primeval forest.

The individual trees were themselves of venerable age, their rough-barked trunks carved by nature into rich gargoyle shapes, and topped with luxuriant dark green foliage. They were spaced in stately, almost measured, intervals so that men might walk with relative ease through the groves while shielded from the sun in heavy, deep shadows. The undergrowth was primarily ferns, low bushes, and patches of grass, along with mushrooms and other

fungi. There was none of the crowding and purplish cancerous profusion of obscenely mutated tangle that choked the scattered patches of Borgravian radiation jungle, and made such places dire and unpenetrable sinkholes, wherein roamed beasts the very sight of which was enough to sour a strong man's stomach.

The trees of the Emerald Wood were genotypically pure; this forest had somehow survived the Time of Fire virtually untouched, the soil uncontaminated. The age of the forest was unknown; it was far older than Heldon itself, conceivably it had existed in this form even prior to the emergence of the true human genotype. Old wives' tales had it that the human race had been born in this forest.

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This might be mere superstition, but it was fact that here, in the Emerald Wood, small bands of true men had huddled after the Fire, and slain whatever mutants were foolish enough to wander into the forest, and had finally been unified by Stal Held into the Kingdom of Heldon. Generation by generation, the Helder had slowly expanded out of the forest, purifying the surrounding lowlands of mutation, until Heldon reached borders similar to those of modern times. Here too, Sigmark IV, last of the Helder kings, had fled during the Civil War, retreating as if by instinct into the ancestral heartland, where, legend had it, he had hidden the Great Truncheon of Held against the day when a pure specimen of the royal pedigree might once again wield the legendary weapon and reclaim the throne. Then Sigmark IV, his court, and the royal pedigree had disappeared into the mists of history.

Yes, the Emerald Wood was filled with legends that stretched back beyond the Fire and occupied a special place in the history and soul of Heldon. Feric felt an unabashed awe in this place. The glory of the past was palpable all around him in the legends of the Wood, in the glorious and sometimes somber history that had played itself out here, and in the very fact of the forest itself—an island of woodland that had passed uncontaminated through the Fire, that had spread its purity through the centuries over what was now Heldon, that was living promise that one day the forces of genetic purity would regain the whole world.

"Magnificent, is it not?" Bogel whispered.

Feric could only nod silently as the roadsteamer continued on into the depths of the lordly forest.

Not long after the sun had passed its zenith, the hostess broke out a lunch of black bread, cold sausage, and beer. The roadsteamer was deep in the Wood now; the road wound through low, rolling, heavily wooded hills, where rabbit and an occasional deer could be observed as the passengers lunched. Feric glanced from time to time at his fellow passengers as he ate, though thus far no word had passed between them. Apparently, it was not the custom on Helder roadsteamers for strangers to force their attentions on each other—a welcome contrast to the boistrous and squalid hubbub on Borgravian transport.

The Helder on the^ steamer seemed a typical and, for the most part, robust group of true men. There was a

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sturdy peasant family in their holiday best—cheery garments of white and red and yellow and blue, plain, but absolutely spotless. Several merchants wore richer if more solemn garb, two of them apparently traveling with their wives. There were in addition all sorts of respectable-looking men and women whose business could not be discerned. All in all, it was an altogether civilized and cultured-looking group, a by-no-means-exceptional cross section of the folk of Heldon, and a tribute, therefore, to the genetic nobility of the populace as a whole.

All seemed to draw spiritual enrichment from the deeply shadowed landscape through which the steamer passed; voices were hushed, even solemn, eyes did not long stray from the grand vistas available through the roadsteamer windows. The overwhelming presence of so much uncontaminated primeval life, the glorious history in which the Wood was steeped, produced what might be fairly called a mystical atmosphere. One would have to be a mutant of the lowest sort or a soulless Dom not to feel the spell of this place.

"I feel a great strength emanating from these woodlands, Bogel," Feric said quietly. "Here I experience a direct organic connection with the glory of our racial history. I can almost hear the voice of my genes singing the sagas of the ancestral past."

"These are strange woods," Bogel agreed. "Strange people live in them today—bands of nomadic huntsmen, gatherers of wild mushrooms and forest herbs, occasional brigands. If one believes the tall stories, even practitioners of black pre-Pire arts."

Feric smiled. "Do you fear the sorcerers and trolls of the Wood, then, Bogel?" he jibed.

"I have no truck with such superstitious rubbish," Bogel replied. "However, it is historical fact that a few of the ancients survived in these woods at least long enough to craft the Great Truncheon of Held for Stal Held, who lived many generations after the Fire. I must admit that the thought that somewhere in these groves their descendants might be plotting to return the Fire gives me a chill, even though I know full well no such warlocks exist."

At this, Feric fell silent. No man cared to contemplate even in fancy the return of the Fire. Out of those few brief days of holocaust centuries past stemmed the major ills still plaguing the world: genetic contamination of the human race, the vast radioactive wastelands that covered

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so much of the globe, the existence of the fetid Doms. The old world had died in the Time of Fire; the new world which had been born was a stunted and pallid imitation of the glory of the ancients. True men would curse the Time of Fire as long as the race survived.

But someday, and within his own lifetime, true men would be set irrevocably on the clear path to a new Golden Age; this Feric vowed to himself as a solemn oath as the roadsteamer carried him north through the stately groves of the Emerald Wood.

As the sun began to wane, a pattern of heavy red twilight and long black shadows fell over the forest, making the thick groves of gnarled trees appear somehow ominous and sinister; long before sunset the Emerald Wood took on many of the aspects of a forest of the night. The mind peopled the woods with its night shapes and fears. This was not to say that twilight robbed the Wood of its beauty; far from it, it enhanced the grandeur of the forest, though now its spell was of a wilder and darker

sort.

The roadsteamer moved through the forest like something isolated in space and time; nothing seemed real but the sylvan vastness through which it seemed to slink like a creature far out of its natural element.

But as the steamer slowly rounded a particularly sharp bend in the road, this mood of mystical detachment was suddenly and rudely shattered. There on the shoulder of the road was the red gas car that had roared past the steamer so gloriously hours ago, turned over on its back like the carapace of some huge dead beetle, its tires hacked to ribbons, its metal body twisted and ripped and marked

with bullet holes. No bodies, living or dead, were ia
evidence.

A babble of voices filled the cabin of the roadsteamer as the driver brought it to a halt beside the wreck with a great hissing of the brakes. This was rapidly replaced by an uneasy silence as it became clear that nothing lived in the wreckage.

"Obviously the work of brigands," Bogel said. "Not so uncommon an occurrence in these parts."

"Do you think we're in any serious danger of attack?" Peric inquired. He felt no fear whatever, only a certain strange excitement he^was hard put to understand.

"It's hard to say," Bogel replied. "It's one thing to

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ambush a small gas car, and quite another to halt a full-sized roadsteamer. Only the Black Avengers with their motorcycles are really capable of that, and from what I understand, their major goal is petrol. Therefore, they would probably be unlikely to attack a steamer."

The roadsteamer driver did not feel constrained to open the cabin door or climb down from his own cab; whoever did this deed might very well be lurking in the immediate vicinity. After inspecting the wreckage from the safety of the steamer for a few minutes and satisfying himself that there were no survivors about, he released the brakes, let steam into the engine, and the vehicle continued on its way, with the atmosphere in the cabin one of apprehension mingled with determined steadfastness, as befitted sturdy Helder.

The roadsteamer continued peacefully on its way for the better part of the next half hour, and the mood in the cabin relaxed somewhat as the minutes passed with no untoward happening. Up ahead, the road ran past a gully between two hills which had once been a streambed and now formed a natural roadbed of sorts leading off into the depths of the forest.

As the steamer rolled past this miniature canyon, an incredible din suddenly wiped out the throb of its steam engine: a series of sharp, staccato little explosions that coughed in the night like a pack of giant metal catapults catching wind of their prey. These merged into a deafening solid roar that seemed to vibrate every molecule

of matter in the vicinity.

Suddenly, a horde of fantastic machines came hurling out of the woods at incredible speed, throwing dirt and stones into the air in a mad cloud, and sending the awful sound like a herald before them. Each machine consisted of two large wheels connected by a framework of steel tubing, the rear wheel driven by chain transmission from a howling bechromed gas engine slung directly between the legs of the rider, the front wheel held in a pivoting steering fork controlled by an ornate branching bar the two great handlegrips of which the rider clutched in his hands. There

- were more than two score of the motorcycles, and each one was festooned, hung, and adorned after its own private fashion—with brilliant enamelwork in red, black, or white; gleaming chrome shields, piping, and baroque grillwork; huge seats upholstered in leather or plush velvet;

great panniers over the rear wheel embellished with extrav-
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agant motifs; gleaming upswept metal tails suggesting all manner of fish and fowl. It was an incredible spectacle of power, metal, dash, extravagance, motion, and color in which the noble ensign of the swastika predominated like some unifying emblem.

This brilliant pack of gleaming machines stormed onto the roadway and took off after the steamer in a mighty sweep of graceful power. Almost at once, the cyclists were upon the steamer, surrounding it easily, fore and aft, left and right, and Feric could clearly discern what manner of men sat astride these heroic stallions of metal.

Truly these were men to match their machines! Great robust fellows wearing wild garments of black and brown leathers, and flamboyant capes in many colors embroidered with swastikas, death's heads, lightning bolts, and other virile designs which streamed behind them like proud pennants. Their costumes were liberally decorated with all manner of metal brightwork—chains, plating, medallions. They wore broad belts set off with studs from which were slung daggers and pistols and formidable truncheons. A few wore helmets of chromed or enameled steel, but most let their wild blond hair ride free in the breeze.

"The Black Avengers!" Bogel gasped.

"Magnificent!" Feric exclaimed.

Feric could all but taste the fear of the passengers in the roadsteamer cabin; beside him Bogel was pale and nervous. He conceded to himself that a certain concern at the appearance of these beings was nothing less than logical;

still there was something about their spirit and dash, the manly vigor of the spectacle, that thrilled him. Barbarians they were, but what magnificent barbarians!

When they had the steamer quite thoroughly surrounded, several of the Black Avengers drew pistols and fired warning shots into the air, the reports of the guns flattened somewhat by contrast with the mighty din of the massed engines. Nevertheless, their meaning was quite clear to the driver of the roadsteamer; he hit the brakes, bled steam from the engine, and brought the vehicle to a huffing halt by the side of the road. At once the motorcyclists formed a circle around the steamer, and, while the bulk of the Avengers remained mounted on their idling machines which continued to bark and roar like a pack of feral metal hounds; a dozen or so of the fellows dismounted, propped their motorcycles up on stands, and

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swaggered toward the cabin door with pistols and truncheons in their hands.

Almost immediately, there was a great pounding on the door, and a powerful harsh voice roared: "Open for the Avengers, or we'll rip this peapod open with our bare hands and eat you all alive!"

The passengers nearest the door bolted from their seats and attempted to cram themselves together in the rear of the cabin while the trembling hostess unbarred the door; a craven performance, Feric thought, and one hardly calculated to win the admiration of men such as these.

Into the cabin burst an enormous man of Feric's height and even more massively muscled. He wore a sleeveless black jerkin which displayed to good advantage the serpents tattooed up and around both of his arms. About his neck on a silver chain hung a nearly life-sized chromium skull. A pistol was tucked into his belt which was fastened with a huge steel buckle embossed with a blood-red swastika, and in his hand was a chromed steel truncheon of impressive length and thickness with a gleaming skull for a headpiece. His shoulder-length blond hair and full blond beard were wild and matted. In his right earlobe was a heavy golden band. His eyes were honest, open, and icy blue. Behind him trailed a black cloak onto which twin red lightning strokes had been sewn.

This individual proceeded to pinch the rear of the hostess with crude good humor and then kissed the blushing young woman full on the mouth while ten of his comrades erupted into the steamer cabin behind him. These fellows resembled the first in general style: they

were all great hearty lads with wild hair and florid beards or mustaches somewhat in need of trimming, dressed extravagantly in loose-fitting leathers adorned with all manner of bright metalwork, emblems, pendants and medallions. They brandished pistols, truncheons, daggers, or various combinations of weapons, according to personal taste. Many of them were tattooed, and earrings of gold, silver, chrome, or stainless steel were common. They were all in serious need of a bath, being liberally coated with the sweat and dust of the road.

When he had finished greeting the hostess in his barbaric fashion, the huge Avenger turned a sour expression upon the passengers cowering in the rear of the steamer. "A slimy gang of underwear cleaners and manure merchants, eh Stopa?" observed a clean-shaven Avenger with

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long, somewhat brownish hair, and a silver ring in his right ear. "Look like candidates for a mutant squash to me."

"We'll see about that, Karm," the huge fellow said. "Just remember who's the commander here. When I want your opinion, I'll ask for it." Karm glowered silently while the others laughed. Clearly this Stopa had the correct instincts of a leader of men, albeit roughhewn.

"All right you bugs," Stopa said, addressing himself to the passengers, "in case you haven't been out from under your rocks lately, I'm Stag Stopa, and we're the Black Avengers, and if you don't know what that means, you're about to find out. We like riding our bikes and getting drunk and wenching and a good fight and stomping mutants and big mouths and not much else. We don't like back talk, mutants, police, or Doms. If we don't like someone, we pound him into the ground; our life is as simple and honest as that."

Stopa's speech was as pleasing to Feric as might have been that of a small boy who lacked nothing but a stern and wiser father to channel his healthy animal instincts in the proper direction. What a splendid figure these Avengers cut beside the townfolk huddled in the rear of the cabin!

"What I want you bugs to understand," Stopa continued, "is that in our own way, we're idealists and patriots. When we think some slug is a stinking mutant, we kill him on the spot. We clear the woods of a lot of genetic garbage that way. We're doing everyone a favor. And since we're doing everyone a favor, we figure we got a right to ask a few favors back. So to begin with, all of you

empty your pockets and hand over your wallets and pouches."

A great moan of dismay and anger issued forth from the passengers, but when Stopa and some of his men took a few steps toward them, a veritable shower of pouches, wallets, and valuables hit the floor of the cabin. Even Bogel reached for his pouch and wallet and would no doubt have handed them over had not Feric, with a touch of his hand and a steely look, restrained him. A fine lot of true men these cowards and poltroons were! Racially, one of these rude barbarians was worth ten of their ilk!

As his men began scooping up the booty, Stopa stalked up to the seats where Feric and Bogel sat conspicuously isolated and immobile. He glared at Bogel, brandished his

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truncheon meaningfully, and snarled: "Where are your valuables, 'you 'little worm? You look like you could be a mutant to me, maybe even a Dom. We tear Dom's arms and legs off before we roast them alive."

Bogel went white as a sheet and froze, but Feric spoke up loudly and boldly: "This man is under my protection. Moreover, you have my word of honor that his pedigree is spotless."

"Who do you think you are?" Stopa bellowed, leaning his great torso over Bogel so as to fix Feric with a fierce stare. "You open your mouth again and you'll find my truncheon in it."

Slowly and deliberately, not averting his own unflinching gaze from Stopa's eyes for an instant, Feric rose to his full height so that the two huge men were both standing erect, their eyes locked in a contest of will above the still-seated Bogel. For a long moment, Stopa's blue eyes stared levelly into Feric's while Feric channeled every ounce of his formidable will into his iron-hard and absolutely resolute gaze. Then Stopa's will broke, and he felt constrained to look elsewhere for respite from this irresistible psychic onslaught.

In this moment, Feric said simply: "I am Feric Jaggar."

Recovering somewhat, Stopa demanded: "Where are your valuables, Trueman Jaggar?" But the final shade of iron conviction was now lacking in his voice.

"Both my wallet and my pouch are secured to my belt as you can see," Feric said evenly. "There they will

remain."

"I told you we're doing everyone a favor," Stopa said, raising his truncheon once more. "If you won't contribute to the cause, you must be some kind of mutant or mongrel, and that kind we kill. So you better prove your purity by handing your things over, or we're going to have ourselves a mutant squash."

"Let me say first of all that I heartily approve of your sentiments. I myself rid the world of one more Dom only yesterday. We serve the same noble cause. In you, I recognize a fellow like myself, ruthlessly determined to protect the genetic purity of Heldon with fist and-iron."

Feric's words seemed to vex Stopa in some manner; he studied Feric's face uncertainly as if some elusive ultimate meaning might be written thereon. His comrades, however, had finished gathering up the valuables of the other
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passengers during this exchange, and were now growing sullen, impatient, somewhat surly.

"Come on Stopa, smash his face and let's get out of here!"

"Stomp the big-mouthed pig!"

At this, Stopa whirled around, in a fury, whipping his heavy truncheon in a great swath through the air. "The next one of you bugs that opens his mouth will carry his teeth back to the den in a sack!"

Even these rough and burly fellows cowered before Stopa's rage.

Stopa returned his attention to Feric, his face still reddened, his eyes hot with anger. "Now look," he roared, "you seem like a better sort than the rest of these worms, Jaggar, more like my kind of man, so I don't really want to have to pulverize you. But nobody wins an argument with Stag Stopa, so why don't you just hand your stuff over, and we'll be on our way."

Feric pondered for a moment. Throughout the exchange, he had acted on the impulse of his instincts alone, sensing that these Avengers were in some way linked to his destiny, that it would ill-serve him to appear as anything but an iron-willed hero in their eyes. Now it appeared that he would either have to fight them all, in which case he would be slain, or give over his money and lose both his modest fortune and their respect. Bogel, for his

part, was clearly terrified to the point where he dared not interfere, even with craven advice. Finally, fixing Stopa with a contemptuous gaze, Feric opted for the utmost in audacity.

"You present a magnificent physical appearance, Stopa," he said. "I would not have taken you for a craven coward."

Stopa's face purpled, his teeth ground into each other, and the muscles of his arms stood out in great knotted ridges.

"You would not dare threaten me thus without your men at your back, your truncheon in your hand, and myself weaponless," Feric continued. "You know that in a fair fight I would be more than your equal."

A great animal howl went up from Stopa's men, which turned into derisive laughter. Stopa turned and glowered at the Avengers, but to little effect. This troop was organized like a wolf ^ pack; the leader commanded only so long as he defeated all comers. Now that he had been

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challenged, his power over the others was weakened until the matter was settled. Stopa himself clearly understood the situation, at least on an instinctual level, for when he looked once more at Feric, there was a narrowed shrewdness about his eyes that belied his flushed features.

"You dare to challenge Stopa?" he roared belligerently. "Only an Avenger may challenge the commander as an equal. I give you three choices, Jaggar: hand over your valuables meekly like any other worm, be smashed on the spot by us all, or undergo an Avenger's initiation rites. If you live through that, we'll settle the rest between us."

Feric smiled broadly, for this was precisely the end he had desired. "I'll go through your initiation, Stopa," he said calmly. "This cabin has cramped my muscles; I could do with a bit of light exercise."

The Avengers roared their appreciation of this gallant jest. Clearly, they were fine material, needing only a firm hand, a shining example, and a clear goal to become a shock troop of the highest esprit.

"You ride with us then!" Stopa said, and it seemed to Feric that his anger had become tempered with admiration of the sort one old wolf gives another, whether they are fated to fly at each other's throats in the next instant or not.

"My friend here will come along for the ride," Feric said, indicating Bogel. "He's not a robust fellow and the fresh air will do him good."

Once again, the Avengers broke into good-natured laughter in which even Stopa could not help but join. Bogel, for his part, looked as if he would like nothing better than to find a hole to drop out of sight through.

"Drag your lap dog along then!" Stopa said. "He can ride with Kami. You, Jaggar, will ride with me."

So saying, Stopa and his Avengers rudely ushered Feric and Bogel out into the cool evening air, where the rumbling circle of motorcycles awaited.

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Although the deep shadows and cool breezes of evening had descended upon the Emerald Wood, the area immediately around the roadsteamer seemed like a heady inferno of gleaming metal, a howling, barking din, and hot intoxicating petrol fumes. Feric followed Stopa toward his motorcycle which stood silently amidst the horde of champing metal steeds.

Stopa's machine was of a size and design appropriate to his station. Its engine seemed larger than the others and its chrome plating shone like a mirror. The steering bars were similarly chromed and worked in the likeness of the horns of some enormous ram; so huge were they that when Stopa mounted the motorcycle and gripped them, his fists were about the level of his head, his arms stretched out majestically to their full length. The panniers of the motorcycle were enameled in jet black, and affixed to the side of each was a chromium death's head of the sort Stopa wore about his neck. The petrol tank was also black, embellished on either side with twin red lightning strokes. The black leather seat was of a size that easily accommodated two, with room to spare for Feric's bag. At the rear of the motorcycle rose twin chromed fins worked in the likeness of an eagle's wings. A great silver eagle's head was affixed to the front wheel guard; an electric globe shone forth from its shrieking beak.

As Feric climbed aboard, Stopa kicked the mighty engine into life with one powerful application of his steel-shod boot to the starting lever. Through the seat, Feric could feel the throb of the engine between his thighs.

Stopa turned half-around, and smiled wolfishly at Feric. "Hang on for your life," he said. Then, shouting above the din to his men: "We ride!"

With a surge that fairly took Feric's breath away, and an ear-shattering bellow, Stopa's motorcycle shot forward, leaned over at a perilous angle, swirled about in a
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tight turn, and headed back down the road toward the gully already doing at least forty miles an hour. What a machine! What a rider! What a storm troop these Avengers would make!

Feric craned his neck around and saw that the other cyclists were following Stopa in a tightly packed if somewhat ragged horde, with Bogel, his face ghostly pale, his eyes all but shut, clinging for dear life to the seat of the machine directly behind Stopa's. Feric laughed wildly into the breeze of passage. What dash these vehicles had, what a fine impression they made en masse! All that was lacking was uniformity and order.

Upon reaching the gully that led off into the Wood, Stopa did not hesitate, indeed hardly slackened speed. The motorcycle leaped off the paved roadway and onto the rough forest track and dashed off through the great dark sylvan corridors with the entire troop howling close behind it.

There followed a wild ride through the dark woods and over the irregular forest floor the like of which Feric would not have imagined in the most extravagant fancy. Careening at exhilarating speed through the random aisles between the trees, bouncing and sliding over roots and rocks and all manner of underbrush, Stopa guided his steed with a sure instinct and a sense of dash and spirit that succeeded in putting Feric totally at his ease. It seemed as if destiny guided the motorcycle and Stopa on some level was aware of this; machine, rider, and passenger were a juggernaut of fate—swift, sure, unstoppable. Though it seemed almost at every moment that the motorcycle would dash itself to pieces against some great looming tree or be flung headlong by a rock or pit or root, Feric was able to relax and enjoy the feeling of power and danger, the wind in his face, the mighty throb of the engine beneath him.

Indeed, he felt a certain regret when, after an hour or so of this demon's ride, Stopa turned onto a rude path which a few minutes later debouched into a treeless hollow between two deeply wooded hills in which stood what was obviously the Avengers' camp.

A dozen or so huts were scattered about the clearing in no particular order. They were small, primitive affairs;

a few of the finer specimens boasted tin doors and small windows appropriated from wrecked steamers and gas cars. There was one larger such hut, and two big sheds pieced together from rusty steel sheeting. Directly behind this
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small settlement was the mouth of a cave where a beaten path and scattered bits of debris gave evidence of human habitation. All in all a squalid camp that indicated only primitive knowledge of the builder's art.

Stopa drove into the center of the encampment and brought his machine to a halt with a flourish, spinning it about in its own length as he kicked down the stand and cut the engine, so that it finished upright in a cloud of dust. Moments later, the others brought up their motorcycles in similar style.

Feric dismounted the moment the cycle halted and even before Stopa himself could step down, so as to deprive the Avenger leader of either forbidding him to do so or giving him the order. For his part, Stopa seemed to ignore the significance of this gesture. He simply dismounted, placed his hands on his hips, and glowered at his men while they climbed down from their machines and formed a rough semi-circle facing their leader. A shaken and dazed Bogel wobbled forward out of this crew to Feric's side.

"This is madness, Feric!" Bogel declared. "These savages will surely slay us and no doubt feast afterward on our remains. What a ride! What a foul midden this is! What friends you have thrown us among!"

Feric shot Bogel a look of such blackness that the smaller man instantly fell silent, fairly trembling in his shoes. Bogel had a tendency to run off a bit at the mouth when silence was a stronger weapon than words. He needed more steel in his backbone as well.

"All right!" Stopa barked. "Don't just stand around with your tongues hanging out! We've got a rite to hold!"

With that the Black Avengers sprang into action. A crew of them went off into the woods on some errand while others entered their huts and emerged bearing sheaves of great ten-foot torches, pointed at their nether ends. Two Avengers went to the oversized hut and returned rolling an enormous wooden keg. More of the great torches were fetched, until there were dozens of them lying in the center of the clearing. The party returned

from the woods laden with branches and logs and began assembling the fuel for a large bonfire. The keg was stood up on end and the top removed, revealing an ocean of heavy brown ale. A cheer went up, and each Avenger dropped a wooden drinking horn into the keg, brought it up brimming, swallowed it down in one great draught, then refilled his horn for fortification while performing his
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duties. Thus invigorated, the Avengers quickly staked out a large circle of torches centered on the great heap of faggots.

While this work was done, Stopa had stood silent and immobile beside Feric and Bogel, his hands on his hips in a lordly posture, neither deigning to join in the tasks, nor drinking his brew with the others. Now he went to his motorcycle, mounted it, and kicked the engine to life. As the cycle sprang forward, he leaned over and snatched a torch off the ground on the fly. This he ignited with a fire lighter. He then roared around the entire circle of torches at speed, firing each in turn, until the center of the Avenger camp was a blazing ring of torchlight casting tongues of flame and bright sparks up into the infinite forest darkness. Stopa then drove his machine into the ring of fire straight for the woodpile at its center. With one sudden breathtaking motion, he pivoted the howling motorcycle about his own right foot, instantly reversing its direction, while tossing his torch directly on the pyre, setting it aflame. He then brought his machine to a screeching halt by the keg of ale, dismounted, and thrust his head beneath the beery waves. He held his head under the foam for long moments, then withdrew, smacking his lips.

"Into the circle, you bugs!" he roared. "We're going to find out whether we have a new brother tonight or a corpse."

The Avengers gathered themselves in a group inside the circle of torches facing Stopa and the great crackling bonfire that now blazed behind him. As Feric led Bogel into the ring of fire, Bogel grimaced at him impishly and said: "Well, I suppose if I must die tonight, it might as well be in a blaze of glory. Apparently you share my taste."

Feric clapped Bogel on the shoulder as they approached Stopa; despite certain limitations, there was no denying that Seph Bogel was made of the right stuff.

Stopa drew his huge truncheon and leaned insolently on it as if it were a cane. "All right, Feric Jaggar," he shouted, "it's all very simple. You're inside the circle

of fire; you leave as either an Avenger or a corpse. If you survive—which you won't—you become an Avenger with the right to challenge me to fair combat. That's the game, bug, all you have to do is survive the three ordeals—the Test of Water, the Test of Fire, and the Test of Steel. So let's get started. Bring on the big hom."

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At this, a large, blond-bearded Avenger wearing a black jerkin emblazoned with a crimson swastika left the circle of torches. In a few moments, he returned bearing a drinking hom of truly heroic proportions. This huge vessel was hewn from a single block of dark-colored wood like the others, but it was a full three times their size, holding perhaps four or five standard tavern measures of ale, and carved all over with stags' heads, eagles, swastikas, and rearing serpents^

Stopa took the great drinking horn, plunged it into the barrel of ale, and brought it up filled to overflowing and dripping with foam. He held the vessel aloft with both hands and declaimed: "Anyone who can't drain this horn of ale without pausing for breath isn't man enough to be an Avenger."

He handed the hom of ale to Feric, then drew his pistol. So heavy was the drinking hom that Feric needed both hands to steady it.

"You drink it all down, Feric Jaggar," Stopa said, "and you pass the Test of Water." He cocked his pistol and pressed the muzzle directly to the base of Feric's skull. "But if you take one breath before it's dry, it'll be your last."

Feric smiled bravely. "I must admit the ride made my throat somewhat dry," he said. "I thank you for your magnanimous hospitality."

Thus speaking, Feric emptied his lungs, sucked in a great breath of air, hoisted the drinking hom to his lips, and poured a great swallow of heavy, powerful ale directly down his throat. When he had filled his mouth and throat to the choking point, he gulped the brew down, while continuing to decant more ale into his mouth on its heels. The second great mouthful immediately followed the first down Feric's gullet while he poured a third; thus he established a rapid rhythm of pouring and swallowing so that the ale gushed from the drinking hom to his mouth, down his throat, and into his stomach in a constant torrent.

Faster and faster, Feric gulped the strong dark ale, nearly on the verge of choking, for he felt both (he building ache in his lungs and the cool metal of Stopa's cocked pistol against the back of his neck. His head began to spin and his knees to grow weak, both from lack of breath and surfeit of brew. But he summoned up his last reserves of will from the core of his being and felt the

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psychic power fight back heroically against the pain in his chest, the gorge in his throat, and the spongy feeling in his knees. He redoubled his efforts, gulping down what seemed like oceans of ale. After an eternity measurable only by the roaring in his ears, the pain in his chest, the pistol at his head, and the choking torrent of ale in his mouth and throat, the horn finally gave up its last drop.

Exhaling a great rush of stale air, Feric tossed the empty drinking horn end over end into the press of Black Avengers, who roared their manly approval of the feat while Stopa put aside his pistol and regarded Feric with a certain grudging respect.

For his part, Feric spent this respite drawing in great gasps of air as the iron slowly returned to his knees. The great bonfire behind Stopa sent clouds of orange smoke and flickers of brilliance up as an offering into the black sky; around each torch in the circle was a sparkling aura.

"Not a bad brew," Feric finally said when he had caught his breath. "Perhaps you'd care to try it?"

The Avengers howled their approval of this notion gleefully and one of them tossed the great drinking horn back to Feric while Stopa fumed in silent rage. Feric dipped the horn into the keg and handed Stopa a brimming measure.

Stopa fairly yanked the horn out of Feric's hands, raised it to his lips in the same motion, and drew one hasty breath before swilling the ale down in great gulps and slobbers which distributed a good portion of the stuff on his jerkin and beard. He ended his quaffing with a series of unesthetic chokes, coughs, and retches, but nonetheless was able to upend a drinking horn out of which no liquid spilled.

Stopa tossed away the drinking horn and stood panting in the orange glow like a great beast of prey, his eyes inflamed with drink and rage, his muscles standing out in bands, his black leather jerkin shining in the firelight where the ale clung to it.

"We'll see! We'll see!" Stopa roared somewhat drunkenly. "You like the taste of ale, do you, Jaggar? Well let's see how you like the taste of fire! Set up the gauntlet! Bring him a bike! The Test of Fire!"

At once the Avengers broke ranks and made for the torches staked in the ground, each man uprooting his own spear of flame. They quickly arranged themselves into two parallel rows of about twenty men to a side, with just
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enough distance between them so that there was a corridor of relative safety a scant yard wide between them when they extended their torches at full arm's length toward each other. The wind-whipped flames of the torches danced tantalizingly through this narrow aisle, enlivening even this thin path through the gauntlet with intermittent tongues of fire.

An engine roared to life in the darkness beyond reach of the firelight, and a moment later a motorcycle with crimson enamel and great chromed fins sporting black swastikas in white circles was driven to one end of the flaming corridor by an Avenger in a black leather jerkin on which was sewn a white swastika in a red circle. The Avenger dismounted and put the cycle up on its stand; the engine, however, was left running, thrumming with power, rumbling its challenge.

"I'll stand at one end of the line," Stopa shouted loudly, as much for the Avengers' benefit as for Feric's, "and you, Jaggar, will drive Sigmark's cycle through the fire to my side. Any real Avenger can do it; our hides are too tough to be scorched by anything short of the sky fire of the ancients." At this, the twin lines of Avengers cheered and waved their torches grandly overhead.

Slowly and deliberately, Feric made his way to the motorcycle which called out to him with its great metallic voice from the head of the gauntlet of fire. Through the flashing and flickering flames of the fiery corridor, he could see Stopa glowering at him in a sullen, drunken rage, the insolence on his reddened face a deliberate challenge to Feric's manhood. Feric determined that he would do more than merely survive this ordeal in the face of such an attitude; he would grab the moment and fling it back in Stopa's arrogant face. Thus would the simple but spirited fellow be notified of his true station.

The Avenger known as Sigmark gave Feric a short briefing on the mechanics of driving the motorcycle: slap down on the lever under your left foot and you engage gears of successively higher ratio, twist the right steering

grip for throttle, under the right foot and right hand were controls for the front and rear brakes respectively, while the lever under the left hand worked the clutch. It all seemed straightforward enough.

Feric mounted the metal stallion and gripped the steering bars firmly in his hands. He disengaged the clutch, twisted the right handgrip; instantly the engine howled and

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he could feel its power surge through the very bones of his body. This seemed to establish an immediate rapport with the machine, as if it were an extension of his own flesh, as if the incredible force generated by the screaming engine were coursing directly through his soul. In this moment, Feric possessed the iron conviction that this steed was fully capable of carrying him through the fire unscathed, and that he was just as capable of making the ride as the circumstances demanded—resolutely, with utter confidence, and without for an instant flinching. This was not a test of physical prowess so much as one of heroism. A true hero would emerge untouched, but one ounce of cowardice or hesitation would result in disaster. Feric could not but admire the instincts of men who had contrived such a perfect test of true manhood.

Without further hesitation, Feric eased the motorcycle off its stand, leaned as low over its petrol tank as possible so that he was fairly hanging by his outstretched arms from the steering bars, gunned the engine into a terrible roar which sent waves of power pulsing through his body, slammed the machine into gear with a resolute application of his booted foot, and dropped in the clutch.

Spewing stones and dirt and lifting its front wheel off the ground for an instant, the motorcycle sprang forward. Unflinchingly confident in the unity of man and machine which he felt with his flesh and his soul, Feric steered the cycle straight for the corridor of fire. Far from being frightened, he felt a certain exhilaration, a manly thrill, at rushing resolutely and heroically into the flames.

With a rush, Feric was enveloped in a universe of intense heat, orange flame, and hurtling speed; nothing but these elementals existed for him and they blended together into a raw essence of power that filled his being and fed the grandeur of his spirit. His only thought was to keep the throttle wide open and hold his steed on an arrow-straight path. He felt neither pain nor fear, only a sense of riding the juggernaut of destiny; indeed it seemed but an instant before he burst through the flames and emerged, singed but unharmed, on the other side.

The Avengers waved their torches and cheered wildly as Feric circled back toward Stopa. For his part, Feric was determined that this little game had not been truly played out as yet; he had avoided losing easily enough, but he would not be satisfied until he had actually won.

As he brought the motorcycle up beside Stopa, he
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bellowed a challenge: "Ride back with me, Stopa, if you dare!"

A veritable pantheon of expressions chased each other across Stopa's drunken countenance: anger, fear, defiance, rage.

"Come on Stopa, don't let the fire get cold," Peric japed. "If you're not man enough, just tell me!"

With a guttural shout of fury and defiance, Stopa leaped up onto the motorcycle behind Feric. Before the Avenger leader had the chance to utter a more heroic salutation, Feric gunned the engine and the cycle sped forward into the flames.

Once more Peric was enveloped in a world of triumphant fire and juggernaut speed; once more the motorcycle emerged from the tunnel of flame with its burdens singed but unharmed.

The Avengers broke ranks and danced a wild cannibal rite of shouts and flaming torches around the motorcycle as Feric brought it to a screaming halt, rammed it up onto its stand, and, simultaneously with Stopa, dismounted.

Stopa regarded Feric with as much respect as fury now. Clearly, he was now convinced that he was involved in a test of will and heroism with a man who at the very least was his unquestioned equal. A lesser man might have now acknowledged the fact with some comradely gesture and backed out of the situation gracefully, with but slight loss of honor.

But to his credit, Stopa's outrage was unabated; he was clearly determined in his own heroic fashion to play out this contest for spiritual and physical supremacy to its conclusion, regardless of the futility of his cause.

"The final ordeal is the Test of Steel, Jagger!" he shouted for all to hear. "We have it out with truncheons between us. Ordinarily, I only play with the mouse in question until I am satisfied that he is worthy or decide that he isn't and slay him. If I required each new Avenger

to defeat me in combat, we'd never welcome a new brother, since no man has ever proven himself my equal with the truncheon."

Stopa paused and fixed Feric with a cold bloodshot stare in which malice and grudging admiration had fused to icy determination. Something in the psychic aura generated by this confrontation caused the Avengers to give over their shouting and cavorting and stare silently at their leader and his bold challenger.

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"But in your case, Jaggar," Stopa continued, "we'll do things in better style. Instead of bruising each other around like playful brats, we'll fight to the death. You and me all the way with steel truncheons, Jaggar. The better man wins his life."

The silence now took on a more somber cast; the banter and rough good humor which had accompanied the initiation thus far quite suddenly evaporated as each man present realized that his own fate was enmeshed with the outcome of the duel that was about to begin. Feric did not need to be told that he who defeated the old leader became the new; by no other means save fortuitous death of the old leader could power change hands in a band such as this. This law was written deep in the true human genes; indeed it was even more primeval than that—it was a law intrinsic to protoplasm itself, the basic canon of evolution, the rule of the strongest. Bogel shot Feric a cold and then a fiery look, indicating that he was aware of the full import of the situation, and that his faith in Feric was iron hard and unshakable.

"Bring a weapon!" Stopa ordered. "Bring the Steel Commander!"

Seven burly Avengers retired from the firelight and disappeared into the darkness. Almost at once, one of them returned bearing a battered old truncheon of respectable length and girth, its stainless steel shaft somewhat tarnished and marked with myriad battle scars. The truncheon bearer presented this hoary weapon to Feric. Upon closer inspection, Feric discerned that this corroded truncheon had once borne elaborate etchings of serpents on its shaft, that the headpiece which at first had seemed to be a plain steel ball had once been enameled with the likeness of a great eye. Feric hefted the weapon with his right hand. It was much lighter than he would have chosen, but it had good balance and was nearly a yard long. He cut a swam through the air with the weapon; the arc felt true, the momentum sufficient to smash a skull to flinders with a direct hit. A battered but honorable trun-

cheon; it would do.

Stopa now drew his own weapon and whirled it through the air a few times. Feric regarded it closely now. Stopa wielded a truly heroic truncheon. It was a full six inches longer than the weapon given Feric, and, judging from the way Stopa swung it, was perhaps as much as a quarter again as heavy. The steel shaft was plated with brilliant

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chromium, and the headball was carved in the likeness of the skull motif Stopa seemed to favor. The handle was of black leather wound over wood. Clearly, Feric had been handed a truncheon in no way the equal in size or style of that wielded by his opponent; just as clearly, however, it would have been the action of an unmanly poltroon to protest the situation aloud.

As Feric and Stopa completed their preparatory swings of their truncheons, a great huffing could be heard approaching the firelit area; then the other six Avengers became visible, groaning strangely under what seemed the negligible weight of the wooden pallet they bore on their

collective shoulders.

But when they reached the spot where Feric and Stopa stood regarding each other, and laid the pallet on the earth between them, Feric gasped once in amazement and

understood all.

The pallet was covered with spotless black velvet and upon it, in all its incredible glory, rested the Great Truncheon of Stal Held, the lost sceptre of royal power,

the Steel Commander!

In mere physical appearance alone, the Great Truncheon was breathtaking. Its handle had been carved out of one great chunk of the ancient milky substance known as ivory and was padded not with leather but with some soft arcane substance that yet had the gloss of ruby. The shaft was a gleaming rod of some tarnishless metal fully four feet long and thick around as a man's forearm, etched all around with rich red traceries of lightning strokes, a motif which made the huge shaft appear as if it had but recently been quenched in blood. The oversize headball was a life-sized steel fist, and a hero's fist at that. Upon the third finger of this metal hand was a ring bearing the signet of a black swastika in a white spot surrounded by a circle of crimson fire, the colors as vivid as if they had been applied

hours ago instead of centuries.

Feric stared at the mystic truncheon in unabashed wonder. "Do you realize what that weapon is?" he said softly.

Stopa grinned smugly at Feric, but he could not keep awe from softening somewhat the ferocity of his features. "It's the Steel Commander," he said. "Once the old Kings of Heldon drew their power from it. Now it's the property of the Black Avengers!"

"It's the property of all Heldon!" Feric roared.
"We found it in a cave deep in the Wood when all you
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worms thought it lost forever!" Stopa snarled, albeit clearly defensively. "It's ours now!" He laughed sardonically. "If you want it, Jaggar, why don't you just pick it up and carry it away?"

The assembled Avengers laughed at this, but not without a good deal of uneasiness; their simple but true instincts told them that the Steel Commander and the ancient arts which had forged it were hardly a proper matter for jest.

For his part, Feric appreciated the irony of Stopa's words perhaps more keenly than did the Avenger himself. Legend had it that Stal Held had ordered the weapon forged by a hidden community of captive wizards who had preserved the lore of the ancients through the Time of Fire and far beyond; once the weapon had been completed, Held had slain these evil creatures to a man. By some lost art, these baleful wizards had so constructed the truncheon that only Held himself and the true bearers of his genetic pattern down through the centuries could wield it. The mysterious alloy out of which the weapon had been forged gave it the weight of a huge boulder; no ordinary man could budge it, let alone wield it. But contact with flesh shaped by the royal genes triggered the release of some inexhaustible power within the Great Truncheon, so that in the hand of a hero of the true royal pedigree, the Steel Commander could be wielded as effortlessly as a willow wand, though to those who felt its wrath, it still had the mass of a small mountain. Thus, the Great Truncheon was both the sceptre of the King of Heldon and the ultimate verification of his pedigree. There were those who insisted that all troubles that had beset Heldon since its disappearance during the Civil War were the result of a rule by men incapable of wielding the Great Truncheon;

in this view, Sigmark IV had been the last proper ruler of Heldon. Therefore, to pick up the Great Truncheon would

be to seize in a very real sense the historic right to rule all Heldon. It was this that Stopa sarcastically suggested that Feric might do.

Yet somehow, there was a mad impulse within Feric to do just that; the truncheon seemed to call out to something deep within his blood, seemed to vibrate his being with a deep, almost cosmic, longing. No doubt many men had felt this; there were many tales of heroes who had sought to heft the Steel Commander and all were cautionary rubrics against the vice of excessive pride.

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"Enough mooning over a weapon that no living man can wield!" Stopa finally said, breaking the palpably mystical reverie. "You have your truncheon, and I have mine, and that's enough for men like us! Defend yourself, Jaggar!"

With this, Stopa ran at Feric, his truncheon high over his head, and brought the weapon down in a stroke that would have smashed a skull like an eggshell.

But Feric had darted to his right, and as Stopa's truncheon went whistling through the empty air where his head had been, he struck the shaft a glancing blow near the handle which nearly caused the Avenger to lose his weapon. The first clang of steel on steel broke the solemn mood and set the Avengers to shouting boisterously and waving their torches in the air.

As Stopa, recovering with admirable speed, raised his truncheon above his head once more to aim another blow, Feric swung his own weapon in a low arc aimed at smashing Stopa's kneecap. Stopa fell back raggedly, avoiding the blow, but Feric was able to get in a quick jab in the stomach with his headball, which caused the Avenger no little discomfort.

However, as Feric withdrew from this thrust, Stopa managed to bring his truncheon down on the tip of Feric's weapon, sending a shock through the steel shaft into Feric's arm which stung enough to prevent him from following up his advantage.

The two men backed up a step or two from each other, circled for a moment, then almost simultaneously aimed blows at each other's heads which resulted only in a mighty crash of steel as their truncheons struck each other dead on. The Avengers roared their approval of this titanic clash of steel on steel, though the strokes resulted in nothing more than jolts to the arms of both adversaries.

Almost immediately, similar parallel strokes, this time at rib level, resulted only in another ringing double-parry. Recovering from this, Feric struck high, while Stopa came in low. Both men were therefore forced to fall back in midstroke and their truncheons whistled through empty air.

Stopa took five quick steps backward, then came at Feric all in a rush, aiming a downward blow at the head, which was parried, then a slash at his ribs, which fell once more on the steel shaft of Feric's truncheon, then a similar blow from the other side, which Feric was forced

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to take low on the shaft of his weapon, sending a lightning bolt of pain up his arm.

For his part, Feric feigned a 'greater pain from this blow than was actually the case and fell back in seeming disarray as the Avengers hooted and Stopa rushed at him, truncheon held high for a finishing head blow. Suddenly, Feric stopped dead in his tracks, jumped to the side as Stopa's truncheon came down in a mighty arc, turned, and fetched the Avenger a mighty blow to the leg, which Stopa was just agile enough to take with his buttock. Stopa howled in pain and continued the downward arc of his truncheon. Feric, from his low position, raised his truncheon slightly to parry this wild blow.

Stopa's truncheon came down squarely on the center of the shaft of Feric's weapon as Feric deliberately swept it toward the ground to cushion the impact.

But instead of a fine sharp clang, there was a sickening crack of rotten metal. Feric's hoary truncheon had been cloven in twain by Stopa's weapon and he found himself holding the useless jagged stump in his hand.

Stopa grinned wolfishly as he allowed Feric to dart to his feet. Slowly, deliberately, with his truncheon held at chest level, he began to stalk Feric as Feric circled backward. The meaning of this was perfectly clear: there would be no exaggerated gallantry here; Feric's weapon had been rendered useless by fate, and no quarter would be offered. Nor, Feric thought, would quarter be requested. If it was his destiny to die in this manner, he would meet his fate heroically, battling to the last with whatever came to hand, with his bare fists themselves, if need be.

Stopa aimed a blow at Feric's head; Feric lept backward. The Avenger took a sweep at Feric's ribs, which Feric was hard put to block with the remains of his

truncheon; once more he was forced backward off balance. Seeing this, Stopa raised his truncheon overhead and smashed down at Feric's head. Once more Feric was barely able to parry the blow with the stump of weapon left to him—but this time the remains of the truncheon were struck from his hand by the force of Stopa's blow, and he found himself defenseless.

With a great animal shout, Stopa struck at Peric's knees, forcing him to jump blindly backward. His feet struck a rock or a root, and he went sprawling. Stopa struck at his head; he rolled away from the blow and the

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headball of the truncheon buried itself in the earth beside him. Once more Stopa struck at him, and again he avoided the blow by rolling his body. Again and again, Feric barely averted death by rolling away from mighty blows, but each time Stopa was on him again before he

could rise to his feet.

Feric rolled one final time as Stopa's truncheon whistled past his ear; this time, however, he had rolled half onto the wooden pallet holding the Steel Commander. The surprise of this cost him precious seconds; moreover, his upper torso was now spread-eagled over the side of the pallet and he could roll no further. Seeing this, Stopa howled, raised his truncheon high over his head, and brought it down in an irresistible arc.

At once, without conscious thought, Feric reached behind him, grasped the handle of the Great Truncheon of Held, and whipped the Steel Commander into the air to parry the blow. Stopa's truncheon struck the thick gleaming shaft of the legendary weapon and instantly shattered

to pieces.

An incredible, scarcely human cry went up from the

Avengers: a low, incredulous moan that almost instantly guttered to silence. Stopa staggered backward a few steps, then dropped the remains of his weapon and sank to his knees, his eyes downcast, his head bowed before him. An instant later, the other Avengers followed his example and assumed this posture of homage, holding their flaming torches erect before them. Even Bogel, thoroughly dumb^founded, could not remain standing in the face of such an

historic moment.

For his part, Feric himself could hardly comprehend

the enormity of what he had done. In his hand was the Steel Commander, the Great Truncheon of Held, and it had no more weight than a wooden wand; it seemed borne triumphantly aloft by a power which seemed to surge down its shaft, through its handle, and throughout Feric's body, a power both symbolic and actual. In him were the genes of the royal house of Heldon; that much penetrated his astonishment with instant crystal clarity. The royal stock had been scattered centuries ago; it was not unreasonable that the royal genotype might emerge once more from the general Helder gene pool. The fact that he held the Great Truncheon aloft proved beyond question that exactly this had occurred;

Slowly, gathering his wits about him, Feric rose to his

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feet holding the great gleaming truncheon high over his head; the light of the bonfire behind him bathed him in fiery orange glory and cast shimmering highlights up and down the length of his mighty steel shaft.

Before him, Stopa kneeled, his countenance displaying a submissiveness of noble and cosmic profundity. "My life is yours to do with as you will, lord," he muttered humbly, without raising his eyes.

The full import of what had occurred finally permeated Feric's being. Fate had moved him to Ulmgam, fate had thrown him in with Bogel so that he would take a later roadsteamer and encounter these noble barbarians; destiny had moved through time and space to place the Great Truncheon of Held in his hand. The meaning was clear:

he was the rightful ruler of all Heldon; the proof of this he held in his hand for all to see. It now remained to secure the power necessary to bring him to his rightful station. This was his fate, his duty, his destiny: to grasp all Heldon in his hand as he grasped the Steel Commander, to use it as a weapon to drive all mutants and Doms from the land, and then to reclaim the last habitable inch of soil on earth for the true human genotype. This was his sacred mission. He could not and would not fail.

Backed by the glow of the bonfire, in the midst of the Emerald Wood, the ancestral heartland of Heldon, Feric Jaggar held the sceptre of Heldon triumphantly aloft in the firelight and stood before his kneeling minions. There

was no doubt whatever, in his mind or theirs, that they were his fanatic followers now, loyal unto death.

Feric lowered the Great Truncheon to waist level; holding the great gleaming steel shaft out before him, he approached the kneeling Stag Stopa. "Arise," he said.

Stopa looked up at the great shining headpiece of the truncheon which Feric held before his face, a headball carved in the likeness of a hero's fist, with a swastika signet ring on the third finger. He started to obey Feric's command, hesitated, then touched his lips to the swastika on the head of the Great Truncheon. Only then did he rise to his feet.

Deeply moved by this spontaneous gesture of fealty, Feric allowed first Bogel and then each Avenger in turn, to kiss the swastika emblem on the tip of his heroic weapon. One by one, the men completed this act of submission, and rose to their feet, the Avengers holding
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their torches proudly erect, their eyes glowing like red-hot coals in the firelight.

When all stood manfully before him, Feric spoke. "Will you follow me without question, with total fanatic loyalty to the cause of Heldon and genetic purity, to your deaths if so ordered?"

The reply was a great massed roar of approval. They were magnificent lads, fit material for the storm troop that was needed.

"Very well then," Feric declared, "you are Black Avengers no more. I baptize you anew with a name whose nobility you must earn; see to it that you do nothing to betray it."

Feric pointed the headpiece of the Great Truncheon squarely at his men; the steel fist with its black swastika in a spot of white encircled by red glowed like a rising sun in the firelight.

"You are now Knights of the Swastika!" Feric shouted. He shot his free arm straight out at eye level before him in the ancient royal salute. "Hail Heldon!" he cried. "Hail the Swastika! Hail Victory!"

Almost at once, Feric was looking out over a forest of outstretched arms, and the newly baptized storm troops were spontaneously roaring: "Hail Jaggar! Hail Jaggar! Hail Jaggar!"

Feric's body stiffened with pride and resolution as he stood there deep in the ancestral heartland, a figure of resolute nobility, larger somehow than life, a hero transcendent, outlined in fire.

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From the outset, Feric had determined that it would be neither wise nor appropriate for him to slink into Walder unannounced like any common traveler; when he entered the city it must be done with proper heralding and sufficient flourish. This meant that first of all he must secure his position as unquestioned leader of the party, that secondly

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changes in nomenclature and style must be made, and that finally his ragged troop of motorcyclists must be properly outfitted and drilled and decked out with new Party uniforms and colors of sufficient dash. Only then would he enter Walder at the head of the Knights of the Swastika.

Therefore, he had commanded Bogel to rent a meeting place of sufficient size and isolation and summon the Party notables thence. Bogel had rented an empty hunting lodge situated on the flattened crest of a small mountain within the Emerald Wood but close to its northern margin, perhaps two hours by roadsteamer from Walder, which lay on the rolling plain to the north. In order to reach the lodge, the Party leaders would have to traverse a long winding dirt road which climbed to the crest through thick groves and wild ravines, making their journey a matter of some psychological import. The lodge itself was a simple but impressive edifice: a long, low, one-story building of granite and mortar facing the rude courtyard where the dirt road ended, with a formal entrance trimmed with wood planking and set off with native trees and shrubbery. From this facade of the building, one looked down on an endless sea of woodland greenery, soothing to the eye, and comforting to the spirit.

Inside was a great common room flanked left and right by wings of sleeping cubicles sufficient to accommodate several-score men. This hunting lodge, empty in this season as it was, suited Feric's purpose ideally. It was close enough to the city to facilitate the necessary preparations while isolated enough to assure secrecy. Moreover, the very act of summoning these urban fellows to such a rustic setting served notice upon them as to the measure of unquestioning loyalty their new leader required of them. Further, it deprived them of whatever psychological advantage they might have gained from meeting Feric on their home ground. Iron control must be established at the

outset.

Feric chose to receive the Party leadership in the great hall itself. The walls of this chamber were naked stone and the floor was rough wooden planking. A ring of torches up near the base of the high vaulted stone ceiling augmented the afternoon light, and a hearty fire blazed in the great fireplace built into the west wall. The walls themselves were decorated with antlers, stags' heads, rifles, bows, spears, truncheons, and various other paraphernalia of the hunter's calling.

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In the center of the room was a large oaken table covered with a cloth of red velvet upon which the Great Truncheon of Held rested in all its gleaming splendor;

rows of plain chairs had been set up along the long sides of the table. Feric himself sat at the head of the table on a chair slightly higher than the others facing the entrance to the hall. Behind him, the doors to a rude balcony had been flung open, revealing a breathtaking view across the northern fringes of the Wood, and the rolling plain beyond, neatly divided up into a checkerboard of freehold farms; Walder itself shimmered like a spectral city on the bare edge of visibility.

A dozen Knights of the Swastika, still attired in their barbaric splendor, stood 'guard at strategic points around the room while Bogel, Stopa, and six more ex-Avengers met the roadsteamer in the courtyard. Feric himself had donned a brown hunter's tunic of exaggerated austerity which was sure to stand out from whatever the others might wear due to its utter lack of adornment.

All in all, it seemed to Feric that he had prepared a proper welcome.

As he had ordered, Stopa knocked loudly on the heavy wooden door, formally requesting entrance. Feric gave the order, and one of the Knights flanking the door opened it with a somewhat ragged flourish, albeit more or less in the spirit which he had been taught. Bogel and Stopa led in an altogether motley crew of middle-aged, somewhat pallid, and not a little threadbare creatures, a half dozen of them in all. The best that could be said of these nabobs of the Human Renaissance Party was that they were clearly examples of the pure human genotype and projected a certain aura of dogged if forlorn determination. Beside Stopa and the six sturdy, high-spirited ex-Avengers who brought up the rear of the group, the Party leadership cut a sorry spectacle. As the men approached him, Feric felt a fleeting pang of annoyance at the caliber of the material

he was expected to lead.

But his mood immediately brightened when Stopa, with perhaps too much of a comradely grin on his face, came to a halt at the foot of the table with a nice snapping of his bootheels together, shot out his arm in the ancient royal salute, and bellowed: "Hail Jaggar!" Instantly, the ex-Avengers all brought their bootheels together, saluted with suitable vigor, and echoed the salutation eighteen-

fold. What they presently lacked in precision and dash they made up for in enthusiasm.

For a moment, the Party leaders looked round, apparently unsure of what was expected of them. Then Bogel saluted, and shouted "Hail Jaggar" in a clear voice of utter sincerity. Somewhat uncertainly and with absolute lack of spirit, the gaggle of clerklike men raggedly aped the salute and managed to utter the salutation. At this point, it was as much as could be expected.

Bogel made the introduction admirably short and simple: "Truemen, our new leader, Feric Jaggar."

"Greetings," Feric said. "You've just given the new Party salute, if none too smartly. No doubt you will soon develop the proper spirit. But we have more concrete matters to deal with today. Please be seated."

Bogel and Stopa took up seats at Feric's left and right hands respectively; the Party officials seated themselves below them, stealing glances at the Great Truncheon, wondering, no doubt, at the truth of Bogel's contention that the new leader he had found was capable of wielding it. In due course their doubts would be annihilated; for the present, Feric preferred the frankness of skepticism.

Bogel went through the motions of introducing the men formally, though of course Feric had been briefed on their histories and pedigrees long since. Otrig Haulman, a prosperous tavernkeeper, was the Party treasurer, somewhat devious, but totally dedicated to genetic purity, having proven his loyalty to the cause by backing it with his own coin. Tavus Marker, a commercial sloganeer, was the corresponding secretary, a thin, unhealthy-looking man, but a tireless worker nevertheless. Heermark Bluth and Barm Decker were a butcher and a minor police official respectively; they, along with Bogel, were the Party's chief orators. Manreed Parmerob, a teacher of history, was the present Party theoretician. Sigmark Dugel was chairman of the membership committee—a dubious distinction considering that the Party presently had no more than three

hundred members. As a retired brigadier who maintained personal contacts in high military circles, Dugel would no doubt one day prove more useful. All in all, not exactly what one would call an elite group, but not entirely without potentialities.

Moreover, the presence of Stopa and the sturdy lads he commanded lent the proceedings a certain air of solidity that they might have otherwise lacked. Here were men
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clearly capable of acting forcefully and with telling effect if need be, and obviously imbued with a sense of personal loyalty to Feric. Already he had brought a new dimension of practicality and martial spirit to this somewhat dreamy-eyed Party; their joining in the new Party salute and salutation had been acknowledgment enough of that fact.

"We have a great deal to accomplish quickly. True-men," Feric began crisply. "I've been studying the Human Renaissance Party as it now stands, and there will have to be some drastic changes. To begin with, the name itself will have to go. In the mind of plain folk, it suggests some sort of tavern debating society, not a rigorous and resolute band of patriots. Something like "The Sons of the Swastika* would be much more to the point. Since the Time of Fire, the swastika has been the unequivocal symbol of racial purity. As such it epitomizes our cause in a manner that even the simplest bumpkin can readily understand. Moreover, it will give us certain advantages in the area of practical propaganda, which will 'become apparent later."

"A stroke of genius!" Marker exclaimed. "Our cause and our Party name can both be expressed in a single visual symbol that will be readily understood even by illiterates. No other party will have such a powerful weapon in the fight for the public's attention."

Feric was impressed by the way Marker had understood the essence of his master stroke exactly and by the way it had enlivened his countenance with fire and spirit. To discover this quality in a subordinate at this early stage was most promising.

The others, for their part, mumbled among each other diffidently, with the exception of the theorist Parmerob, who seemed considerably agitated. Finally, his annoyance burst into speech.

"The name Human Renaissance Party was chosen after considerable deliberation," he said petulantly. "It accurately represents the basic Party positions."

"Accuracy is not the same thing as force," Feric pointed out. "The name of the Party must shout what we stand for with the voice of a tergeant-major."

Parmerob grew even more indignant. "I formulated the name and the Party platform myself," he declared. "We stand for the purity of the true human genotype, the rigorous enforcement of the genetic purity laws, the complete annihilation of the anti-human Dominators, the exclusion of all mutants for all time from the sacred soil of

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Heldon, and the extension of Helder dominion over new areas and the purification of their gene pools wherever possible. This is the formula for a renaissance of true humanity—thus the name Human Renaissance Party."

Feric rose slowly and placed his right hand casually on the handle of the Great Truncheon of Held; all eyes were instantly upon him. Would they now actually witness the wielding of the Steel Commander? There was a moment of silence in which only the whispered roar of the bonfire in the great stone fireplace could be heard.

Feric's voice broke this stillness: "Is there any nuance of what you have said not implicit in the symbol of the swastika?"

Abruptly, Parmerob's face creased in a smile. "You are right of course," he said. "Your name for the Party is infinitely superior to mine. Sons of the Swastika we are indeed."

Feric reseated himself without hefting the Great Truncheon, though he kept his hand upon it. "Very well," he said, "that's decided. I've designed a Party flag, armband, and various emblems around the swastika motif. I've also designed a uniform for the Knights of the Swastika, our storm-troop arm. The men you see here are the nucleus of that force; presently the Knights of the Swastika number two score, but I have plans for a troop of at least five thousand."

"The generals of the Star Command would not look with favor or indifference on such a private army," Dugel pointed out.

Feric smiled. "I don't doubt for a moment the fanatic patriotism of the professional officer corps," he said. "We share a common cause with the army, and ways shall be found to convince the Star Command of that fact. No doubt your own experience and expertise in these areas will prove invaluable in this regard."

Dugel's concern seemed somewhat eased, though a certain hint of skepticism still lingered on his countenance. As for the others, Haulman had not revealed himself at all while the two Party orators, Bluth and Decker, radiated a certain aura of hostility; Parmerob and Marker seemed keen and enthusiastic, Bogel was of course his original champion, and Stopa was dedicated to his person with a childlike fervor. As things stood now, he could easily dispose of any hostile elements within the Party if he so

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chose; it would be better, however, to win the unquestioned loyalty of all at the outset.

"It but remains to organize our first mass demonstration," Feric continued slowly.

But at this point, Heermark Bluth interrupted loudly and somewhat belligerently. "What about the question of leadership?" he demanded. "We haven't voted on that. Bogel is at present our Secretary-General and titular head;

you, Trueman Jaggar, have no title at all."

"I'm perfectly willing to resign the Secretary-Generalship in favor of Feric," Bogel suggested. "I would content myself with the title of Executive Chairman under his leadership."

"We haven't elected Jaggar our leader as yet," Bluth insisted. "I demand a vote."

Feric pondered the situation. Bogel, Parmerob, and Marker would undoubtedly vote in his favor; Bluth and Decker would probably vote against him; the positions of Haulman and Dugel were unknown, though in a pinch he could probably rely on the retired brigadier. Moreover, he could rightfully claim a voice for himself, and, for that matter, for Stopa. He could not lose a vote.

Nevertheless, he would lose a certain measure of absolute authority if he allowed the Party officials to vote him the leadership, and to permit any such vote to be less than unanimous would be disastrous. He must lead by unassailable right, not by leave of some council of notables.

"You will retain the title of Secretary-General, Bogel," he said. "It suits your style better than mine. For my part, I am content to be known simply as Commander."

The challenge was clear: Feric was claiming the title of Commander of the Sons of the Swastika and all that it

implied by right, not by vote. Bluth grew greatly agitated, and Decker also seemed almost ready to foam at the mouth. Bogel, Marker, Parmerob, and Stopa obviously understood and agreed, while Haulman still did not reveal himself, and Sigmark Dugel seemed to approve of the martial ring of the new title of absolute leadership.

Decker finally asked the question that Feric had hoped would be put: "By what right do you claim the leadership of the Party without benefit of a vote?"

Once again Peric rose deliberately to his feet, his right hand still resting lightly upon the Great Truncheon of Held. A gust of wind blew into the room from the open doors behind Feric, setting the torches around the ceiling

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to Dickering wildly. Behind him, the late afternoon sky was a deep blue tinged with traces of orange, and the great central plain of Heldon lay spread at the foot of the mountaintop beyond the bastion of the forest. Framed by this mighty vista in the flickering torchlight, his hand on the primeval sceptre of the Helder nation, Feric seemed the incarnation of the legendary heroes of the dim past, and even Bluth and Decker could not but be somewhat awed.

"He who wields this Great Truncheon is the true ruler of all Heldon by genetic right, a right that goes far deeper than any law of Party or Council," Peric said. "Is there a man among you who believes that the Great Truncheon of Held is his to wield?"

All were cowed to silence.

Slowly and deliberately, Feric clasped his right hand around the handle of the Steel Commander. With an easy motion, he swept the Great Truncheon into the air high over his head.

Then he brought the Steel Commander down upon the heavy oaken tabletop and smashed it to flinders.

It was Bluth himself who led the others to their feet, saluting smartly, and shouting, "Hail Jaggarl!"

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Roaring across the plain toward the suburbs of Walder came a grand procession, the dash, sound, and color of which was enough to take the breath away and set the heart singing: two long rows of motorcycles howling down the road at fifty miles an hour at the rear of a sleek black

gas car. Gone were the barbarian rags of the Black Avengers, replaced by the stylishly cut brown leather uniform of the Knights of the Swastika, set off with high-peaked foresters' caps also of brown leather, bearing bronze medallions of the new Party crest: an eagle bearing a swastika shield. Behind each motorcyclist trailed a red cloak emblazoned with a bold black swastika in a

circle of purest white; this was repeated on the red armband each man wore on his right sleeve. The cloaks and armbands were miniatures of the four great red, black, and white Party flags secured to the frames of the motorcycles at the front and the rear of the double column. These flags, flapping in the wind of passage, were dominated by the black-and-white swastika emblems at their centers, and affixed to sturdy brazen poles capped with the Party shield. The motorcycles had themselves been redecorated to a uniform scheme: the frames were bright red, the fuel tanks done up in the color and design of the Party flag, the panniers finished in unadorned gleaming chrome, the tail fins likewise of chrome and formed into the shapes of great lightning bolts. Feric had well calculated the overall effect to stir the spirit and capture the eye of any true Helder.

The black command car itself was unadorned save for small Party flags above each front wheel. In the cab of the car were two uniformed Knights of the Swastika: a driver in the left seat, and a trooper beside him for the sake of symmetry. In the front of the open cabin sat Seph Bogel and Sigmark Dugel. Behind them, on a higher seat, sat Feric. Bogel, Dugel, and Feric were dressed in the uniform which Feric had designed for the Party elite. This was of black leather, tailored quite snugly, trimmed with chrome brightwork, and set off at the throat with red scarves secured with white-and-black swastika clasps. The armbands and cloaks were of a design identical with those of the Knights of the Swastika, but the black leather caps were more sleekly cut, with narrow chromed visors, and the Party crest done in silver, with the swastika etched in black.

Secured to Feric's waist, with a wide leather belt set off with chrome studs, was the Great Truncheon of Held, polished till it shone like a mirror.

Thus would Feric Jaggar enter the second city of Heldon—at the head of a dashing storm troop, a pageant of sound and power and color carefully designed by his own hand to set the soul of the beholder soaring.

Indeed, the procession had already gathered a small following of private motorcycles, gas cars, and even bicy-

clists, pedaling frantically at top speed to keep up, by the time it reached the southern suburbs of Walder and slackened its pace to thirty miles an hour. Peric realized that these folk had been drawn by the exciting spectacle of

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uniformed men dashing down the road at high speed, rather than by any loyalty to the Party, since the new colors had never before been displayed; still those who responded to such a sight with fervent enthusiasm were most likely men of the proper Helder spirit.

By some sixth sense—not to mention the mighty din that the column sent as a herald before it—the people of Walder were alerted to its passage long enough beforehand to line the streets before their sturdy and spotless brick homes as Feric's car sped by. The clean concrete streets, the bright houses with their lawns and flower patches, the robust working folk in their clean blues, grays, and browns, the shopkeepers in their white tunics trimmed with all sorts of piping, the healthy-cheeked children—all presented a most pleasant aspect to Feric's eye as he drove past the crowded walkways. The scene spoke well of the Helder gene pool and the healthy quality of the life of the city; it was bracing to view so many fine specimens of true humanity among such spotless surroundings.

As the column drove deeper into the city, the crowds on the walkways thickened somewhat, and the buildings grew somewhat larger; four- and five-story apartment dwellings dominated now, rather than private houses. They too were of brick, much of it glazed in bright colors, and were graced with all manner of ornately carved wooden facades and private balconies. Trees and shrubbery provided shade and a soothing spectacle to the eye. The folk in this neighborhood seemed to Feric to be somewhat less prosperous, for their garb was somewhat drabber and the shops a bit plainer, but he found the cleanliness and repair of everything in sight nothing less than exemplary.

Here, too, the street was wider, and there was traffic of sorts which was constrained to scatter out of the path of the motorized parade: great numbers of bicycles, some gas cars and motorcycles, steamtrucks of various sorts, and a municipal roadsteamer or two. Every time the column was forced to swerve around some oafish vehicle that was unable to clear the road in time, the command car and the motorcycles roared around the roadblock without slackening speed, and with a great loud rapping of the motorcycles' engines, to the delight of the crowds on the walkway, who broke into spontaneous cheering. The ragged army of bicyclists and assorted motorized vehicles that trailed along in the van of the storm troop had to

follow the line of the parade as best they could.

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The proportion of shops to residential buildings increased as the parade neared the center of the city, and the buildings themselves were more imposing. Many reached ten or even fifteen stories in height and they were constructed of brick or concrete or cement, faced with marble, brasswork, or carved stone facades. On street level, the buildings housed broad-windowed shops offering a rich variety of goods: foods of all sorts, wearing apparel, steam engines for the home with slave devices, home furnishings of every description, paintings and wall hangings, statuary, even private gas cars for those who could afford them. Judging from the sounds of machinery that could be heard and the bustling workers Feric glimpsed occasionally through the upper windows, the upper stories of these great buildings were devoted to craft and industry. No doubt many of the goods offered for sale in the shops below were turned out right on the spot.

There was a certain amount of dust in the air in this

beehive of commerce and industry, but still the streets were free of any sort of offal, the walkways in every way admirably maintained and inviting. What a far cry from the ghastly sweat pits of Gormond! Feric could sense the power of the city all around him in these precincts. No one could doubt that the racial genotype which constructed cities such as these was the genetic superior of any other population of sapient beings on the face of the earth. The world was rightfully Helder by dint of evolutionary fitness.

Here in the commercial center of the city, the crowds,

stopping along the walkways as the spectacle roared by with a grand flourish of scarlet and swastikas, were quite impressed, and many of the good folk shouted out their spontaneous approval. Though few or none of them could have any idea of what the parade was about, or who the hero riding in state was, Feric felt constrained to reward their instinctive approval with an occasional modest Party salute. The good people would comprehend the significance of the gesture soon enough, and the spirit of enthusiasm that was being generated surely required some formal acknowledgment.

Feric was delighted at the great throngs that greeted the motorcade[^] as it debouched upon the Emerald Promenade, the great wide boulevard which ran through the

cultural and governmental heart of the city; throngs appropriate to the heroic scale of the official architecture.

Here were some of the largest and most visible proofs of the grandeur of Helder civilization. The City Hall was a massive edifice of white marble with a resplendent flight of formal stairs and a heroic facade of pillars, each capped with a bronze of a notable figure out of Helder history, the whole surmounted by a great dome of weathered green bronze. Each of the eight tiers of the Municipal Theater had its own facing of stone pillars supporting pediments rich with bas-reliefs of appropriate subjects, giving the whole massive building the airiness of a baker's confection. The Museum of Fine Arts was a low building of only three stories, but was designed as an endless series of wings that rambled off in all directions like a natural growth. This inviting treasure-house of art had been Grafted of diverse materials, the style of architecture varying slightly from wing to wing, and each wing was set off with sculptures of a different artistic period, so that, the whole of the exterior mirrored the manifold wonders within.

The various lesser public buildings were constructed on only a slightly smaller scale, and no effort had been spared in embellishing the least of them with heroic statuary, bronzes, and ornately worked stone, marble, or metallic facades. Each building faced an open square across the Emerald Promenade, so that the whole gave an effect of vast spaciousness as well as heroic scale.

Feric longed for the day when Party parades would fill this great boulevard from walkway to walkway and for miles in length, bearing scarlet forests of Party flags, marching to the beat of martial music and chanting patriotic songs. Soon enough that day would come, but, for now, the massed howl of motorcycle engines and the flash of flags and steel at speed were song and spectacle enough to set this stately boulevard vibrating with energy as workers and officials poured out of the buildings to observe its passage.

The column swept up the full length of the Emerald Promenade, drawing an ever-growing comet's tail of vehicles and bicycles along and then headed away from the center of the city in a northwesterly direction. The sun was waning, and Feric's plan was to tour through the western section of the city before returning at dusk to the site near the center of Walder which had been chosen for

the first mass rally, for surely sunset would be the most dramatic hour for what was planned.

This course carried the convoy through another bustling commercial district, then an area of tasteful apartment dwellings; slowly and subtly these well-maintained and spotless environs gave way to a neighborhood where the architecture of the dwellings was similar, but the facades rife with unrepaired damage, the walls begrimed, the plantings gone to seed and ill-tended, and the streets mired in rubbish and filth. Here the people in the streets wore soiled and worn garments and bad sullen, vacant expressions; they lined the streets silently, an unhealthy-looking and altogether sorry spectacle all too reminiscent of the dull rabble of Borgravia. To Feric's trained nostrils, the reek of Dominators hung fetid and

heavy in this air.

Feric leaned forward and questioned Bogel: "What is

this place?"

Bogel turned to face him with a distasteful grimace on his thin features. "This foul warren is known as Graytown. It's a notorious den of Universalists; the rabble here have been thoroughly infected with the pestilence of Zind. Periodically, they erupt from this cesspool in riots, demanding such obscenities as open borders, and the breeding of subhuman slave creatures with the aid of advisers from Zind. When our colors are known to all, we dare not show ourselves in these precincts."

"On the contrary," Feric informed him, "in the near future our storm troops must sweep through this area and slay the hidden Doms responsible for this blight on true

humanity."

"No one has ever succeeded in rooting all the Doms out of this maze," Bogel said. "They are everywhere and

nowhere."

"Then we must simply crack heads here until improvement in the situation proves that we have eradicated them all. The only way to destroy well-entrenched dominance patterns is with ruthless force enthusiastically and somewhat indiscriminately applied."

As the column sped through the filthy streets past the unkempt gardens and grimy dwellings, Feric vowed to save as many of these poor wretches as he could from their Dom masters and Yetum them to their true Helder inheri-

tance. As for those too deeply enmeshed to be extracted
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from the dominance patterns short of death, to slay them would be a mercy, when one considered their present state.

As the last rays of the sun fired the western hills with purple and orange and the lights of the city came on, Feric's command car led the motorized column up the broad avenue which entered Brammer Park from the south. Here, on the flat crest of a gently rolling hill in the southern end of the park, Feric would address the first mass rally of the Sons of the Swastika.

Up the avenue, this hillside was clearly visible now, and Feric could see the blazing twenty-foot swastika of faggots that crowned the crest like a proud beacon. Cupping this breathtaking Party ensign was a great semi-circle of ten-foot torches; as the command car approached within a few blocks of the Park, Feric could make out the low speaker's platform flanked by giant scarlet swastika flags immediately in front of the swastika bonfire, the massed Party officials in black leather to the right of the platform, and the hired military band in Knight's uniforms to the left. All seemed in readiness.

Looking behind, Feric saw the twin columns of motorcycles, scarlet swastika flags and cloaks snapping in the wind like a great red forest fire; the earth-shattering roar of the engines set the very molecules of the air to dancing. Far down the avenue behind this storm troop, he could make out a vast commotion of roadsteamers, gas cars, steamtrucks and bicycles blocking the roadbed from walkway to walkway, and behind these vehicles a multitude of Helder scurrying along in the wake of the spectacle on foot. Truly the stage was set for a turning point in history!

As Feric's car approached the base of the hill, the Knights of the Swastika executed a smart maneuver: the two columns of motorcycles sped up while Feric's driver slackened his pace somewhat, so that the command car was now flanked on either side by a precise line of motorized storm troops. When the procession reached the very base of the hill where the giant fiery swastika and the line of torches stood out in bold relief against the blackening sky, another drill was performed. The two flag-bearing motorcyclists at the head of the column fell backward and inward, so that they became a color guard directly in front of the gleaming black command car. At

once the flanking columns of motorcycles dashed ahead of the car and color guard, straight off the avenue, and up the slope of the hill toward the fire at its peak. As they roared up the grassy slope, they spaced themselves out evenly. When the two lead motorcycles had reached a spot about ten yards from the speaker's platform, they came to a smart halt; the others instantly stopped in their tracks so that the two columns of idling motorcycles formed an aisle of honor from the base of the hill to its summit.

At the bottom of this corridor, the color guard and command car waited at idle for the great press of people boiling up the avenue to arrive on the scene. From this vantage, Feric could clearly make out Bluth, Haulman, Decker, and Parmerob standing together to the right of the speaker's platform in a tight press, resplendent in their black-and-chrome Party uniforms. Stopa stood out clearly in his brown Knight's uniform, separated from this group by several yards of open space.

It was not very long before the entire avenue behind Feric's car was a scene of good-natured pandemonium, as first the motor vehicles arrived and disgorged their passengers, then the bicyclists pulled up and dismounted, and finally a great crowd of pedestrians, ten thousand at the very least, pressed forward, filling every inch of standing space. All were shouting and speculating to each other, raising a great hubbub, but no one dared set foot on the empty hillside where the aisle of motorized Knights stood gunning their engines now and then, a metallic sound that cut through the human tumult like a knife.

When he deemed that the psychologically appropriate moment had arrived, Feric tapped Bogel on the shoulder. Bogel, in turn, tapped the Knight beside the driver of the black car, who raised his arm in the Party salute.

Instantly, the band on the hilltop struck up a heady martial tune, and the two color-guard motorcycles started up the hill through the aisle of honor, bearing the two swastika flags before the command car. As Feric's car followed the color guard up the slope toward the crescent of fire, each pair of Knights gave the Party salute as the car passed, then fell in behind it, so that by the time the color guard had reached the summit, wheeled, and halted facing the command car, the original twin column of mounted Knights had reformed behind it, with two more Party flags bringing up the rear. As Feric's car halted before the color guard, the two columns divided and

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formed a semi-circle of motorcycles twenty yards down

the slope from the crescent of torches, a wall of safety between the speaker's area and the great mob of citizens that had now begun to roil up the hill.

With a minimum of ceremony, Bogel and Dugel got down from the car and joined the other Party functionaries by the speaker's platform. For his part, Feric waited in the car until the press of the mob had reached the picket circle of motorcycles.

He then slowly stepped out of the car. The moment his foot touched the soil, every Party functionary and Knight shot out his right arm in the Party salute, and the hearty massed roar of "Hail Jaggar!" filled the air.

The salutes were held until Feric had reached the speaker's platform, and the car had been driven behind the great swastika bonfire, where it would not spoil the spectacle. Instead of mounting the platform, Feric turned to face the great multitude of Helder who choked the hillside; an audience of sufficient size to suit his purpose. He paused for dramatic effect, as if inspecting the people massed below him and finding them fit. Then he himself gave the Party salute.

Instantly, there was another massed shout of "Hail Jaggar!" a click of heels, and then the arms of Knights and Party functionaries alike were returned smartly to their sides.

Feric stood by the speaker's platform with his right hand resting lightly on the hilt of the Steel Commander, gazing resolutely at the great throng while Bogel mounted the platform and made a short introductory speech.

"I do not speak to you tonight as leader of the Human Renaissance Party, for that party is no more. Like the legendary phoenix, there now arises from its ashes something grander and far more glorious, the true and ultimate expression of the racial will of Heldon, a new party, a new crusade, a new cause—the Sons of the Swastika! And to lead this mighty new force, a new leader, a new man, a hero in the finest sense of the word, I give you the Commander of the Sons of the Swastika, Feric Jaggar!"

Bogel finished his introduction with a click of his heels and a Party salute. At once, every Knight and Party official responded in kind, and shouted "Hail Jaggar!" Moreover, the scores of Party members scattered strategically throughout the great crowd did likewise, initiating a certain number of spontaneous salutes and salutations

among the good folk of the audience, quite a lively response, in fact.

While the cheering went on, Bogel left the speaker's platform; after a proper interval, Feric gave a hand signal, and a sudden blare of trumpets cut through the hubbub. With this, Feric himself mounted the platform; a swastika of flame twenty feet high stood out in glory against the night sky behind him, bathing him in heroic red firelight, flashing highlights off the brightwork of his gleaming black leather uniform, setting his powerful eyes ablaze.

He could feel the uncanny silence in the air over the great throng as a physical force; thousands of people standing shoulder to shoulder as far as his eyes could see, every fiber of each soul focused on his being and his being alone, waiting for him to speak. He felt the irresistible power of destiny flow through his body, merging seamlessly with the energy of his own mighty will. He was the fleshly incarnation of the race's greatest cause, the embodiment of the racial will, and he sensed that the multitude before him knew it. He was the will of Heldon; he could not and would not fail.

Spontaneously, the words sprang to his lips. "It has been more than a thousand years since the Time of Fire and still mutants prowl the earth contaminating true humanity with their foul and twisted genes. Who can deny that Heldon is a bastion of racial purity in a worldwide sea of pestilence? To the south is Borgravia, a state rich in genetic potential and therefore a rightful part of the Helder domain, but ruled at present by vile mutants and mongrels who seek by racial mingling to eradicate all traces of the pure human genotype from their territory. To the west are Vetonias and Husaks, dunghills of genetic filth not one whit less foul, where the true human genotype is persecuted and reviled. Beyond these political obscenities are the genetic cesspits of Cressia, Arbona, Kar-math and their ilk, where the gene pools are fit only for total extermination, and beyond that, naught but radioactive wastelands. All of these mutants and mongrels are our implacable racial foes—and that is not the worst of it!"

Feric paused for dramatic effect, and in that moment was nearly overwhelmed by the great wave of psychic power and rapt approval that washed over him from the ten thousand pairs of eyes that blazed up at him like

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gleaming coals in the darkness. He could all but taste their bottomless hunger for more of the same: the Helder

people had a racial longing for the plain unvarnished truth which had been too long unappeased. They were totally with him.

"No, that is not nearly the worst of it!" Feric roared.

"For to the east, lurking behind political jokes like Wolack and Malax, is the unimaginable vastness and unparalleled putrescence of the slave pits of Zind! Half the mutant population of the world under the control of a handful of Dominators! Vast resources and a gigantic population at the command of foul Doms whose grandest desire is to exterminate the last vestiges of true humanity from the face of the earth and rule a worldwide soulless slave rabble for all time! And that is not the worst of it!"

Once again Feric paused, and, as he did, the intake of breath among the multitude before him was actually audible. He was awakening their dormant instincts of racial will and righteous indignation. He was setting their spirits aflame by daring to utter the simple truth. He was forming a juggernaut of racial power.

"The worst of it is right here in Heldon!" he continued.

"Here we have a government of cowards and weaklings who lick the boots of the feckless rabble by hinting at the breeding of brainless slaveys and relaxing the rigor of the genetic purity laws. Thus do they hope to preserve their own worthless hides against the day of reckoning that must surely come. In Heldon, the last hope of the true human genotype, we have a government of imbeciles who flirt with the stinking Universalists while knowing full well that Universalism is the cynical concoction of the Dominators of Zind. In Heldon, the fatherland of human purity, we are infested with an unknown number of secret Doms dedicated with inhuman fanaticism to our total destruction!"

This time when Feric paused there was not silence but rather a great commotion of angry voices. A forest of fists waved in the air, and there was great shouting of both indignation and approval. The deepest racial instincts of the crowd were now fully aroused from the lethargy into which they had been cozened. There was power in the air and a thirst for Dominator blood.

"What is needed now is a new fanatic determination to preserve the racial purity of Heldon! What is needed now is a government with the iron will to purge all Heldon of
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the last Dom and the last contaminated gene with steel and fire! What is needed now is an external policy ruthlessly dedicated to the total and final conquest of the last

inch of habitable soil on the face of the earth by the forces of true humanity. What is needed now is a new party of heroic force and fanatic zeal to fling the present rabble from power and onto the dung heap of history! What is needed now is leadership willing and able to lead the Helder people to crushing and final victory over all the Doms and mutants and mongrels who oppose us! What Heldon now needs is the utter fanatic support of all true men for the Sons of the Swastika!"

An overwhelming shout of approval went up from the crowd. Ten thousand and more arms shot up again and again in repeated spontaneous saluting. Feric let this hearty demonstration go on for quite some time while he stood gazing out over the wildly cheering multitude, a figure of utter resolution haloed in the fiery orange glow of the giant swastika which dominated the sky behind him.

Then, with a dramatic flourish, he drew the Great Truncheon of Held, and held the lightning-etched silvery weapon before him in the Party salute. Murmurs and gasps went through the crowd as recognition of the legendary Steel Commander passed among them; in a minute or two, there was utter silence.

The gleaming headball of Feric's shaft caught the glow of the firelight and blazed like a miniature sun as he raised the weapon high over his head, straining his voice to the utmost as he addressed the people in a truly heroic voice. "I hold in my hand the Great Truncheon of Held, and thus do I claim sole rightful rule of all Heldon and what lies beyond not merely for myself, but in the name of the Swastika! I dedicate myself, the Sons of the Swastika, and this sacred weapon to the repurification of all Heldon with blood and iron, and to the extension of the dominion of true humanity over the face of the entire earth! Never will we rest until the last mutant gene is swept from the face of the planet!"

Miraculously, as with one great voice, and with uncanny precision, the huge throng shot every right arm into the air and chanted: "Hail Jaggar! Hail Jaggar! HAIL JAGGAR!" The sound seemed fit to split the heavens asunder and cow the very gods.

Beaming, Feric sheathed the Great Truncheon, and returned the salute. Incredibly, the sound of chanting was

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redoubled in volume and fervor, and the saluting became a bone-snapping frenzy. The joy of the moment buoyed Feric's soul to undreamed heights of racial glory. Ten thousand and more Helder had become fanatically loyal to

the Party. As a torch had ignited the great swastika of wood that blazed behind him, so had his words and will ignited the swastika in the souls of these good Helder. As the swastika of flame lit up the night sky with tongues of orange fire, so would the swastika of the Helder soul light up the darkness of the spirit and emblazon the ensign of the New Age across the heavens.

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The Sons of the Swastika occupied the fourth floor of a ten-story stone building, the rest of which was rented out to an assortment of tradesmen, small businesses, physicians, and the like. At Feric's order, Haulman had selected a situation in which the Party was the landlord's most important tenant; in fact he had gone Feric one better and rented the suite from a crony who was deep in his debt. As a consequence, although the Party occupied only one floor of ten, Feric had been able to dictate a redecoration of the entire facade of the building.

The upper six stories of black stone had been painted red, and upon this enormous red field was emblazoned a black swastika in a white circle of suitable proportion, making the upper half of the building's facade into a gigantic Party flag. Immediately below this was a large bronze plaque proudly proclaiming: "National Headquarters of the Sons of the Swastika." Two large Party flags overhung the street. All in all, Feric had been able to make the facade of this ordinary building suit his style and purpose.

Since Party headquarters was quite literally a giant red flag in the face of the Universalist scum, suitable security precautions had been taken. A squad of uniformed Knights armed with pistols and truncheons stood along the walkway, screening the entrance from the street at every

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hour of the night and day. Four more guards stood by the door itself at all times. On the roof of the building were four machine-gun positions, constantly manned, and covering every approach. Patrols of six Knights each marched regularly around the building in short intervals, day and night. Inside, every floor was constantly patrolled by armed Knights, and the fourth floor itself could only be entered by two staircases, both of which were protected by machine gunners.

Across a side street from the headquarters, a vacant lot had been surrounded by a high wire fence through which coursed a powerful electric current generated by a steam engine within the perimeter. The headquarters garrison of Knights lived inside this compound in a series of low

wooden barracks. Two hundred motorcyclists and their steeds were included in this complement. In the event of an attack on Party headquarters, the scum would be caught between the men in the building and these motorized storm troops and crushed utterly. It might even be possible to fend off an attack by elements of the regular army for an extended period.

The fourth floor itself had been divided up into a series of offices, meeting rooms, and bedrooms. While Stag Stopa bunked with the Knights in the compound, and the other Party officials dwelled in their own private homes, Feric himself slept in a bedroom adjacent to his office, and Bogel too occupied similar accommodations. In addition, Ludolf Best, a keen young fellow whose intelligence and devotion both to the cause and to Feric's own person made him the ideal personal assistant, also slept within the headquarters, where he could be instantly at his master's service at any hour.

Feric's office, though of course the largest in the Party headquarters, was kept deliberately austere. The walls were of rough-hewn wood like those of a military barracks; ceiling and floor were of plaster and tile respectively, both painted red, with the black swastika in the white circle at their geometric centers. There were three rows of wooden benches facing Feric's plain oaken desk so that he could easily brief fair-sized groups here when necessary. On the desk itself, the Great Truncheon of Held lay on a tray covered in black velvet. This, the black drapery around the two windows, the large Party flag hung as a tapestry behind Feric's desk, and a huge oil painting of the Battle of Roost were the office's only decorations.

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At considerable expense a private television set had been purchased at Bogel's insistence. This was a plain steel box with a glass face that sat inconspicuously in one corner of the room. Now Feric and Bogel sat on one of the benches utilizing this expensive device for the first time.

"You see, Feric, the expense is well worth it," Bogel insisted for the tenth time. "With this receiver, we can see every public television broadcast; valuable information can be gained in this manner."

Feric somewhat dubiously watched the Finance Minister delivering a tedious economic report on the official noon news broadcast. The point of all this still eluded him; the public television broadcasts were controlled entirely by the present decadent regime. There was no doubt that television broadcasts were a propaganda tool of

immense potential, reaching as they did public television receivers in every public square in Heldon. But since the government had absolute control of this means of communication, it seemed impossible that the Party would ever be able to use this latest wonder of Helder science for its own patriotic ends.

Suddenly Feric's eyes widened in amazement as he perceived his own image, framed against a burning swastika, on the television screen. Over the speaker came not Feric's voice, but that of the official commentator: "... this third mass rally of the Sons of the Swastika in as many weeks was to end in the tragedy of violence...."

The screen now showed the Emerald Promenade choked from walkway to walkway with citizens, all wearing swastika armbands, many waving torches aloft. Scores of red swastika flags were visible, borne triumphantly aloft over the mass procession.

"The stupidity of the Libertarian regime astounds me, Bogel!" Peric exclaimed. "It appears that we have only to hand these cretins shovels and they will gladly dig their own mass grave."

"From their point of view, they're educating the people against a menace to the state," Bogel said wryly. "Certainly, they're doing their best to make all Heldon aware of our existence!"

Now the screen showed a tight formation of Knights leading the people through the streets on their colorful motorcycles, clad in their trim brown uniforms and flaming scarlet capes.

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"... proceeded peacefully until the demonstrators reached Graytown, where they were met by flying squads of Universalist hooligans...."

The sordid environs of Graytown were visible now as the Sons of the Swastika surged through the filthy streets. Suddenly, a squad of men, all poorly dressed and thoroughly begrimed and armed with an assortment of clubs and knives, erupted from a side street and tore into the press of unarmed citizens. Instantly, a dozen or more Knights whirled their machines around and set after these cowardly wretches with their long steel truncheons. Those few Universalist thugs who were not felled in a minute or so of smart action fled howling from the scene with

gashed heads bleeding.

Although the government commentator went prattling on about Swastika gangs and Universalist hooligans settling their differences in the streets to the detriment of the body politic, Feric knew full well that the good Helder watching the spectacle in public squares throughout all Heldon would pay more heed to their own eyes than to the ravings of some government jackanapes, and what they saw was the Swastika triumphant. So far had putrescence set in in the brainpans of the racial traitors that they were broadcasting Swastika propaganda without even knowing it, since the sight of massed men behind the ensign of the Swastika, and these gloriously triumphant, spoke to the heart, while the best that the stale condemnation of the prim announcer could arouse was a certain biliousness in the viewers' stomachs.

"There must be some way to dupe these morons into

granting the Party some access to the public airwaves," Feric said. "If we could broadcast our own propaganda to every square in Heldon, we could sweep the degenerates out of power and into the sewage heap where they belong

in a month or two."

"As it is, we still have ways of at least getting our spectacles shown," Bogel pointed out.

Feric grinned and nodded. "A few dead Universalists in the gutter after a rally, and television coverage is virtually assured!"

As Bogel turned off the television receiver, Ludolf Best,

a slim, intense, blond young specimen of true humanity," quite dashing in his trim black Party leathers and scarlet cloak, entered the office, walked smartly up to Feric,
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clicked his heels, gave the salutation, saluted, and stood at rigid attention.

"What is it. Best?"

"My Commander, Brigadier Lar Waffing is here and requests an immediate audience."

"What do you know of this Waffing, Bogel?" Feric inquired.

"An important figure," Bogel replied. "A commander of aerial dreadnaughts during the war, quite a young hero. Although his family has considerable wealth, he successfully pursued a military career after the war, before finally resigning his brigadier's position as a protest against the weak-kneed policies of the present regime."

This Waffing seemed a true patriot and a man of considerable spirit, Feric thought, and more to the point, he no doubt retains powerful influence in military as well as economic circles.

"Show him in. Best," Feric ordered, rising, crossing the room, and seating himself behind his desk for the sake of dignity.

The man that Best ushered into the office cut an extravagant if not quite comic figure. Waffing was tall, with regular features bespeaking the highest genetic purity, and had a bluff, hearty, manly look about him, but he had put on considerable weight since his flying days. He was dressed in a gray military-style tunic trimmed with plenty of gold braid and wore a bright blue cloak; this style on an ordinary man of Waffing's considerable girth would have been ludicrous, but Waffing himself projected a sufficient aura of will and manhood to carry it off.

The two men marched in step to Feric's desk, and to his delight and surprise, Waffing joined Best in the Party salute, and greeted him with a quite enthusiastic "Hail Jaggar!"

Beaming congenially, Feric returned the salute, ordered Best to depart, and bade Waffing be seated on the front bench next to Bogel. Something about Waning appealed to Feric's instincts, entirely apart from the uses to which a man of such position might be put.

"I can see you're a fellow I can talk plainly to, Jaggar," Waffing said in a deep, bluff voice. "A man much like myself. I like what you're doing. As I've said many times myself, the only way to treat enemies of genetic purity is to smash their skulls, and I'm glad to see that there's finally a party in Heldon dedicated to doing just that. I

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like the things you say, Jaggar; I've been saying most of them myself for years, but I don't have your way with words, and besides I had no intention of soiling myself with involvement in the pettiness of electoral processes. But you've clearly made the Sons of the Swastika an expression of racial will rather than a society for gener-

ating hot air, and I'm therefore pleased to offer you my

services."

Feric was deeply touched by this profession of loyalty

from a man of such caliber. Waf&ng's blunt honesty was quite convincing, especially since there wasn't an ounce of false humility in it. Only a fine specimen of true humanity secure in the knowledge of his own heroic nature could make such an immediate declaration of faith in the cause while seeming neither arrogant nor suspiciously submissive.

"I welcome you to Party membership. Brigadier

Waffing," Feric said. "I'm sure you'll serve the cause

well."

"I'm just as sure of that as you are!" Waning exclaimed

with a hearty laugh. "From what I've been able to find out about your organization—which is considerable, since I have ready access to all Star Command intelligence reports—you lack proper military leadership. You, of course, possess the instincts for supreme command, Truman Jaggar, but then your level of military leadership sinks all the way to the abyss of this ruffian Stopa."

"Stopa does his job well enough," Feric replied cautiously. "The cracked heads of hundreds of Universalist thugs are testimony to the efficiency and force of the Knights of

the Swastika under his command."

Waning smiled. "No doubt, no doubt," he said. "I'm sure the man leads his little band well enough for now. But you can't seriously consider placing that sort at the

head of a real army."

Feric sensed some inner meaning to all this. "The Knights of the Swastika are merely a private security force," he said blandly. "They are hardly an army."

"I'll speak bluntly" Waning said. "Much of the Star Command is sympathetic to the Sons of the Swastika, but out of a firm sense of preserving their own position, they won't let the Knights grow much more powerful under the present leadership."

"Under the present leadership?"

"You can hardly expect the Star Command to trust the

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friendly intentions of a powerful force led by such as Stopa. On the other hand, if your storm troops were led by a man whom the generals trusted, they would be more secure in their belief that the Knights of the Swastika represented an ally rather than a rival."

Feric could not help chuckling aloud. "A man such as yourself?" he asked Waffing.

Waning put on a broad, mock-humble expression. "It's true that I'm an experienced leader of men and that I have the confidence of the Star Command," he said. "As for my personal qualifications, I would not presume to advise you in that regard, Commander Jaggar."

"Have you been put up to this by the Star Command?"

Waffing's reply was instant, forceful, and characterized by intense, indeed fanatic, sincerity. "My loyalty is to yourself and to the Sons of the Swastika, my Commander!" he shouted, his eyes flashing fire. "If you so direct, I will take up a post of latrine orderly so as to serve you and the Swastika! The Star Command knows nothing of this; I merely inform you of the attitude of the generals and suggest a solution."

The situation was crystal clear. With Stopa in command, the army would not permit the Knights to grow to the point where they presented a potential threat, that is to say, to the point where they became a militarily useful force. With Waffing as his military commander, the Star Command would be less resentful; indeed they might be won over entirely, being for the most part good Helder patriots. On the other hand, the nucleus of the Knights was the ex-Avengers and the men they had recruited;

these fellows had an awe of Stopa second only to their respect for his own person. To replace Stopa with an outsider like Waffing would surely stir trouble in the ranks. A subtle solution was called for.

"I will appoint you Party Security Secretary," Feric told Waffing. "I will create a new bodyguard to be called the Swastika Squad, a true elite, chosen for devotion, genetic purity, physical force, and high intelligence. You will directly command neither the Knights nor the Swastika Squad; however, in your capacity of Security Secretary, you will be the superior of the heads of both storm troops. This arrangement should mollify the Star Com-

mand."

Waffing broke into a broad grin. "A stroke of genius!" he declared. "Better than I could've worked out myself."
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Once again, Waffing laughed heartily. "When you know me better," he said impishly, "you'll know just how high a compliment such an admission is, coming from the lips of Lar Waffing!"

At this Bogel, and Feric himself, could not help but burst into comradely laughter.

At last Feric was able to call the first full meeting of the Swastika Circle, the thoroughly reorganized and renamed Party heirarchy, and could not be other than heartily pleased with the great changes he had wrought. Gone were the petty-fogging Party titles, replaced by honorifics of rigor and force, which, moreover, served to make the chain of command crystal clear. Gone were the idiosyncratic styles of personal garb with which the Party leaders had first greeted Feric's eye; with the exception of Stopa in his brown Knight's uniform, every man seated around the plain oaken table in the stark conference room was resplendent in the black leather of the Party elite.

Moreover, the makeup of the Swastika Circle fully reflected Feric's will. Bogel was now High Commander of Public Will in charge of both formulating the aims of the Party and making those aims the desires of the Helder people, thus banishing the likes of Parmarob and Marker from high Party circles. Haulman was still Party Treasurer, but without the rank of High Commander; a distinction that made the relationship of economic necessity and Party policy abundantly clear. Waffing was High Commander of Security. Stopa had been given the ambiguous title of Commandant of the Knights of the Swastika, which ranked him below Waffing, although he was entitled to a place on the Swastika Circle. For the sake of symmetry, Bors Remler, Commandant of the new Swastika Squad, had also been admitted to the Swastika Circle. In order to emphasize the absolute supremacy of his position as Supreme Commander, Feric had appointed Best to the Swastika Circle with the full rank of High Commander, though the lad lacked even a single subordinate in the line of command. As for Bluth and Decker, they had been banished to the obscurity that such nonentities deserved. All in all, the Party's house had been put firmly in order for the heroic struggle to come.

Feric opened the meeting without formalities; the atmosphere was more that of a meeting of comrades to discuss

battlefield strategy than of a bourgeois party hot-air ses-
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sion. "Our ultimate goal is the re-establishment of true human rule over the habitable earth and the extinction of all subhuman sapients. The first major step in this direction must be to establish the absolute rule of the Swastika in Heldon. We must now take practical steps to bring us to total power."

This forthright statement was greeted with fervent enthusiasm. Remler in particular seemed to shine with fanatic fire; his icy blue eyes and thin aquiline features radiated an almost papable patriotic frenzy.

"With five hundred cycles and five thousand trooperSr the Knights can take Walder in a day," Stopa promised. "With a thousand cycles and ten thousand men, we'll march on Heldhime and squash the bugs with our boots!"

"It's not that simple," Waning said, without raising his voice in anger. "If the Knights take Walder or march on the capital, the government will order the army to crush us. Rather than display fear in the face of an armed enemy, the Star Command will move against us and our cause will be lost. We cannot hope to defeat the regular army in an all-out civil war."

"I myself favor the electoral method," Bogel said. "There will be a Council election soon; all nine seats will be at stake. I feel confident that we can elect at least Feric to the Council. With Feric in Heldhime as a Councillor, we certainly should be able to place four more men on the Council in the election after that, only five years hence."

Render's thin, shiny face blazed with indignation. "We cannot think of waiting five years to seize power!" he exclaimed. "How many genes will be lost in five years? How much deeper will the Doms worm their way into the body of Heldon? How much stronger will the Universalists grow? It is our sacred racial duty to seize absolute power with the least possible delay!"

"Well spoken!" Feric declared. There was no doubt that he had chosen well when he picked Remler out of the ranks to head the SS. The fellow was a brilliant but utterly pragmatic idealist and he had stated the moral imperative precisely. The twin red lightning bolts that Feric had made the special ensign of the SS well suited his vigor and style;

Remler was a fine model for the elite of genetic purebreds he would command.

Remler's speech had only confirmed the moral and pragmatic suitability of the plan upon which Feric had
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already decided. To commit the Party to seeking power by means[^] of decadent electoral legalism alone would be treason to the sacred cause of genetic purity. However, a political campaign would give Party propaganda a most useful focus, and, more to the point, each candidate for the Council was given one hour of national television time a week to use as he saw fit.

"I have decided our immediate course," Feric declared. "I and I alone will seek a Council seat. The fact that my candidacy will give us access to one hour of public television a week to fill with our own propaganda—which need not be confined to the banalities of electoral politics—is enough to convince me to run. Throughout the campaign, we'll stage mass rallies and displays of force. We'll drive the Universalists from the streets with fist and iron and make things hot enough for the Traditionalists and Libertarians as well. The goal will not be so much to win the election as to impress the patriotic people of Heldon with our determination to gain power and our genetic and ideological fitness to wield it. We will deliberately call down the wrath of the Universalist goon squads upon us for the purpose of getting them to put their skulls in position for bashing. The Party will not be used as a tool for winning the election; rather the election will be used as a tool for furthering the Party's ultimate ends."

At this, even the idealistic Remler joined in the general applause. The instrument of final victory had been forged;

now it would be wielded with ruthless fanaticism and overwhelming force.

Heldhime Municipal Stadium was a vast concrete bowl that seated well over one hundred thousand people, and on the evening of the first mass rally of the Sons of the Swastika ever to be held in the capital, every last inch of seating room, and standing room as well, was packed solid with true humanity. The upper rim of the grandstand as well as the inner wall of the arena had been festooned with resplendent red, white, and black swastika bunting, which made for a fervent patriotic atmosphere.

A speaker's platform had been erected in the exact center of the arena floor; this was a simple cube of white-painted wood ten feet on a side. Upon it, the speaker would be visible from every corner of the stadium.

Surrounding the speaker's platform and filling the arena floor was a sea of uniforms and fire. Eight thousand
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Knights of the Swastika in their brown leather uniforms stood at attention holding flaming torches aloft. Among these Knights stood two thousand Swastika Squadmen in black leather uniforms with special black capes, forming a great swastika of men centered on the speaker's platform. Since the SS formation was torchless, the appearance of the arena floor from the upper rim of the stadium where Feric had had television cameras placed was that of a great circle of fire on which was emblazoned a giant black swastika that gleamed like some fantastic metal in the massed torchlight. The pure white speaker's platform stood out in the center of this huge black swastika like the hub of the universe.

Waiting inside the hollow speaker's platform with Lar Waffing for the rally to begin, Feric was filled with an almost unbearable elation; this mass meeting with its announcement of his candidacy would be the climax of the most exciting week he had yet spent in Heldon. His first visit to the greatest city in the world, with its heroic architecture and advanced technology, was thrilling enough for its own sake, but, more to the point at this juncture, Heldhime was in every way the center of power in Heldon. Here the Council sat, and here were headquartered the government ministries, the Star Command, and most of the great industrial concerns of the High Republic. The most advanced scientific research and production facilities were in Heldhime. The reigns of power were here to be grasped.

Waning had introduced Feric in high economic circles, as well as to important members of the Army Star Command. Many of the industrialists had poured funds into the Party coffers, and to a man the generals had proven to be opponents of the Universalists and the Doms; many openly admitted that they longed for the day when they would be ordered to crush these vermin. For his part, Feric left them with the solemn promise that when he became ruler of Heldon, they would have their wish and then some.

Further, Feric's fame had come to the capital before him, and little crowds of cheering citizens formed around him the instant he showed his face in public. Officers he had never seen greeted him with enthusiastic Party salutes. When he attended the theater, he was given a three-minute standing ovation by the audience as he entered his box.

Thus he awaited the commencement of the rally with a
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sense of keen anticipation and overwhelming self-confidence.

As the public television coverage commenced, Lar Waning, massively impressive in his black Party uniform and red swastika cloak, shook his hand for luck, and then puffed up the wooden stairway, appearing on the speaker's platform to an avalanche of massed cheering and saluting. The hour of destiny had come! At this very instant, Bogel would be speaking in Walder's Am Square, where thousands would be gathered about the public television receiver to hear Feric's speech. Similar mass torchlight rallies were being held around public television receivers in every city, town, and village in Heldon, and officials of the Sons of the Swastika, great and small, were at this very moment preparing to announce him.

Waffing stepped up to the microphone and gestured for silence; in a moment a great hush filled the packed stadium. Waffing's introduction was surprisingly brief and to the point.

"Sons of the Swastika, fellow patriots, true Helder everywhere, I present the Supreme Commander of the Sons of the Swastika, our great and glorious leader, Peric Jaggarl"

At this, the scene in Heldhime Stadium became pure bedlam. The great crowd seemed determined to shout itself hoarse, while the sea of torches on the arena floor tossed madly, and the SS men in the great black swastika formation saluted again and again in perfect and fervent unison. Slowly, Feric climbed the stairs and emerged onto the speaker's platform and into this awe-inspiring universe of name and cheering and massed saluting. At the sight of this heroic figure in his tight-fitting black-and-chrome uniform, his red swastika cloak trailing majestically behind him, the Great Truncheon of Held secured to his studded leather belt, twin red lightning-bolts emblazoned on each of his high black boots, the enthusiasm of the great throng reached a new fever pitch of frenzy.

Feric clapped Waning on the shoulder as he departed and then stood alone on the white platform at the hub of the great black swastika gleaming in the fiery sea of massed torches. He was totally surrounded, engulfed, by cheering, saluting, arm-waving Helder, the focus of the souls of

thousands of people he could see all around him and millions more waiting for his word throughout the length and breadth of the land. The roar of the crowd was like
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the legendary heaven-shattering sky thunder of the ancients in intensity and magnificence, a sound that enveloped Feric's being in mythic grandeur.

Standing at the exact focal point in space and time of this turning point in history, his soul the center of a sea of patriotic fire, Feric felt the power of cosmic destiny flow through him and fill his being with the racial will of the Helder people. In a very real sense, he was the pinnacle of the evolutionary force; when he spoke, he would advance the course of human evolution toward a new height of racial purity by an act of his own will. Through his lips would speak the collective voice of true humanity. At the moment of such an act, he was the Party, he was the racial will; he was Heldon.

At the peak of the ovation, Feric raised his hand in the Party salute, and the almost instant silence was even more awe-inspiring than the tumult had been. The breath of the whole world seemed to be held in anticipation, waiting for him to speak.

"Fellow Helder," he said simply, the echoes of his voice reverberating back to him and filling the massive silence with his presence, "I stand before you today to announce my candidacy for a seat on the Council of State. I stand alone as the standard bearer of the Sons of the Swastika, for I run for the Council not to join the decadent rabble who control that farce as one Councillor among equals, but the better to bring this cabal of limp-wristed traitors and cowards crashing down in pieces into the rubbish-heap of history. Election of a Swastika majority on the Council would not be enough to save true humanity from the perils that beset it; even a Council composed entirely of Sons of the Swastika would not suffice. Heroic challenges demand heroic acts!"

Deliberately, so that none might miss the gesture, Feric placed his right hand upon the hilt of the Great Truncheon of Held, though he refrained from drawing the noble weapon.

"Once this Great Truncheon was the sceptre of the kings of Heldon; now I wield it, not as claimant to any royal title, but as the instrument of our racial will. I take part in this ludicrous election only to allow the racial will to make itself known by my election to a Council seat! Once elected, I will base my actions not on the dictates of

some numerical majority, nor out of some sense of fealty to petty-fogging legalism, but on the principle of unswerving

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loyalty to the racial will, to the genetic purity of Heldon, and to the cause of total human victory over all mutants and mongrels everywhere!"

At this, the crowded stadium once more broke into a prolonged and absolutely thunderous ovation, while the SS men in the swastika formation saluted again and again with iron perfection and fanatic force.

Feric removed his hand from the hilt of the Steel Commander and held it up for silence. Instantly, a great hush came over the stadium; by extension, Feric could feel this expectant quiet extending to millions of souls in public squares all over the nation, for in this moment all Heldon was bound together in the mystic communion of the racial will.

Speaking somewhat more measuredly, Feric filled the waiting void with words that struck a noble chord in every Holder breast. "Today I call upon every true man in Heldon, every patriot, every specimen of the true human genotype, every denizen of this wide realm that walks on two feet like a man, to rise up in a great body of enraged heroes and carry the Sons of the Swastika, as the bearers of our racial cause and the cause of sapient evolution, to total and final victory!"

Once again, Feric's right hand went to the hilt of the Great Truncheon of Held. "I do not beg for your votes like the unmanly bourgeois politicians!" he shouted. "Nor do I seek to capture your votes with guile like the Universalist lackeys of the foul subhuman Dominators. As the human embodiment of the racial will, I command them as my right! And I command more I command every true son of Heldon to take to the streets tonight in overwhelming force. With your massed presence and patriotic fanaticism, I command you to convince all you encounter of the righteousness of our cause, the irresistibility of our will, and the certainty of our final and total victory! Should Universalist scum show their wretched faces, smash their skulls and grind their ruined bodies beneath the soles of your booted feet! Should supporters of other parties remonstrate with you by word or deed, persuade those capable of reason, and ram the others aside! Let the forces of the Swastika march throughout Heldon this night and far into dawn! Make the streets ours!"

With this, Feric drew the Great Truncheon of Held and

thrust it toward 'the heavens, a huge shaft of gleaming metal aimed at the stars; the glistening headball sucked up

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the power of the massed torchlight and flung bolts of this physical manifestation of the racial force flying to every section of the stadium, and via the airwaves to all Heldon.

At this signal, the thousands of Knights and SS men began a circular close-order march around the hub of the speaker's platform, filling the stadium and all Heldon with the drumfire thunder of high-stepping steel-shod boots. From above, the great circle of flame on the arena floor seemed virtually motionless while the great black SS swastika rotated about Feric endlessly and irresistibly, like the grinding wheel of fate.

To Feric, it seemed as if he stood at the axis of the world, with all Heldon rotating at his feet, the racial will pivoting about his being, as he brought his speech to a crashing climax.

"Hail Heldon!" he shouted with every last physical and mental fiber of his being. "Hail the Swastika! Hail final victory!"

Standing in the center of the great revolving swastika, the epicenter of the nationwide eruption of racial will, his body thrumming to the heady thunder of fourteen thousand marching feet, Feric felt a total fusion with his people, as if every Helder now pouring into the streets throughout the land were an extension of his flesh, his being.

And from a hundred thousand throats in the stadium, from millions of new Swastika fanatics choking every public square in the nation, the reply came in one great racial voice from amidst groves and forests of outstretched arms, the racial will itself speaking in a transcendent bellow that shook the very land with its thunder: "HAIL JAGGAR! HAIL JAGGAR! HAIL JAGGAR!"

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From the outset, the legalistic result of the election was a foregone conclusion. Since Feric was the sole candidate of the Swastika while the other parties ran full slates of
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nine candidates for the nine Council seats which were filled at large nationwide, his election to the Council was assured. What was also assured was that he would be the only

Swastika Councillor on a Council that would probably be dominated once more by the Libertarians, a result Feric considered altogether desirable. Far better to be a lone hero opposing a gang of traitors and poltroons than the leader of a minority political party!

Since the legalistic result of the election was not in question, the campaign could be used to further more absolute goals: to demonstrate the ruthless and forceful fanaticism with which the Sons of the Swastika pursued their sacred ends, and to show that the racial will spoke through Feric by assuring that he got more total votes than any other Councillor. Fortunately, these two election goals were entirely compatible; they could be pursued with undivided attention and total concentration of force.

Thus, three days before the election itself, Feric stood erect in the rear of his open command car, resplendent in his black leather uniform and scarlet cape, and holding the Steel Commander in his hand for all to see, ready to lead his men into the climactic battle of the election campaign. Crouching before him in the car also in the black leather of the Party elite were Bors Render and Ludolf Best, armed with spanking new submachine guns.

The force that Feric led through the streets of Heldhime toward Oak Park was of necessity the largest and finest troop that the Sons of the Swastika had yet fielded, for Feric had deliberately challenged the Universalist filth to do their worst by grandly announcing that the final election rally of the Sons of the Swastika would be held in this grimy park located smack in the center of Borburg, a malodorous district notorious for being the largest and foulest nest of Doms and their Universalist lackeys in all Heldon. If the Universalists allowed such a rally to be staged without destroying it by force, they would be totally discredited as a serious contender for power, not only in Heldhime, but throughout the High Republic, since Feric had chosen to expend his final hour of public television time on coverage of this rally.

For his part, Feric knew that the Sons of the Swastika must maintain the safety and integrity of their rally in these utterly hostile surroundings, or suffer similar ignominy. Feric had therefore assembled a force fully capable of dealing with any eventuality. In front of his command car

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was a roadsteamer fitted out with a great iron plow;

behind this shield lay three SS machine gunners, and inside the roadsteamer was a shock troop of the finest SS pure-breds armed with truncheons and submachine guns.

Immediately surrounding Feric's car was a squad of SS fanatics in snug black leather mounted on gleaming black motorcycles embellished with the shiniest of chrome bright-work. Behind Feric's car marched five thousand Knights of the Swastika carrying truncheons, torches. Swastika flags, and lengths of heavy chain. To the rear of this foot troop were two thousand motorized Knights, and as rear guard five hundred fanatic SS on foot armed with submachine guns and truncheons.

Throughout the campaign, both the SS and the Knights had acquitted themselves nobly. The hecklers who plagued every Swastika rally no sooner opened their mouths than their heads were split open by SS truncheons; the Knights ranged far and wide, to the point where no Universalist or bourgeois orator could open his mouth in front of ten people at a time without making himself the hapless target of their iron fists. Three times the Universalists had attempted to hold giant rallies, and three times motorized storm troops had sent the vermin scattering.

Now, however, the Universalists and the Doms could be expected to do their very worst. As Feric's car followed the armed roadsteamer down Torm Avenue, an ordure-strewn ditch surrounded on either side by reeking tenement slums, Feric gripped the handle of the Great Truncheon tightly, ready and eager for action.

"My Commander, look!" Best suddenly shouted, pointing up the avenue with the barrel of his submachine gun. A rude barricade of beams, crates, and all manner of garbage and rubbish had been thrown across the street up ahead to bar the passage of motorcycles. Behind this stood a mindless horde of filthy, pathetic, Dom-controlled rabble, armed with clubs, cleavers, knives, and whatever else came to hand; these wild-eyed wretches choked the street ahead as far as the eye could see. Fluttering above this sordid mob were greasy, tattered blue rags bearing the yellow star-in[^] circle—the battle flag of the Dom-controlled Universalists.

"Don't worry. Best," Feric said, "we'll make short work of these vermin!" For indeed, he had fitted out the roadsteamer for dealing with just such tactics.

Twenty yards from the barricade, the machine gunners on the roadsteamer opened up. The jeering rabble behind
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the roadblock broke into shrieks of pain, fear, and dismay, as their ranks suddenly were bloodied and decimated by the hail of bullets. Scores of the creatures spurted blood from innumerable gaping wounds and fell. Their comrades crushed the wounded and the dead underfoot, pressing and

clawing at each other in a frantic and futile attempt to fall back up the street away from the Swastika force; since the street was packed for its entire length, this action proved as impossible as it was craven.

The plow of the roadsteamer struck the rude barricade at twenty-five miles an hour, smashing it to flinders, and pushing the rubble aside. The SS gunners inside the roadsteamer began firing massed volleys into the grimy tenements on either side of the street, feeding the panic.

"Forward!" Feric shouted at the top of his lungs, waving the Great Truncheon of Held high overhead. As the guns of the roadsteamer fell silent, the command car, surrounded by its honor guard of SS motorcycles, led the huge formation of marching Knights around the steamer and straight into the press of Universalist scum.

The truncheons of the Knights rose and fell like pile drivers, pounding screaming Dom-controlled creatures into the ground; chains whirled through the air like windmills, cracking open Universalist heads like so many rotten eggs. A dozen huge fellows carrying long knives suddenly rushed through the screen of motorcycles straight at the command car, their eyes aglow with the mindless frenzy of Dominator slaves, flecks of slaver wetting their lips.

"My Commander!" Best shouted, as his submachine gun tore two of the wretches to pieces. Feric felt the limitless power of the Steel Commander course through his being;

with a savage battle cry, he swung the truncheon effortlessly through the air. It struck the first two attackers on the chest and passed through their flesh as if it were so much cheese, cutting them in half in an eruption of organs and gore. Recovering, Feric smashed the skulls of three more, while Best and Remler dealt with the rest with their submachine guns.

Like a herd of stampeding cattle or a pack of fear-crazed swine, the rabble scrambled frantically backward, crushing scores of their own comrades in their cowardly frenzy to escape the irresistible wrath of the forces of the Swastika. As the Swastika column fought its way up Torm Avenue, squads of Knights and SS entered the foul warrens, and dragged out suspicious wretches who had held

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back from the fray; these were almost certainly Doms, and were summarily executed on the spot. Once they were cleared of these vermin, the tenements were put to the torch for good measure.

As the column advanced up the street toward Oak Park with ever-greater momentum, Feric's car passed through a corridor of fire and smoke as the tenements and warrens of malodorous Borburg went up in purifying flame. The street was strewn with more than the usual offal, that is to say, with the broken bodies of Dominators and their Universalist lackeys. A furtive figure darted out of the doorway of a flaming building; instantly Best cut the Dom to pieces with his submachine 'gun.

Suddenly, one of the bodies over which Feric's car was passing leaped up, caught hold of the body of the car, and thrust a long, gore-caked dagger at Feric's throat, screaming: "Die human filth!" Unable to bring the Steel Commander into play, Feric caught the howling Dom by the throat with his left hand, and squeezed until the creature's eyes rolled up white, then tossed the body back from whence it came.

Soon the column reached Lormer Street, which fronted on Oak Park itself. This was a wide expanse of ill-kempt lawn littered with all manner of muck and ordure; the putrid sour odor characteristic of Borburg prevailed in this open space as well, and the concrete pedestal of the public television receiver was thoroughly defaced by scrawled obscenities and vile political epithets. The entire park was crammed with the foulest of rabble, at least ten thousand of the sordid creatures, armed with clubs, knives, truncheons and firearms, and inflamed by their hidden masters with a thirst for blood.

Feric waved the Steel Commander thrice over his head, and at this signal, an intricate maneuver was carried out with the utmost precision and dash. The SS men poured from the cabin of the roadsteamer and became the spearheads of two great phalanxes of Knights, who advanced in either direction along Lormer Street, driving the rabble before them and clearing the roadway of the enemy. More Knights poured up Torm Avenue into Lormer Street to join them, so that the entire length of Lormer Street facing Oak Park was soon entirely occupied by a massed Knight formation.

A momentary hush fell over the scene, broken only by the crackling of flame and the massed roar of the motor-
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cycle engines, as the craven rabble in the park were placed in sudden confrontation with a veritable wall of heroes in brown leather. Their dismay was audible in a great collective groan. Then, at another signal from Feric, the center of the Knight formation parted, and the SS motorcyclists, all gleaming black and shining chrome, wheeled to the fore-

front of the skirmish line, forming a shield of steel motorcycles and iron resolve in front of the foot troopers. Finally, Feric's command car emerged to take the central position in this front line of heroes.

As for the motorized Knights and the other foot troops, Stag Stopa was at this moment leading them in a wide circle through the burning streets of Borburg to arrive at the rear of Oak Park and cut off any retreat.

Feric took one look at the confused rabble now jeering uncertainly and waving their weapons in a pitiful display of false bravado, then surveyed (he precise formations and uniformed elegance of his lusty Knights and fanatic SS elite, observing what a splendid contrast they made to the ragged filth they opposed. What a telling spectacle this would be on the public television receivers in public squares all over Heldon!

Feric stood erect on the floor of the command car cabin bracing himself against the back of Best's seat with his left hand; with his right, he pointed the shining steel fist that was the headpiece of the Great Truncheon at the heavens. "Hail Heldon!" he shouted, his mighty voice piercing the din. "Death to the Dominators and their Universalist slaves!" He brought the Steel Commander down in a great arc, and with an earthshaking roar of "Hail Jaggar," the forces of the Swastika swept forward.

The line of motorcycles smashed into the leading edge of the horde in the park to the accompaniment of massed fire from squads of SS gunners. With great screams of fear and dismay, hundreds of the wild-eyed scum went down choking on their own blood while cold steel split skulls and wheels crushed the limbs of the fallen. Through the interstices in the forward line of motorcycles the Knights then charged, swinging their truncheons and swirling their chains, cracking limbs and smashing heads, consolidating the opening that the motorized SS had given them. Feric's driver took the command car straight into the forefront of the battle. As Best and Render cut broad swathes through the panicked rabble with their sub-machine guns, Feric swung the Steel Commander in great

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arcs of destruction, smashing dozens of heads, crushing scores of limbs, cutting the torsos of the enemy in twain, wreaking incredible havoc with every blow. What a dashing sight this was to viewers all over Heldon, and what an inspiration to his men!

After a few minutes of this furious onslaught, the ranks of the Universalists were thrown into total chaos and

complete blind panic. Those in the heat of the fray were so thoroughly terrified by the efficiency of the force being applied by the troops of the Swastika that not even the wills of the Doms in the crowd could maintain any semblance of order. Their only thought was to flee before their brains, such as they were, were dashed out, and in their panic to escape many of the Universalists fought with those behind them who were still inflamed into blood-lust by the Dominators. The result was that they slew as many of their own number as they did Swastika troops.

As the command car penetrated deeper into the park, it was suddenly set upon by perhaps two score of the enemy armed with clubs and long knives and apparently fired to self-sacrificing fanaticism by some nearby Dom. Half of them went down before the furious submachine guns of Render and Best; Feric dispatched five more with a single sweep of the Steel Commander. Then he spied a gray, crabbed creature with gleaming black rodential eyes hanging back at the rear of this attack force.

Holding onto the rim of the cabin with his left hand for purchase, Feric leaned far out over the fray, and brought the headball of his weapon straight down on the skull of this cowardly Dom, sending a fountain of gray brains into the air. Almost at once, the Universalist filth who a moment before had rushed fearlessly at the command car fled every which way screaming in fear and horror.

Seeing this, the SS fanatics concentrated their attack on what Doms they could spy, and soon the raggedness and speed of the rout was more than redoubled. The contest was never in doubt. Though the Universalists fought with animal ferocity in the vicinity of a Dom's person, they lacked the will and discipline, not to mention the inspirational leadership, to maintain even a show of overall resistance. In hand-to-hand combat the individual Knight was worth at least ten of these soulless creatures, and as for the SS men, their superiority in will and fighting ability to the rabble could only be measured in astronomical figures.

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It was not long before the rabble lost all hope of victory and even the Doms commanding the slave horde could think of nothing but escape. With a great rearward surge, the ranks of the Universalist filth broke and ran toward Ophal Street, the northern border of the park, and as far away from the fray as they could hope to get. All at once the Knights and the SS were pursuing a broken, formless, and terrified herd of stampeding human cattle northward through the park.

Feric's command car rode at the very point of this triumphant pursuit, the guns of Remler and Best decimating the ranks of the rabble fleeing before the car, Feric's noble truncheon dispatching any and all stragglers. The fear-driven stampede could not outrun the motorized vanguard of the Swastika storm troops, and the command car and the motorized SS soon tore into the rear ranks, piling up great heaps of bloody and broken corpses.

Moreover, as the fleeing ruffians poured onto Ophal Street, Stopa's motorcyclists suddenly poured forth from every side street and alley, and behind them came Knights on foot with chains and truncheons. The rabble was caught between the hammer and the anvil.

Small groups of the enemy fled disjointedly in all directions, only to be run down by motorcycle squads and then knocked senseless by foot troopers. Those who managed to escape the immediate environs of Oak' Park into the flaming ruins of Borburg were not pursued. But all the Universalist scum still within the confines of the four streets bordering the park were broken down into smaller and smaller groups and smashed to pieces.

Since a few minutes of public television time remained after the last of the Universalists had been either slain, knocked senseless, or driven from the vicinity of Oak Park, Feric had the command car driven to the park's geometric center. Around him, the motorized SS, their engines idling, their black leather soiled with the honorable blood and dust of battle, formed a circle of honor. Facing their mounted comrades stood a rank of five hundred SS foot soldiers at rigid attention. Behind this elite guard were first the ranks of Knight motorcyclists, and then the massed might of thousands of Knights of the Swastika, all heroic figures swaggering grandly in their uniforms of brown leather, most of which were liberally spattered with the blood of the enemy.'

All around this victorious army lay the evidence of its
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prowess, ruthless fanaticism, and glorious victory. The bodies of Universalists and Dominators were strewn all over the park, singly and in great bloody heaps. Beyond the park, great billowing flames burned the last traces of pestilence out of the Borburg warrens.

Feric was handed a microphone as he stood on the seat of his command car to address his victorious troops. When he spoke, his voice reverberated throughout the High Republic as well as in the echoing streets of captured

Borburg.

"Fellow Helder, I salute you! This great and glorious victory we have won today will live forever in the hearts of true humans everywhere. Hail Heldon! Hail the pure human genotype! Hail the total victory of the Swastika!"

The answering roar of "Hail Jaggar" shook all Heldon to its very foundations, and the men could not be restrained from repeating it a dozen times, each time with the jaunty clicking of the heels of thousands of boots, and a forest of Party salutes that challenged the heavens. When the fervent cheering finally subsided, the final election rally drew to a solemn close with the massed singing of the new Party anthem, "The Swastika is Forever," which Feric had written for the occasion. The noble strains of this grand martial tune, coming as they did strictly from the throats of victorious heroes, were a note of sufficient dignity with which to close the day's proceedings.

After the crashing success of the Oak Park election rally, the remaining three days of the election campaign became nothing more than a victorious promenade for the Sons of the Swastika; the election of Feric Jaggar to the Council of State by the greatest margin in history was never again in serious doubt.

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As the gas cars of the Council members began pulling up to the formal entrance to the Palace of State, the scene was set for a truly historic moment. The first meeting of a newly elected Council of State was always an event of

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prime importance, but this particular first meeting would be the first direct confrontation of the degenerate old order with the hero of the dawning New Age, Feric Jaggar. It would hardly be an exaggeration to state that the people of Heldon were holding their racial breath.

The Palace itself was a fit setting for such a drama, being an impressive edifice of black marble, set off with four heroic bronze bas-reliefs of great battles in Helder history, one on each face of the building. The formal entrance faced Heldon Boulevard across a broad expanse of immaculate lawn. A long driveway curved gracefully up the gentle slope of the lawn to the entrance portico, and then returned in a curve of similar grace to the public boulevard, where a large crowd had gathered on the walkway. A line of army troops in field-gray uniforms and burnished steel helmets kept this throng from spilling over

onto the Palace grounds.

The rather plain cars of the Councillors arrived one by one and were escorted up the drive by an honor guard of army motorcyclists. The equally plain-looking politicians disembarked and disappeared into the building, until all had arrived save Feric. The dramatic tension among the people in the crowd on the boulevard, as well as the vast audience watching on television in public squares all over Heldon, built to a crescendo as all awaited the climactic appearance of Feric Jaggar.

Finally, the roar of massed motorcycle engines was heard proceeding at speed up the boulevard toward the Palace of State, and, a moment later, Feric's gleaming black command car appeared behind a squad of ten SS motorcyclists, resplendent in their black leather and red swastika capes, and bearing two huge Party flags at their head. Feric himself, a grand figure in his black-and-scarlet uniform with the dazzling brightwork catching flashes of afternoon sunlight, stood at attention in the rear of the open cabin, braced against the seat before him with his left arm.

As the convoy turned off the boulevard and barreled up the drive, the good folk lining the walkway broke into spontaneous Party salutes and fervent shouts of "Hail Jaggar!" which continued until the command car had reached the entrance portico. For his part, Feric returned the greeting with an outstretched salute which he maintained until the command car had come to a halt, to the delight of all.

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The SS escort dismounted as Feric stepped down from his car, and while six of them remained at rigid attention in front of the short flight of marble stairs, much to the discomfort of the army functionaries, the two flag bearers preceded Feric up the stairs, while the final two SS men formed an honor guard behind him. Just before entering the building, Feric paused, executed a heel-clicking turn, and favored the crowd with another Party salute. To the answering massed chant of "Hail Jaggar!" Feric and his SS escort then entered the Palace of State.

Feric marched down a long hallway with white marble walls, a red, white, and black tiled floor, and a lushly painted ceiling, toward a set of great arched wooden doors decorated with heavy brasswork, flanked on either side by a soldier of the regular army. The steel-soled boots of the SS honor guard beat a crisp martial rhythm on the gleaming tiled floor as the troop approached these ceremonial

functionaries. The flag bearers came to a smart halt facing the soldiers with clicks of their heels, a pounding of the ends of their staffs against the tile. Party salutes, and a hearty "Hail Jaggar!" Behind these fine SS men, Feric halted for a moment as the two soldiers, torn between their natural inclination to return the salutation and their pusillanimous orders, hesitated in confusion. Finally, they contented themselves with opening the double doors, and Feric, preceded by his standard bearers and followed by his other two SS guards, marched into the Council chamber.

The chamber was a small rotunda in the center of which was a large round table of gleaming black wood inlaid with white-and-red tile. Nine chairs of a matching style were spaced evenly around the circumference of the table; all save one of them occupied by truly unsavory specimens. These creatures acted like bugs suddenly exposed to the light as Feric and his troops strode into the room, scuttling uneasily in their seats, and openly displaying unmanly consternation. Surrounded by his honor guard, Feric marched to the empty chair and seated himself as the four SS men came to rigid attention behind his seat, clicked their heels, saluted, and roared "Hail Jaggar!"

"Remove your ruffians from the Council chamber at once," wheezed a rheumy old creature whom Feric recognized as Larus Krull, the senile Libertarian leader. •

"On the contrary," Feric rejoined, "the SS elite will
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eject your useless carcasses from this establishment in due course."

"There is no precedent for private guards in this chamber, Trueman Jaggar," whined a foppish individual in florid blue and gold. This was Rossback, one of the three Traditionalists, an utter cretin.

"I have now remedied that lack," Feric replied dryly.

"I demand that you remove your men at once!" insisted Guilder, a notorious toady of Krull's.

"We must vote on the question," said the Universalist, Lorst Gelbart. This was a truly repellent mound of protoplasm, but when the pustulant creature opened its mouth to break wind, the other wretches displayed a strange deference, instantly falling silent and paying rapt attention to Gelbart's words. And no wonder, for it only took one quick glance from Feric's trained eye to discern that this Gelbart, with his greasy black hair, crude blue

tunic, and beady, rodentlike eyes, was actually a Dominator! The odor of Dom was fairly exuded by his coarse and unwashed skin. If the foul creature had not yet totally enmeshed the Council in a dominance pattern, it was clearly only a matter of time, and not much of that by the look of things!

Therefore, there was no point in wasting time with foppish niceties. "I did not come to this meeting to exchange banter or haggle over points of protocol, much as such pastimes may be to the liking of specimens such as yourselves," Feric said, turning a disdainful gaze on each of the human Councillors in turn, so that there would be no doubt of the contempt in which he held them. When his eyes met Gelbart's, there seemed to be a strange moment of mutual recognition of the facts of the matter, though the stinking Dom prudently made no attempt to draw Feric into his psychic web.

"I am here to present the basic program of the Sons of the Swastika and to demand its total and immediate implementation," Feric continued. "The racial will demands nothing less."

Of course, the jaws of these old windbags fell open at the sound of such a forthright statement, and the pack of them gulped and gasped like beached fish. Gelbart, for his part, maintained his inhumanly cold expression throughout.

Ignoring the impotent silent protests, Feric ticked off the basic Party demands. "Firstly, the Treaty of Karmak
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must be renounced and all mongrels and mutants forever barred from every inch of Helder soil. Secondly, the racial purity laws must be enforced with renewed rigor, and because of the laxness of late which has allowed all sorts of contaminants to infiltrate the Helder gene pool. Classification Camps must be established throughout the nation where all Helder whose genetic purity can at all be called into question will be held until their pedigrees and genetic patterns are thoroughly reexamined. Those found to be genetically contaminated will be given the choice of exile or sterilization."

Feric stared at Gelbart evenly, without betraying emotion; he sensed, however, that the Dom knew full well that Feric had smelled him out. "Any Dominators that are discovered," Feric said, "will of course be slain. Thirdly, the size of the army must be speedily tripled so that we may deal properly with the mutant hordes that surround us. Finally, in order that this new national policy be

carried out with the utmost vigor and force, this Council must vote to suspend the constitution and grant me emergency powers to rule by decree."

"The man is mad!" shrilled old Pillbarm, the dean of the Traditionalists, a dried-up old prune who had not yet displayed the capacity for human speech.

Instantly, Feric was on his feet, the Great Truncheon of Held in his hand, a towering figure of righteous wrath. "Do any of you dare defend the contamination of the gene pool by mutants and mongrels? Will you defend the lives of Dominator filth with your own? Will you stand before the Helder people and declare that a position of weakness is preferable to a policy of utter force and iron resolve?"

There was no reaction to this ringing challenge; that alone was sure indication that Gelbart's dominance pattern was all but established. As if by command, the cowardly wretches held back and waited for the Dom itself to reply.

"All this talk of genetic purity is long out of date, Jaggar," Gelbart said with a cruel little smile. "Already many of the people are demanding that great masses of mutants be imported to perform the distasteful labor necessary to maintain a high civilization. Soon Heldon will realize that much the best course is to breed mindless creatures, protoplasmic robots, if you will, in the manner
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of Zind. You are shouting in a whirlwind. The natural sloth of human beings is your implacable foe."

Feric ignored Gelbart entirely; there was no point in reasoning with a Dom, and even less in trying to persuade his craven victims to do their racial duty. The only thing that would set to right the pestilence that ate at the heart of Heldon was the ruthless application of force.

Feric sheathed the Steel Commander, but remained standing, and raked each member of the Council in turn with his steely gaze. All save Gelbart—who of course was beyond such human reaction—withered in turn under the psychic onslaught.

"I have done my duty as a true human and given you fair warning and an opportunity to lend yourself without coercion to the expression of the racial will," Feric said evenly. "Unless you immediately vote to accept the Party program forthwith, you are openly declaring the moral bankruptcy of the government of the High Republic. You

call down the consequences on your own heads."

Only Gelbart had the impudency to reply to this solemn warning. "Do you dare to threaten the Council of State of the High Republic, Jaggar? Even a Councillor may be arrested for treason."

The grotesque humor of this puling Dom actually accusing a true human of treason to Heldon was almost enough to make Feric burst out laughing despite the righteous fury aroused in his heart by this ultimate perfidy.

"I'd like to see this collection of old dung try to arrest the Knights of the Swastika and the SS for treason!" Feric roared. "We'd soon see who would be hanging from traitors' gibbets!"

With this rejoinder, Feric turned on his heels and stalked out of the Council chamber.

Upon his election to the Council of State, Feric had moved the Party's national headquarters to a spacious compound near the center of Heldhime, roughly equidistant from the Palace of State and Star Keep, headquarters of the Army Star Command, and bivouac for the city garrison. The new headquarters had been the palatial residence of an industrialist who had been persuaded to lease it to the Sons of the Swastika for a nominal sum. The mansion itself had been divided up into apartments for Feric, Bogel, Waning, Render and Best, dormitories

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for lesser Party functionaries, meeting rooms and offices, while two thousand SS were housed in tents pitched on the broad expanse of lawn within the high stone wall of the compound. Motorcycles and cars were kept in various outbuildings and sheds; machine-gun positions had been emplaced every fifty yards along the walkway atop the wall. In addition, five howitzers, heavily camouflaged, were secreted within the compound. All in all, the Party headquarters was a fortress sufficient to stand off the city garrison for some time without reinforcements.

Nevertheless, such reinforcements were readily at hand, for five thousand Knights of the Swastika under the direct command of Stag Stopa were barracked on the outskirts of Heldhime, not fifteen minutes by motorcycle from Party headquarters. One word from Feric, and these storm troops would roar into the city and crush any besiegers of the headquarters' compound from behind.

Three weeks after the election, Feric called a meeting

in his private sitting room to firm up final plans for dealing with the Dominator-controlled Council. This was a somewhat grandiose chamber, all blue paint, rich tapestries, and ornate giltwork, which Feric favored solely for the large balcony from which the night view of Heldhime was a carpet of the light resplendent under the dark grandeur of the heavens. Feric, Bogel, Waffing, and Best sat in plush chairs around a round rosewood table over tankards of ale, awaiting the uncharacteristically tardy Remler.

"As I see it," Bogel said, "our problem is to seize power behind a facade of legalism so that there will be no question of whose orders the army will carry out. Would not the Star Command instantly accept Feric as absolute ruler of Heldon if there were sufficient legal pretext?"

This had been addressed to Lar Waffing, who took a long drink of ale while pondering his response. Laying his wooden tankard down on the table and refilling it from the small keg thereon, he delivered his considered opinion.

"No doubt at all that the Star Command wants a Heldon under the Swastika, for we're the only ones that promise the action that all good soldiers crave," Waffing said. "However, the generals are pledged to defend the lawful government of Heldon and pride will not permit them to betray their honor. Forceful action at this time might very well precipitate civil war."

Feric was sorely vexed by the situation. Gelbart had
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formulated an ordinance calling for the disarming of the SS and the disbanding of the Knights; once his slaveys had passed it, the fat would really be in the fire. Clearly, it would be best to strike before events placed the Star Command in a position where their only choices were open capitulation to Party force or the initiation of civil war. Still, an out-and-out coup would confront the army with the same situation!

"Further," Waning said, "the Star Command is growing quite uneasy about the Knights and Stag Stopa. They see that Stopa retains a certain personal following since his lieutenants are all ex-Avengers with loyalty—"

Suddenly, Bors Remler burst into the room, his thin face flushed, and almost feverish, his blue eyes burning.

"What's taken you so long to—"

"My Commander," Remler said excitedly, as he threw

himself into the chair at Feric's left hand, "I must report the existence of a plot against your person and the Party by Stag Stopa in collusion with the Council of State!"

"What?"

The words fairly poured out of the SS Commandant. "I had taken the precaution of secreting SS agents in the hierarchy of the Knights as a matter of course," he said. "Tonight I received a report of the utmost urgency. Stopa has met with agents of Gelbart and possibly of Zind as well. A squad of uniformed Knights will slay the Star Command the night the resolution banning the Party storm troops is passed. This will goad the army into civil war against the Party. Apparently; Stopa has been promised supreme military command by Gelbart after the hostilities have been concluded; possibly Zind has offered him the position of overlord of Heldon, for surely the result of such a civil war will be the destruction of the bulk of the fighting forces of Heldon, leaving us open to easy conquest by the hordes of Zind. No doubt Stopa will be slain by Zind agents during the confusion; he is too na?ve to realize this."

A great collective gasp was clearly audible when Remler had finished. For his part, Feric was deeply hurt and shocked. "I've never doubted Stopa's loyalty to the cause and to my person!" he declared.

"I have ample proof, my Commander!" Remler insisted.

"I don't for a moment doubt it," Feric assured him. "But I'm surprised and troubled by this development. Obviously, Stopa must be dealt with, but I take no pleasure in the necessity."

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Although there was no denying that it would pain him deeply to be forced to deal with Stopa as a traitor, there was no denying that his first and only loyalty had to be to the Swastika and the cause of genetic purity. Stopa was a traitor who stood in the way of victory; duty could not always coincide with personal pleasure. Further, this whole unfortunate business might be put to pragmatic use.

Feric spoke to Lar Waning. "Assuming that the Star Command's qualms about the Knights could be settled once and for all, would they accept me as absolute ruler of Heldon without demur, providing that such powers were granted to me by a legally constituted Council of State?"

"Under those circumstances, there would be no doubt about it, my Commander!"

"How do you propose to accomplish such a great feat of legerdemain, Feric?" Bogel asked. "Those wretches would as soon vote themselves out of office and onto a dung heap!"

"My dear Bogel," Feric rejoined, "that will be precisely their destination before the week is out. Within five days, the Swastika will reign supreme over all Heldon!"

"I'll drink to that!" Waning declared.

"You'll drink to anything, Waffing!" Bogel japed. At this, all present, including the portly Waning himself, burst into hearty laughter.

As the sun went down behind the towers of Heldhime spreading deep shadows over the streets and painting the high stone wall of the Party headquarters compound a fiery orange, squads of SS men wearing their black leather uniforms, but riding in plain unmarked cars, left through the main gate at five-minute intervals. Each squad consisted of six troopers armed with submachine guns and truncheons; eight squads in all left the compound and melted into the dusk of the capital.

Two hours later, when night was fully upon the city, a final unmarked car left the compound, followed five minutes later by forty sleek black SS motorcycles.

The grounds of the Palace of State lay in semi-darkness; only a skeleton honor guard of some dozen soldiers patrolled the environs of the empty Palace at this late hour. Two of these men were stationed at the Heldon Boulevard gate, four more at the entrance to the Palace itself; the other six walked solitary watches along the

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perimeter of the fence surrounding the grounds. No one dreamed of an attempt to seize the Palace at such a time, since there was nothing and no one within worth seizing;

the soldiers who drew this duty were for the most part careerists nearing retirement rather than alert and vigorous young lads.

Thus it was no trick at all for the SS to seize control of the Palace of State from this handful of time servers. An unmarked car holding four SS men in civilian tunics drove up to the gate and demanded admittance, claiming to have authorization from Councilor Krull to remove some books and papers he desired for study. When one of the guards stuck his head inside the car, he found himself staring

down the oiled iron barrel of a submachine gun. It was therefore easy enough to persuade the fellow to draw over his companion on the pretext that confirmation of the authenticity of the certificate of authorization was needed. The two were trussed up nicely and tossed in the back of the car while one of the SS men opened the gate.

Once this had been accomplished, the need for stealth was removed; a signal was given and in the darkness of a nearby side street, two-score motorcycle engines were kicked into life. Before the remaining soldiers could respond to this sudden hubbub with anything more forceful than confusion and alarm, forty black SS motorcycles came roaring up the drive at eighty miles an hour. They reached the Palace entrance with such blinding speed and such a spectacle of forceful vigor that the four hapless wretches at the foot of the stairs did not so much as get off a shot before they were felled by SS truncheons. After that, it was an easy matter to round up the six isolated sentries, who had been thrown into a state of terror, and confine (hem under guard in the basement of the building with the other prisoners.

Notification of the capture of the Palace was given by electrophone to Party headquarters, and reinforcements were immediately dispatched. Within fifteen minutes, the Palace of State had been garrisoned by three hundred elite SS troops, and the perimeter of the fence was guarded at twenty-yard intervals by heavy machine-gun emplacements. In addition, the howitzers in the headquarters compound had been zeroed in on Star Keep. If the army made any attempt to march on the Palace, it would pay dearly. Lar Waffing was even now informing the Star Command of certain selected details of the situation.

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Within half an hour of the seizure of the Palace by SS shock troops, unmarked cars began arriving at short intervals with their assigned prisoners. Only when word of the completion of this phase of the operation reached Party headquarters, did Feric, escorted by a score of motorcycle SS, leave for the Palace.

Never had the Council chamber presented to Feric an aspect this pleasing. All eight Councilors were trussed to their chairs like so many chickens in a market, and over each of them hovered two tall blond SS men with steely blue eyes, fanatic resolve, and cocked submachine guns. Twenty more SS men in black leather encircled the rotunda; in the hall outside, Feric could hear the reassuring clatter of steel-shod SS boots on tile. There could be no mistaking who ruled here now.

Behind Feric as he confronted the prisoners were Best, Bogel, and Remler, crooking submachine guns in their arms. A Party flag had been erected by the Council table and the double red lightning bolts of the SS were displayed on a smaller black banner beside it.

Only Krull, out of his senile whining arrogance, presumed to address Feric under these circumstances. "What is this filthy outrage, Jaggar?" he wheezed. "How dare you—"

Before the old degenerate could further pollute the atmosphere, the nearest SS guard ended the outburst with a smart backhanded blow across the mouth that left the old pirate drooling blood.

Feric favored this fine young fanatic with a modest nod of approval before deigning to address the collection of cooked political geese; the fellow deserved to know that his Commander had noticed his dash and speed.

"I will now inform you of the reason for your arrest," Feric said.

"Arrest!" Guilder cried. "You mean kidnapping!" A gun butt to the back of the head ended this unseemly outburst, and Feric continued. "You are all charged with treason. There is a Dominator among you and you have fallen into his net. Such laxity in will in Helder of your high position is tantamount to displaying cowardice in the face of the enemy, a treasonable offense, punishable by death."

The faces of the prisoners fell. Gradually their eyes came to focus on Gelbart—a Universalist after all, and
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therefore the most likely of their number to be a Dom. For his part, Gelbart stared impassively into space; Feric could sense him exerting the full force of his will on the wretched creatures. Their resolve slowly stiffened, and all at once, they gained the courage to speak.

"What nonsense!"

"Where is your proof?"

"A Dom on the Council? Utter rubbish!"

Feric had held up his hand at the first sound of this outburst, restraining the SS guard from maintaining silence by force. Now he had the unconscious Guilder shaken awake so that all of the Councillors would fully

understand their situation.

"Very well," Feric said, "I'll give you the chance to prove that you're free from Dominator control, I order you to vote me emergency power to rule Heldon by decree, to adjourn this Council indefinitely, and then to resign your seats. If these orders are obeyed, my first act upon assuming the title of Supreme Commander of the Domain of Heldon will be to commute your death sentences to permanent exile. You have sixty seconds to

decide."

The whining that arose from the degenerate wretches

was all too predictable. "An outrage!" "There has been no trial!" "You have no authority!" Clearly such craven creatures would not have the will to cavil in this manner in the face of death without the psychic underpinning supplied

by the Dom, Gelbart.

This repellent creature now glared at Feric with unconcealed hatred, his black rodent's eyes filled with cold fire.

"This will get you nowhere, Jaggar," the Dominator hissed. "When the army learns of this, you will be annihilated."

At this, the Councillors seemed to take heart, emboldened by Gelbart's words as well as by his psychic emanations.

"I see that it is time to clear the air once and for all,"

Feric observed, unsheathing the Steel Commander and raising the gleaming shaft high above his head. He stepped forward a few steps, and with one irresistible stroke brought the headball of the Great Truncheon down on the top of Gelbart's skull and dashed the Dom's head to

pieces.

With the Dominator who had controlled them lying

inert in his chair with his putrid brains spattered all over
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the Council table, the seven remaining Councillors had no further illusions as to the gravity of their situation. The stench of fear rose over them like the vapors of some malodorous swamp.

"I vote in favor of Councillor Jaggar's motion," Ross-

back stammered.

"And I," said KruU.

With that, the others fell over each other in their haste to make the motion unanimous.

"The papers. Best," Feric ordered. "Untie the hands of the prisoners." As Best extracted a sheaf of documents from his tunic pocket, the SS guards freed the prisoners, who heaved a collective sigh of relief. Feric passed around a copy of the resolution for signature. When all had signed, he signed the document himself for the sake of unanimity, then returned it to Best for safekeeping. "The letters of resignation," Feric said. Best handed these documents around to the seven Councillors. When several of the swine began reading the papers, Feric roared "Sign them at once!" The prisoners instantly complied.

When Best had collected all the documents, Feric turned to Bogel. "The new Council of State now consists of the present members of the Swastika Circle. I will rule by emergency decree until a new constitution can be written which permanently abolishes republican forms. Prepare the proclamation for broadcast at noon tomorrow."

Bogel grinned, saluted, shouted "Hail Jagger!" and went off about his business.

Feric returned his attention to the cowardly wretches seated around the Council table. They had signed the resolution as well as the confessions to high treason. There was no further need for these vermin, and the moment had come none too soon. The very sight of these puling traitors soured his stomach. The world would certainly be better off without seven such swine as these!

"Remler, take these reeking bags of garbage out of here and have them shot!" he commanded. No order he had been able to issue thus far had given him such patriotic satisfaction.

Feric awaited Field Marshall Heermark Forman in a small, plain office on the top floor of the Palace of State, so that, by the time the representative of the Star Command arrived, he would have already have seen the thoroughness
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with which the building had been garrisoned, and would have been made to climb several flights of stairs.

The man Waffing ushered into the room was an imposing old fellow in his late sixties; an excellent example of

how a genetically pure human could retain his vigor and force long after his physical prime. Although older than Waning, he was a good forty pounds lighter, and in his field-gray uniform festooned with medals and trimmed with rich brasswork, he held his own as far as dash went, even though Waffing's black leather uniform was of clearly superior design. His gray mustache and steely eyes added dignity and force to his appearance; here was a man well used to both discipline and command. Forman was breathing heavily as he seated himself on one of the plain wooden chairs that were the sole furnishings of the little aerie. As for the state of Waffing's respiration after the climb, the less said the better.

"I trust that High Commander Waffing has already briefed you on the basic situation," Feric began.

Forman regarded him somewhat coldly. "I've been given to understand that your men have occupied the Palace of State for the purpose of thwarting a Universalist plot in which the Council itself was implicated," the Field Marshall said cautiously.

"Events have progressed swiftly," Feric said. "The filthy cabal has already been dealt with. Gelbart was a Dom; all the Councillors save myself were enmeshed in his pattern. Gelbart's plan was to vote a ban on the SS and the Knights of the Swastika. I'm mortified to have to say that the Knight Commandant Stag Stopa was implicated in the plot. His men were to have then slain the Star Command, thus precipitating a ruinous civil war between the Sons of the Swastika and the army. The patriotic forces of Heldon would then be so decimated that the hordes of Zind could then march upon us and annihilate the true human genotype. Naturally, when the SS uncovered this plot, I ordered my men into action at once. Gelbart was slain, and the wretched Councillors confessed."

Feric reached into a tunic pocket and withdrew a series of documents which he passed over to Forman, who accepted them without comment. "Their signed confessions may be inspected at leisure by the Star Command," he said. "Before resigning, the Councillors unanimously passed a resolution suspending the constitution and grant-

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ing me the power to rule by decree. I have assumed the title of Supreme Commander of the Domain of Heldon and have appointed sturdy patriots of unquestioned loyalty to Heldon and total devotion to racial purity to the vacant Council seats. The emergency is now past."

"What of the traitors?" Forman inquired evenly.

"Stopa has yet to be dealt with," Feric said, "but my very first act as Supreme Commander of Heldon was to have the whole foul lot of Council swine shot."

For the first time, there was a modest display of emotion on the Field Marshal's face: a certain soldierly approval for a task well and smartly done. "I'm not quite sure why I'm here. Commander Jaggar," he said. "You obviously have the situation well in hand. Provided all is -as you say it is, the Star Command is ready to accept you as rightful ruler of Heldon; I say this as a representative with full plenipotentiary powers."

Feric gave Waning an approving side-glance, which Waning acknowledged with a nod; the High Commander had done his job well. Forman had the power to make a binding bargain and understood the situation precisely, so that neither party would have to resort to crudities.

"There is only one aspect of this matter that vexes the Star Command," Forman went on. "You yourself are unquestionably a man of superior quality, and we expect that as Supreme Commander of Heldon you will be far more sympathetic to the aims of the military than the late Libertarian rabble ever was. However, I'm afraid I must inform you that the Star Command considers the continued existence of a full-scale private army like the Knights totally unacceptable, and all the more so in light of the fact that its commander was engaged in a plot against Heldon. There can be only one Helder army; over this point, we are ready to fight to the death."

"Fairly spoken!" Feric replied approvingly. "Obviously, recent events have convinced me of the wisdom of such a position. The matter of Stopa and the traitors within the Knights must be dealt with in any case, and you've just suggested the proper course of action."

"Do continue," Forman said with unabashed interest.

"The Knights will be dissolved. The bulk of the men, that is to say those innocent of all wrongdoing, shall be offered enlistment in the regular army. Would you agree?"

"We can always use sturdy, well-trained lads," Forman
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said. "I see no reason why the bulk of the Knights should be barred from military service by the perfidy of the

few."

"The SS will continue to exist as an elite force," Feric said. "As you know, the genetic, intellectual, physical, and ideological standards of the SS are the highest possible. Thus, the strength of the SS will never approach that of the

army. On this, you have my sacred word."

"Accepted," Forman said simply.

"Finally, I shall appoint High Commander Waning Minister of Security Forces. Although this has traditionally been a civilian post, Waffing will become a Field Marshall to make it clear that the relationship between the army and the Supreme Commander will be warm and intimate."

At this, Forman finally cracked a smile. He rose to his feet. "In the name of the Star Command, I pledge our loyalty to the new Supreme Commander of Heldon." The Field Marshall clicked his heels smartly and gave the Party salute. "Hail Jaggar!" he declared.

Feric arose and returned the salute, choked with emotion. What a fine moment this was for Heldon—the Swastika and the army united at last! Together, they would sweep across the earth!

"If you wish the army to deal with Stopa and his clique, you have only to give the order," Forman said.

A certain heaviness crowded aside the elation that filled Peric's heart; the perfidy of Stopa and the ex-Avengers weighed down his soul with sorrow. It would be less personally painful for him to turn the matter over to the army; certainly, the temptation was there. But the Party must discipline its own.

"I must decline the offer," Feric said sadly. "These men have betrayed the Swastika. We owe it to ourselves and to Heldon to purge our own ranks of any contaminating

elements."

"I understand the courage it takes to make such a decision," Forman said. "Yes, a man must maintain his own iron discipline within his command."

In the cold bleak hours before dawn, Feric himself led an SS convoy through the silent empty streets of Heldhime and out into the slumbering countryside toward the Knights' barracks. Honor demanded no less than this, for
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Stopa had sworn loyalty to Heldon and to Feric's own person. Feric felt the same social obligation as the owner of a dog gone rabid: it was his duty to put the creature out of its torment by his own hand.

For this mission, Feric had armed a mere three hundred SS men with submachine guns and truncheons and loaded them into trucks. Three hundred crack elite SS troops operating in quiet and stealth could perform a surgical excision, whereas a massed attack would precipitate a bloody battle in which many salvageable Knights would be lost.

Therefore, when the truck convoy was yet two miles from the Knight encampment, Feric ordered a halt, had the men disembark, and led them across the dewy fields on foot, with Waning and Remler close by his side. There was not a murmur of complaint from even a single one of these fine young heroes; only Waning left his seat for his feet with something less than total enthusiasm. It lifted some of the weight from Feric's soul to see the proud but decidedly out-of-shape High Commander puffing and blowing to keep pace with his own powerful strides, clearly discomforted by the strenuous pace, but never dreaming of mentioning it.

Feric had located the Knights' compound atop a small knoll overlooking the road to Heldhime so that it would 'be as difficult to attack by surprise as possible. Now he himself was suffering the keen edge of his own military acumen. He formed his men up into attack squads in a deeply shadowed hollow at the base of the knoll and pondered the situation. Atop the knoll, the wooden barracks were surrounded by an electrified fence; there was a high tower at each corner of the compound mounting a searchlight and a machine gun, and guards patrolled the perimeter at very short intervals. The gate was also electrified and 'guarded by machine gunners. Feric knew all too well how impregnable such a fortification was, since he had designed it himself. There was nothing to do but take the place through sheer force of will.

"Very well, Remler," he said to the SS Commandant, who stood eagerly at his side, "you will keep the men here while Waning and I go up to the gate and order the fellows to open it. Once this is accomplished, you will lead the men inside. Shooting must be prevented at all costs until we reach the officers' quarters."

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"But my Commander, I want to be in the forefront of the battle! Let me come with you!"

Peric was deeply moved by Remler's fanaticism and certainly understood how he felt, but Remler's presence certainly wouldn't make things easier when it came to con-

fronting the guards. "I'm sorry, Remler," he said, "but if you show your face, the guards are bound to know something's up."

In response, Remler clicked his heels together and gave a silent Party salute. Peric favored him with a small smile, returned the salute, and led Waning up out of the shadows and onto the roadway which led to the main gate.

They had not come more than halfway up the knoll when they were pinned in a circle Of light; at least Stopa's perfidy had not caused the efficiency of the garrison to deteriorate to zero. As the spotlight illumined their way to the gate, Feric wrapped himself deeply in his scarlet swastika cape, hunched himself over somewhat, and fell in behind the unmistakable girth of Waffing, who stalked grandly toward the nervous gate guards, playing it to the hilt.

Feric hung back in the shadows as Waffing reached the gate and bellowed at the machine gunners behind it.

"Open the gate at once!"

"Commandant Stopa has ordered us to admit no one tonight," one of the gunners said uneasily, fully cognizant

of the identity of the officer he faced.

"Open the gate or I'll have you shot for insubordination, you swine!" Waffing replied. "I'm High Commander Waffing and my orders supercede Stopa's."

"We've been given strict orders to admit no one on pain of death," the other gunner stammered. "Would you ask us to violate a direct order by a superior?"

Peric realized that these good lads were in a moral quandry, uncertain of which order it was their duty to obey. Only he himself could resolve their doubt. Swirling his cape behind him and deliberately revealing himself with a flamboyant gesture, Feric stepped into the full glare

of the light.

Instantly, the two young gunners snapped to attention with clicks of their heels, shot out their arms in salute, and shouted "Hail Jaggar!" in perfect unison.

Feric returned the salute and issued orders sharply. "I'm taking direct command of this garrison. Commandant Stopa is relieved. You will follow no orders but my own.

You will open the gate at once and admit the SS squad that follows. When they have entered, you will close the gate and allow no one to enter or leave until I myself order otherwise. You will notify no one of our arrival. Is all this understood?"

"Yes, my Commander!"

"Very well lads," Feric said more softly. "I'll remember the sound judgment and devotion to duty you've displayed tonight."

Within two minutes, Feric had the three hundred SS men gathered about him within the compound. With no more than a nod of Feric's head toward the large officers' barracks in the center of the camp, they went about their business. Feric had issued simple orders. Each SS man was to creep up as closely to the officers' barracks as possible and was not to open fire until he first heard a shot. The closer they got, the greater the surprise would be, and the quicker and neater the whole unpleasant business would get done.

Most of the camp was deep in darkness at this late hour, with the Knights having long since gone to their bunks. Thus Feric had hopes that no early alarm would be given. The SS squad fanned out among the rows of plain wooden buildings, stealing up on the officers' barracks in small silent groups, their black leather uniforms serving admirably to melt them into the general darkness.

The officers' quarters, however, showed lights in the windows; moreover, there were two guards at the door and sentries covering all four directions positioned at the corners of the barracks. There was no question but that they would have to shoot their way in.

Feric, Waning, and Remler approached the entrance to the barracks together, crooking their submachine guns in their arms and staying within the cover of the darkened barracks' building until they were within twenty yards of their objective.

Feric called a momentary halt and gave terse orders. "We'll start the attack. There are two sentries and the door guards in our field of fire. I'll take the door guards myself; Remler, you take the sentry on the right, Waffing the one on the left. We've got to get them with our first bursts. Good luck!"

With that, Feric leveled his submachine gun, took aim

al the two door guards, pressed home his trigger, and dashed straight at the barracks at full speed.

Abruptly the night silence was fractured forever by the chatter of hundreds of submachine guns, man-made thunder fit to split the heavens apart. Sentries and guards went down in an instant together, before any of them could get off a shot. As he ran for the entrance to the building, firing at random through the windows, Feric could see a horde of men in black leather descending on the officers' quarters from all sides, their submachine guns flashing fire. The door opened and two dazed-looking Knights in rumpled brown uniforms began firing wildly into the night. Feric brought both of them down with a quick burst. Three more Knights appeared and were immediately felled by massed fire from the scores of SS men who followed on Peric's heels as he dashed up the short flight of stairs, kicked the door aside with his steel-shod boot, and stormed into the building behind his flame-sputtering

submachine gun.

Inside was confusion and horror. The interior of the officers' barracks reeked like a brewery; there were puddles of beer everywhere, and three great overturned barrels. Stopa's cronies were all out of uniform, some wearing only breeches, others wearing only shirts, some running about naked in their boots, the lot of them in a drunken panic, dashing every which way to avoid the hail of bullets like a coop full of startled chickens. Further, there were a dozen or more naked females shrieking and moaning; these were not true humans but pleasure sluts of the sort the Dominators bred for themselves in Zind—mindless creatures with oversized hips and breasts motivated solely by a boundless need for copulation.

Feric fired his submachine gun furiously into this nest of corruption; he was aware of Render and Waffing at his side blasting away, their faces stricken with loathing and revulsion. SS troops by the score poured into the barracks filling the air with the roar of gunfire and the bracing smell of

powder.

Peric glimpsed Stag Stopa, naked to his boots, reaching to grab up the weapon of a fallen Knight. He caught the traitor with a burst to the stomach. Stopa screamed, coughed blood, and collapsed, writhing in his death agonies. Feric ended it with a burst to Stopa's head; even a traitor deserved that much mercy.

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la less than a minute, it was over. Bunks and floor were

Strewn with the bodies of the traitors and the pleasure sluts from Zind. Here and there an SS man terminated someone's agony with a short burst. Then there was silence. Suddenly Remler shouted: "My Commander!" Feric turned and saw that the SS Commandant had hold by the throat of a bleeding man that yet lived and was pulling him erect. As Feric saw the eyes of the dying thing, he realized that this was no man but a loathsome Dom. The cold hate that the creature exuded left no doubt there!

Feric approached and peered down at the dying Dom. The contempt for all things human characteristic of the monstrosities blazed in the alien reptilian eyes like a dying ember. The creature spotted Feric and snarled defiance.

"May you die choking in your manure, worthless meat!" it rasped. "May your genes be scattered to the winds!" It coughed up a large bubble of blood and expired.

"YOU noticed the accent, my Commander?" Remler asked.

Feric nodded. "From Zind itself I"

Feric surveyed the roomful of dead traitors, though perhaps many of them were as much victims as villains, dominated by an actual agent from Zind. A good thing that the blow had been struck when it had! Zind must indeed be girding for an early war if the swine dared this much. The danger was more immanent than anyone had dreamed.

"My Commander!" an SS man shouted. "The building is surrounded by Knights!"

"Come on, Waffingi" Feric said, and the two of them dashed outside to face a veritable sea of confused Knights, some in uniform, some half-dressed, some armed with rifles or submachine guns or truncheons, others standing around like half-wits, empty-handed.

At least when they saw Feric, the ragged horde fell into some semblance of attention. A goodly number gave the Party salute and shouted "Hail Jaggar!" but for the most part there was naught but confusion.

Feric minced no words. "Commandant Stopa and his officers were traitors plotting with Zind and have been executed. High Commander Waffing is now in direct command of both the Knights of the Swastika and the regular army in his new capacity as Field Marshall High Commander of the Security Forces of Heldon."

He paused for a moment, letting that sink in before giving them the good news; this would make it easier to pull them together.

"The Sons of the Swastika have seized complete control of Heldon," Feric went on. "I have assumed the title of Supreme Commander of Heldon and I now rule by decree."

At this, the Knights broke into ragged, but loud and enthusiastic cheering. Feric let it go on for several minutes. When he judged that the men's exuberance had had sufficient opportunity for expression, he signaled to Waffing with a nod of his head.

"Attention!" Waffing bellowed like a bull. Almost at once, the cheering troop fell silent, formed into somewhat makeshift ranks, clicked heels, and stood rigidly at attention.

"We have work to do and lots of it!" Waffing told

them. "I want this mess cleaned up and the entire camp fit and ready to pass the most rigorous inspection within half an hour. Hail Heldon! Hail Victory! Hail Jaggar!"

Now the response was a mass salute of true military precision, and a chant of "Hail Jaggar!" that left nothing to be desired in the way of spirit or force. The New Age had been born; the Swastika ruled all Heldon. The threat from within had been crushed, once and for all, and the nation was united behind the Party.

But as he returned the salute, Feric knew full well that his sacred mission was only beginning. Like a vast gangrenous monstrosity, the Empire of Zind loomed on the eastern horizon, ready to burst like a gigantic pustule and engulf humanity in its reeking poison. Tonight, the tentacles of this cancerous mutant mass within the body of Heldon had been lopped off with ruthless force, but there would be no rest for Feric Jaggar and no peace for true humanity until the last foul mutant and monstrous Dom had been expunged from the face of the earth. The entire globe must be purified of all contaminating elements as Heldon had been purified tonight.

Today Heldon, tomorrow the world!

Up on the high reviewing stand in front of the Palace of State, Feric Jaggar stood resplendent in his black leather uniform, with its scarlet cloak flowing in the breeze, waiting for the grand parade to begin. To his right stood Lar Waffing in the new army uniform—light field-gray with a red swastika cape—and Seph Bogel in his Party uniform; to his left, Ludolf Best, also in trim black leather, and Bors Remler in black leather embellished with the twin red lightning strokes of the SS.

The sun was high in the clear blue sky, and the boulevard had been decorated all along its length with red, white, and black Swastika bunting. The walkways on either side of the street were crammed with robust Helder waving a red sea of Party flags. Television cameras would make the spectacle visible throughout the world, and Feric earnestly hoped its meaning would be loud and clear to the Dominators of Zind.

There was no doubt that Heldon had taken heroic strides during Feric's first two months as Supreme Commander, and all his High Commanders had a right to feel proud of what they had accomplished.

Bogel had ferreted scores of Universalist sympathizers and even some Doms out of the Ministry of Public Will •and had transformed that nest of pallid pen-pushers into a true weapon of the racial consciousness.

Waffing had seized control of the army with an iron hand, purged the command structure of weaklings and troublemakers, and thoroughly integrated the old Knights into the ranks, where they inspired confidence, spirit, and a sense of patriotic fervor in the ordinary Helder soldier.

Under Feric's supervision, Best had written a new constitution which vested all power and responsibility in the Supreme Commander, who retained his office at the pleasure of the people of Heldon, who could recall him by

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plebiscite at any time. Thus would the will of the Supreme Commander and the racial will of Heldon never fail to coincide.

Remler's task had only begun. Classification Camps were under construction in every region of Heldon and several were already in operation, but the job of re-examining every certificate holder in Heldon was a staggering one and would require a prolonged heroic effort. The benefits, however, would be worth any sacrifice. When the task was completed, the last Dominator within the

boundaries of Heldon would be slain, every inhabitant tainted by a mutated gene would be sterilized or exiled, and the very cream of the gene pool would be concentrated in the SS, which would become the purebred breeding stock of the next stage of true human evolution.

Although Feric could find no fault with the progress made under his leadership, there was little cause for rejoicing at this stage. This parade was not a true celebration, but a display of force primarily for the benefit of the Dominators of Zind. The rumblings from the east grew more ominous every day. SS intelligence had reported the massing of a great horde in the western reaches of Zind, not far from the Wolack border. Whether this mobilization had been meant to coincide with the failed Council plot was not clear, but the Dominators were obviously preparing to march west.

And Heldon was not properly prepared to greet them.

The size of the army had been doubled, but with the exception of the ex-Knights, most of the new soldiers were green recruits. The SS had been expanded to ten thousand men, and these prime specimens were of course more than ready for any task that might be set for them, but there were potentially ten thousand more SS purebreds to be gleaned from the general population through the Classification Camps, and this process would take another four months. A new armaments program had been set into motion, but only half the troops had as yet received the new submachine guns, no more than a score of aerial dreadnaughts had been tamed out, and as for the new light land dreadnaughts, volume production was only just beginning. Moreover, ammunition for all the new weapons was still in somewhat short supply.

Heldon needed 'at least four more months before it would be ready to hurl its full force against the barbarian
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vastness of Zind. It was Peric's fervent hope that today's display of armed might would generate enough fear and dismay among the Dominators to delay any westward march for several months; courage was hardly a Dominator strong point.

A great massed cheer went up as ten SS motorcyclists bearing huge Party flags on great brass standards roared past the reviewing stand, signaling the beginning of the parade. Immediately behind them marched a square of a hundred SS troops, half bearing Party flags, the other half bearing the banner of the SS, all dressed in gleaming black leather that sparkled in the sun. As the color guard passed

the reviewing stand, the scarlet Party flags were dipped. Feric answered this honorific by shooting out his right arm in the Party salute and maintaining it there with rigid precision as the troops continued to parade by.

A thousand more high-stepping SS troops followed, turning a smart eyes-right and giving massed Party salutes as they passed the reviewing stand, their chrome uniform trim flashing in the sun, their boots falling with the gunfire slap of steel on concrete. What a sight to strike terror into the enemies of Heldon!

Now a huge army contingent in field-gray began marching past the reviewing stand, rank after rank, the end of the formation hidden by a bend far up the boulevard. These troops, with their scarlet swastika capes, trim new uniforms, gleaming submachine guns, and revitalized esprit were a far cry from the sorry and slovenly rabble with which Feric had been confronted at his Inaugural Parade. They might be green and unblooded, but these lads represented the finest qualities of the true human genotype. The pride and dash with which they slammed the pavement with their boots at every step and the fervent precision of their saluting left no doubt in the mind of the beholder as to their devotion to their sacred cause. Even the filth of Zind must realize that they faced an army of true racial heroes.

After the ranks of regular infantry, the first squadron of the new land dreadnaughts rolled by on their segmented treads. This score of speedy gas-powered tanks was a far cry from the huge and cumbersome steam dreadnaughts that still formed the bulk of Heldon's armor. A quarter the size of the lumbering old turtles, they moved at thrice the speed. Instead of a huge armored cabin bristling with

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fixed gunports, these tanks boasted revolving turrets fitted out with repeating cannon and heavy machine guns, with two more machine guns at the fingertips of the driver and his observer, and a lone gunner defending the rear. Within three months, the army would have hundreds of these speedy tanks, and once the oil fields of southwestern Zind were within reach and fuel was no longer a problem, thousands could be turned out. The Army of Heldon would advance across Zind behind an unpenetrable shield of powerful and speedy armor.

As the last of the tanks passed the reviewing stand, five great aerial dreadnaughts lumbered overhead, filling the air with prolonged thunder. As Feric watched these huge flying fortresses, each propelled by a bank of ten airscrews driven by individual gas engines, a sudden inspiration

struck him. Why not apply the same principle of speed, size, and number as obtained with the new armor to the fighting machines of the air? Aerial dreadnaughts took forever to build and were monstrously expensive. Small aerial fighters a tenth their size would need only one engine, would be twice as fast, and could be mass-produced for a twentieth of the cost. Heldon could have a vast aerial armada instead of a few score clumsy behemoths. Yes, production must start on such fighters at

once!

Behind the tanks came a thousand motorcycle SS, and behind them a similar contingent from the regular army, a flashing spectacle of power and bridled speed. The incredible din of the massed engines was a battle cry that shook

the earth.

After the motorcyclists, a group of fast troop-carrying trucks rolled by. The key to the new-style army that Feric was building was power and speed. An army that had the ability to bring an overwhelming concentration of power to 'bear on a given objective before the enemy could react would be able to make mincemeat out of a foe ten times

its size.

Behind the trucks came a large formation of marching SS troops, then the second formation of regular infantry, which wound up the parade. As the first of these men in field-gray high-stepped past the reviewing stand holding massed salutes, Feric saw an SS captain dash excitedly up onto the reviewing stand and whisper a few terse words to Render. Instantly, the SS Commandant bounded to Feric's

side with a look of feverish fervor lighting up his sharp-boned face.

"Well Remler, what is it?" Feric asked, still holding his salute for the benefit of the troops marching by.

"My Commander, the hordes of Zind have crossed the border of Wolack. They are sweeping through the eastern regions of that country with irresistible force."

Though this news jolted Peric to the core, the rigidity of his salute did not for an instant waver; it would be disastrous for the leadership to display anything but glacial calm on a public occasion such as this. He drew Waning and Remler closer to him, and had the SS captain approach, though no outward sign of what was going on

was visible to the great throng below.

"What is the precise situation, Captain?" Feric asked.

"My Commander, our latest reports put a vast Zind horde at no more than five days' march from Lumb."

"Once they overrun the capital, there will be no resistance between them and the Helder border," Waning pointed out. "In nine days they can be upon us. We should immediately fortify our border with Wolack with our best troops, mainly SS, and hold the horde off there until our new armies are ready."

From what Feric knew, the western reaches of Wolack were perfectly good uncontaminated farmland that cried out for human colonization. That such rightfully Helder territory was held by such as the Wolacks was bad enough; to allow the pus of Zind to inundate such land was unthinkable to a true patriot, aside from the military threat such a Zind occupation would impose.

"There can be no question of assuming a defensive position while Zind overruns Wolack," Feric declared firmly. "We must attack, we must attack at once, and we must attack with blinding speed and crushing force."

"But my Commander, we're not ready to fight Zind now; in four months—"

"My mind is made up. Waning!" Feric snapped. "We simply cannot allow Zind to march into Wolack unopposed. We will attack at once with whatever we have."

A scant thirty-six hours later, a great Helder army stood poised at the border, ready to storm into western Wolack. Feric had mobilized the cream of the army and the finest SS units and would lead them into battle him-
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self. Since the key to the situation was concentrated power and lightning speed, Feric had assembled a wholly motorized striking force, divided up into two main columns.

Lar Waffing led the army contingent which consisted of two divisions of motorized infantry packed into every gas truck that Heldon could muster, escorted by three thousand motorcycle troops and a score of the huge steam dreadnaughts. This force would roll straight across the

western fens of Wolack, to meet the Zind horde head on somewhere in the vicinity of the capital, Lumb, on the western bank of the River Roul. Heavily outnumbered, Waffing's troops would have little chance of stopping the horde by themselves.

However, Feric himself, with the loyal Best at his side, would lead a division of the finest motorcycle SS shock troops backed up by a score of the new fast tanks in a wide flanking maneuver to the northeast. If all went as planned, Feric's force would dash up and around the set battle at Lumb, then sweep down to attack the rear of the Zind forces on the east bank of the Roul while the whole unwieldy horde was in the process of crossing the river via one comparatively narrow bridge. The plan required the SS troops to make quick mincemeat out of forces outnumbering them by as much as a hundred to one, but the shock and surprise would cut down the odds, and the innate superiority of the SS fired to a fanatic fervor by the inspiration of their Supreme Commander fighting at their head should do the rest.

The wan morning sun was obscured behind a leaden sky as Feric sat on his motorcycle at the head of his SS division watching his timepiece tick off the last few moments to zero hour. Beside him, Best's face glowed with youthful excitement as he waited for the moment to start his motorcycle.

"Do you think the Wdacks will resist our advance?" Best asked hopefully.

"Hardly, Best," Feric replied. "The Wolack army is nothing but a mutant rabble to begin with and I expect it's got more than its hands full in the east."

Nevertheless, since time and speed were of the essence, it would be best to stun Wolack into utter helplessness at the outset. Cannon set up in a hollow five miles from the border would pulverize the Wolack border fortifications before the army and the SS reached the border. The two
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columns would then pour into Wolack side by side, smashing any resistance that might arise. Only when all Wolack had been thrown into utter panic would Feric lead the SS off to the northeast.

Behind Feric and Best was the hundred-man SS elite guard, their black motorcycles and matching leather glistening, their submachine guns freshly oiled, their truncheons hanging near their hands and ready for action. Behind this elite force were a dozen tanks, then the rest of

the motorcycle SS, the other light tanks, and behind this massed SS contingent, Waffing's regular army force, stretching out to the western horizon farther than the eye could see.

"What a grand spectacle!" Feric exclaimed.

Best nodded. "Before the week is out, the nominators will get a taste of the might of the Swastika, my Commander!" he replied enthusiastically.

As the last few seconds ran out, Feric unsheathed the Great Truncheon of Held, and thrust the gleaming shaft high into the air. At this signal, the air was filled with the ear-shattering sound of thousands of motorcycle engines as the steel stallions were fired into life. This roar was backed a moment later by a low gut-thrumming chord that seemed to shake the hills as the engines of all the massed trucks and tanks and steam dreadnaughts began to idle. Feric felt the racial will of all Heldon pounding through his flesh in the vibrations that filled the very air with power. His will merged with the mass will of the men he was about to lead into battle; he was the army, they were his, and together they were Heldon.

Then, with a glance at Best, Feric swept the Steel Commander down through the air. From miles away, Feric heard the sudden thunder of cannon, as he gunned his engine, and the host of Heldon surged forward.

A mighty sustained roar filled Feric's mind; his body thrummed with the power of the engine he straddled as he led his army at breakneck speed across the rolling green hills toward the Wolack border. Cannon shells whistled overhead, the earth shook to the rumble of wheels and treads, and a great cloud of gas fumes and dust boiled into the air. The sounds and smells, the gigantic power and dashing speed, took his breath away and set his heart soaring. Glancing at Best beside him, Feric saw that he, too, was carried away by the glory of the moment; they
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exchanged comradely smiles as the tanks behind them began firing their cannon.

Feric led his great army up one last hill, crested the rise, and beheld the Wolack border. A barbed-wire fence demarked the Heldon side of the border with machine-gun towers at regular intervals; then there was a half-mile strip of no-man's land and a line of crude stone Wolack pill-boxes set about three hundred yards apart. The Helder positions had been evacuated, and great gaps cut in the fence. As for the line of Wolack fortifications, many of

these had taken direct hits from the cannon and were naught but steaming, rubble-strewn craters. Others were partially destroyed, with the smashed bodies of Wolacks strewn about the ruined stonework.

Even over the din of the engines, Feric could hear the great cheer that went up from his troops as they saw the fortifications of the Wolacks before them. As one last barrage of cannon shells exploded in a neat line amidst the Wolack pillboxes, sending great fountains of gray stone, brown earth, and red flesh into the air, Feric gunned his engine, and roared down the hill through a gap in the barbed wire, and across the border into Wolack, with Best's motorcycle humming along at his heels. Immediately behind came the SS elite guard, swinging their truncheons and bellowing a hoarse battle cry. Then the squadron of tanks spread out, and their heavy steel treads crashed through the wire. Thousands of motorcycle SS shock troops crossed into no-man's land along a wide front in their van.

As Peric led the vanguard of his troops across no-man's land toward the Wolack lines, the SS motorcyclists fanned out to form a long skirmish line on either side of his motorcycle. At hundred-yard intervals, this forward wall of heroes was reinforced by tanks blasting away with their machine guns and cannon. Behind the shield of this SS phalanx came the trucks of the motorized regular infantry, backed up by the great lumbering steam dreadnaughts which sent hails of mortar shells crashing into the Wolack fortifications.

Soon the forward line of SS reached the Wolacks. Feric himself drew up on a partially demolished pillbox, from which scuttled about half-a-dozen Wolacks—a hunch-backed dwarf, a Parrotface, a brace of Toadmen, and other assorted monstrosities—all fleeing mindlessly from the fray like the craven dogs they were. Swiftly, Feric

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chased down a Parrotface and dashed out its reeking brains with one heroic swipe of the Great Truncheon. Beside him, Best, his blue eyes glowing with patriotic fervor, came upon a dwarf and dispatched the creature with a quick hail of truncheon blows.

Suddenly Feric spied a gross froglike mutant with wet leprous skin training a rusty rifle at Best's head. Instantly, he opened his throttle and rammed the front wheel of his motorcycle into the monstrosity at forty miles an hour, slamming the creature aside with a scream and a shower of viscous purple blood. He spun the cycle about his heel, roared back, and smashed the creature's skull with his truncheon, for good measure.

Best paused long enough to utter an emotional "Thank you, my Commander!" Then the lad plunged back into the heat of battle.

All around Feric, the SS men were splitting open the skulls of the Wolacks and driving them madly in all directions. A fear-crazed Blueskin ran blindly at Feric's cycle with a truncheon in his hand; Feric decapitated the creature with a swipe of the Steel Commander, the head rolling under his wheels, while the body stumbled on a few paces before expiring. It was no proper battle, it was a rout! These Wolacks milled about aimlessly like insane cattle; they were all cowards and weaklings who had no taste for honorable combat!

Feric raised the Great Truncheon of Held high in the air, its silvery shaft emblazoned with the honorable blood of battle, and raced his motorcycle forward beyond the ruined fortifications, leading the SS vanguard deeper into Wolack. There was no point wasting precious time dispatching aU of these creatures; the occupation forces that would follow the motorized columns into Wolack before the sun had set would be more than adequate to mop up this pathetic rabble.

Soon Feric was once more at the head of a tightly massed formation of motorcycle SS shock troops roaring eastward across Wolack with precision and dash. The tanks fanned out about this column as outriders protecting either flank. About half a mile behind and slightly to the south were Waffing's regular army troops, obscured by a huge dust cloud. Behind them, the Wolack border fortifications were naught but smoking ruins.

"What a fine beginning to the campaign, my Command-
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er!" Best called out. "An utterly devastating victory!" His face was almost feverish with the manly thrill of having fought his first real battle.

"So much for the army of Wolack!" Feric answered, not wanting to take the edge off Best's mood. But he knew only too well that the Wolacks had only served to blood these untested Helder troops, and give them a chance to experience their own manhood, heroism, and skill. The real battle was hundreds of miles away with the Warriors of Zind, and those baleful creatures would not break and run like a gaggle of craven Wolacks.

But Peric heard the incredible massed symphony of engines behind him, saw rank after rank of shiny black

motorcycles, swift tanks, and motorized infantry dashing across the plain behind him like a grand parade, and he could sense the fire and elation and hot blood of his troops as a palpable force.

Let the Warriors of Zind fight to the death! Let them throw their full might against the army of Heldon! All the more thoroughly would this corps. of heroes grind their obscene warped protoplasm into a thin slime of squamous jelly soiling the dust!

As the Heldon strike force drove deeper into Wolack, Feric noticed that the nature of the countryside was gradually changing. The grass was becoming patchy and taking on an unwholesome blue-gray undertone. The occasional pigs and cattle that the columns routed as they swept through the fields became ever more genetically twisted, many of them encumbered by trailing vestigial limbs, all with purplish or greenish mottling of the hide, some with the primitive stubs of secondary heads bursting like buboes from the bases of their necks.

"What a horrid country this is!" Best called out as he rode close by Feric's side. "Perhaps we should set it all to the torch, my Commander."

"It would do no good. Best," Feric said. "No fire we could set would burn out the poison of the Fire of the Ancients."

Indeed, the countryside was rapidly becoming a putrid sinkhole of residual radiation and genetic contamination. Mutated crows cawed overhead through their grossly deformed pink beaks,,their eyes bursting out of their sockets like the orbs of deep-sea fish. In the distance here and
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there, Feric spied the first patches of radiation jungle:

great twisted mazes of purplish, reddish, and bluish vegetation, caricatures of grass the size of small trees, tangles of outsized vines like poisonous serpents, giant bloated cancerous flowers. Lurking in these pus pockets of radiation were creatures that defied description: wild dogs that dragged their intestines behind them in translucent sacs, multiheaded swine, featherless birds covered with running sores that oozed noxious venom, all manner of mutated vermin that bred ever-more-revolting variations from generation to generation.

Occasionally, the head of the column would flush cowering Wolack peasants from their holes. These loathsome mutants were exactly the sort one would expect in such

debased environs. There was not a one of them who did not display some gross departure from the true human genotype. Blueskins, Parrotfaces, Toadmen, dwarfs, and all the usual mutations abounded. Several of the frog-skinned monstrosities were sighted; without exception, these slime-oozing creatures were run down and slain by the SS, for their sight was a particularly strong affront to true human eyes. As for the bulk of the Wolack peasantry, these were for the most part allowed to flee every which way before the Helder army; only those too dull-witted or physically warped to make proper way for the column felt the weight of Helder truncheons. The Classification Camps that the occupation forces would set up would deal with these wretches in due course.

All in all, the most vexing aspect of the march eastward thus far was the gorge building up in the back of Feric's throat as he drove deeper into the contaminated reaches of the Wolack fens. Of resistance there was none, and only the occasional running down of a particularly vile mutant gave the troops any opportunity to maintain their fighting edge. The column neither avoided the reeking wattle villages nor sought them out; straight east, the army roared, and any obstruction was smashed to pieces and set to the torch.

After this relentless advance had continued for several hours and nearly two hundred miles without major incident, Feric decided that it was time for the SS troop to veer off and begin its northeasterly sweep.

He drew the Great Truncheon of Held, pointed the gleaming fist that was its headball in a northeasterly direc-

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tion, then guided his motorcycle off on this heading. Without pause, the column of black motorcycles and tanks followed him up over a rise and off across the lowland fens of the Roul delta.

"At this rate, we should reach the Roul within a day," he called over to Best. "There's an ancient bridge about two hundred miles downstream from Lumb that freakishly survived the Time of Fire. There we can cross the river undetected."

Best's face creased in puzzlement. "Surely Zind will fortify such a key position, my Commander?" he said confusedly.

Feric grinned. "The bridge is supposedly infested by monsters too vile and terrible for even the Warriors of Zind to face with equanimity," he said. "Because of these

so-called trolls, the area is devoid of sapient habitation."

At the sight of Best's alarm at this information, Feric broke into good-naturedly laughter. "Don't worry, Best," he said. "There isn't a protoplasmic creature in existence that's immune to the submachine guns of the SS!"

At this, Best himself grinned broadly.

The dash across the Roul delta could not exactly be described as a pleasant scenic tour, but it was without serious incident, since these lowlands were much more sparsely inhabited than the rest of Woiack; the reputation of the area among the Wolacks was unsavory, even ominous.

Feric could well understand why even low creatures like Wolacks would choose to leave territory like this unsettled. Here the residual radiation was obviously quite high, for patches of radiation jungle were everywhere, many of them merging with each other to form nightmare forests of considerable extent. Even the mighty column of motorcycles with its flankers of powerful tanks avoided these vicinities at Feric's direction; not out of fear of the monstrosities lurking within, but because of the dangerously high radiation level that such pus-pockets of mangled chromosomes denoted.

"Over there, my Commander!" Best called out, pointing to the east. The twin towers of the ancient bridge were clearly visible on the horizon.

With motions of the Steel Commander, Feric redeployed his troops in order to properly deal with whatever
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might bar the way across the bridge. Four tanks were brought to the head of the column where they formed a box around the motorcycles of Feric and Best. The other tanks were brought in closer to the column into tight formations to protect against attack from the sides or rear.

An ancient roadway began about two miles from the bridge, leading through the fens and onto the bridge itself;

as Feric led the column along this crumbling track, he saw that the entrance to the bridge itself was surrounded by foul radiation jungle. Creepers, vines, and bloated shrubbery in ghastly bluish and purplish hues grew about the bridgehead in fetid profusion; only the concrete roadbed itself was free of the densely tangled mutated underbrush.

Feric gunned his engine slightly and signaled to the tank drivers beside him; the head of the column sped up to nearly fifty miles an hour, opening up a gap of a hundred yards between itself and the column of motorcycles. Feric drew a few yards ahead of the tanks with Best's cycle close behind, unsheathed the Steel Commander, and plunged his motorcycle into the narrow canyon between the densely tangled walls of cancerous radiation jungle.

At once he was immersed in a world of slithering, clattering putrescence. Multiheaded snakes hung from slime-encrusted trees. Large featherless birds with prehensile beaks hopped heavily from branch to branch uttering guttural liquid croaks. Something large and crazed shrieked horribly to itself in the depths of the jungle. Here and there, Feric made out huge nebulous shapes moving about behind the twisted boles of the unwholesome trees: vast expanses of wet green hide, moving masses of blood-red pulpiness, things like gigantic abdominal organs imbued with independent life.

"What a cesspool of genetic garbage!" he muttered aloud.

Best's reply was a sudden wordless cry of terror. Fifty yards up ahead, Feric saw something which nearly caused him to retch, and made his blood go cold. Blocking the road ahead was a gigantic mound of formless protoplasm, a pulsating amoeba of greenish translucent flesh perhaps ten feet high and wider than the roadbed. The surface of this enormous lump of living slime seethed with scores of huge lipless sucking mouths filled with rows of knifelike teeth; from each obscene orifice projected a long

tubular writhing red tongue. The oozing surface of the monstrosity swarmed with hundreds of powerful-looking tentacles as well. From the mouths came a ghastly puckering wet sound and a stomach-turning high-pitched keening.

Feric slammed on his brakes and brought his cycle to a screaming dirt-flying halt a scant twenty yards from the thing; at these close quarters, the rotten-fish stench of the monster was nearly overpowering. Even as Feric brought up his cycle, the amoeboid mound of primal protoplasm began to flow toward him. No wonder the Wolacks shunned this place!

But craven Wolacks were one thing and true men quite another. Feric drew his submachine gun from its scabbard and leveled it at the creature. He pressed home the trigger, holding it down for sustained fire, and his weapon spurted a screaming hail of machine-gun bullets directly

into the pustulant thing; a second stream of bullets from close behind him told him that the quick-witted Best had followed his lead.

The bullets struck the pulsating flesh of the amoeboid creature like a series of small explosions, sending gouts of translucent green slime flying into the air. A horrid series of sustained shrieks came from the thing as scores of huge sucking mouths cried out in mindless agony. A viscous green liquid flowed copiously from the wounds. The creature writhed insanely as Feric and Best continued to pepper its slimy surface with machine-gun bullets.

Then the tanks which had halted close behind Feric's cycle opened fire. Four cannon shells whistled overhead, plowed into the creature at point-blank range, then exploded with a mighty roar, sending smoke and slime into the air in a titanic blast of destruction.

When the smoke had cleared, there was nothing blocking the column's advance but a few steaming puddles of thin green liquid.

Feric and Best beamed triumphantly at each other. "So much for the trolls of the lower Roul!" Feric shouted.

"Hardly proper target practice for modern Helder weaponry," Best said. "I hope we see proper action soon, my Commander!"

"Don't worry Best, we'll reach the Zind horde soon enough now." So saying, Feric drew the Steel Commander, waved it aloft, and led the column onward through the jungle and out onto the roadbed of the ancient bridge

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which was suspended from great steel cables hung from stone towers anchored far below the muddy waters of the Roul.

Halfway across, Feric heard machine-gun fire behind him and the booming of cannon. Glancing back, he saw that several more of the putrid horrors had emerged from the jungle to harry the column. The cannon of the tanks and the machine guns of the SS made short and bloody work of these monstrosities.

When the rear of the column was safely on the eastern side of the river, Feric called a short halt and formed his tanks into an impromptu artillery battery. Under Feric's direction, the tanks fired high explosive shells into the towers of the ancient bridge, smashing them to pieces and dropping the center of the bridge bed into the reeking

waters of the Roul.

As an afterthought, Feric had the tankers reload their cannon with incendiary shells and drop a full barrage on the jungle itself, so that when the column got underway again, swinging south toward its rendezvous with the rear of the Zind horde, it left a billowing pillar of orange fire lighting up the horizon behind it where the obscene spawn of the radiation pocket had been.

Evidence of a great battle presented itself more than fifty miles out of Lumb. Great rivers of refugees poured northward and westward like insects fleeing the crushing of their nest as the column raced southward toward the capital about twenty miles east of the Roul and roughly parallel to its bank. Mongrels and mutants of every sordid description swarmed northward along the major road to Lumb, making it impassable to the Helder shock troops. It would have been possible to clear a path through this unsavory mob by sheer force, but hardly worth the delay, for even at this distance a pall of smoke occasionally enlivened with flashes of fire hung on the southern horizon while the rumble of far-off artillery could be heard, sure evidence that Waffing's force was already in contact with the enemy, since the Wolacks had no such firepower, and Zind would hardly employ cannon on such scale against so puny an enemy.

Feric therefore led the SS column south across the sickly fields themselves, avoiding the rabble-choked road two miles to the east, for it was absolutely essential to

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arrive on the scene before the entire Zind horde had crossed the river. For once the Dom's creatures completed the crossing, the advantage would be lost, Waffing's army overrun, and the SS column trapped far behind the lines in Zind-conquered territory.

Soon the far-off rumble of artillery became a nearby thunder, and continuous flashes of fire could be seen to the south, clearly on the western bank of the Roul; in addition, an incredible crackle of massed machine-gun fire was audible as counterpoint to the artillery duel. Waffing's forces were fighting the Warriors of Zind in western Lumb; the only question now was how much of the horde remained on the eastern side of the river. On this might very well depend the history of the world and the survival of the true human genotype.

As the column neared the outskirts of Lumb, the tide of refugees trickled away to nothing and everything in sight had been trampled utterly flat; sure sign that the horde of

Zind had passed this way, and not long ago by the look of things, either.

Feric therefore whipped his forces into final battle array. He and Best of course formed the point of the formation, backed up by the hundred-man elite motorcycle SS bodyguard enclosed in a square of four tanks. Behind this spearhead was a wide solid line of tanks serving as a shield for the main formation of motorcycle SS shock troops. More tanks guarded either flank of this tightly packed formation of iron men and steel machines. No Zind filth would be able to violate the integrity of such an impenetrable

force!

Feric unsheathed his submachine gun and rested it in its firing rack. Glancing at Best, who had also put his weapon in position, he shouted: "Now you'll have all the action anyone could want. Best!" As Feric opened his throttle all the way, Best replied with a boyish grin and a mighty "Hail Jaggar!" which triggered off a spontaneous mass salutation from the ranks as the great SS force surged forward in a final dash into battle at nearly sixty miles an

hour.

Feric led his troops over fields and hills strewn with bits and pieces of dead Wolacks who had been partially devoured by the nauseating scavengers of Zind. The mighty motorized shock force crested a final rise and Feric beheld

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the long valley that led to Lumb, choked with the hosts of Zind.

Ludolf Best cried out in horror at his first sight of the Warriors of Zind. The entire valley floor was covered with vast formations of these monstrosities and the creatures themselves were enough to daunt even the staunchest hero. Each of these specially bred protoplasmic killing machines was a hideous caricature of the human form:

fully ten feet tall with incredibly massive chests, arms, and thighs, and tiny heads barely large enough to serve as mounts for their tiny red eyes, button ears, and lipless drooling mouths. These pinheaded creatures were entirely naked save for rude leather belts from which hung truncheons of immense size and weight and were liberally caked with dung, ordure, and all manner of filth. Most horrifying of all, each formation of perhaps five hundred of the creatures marched along in perfect synchronization with each other, down to the swing of their tree-trunk arms and the rifles in their hands as if they were interchangeable

cogs in some vast fleshly machine.

Seeing Best's dismay, Feric called out to him. "Mindless robots, all of them! All muscle and literally no brain!"

For his part, Peric was far from daunted by this sight, for it meant that perhaps half the horde was still on this side of the Roul—his desperate plan was working! Moreover, he knew that this vast horde of Warriors was entirely dependent on the Dominators who controlled the formations; each synchronized formation was in fact the dominance group of a single Dom. In combat, the Warriors possessed but rudimentary wills of their own. Spaced throughout the horde at more or less regular intervals were huge war-wagons, flatbed carts pulled by teams of gigantic mutants that were all enormous thighs and buttocks, with withered upper torsos and virtually no arms or heads. The beds of these war-wagons were packed with ordinary mutants who served as mortar-crews and machine gunners, but it was a good bet that the controlling Doms were hidden in the rabble atop these carts. Further, it was quite probable that the eight heavy lumbering steam dreadnoughts near the rear of the horde housed the master Dominators of the entire horde—trust a Dom to secrete his cowardly carcass in the most secure place possible! If these master Dominators could be slain, the

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entire horde might be thrown into leaderless uncontrolled confusion.

Uttering a fierce battle cry, Feric led the SS battle formation straight down the slope at the nearest formation of Warriors at better than forty miles an hour. Feric held down the trigger of his submachine gun, sending a long burst of leaden death into the ranks of the enemy, and at this signal, every tank cannon let fly with high explosive shells, so that the first warning given to the horde was when a thousand Warriors were suddenly blown to steaming bloody fragments by a rapid series of explosions.

A moment later, Feric led his spearhead of tanks and motorcycles into this bloody gaping hole in the enemy flank. Once more the Helder tanks fired a massed barrage, now at point-blank range, and the entire wall of naked, hairy, sour-smelling flesh before Feric flew apart in a hail of dirt and meat, showering him with gore and filth as he gunned his motorcycle forward. Only now did the cannon of the Zind steam dreadnaughts open fire, lobbing a ragged barrage into the rear of the Helder column. Several score Helder machines were blasted apart by the explosions, but the precision of the SS formations never wavered for an instant.

As for the minions of Zind, the surprise, incredible Speed, and withering concentrated firepower of the Helder attack left them milling about in confusion and disarray. The dreadnaughts continued to lob shells into the Helder ranks, and at this range even the filth that served the Dominators as gunners could hardly help dropping their loads on target, inflicting telling losses on the Helder troops. But whereas the formations of Warriors continued to march brainlessly toward Lumb and had yet to put up a coherent defense in the face of the rapid-fire Helder tank cannon, the SS shock troop retained its iron discipline in the face of the point-blank Zind barrage.

Feric led his spearhead force at breakneck speed into the path in the enemy ranks opened up by the artillery, leading his "men straight for the command dreadnaughts.

Finally, the Dominators controlling this section of the horde apparently recovered from their initial shock, for suddenly and with an eerie superhuman precision, thousands of the giant Warriors executed precise ninety-degree turns and ran at top speed straight into the face of the Helder tank barrage, swinging their massive truncheons

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like enormous scythes. Wave after wave of the naked Warriors was blown to pieces, but so vast was the horde, so bottomless the Dom's supply of cannon fodder, that thousands upon thousands of the creatures fell upon the Helder forces from all directions, hurtling straight through the massed cannon and machine-gun fire by sheer force of numbers.

Peric suddenly found his advance barred by a solid line of ten-foot, massively muscled, filth-caked monstrosities, swinging huge rude truncheons through the air in apparently random strokes, red eyes blazing mindlessly and drool flecking their chins as they came at him at top speed on legs as thick as marble columns. Feric drew the Great Truncheon of Held and met them head-on, swinging the mystic weapon before him in great juggernaut sweeps.

A vast surge of power seemed to shoot down his right arm and fill his body with inexhaustible energy and superhuman strength. The Steel Commander was a feather in his hand, but his first blow hit with the force of an avalanche, smashing the tiny heads of six Warriors to bloody flinders and sending their bodies writhing in the dust, fountaming gore. He heard a great cheer go up behind him; fired to heroic fervor by the sight of this incredible feat, the SS motorcycle elite guard, led by Ludolf Best, plunged into the fray at the side of their

Supreme Commander. Though heavily outnumbered, and by creatures twice their size to boot, the SS fanatics made up for it with speed and superhuman fire, falling upon the Warriors with their truncheons, crushing legs with the wheels of their motorcycles, keeping close to Feric's heels as he cut his way ever deeper into the heart of the Zind horde with the irresistible Steel Commander.

For his part, Feric continued to mow down the hairy sweat-soaked giants in great lots and bunches: smashing through a forest of legs and leaving the crippled howling creatures for the troops behind him to dispatch, then whirling around to pulp a score of the tiny expressionless Warrior faces with the steel fist headball of the Great Truncheon.

Even in this close-quarter combat, the Warriors of Zind showed little if any individual initiative. They simply pressed forward, rank after rank, swinging their truncheons at everything that moved; perhaps even their truncheon blows were automatic behavior rather than individually

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aimed. As each Warrior fell, another in the solid press behind simply popped into the gap in the line, a replacement part in the great protoplasmic killing machine that was the Zind horde.

Thus the battle assumed an inevitable pattern. Led by Feric, the Helder column tore into the horde at speed, killing everything before it, but taking certain losses due to sheer attrition. For their part, the Dominators simply threw wave after wave of Warriors at the onrushing Helder, for their reserves seemed endless. The consequent slaughter of Warriors was so tremendous that the forward advance of the Helder strike force was limited chiefly by the tangle of smashed giant's corpses that lay strewn in its path.

Soon Feric had fought his way to within a hundred yards of the Zind steam dreadnoughts which had gathered themselves into a defensive circle completely surrounded by Warriors. Behind him came Best, then the four lead tanks, and the elite motorcycle SS bodyguard, their black leather reddened with Warrior blood. To the rear, was the great main formation of SS shock troops advancing through the body of the horde leaving a bloody river of fallen Warriors in its wake.

Suddenly, the tactics of the Dominators changed. The

dominance groups of Warriors surrounding the dreadnaughts stood their ground, switched over from truncheons to rifles, and began to fire volley after volley at point-blank range straight at the unrushing Helder shock troops. Behind Feric, a fine young SS hero screamed in pain, then fell from his motorcycle with bright blood spurting from the deep wound in his neck. All around Feric, bullets tore into the SS men, scores of fine specimens shrieked in agony and fell from their mounts into the dust; a bullet pinged off the frame of Best's cycle and missed his head by inches.

"Machine gunsi!" Feric shouted, sheathing the Steel Commander, and drawing his own submachine gun. He gunned the engine of his cycle and led the column on a short flanking sweep to the north, so that the maximum number of Helder tanks could be brought to bear on the enemy dreadnaughts.

Feric then fired his submachine gun directly into the nearest formation of Warriors, cutting down a brace of the creatures. At this signal, the tank cannon opened up. A barrage of high explosive shells crashed amidst the enemy
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dreadnaughts in a tight pattern, sending a dense pillar of orange fire and black smoke into the air, followed by a heavy clattering rain of sharp metal fragments. Before the flame and smoke had even begun to disperse, another massed barrage rocked the Zind dreadnaughts, then another, and yet again another.

In the place where the eight Zind command dreadnaughts had been was naught but a steaming crater filled with shards of smoking metal and bits of bloody protoplasm.

The effect of this destruction on the formations of Warriors who had been defending the dreadnaughts was nothing short of astonishing. The synchronized disciplined formations instantly dissolved; giant brainless Warriors began milling about crazily in every conceivable direction. Some of the creatures fired their rifles wildly in the air;

others simply tossed their weapons away. Many of these suddenly decorticated lumps of muscle began to urinate aimlessly, spattering their fellows. All sorts of disgusting grunts, shrieks, and howls rent the air. The whole mass of creatures around the smoking crater as well as great sections of the Zind horde in the general vicinity were reduced to nothing more than a brainless herd of rioting animals; the Doms controlling this entire section of the horde must have been housed in the dreadnaughts along with the Zind high command. With the destruction of

these dreadnaughts, the Zind horde was bereft of overall command, and this particular fighting section was converted into nothing more than randomly twitching muscles.

The cannon and machine guns of the SS mowed down these decorticated former slaves of the Doms like fish in a barrel as Feric led his troops in a zigzag course through the herd of leaderless and essentially helpless Warriors across the valley floor and up onto the southern ridgeline out of the chaos below. Uncountable thousands of the Zind slaves were dispatched; yet thousands more could have been slain had Feric's tactics called for anything less than continuous disorienting speed.

Instead, Feric led his force east along the ridgeline for a few miles, then down into the valley again, hitting the horde that much closer to Lumb. The Helder troops concentrated their attacks on the war-wagons drawn along by the huge Pullers, for each time one of these mobile firing platforms was blasted to bits, one more formation of

Warriors went berserk, throwing their weapons away, firing wildly into the air, attacking their fellows aimlessly, urinating and defecating all over each other like a vast pen of crazed swine. There was no doubt that the controlling Doms were located on the war-wagons; each such Dom slain rendered a thousand Warriors militarily useless.

Again and again and again, Feric led his men in sweeps across the Zind horde, each swing bringing the SS force closer to Lumb and the bridge over the Roul, each traversing of the valley cutting a broad path of massive destruction through the Zind horde.

By the time the eastern outskirts of Lumb were visible, the entire rear echelon of the Zind horde had been thrown into chaos. Tens of thousands of Warriors had been slain, and tens of thousands more, deprived of their Dom masters, had been converted from efficient cogs in a great protoplasmic killing machine into an altogether disgusting self-destructive mass of brainless muscle. Like some great decapitated reptile thrashing about in its maddened and interminable death throes, these huge herds of brawny literally brainless giants twitched and jerked about aimlessly, shooting, kicking, urinating, biting, defecating, and striking out entirely at random, slaughtering hundreds of their own number in the process, and as a bonus making it thoroughly impossible for those formations still under Dominator control to operate effectively.

As Feric drove his motorcycle down the wide avenue that led through the thoroughly flattened ruins of east

Lumb, the scene he led his troops into was one of nightmare chaos.

The Zind horde had advanced through the city along a wide front. The crude stone-and-wattle buildings had been ripped to pieces and quite literally pulverized; not an artifact was left standing, and the rubble that clogged the rude mud streets was hardly recognizable as the ruins of buildings. The Warriors slew everything in their path and every inch of the city was littered with the decomposing corpses of every conceivable breed of mutant and mongrel, all stinking to high heaven. Apparently the proximity of so many rogue Warriors made it nearly impossible for the remaining Doms to retain tight control of their creatures, for tens of thousands of the grimy giants coursed and surged throughout this ghastly carnage heap, smashing into each other in mindless raging panic, firing into the air, grunting, clubbing at each other or piles of corpses

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with their truncheons, urinating on themselves, shrieking, spewing oceans of drool from their tiny lipless mouths.

It was a vista that caused the gorge to rise in Feric's throat and the blood to pound in his veins. "This is the future the Dominators seek for the world!" he shouted to Best. "A cesspool planet peopled by naught but drooling mindless monstrosities which the Doms and the Doms alone control! I swear by my Great Truncheon and the Swastika that I shall not rest until their scourge is expunged forever from the face of the earth!"

Gunning his engine, Peric led the SS column down the avenue, an irresistible juggernaut of cannon, machine-gun bullets and truncheons, every last Helder fired to transcendent heroism by utter racial revulsion for the crazed and debased perversions of what was once human germ plasm that rioted and drooled and urinated obscenely all around them. Cutting everything in their path to ribbons, the Helder troops plunged toward the immense pall of fire and smoke that hung over western Lumb. Even at this distance, the roar of the cannon and the immense staccato clattering of thousands of machine guns that came from the great battle on the other side of the river was deafening.

A lone pontoon bridge spanned the body-choked Roul and as Feric hove into sight of this basically primitive structure, the scene was one of utter pandemonium. A formation of Warriors surrounding a war-wagon was marching across the bridge in perfect synchronized unison;

apparently these Warriors, confined as they were to the

narrow territory of the bridge bed, were not infected by the general panic and disintegration which Feric and his SS shock troops had inflicted upon their fellows. However, the entire east bank of the Roul was absolutely packed with masses of shrieking, murderous, uncontrolled ten-foot giants. Great presses of these rogue Warriors sought to smash their way past the disciplined troops on the bridge, perhaps out of residual fealty to forgotten psychic commands, perhaps purely as a result of the mathematical laws of random motion. Whatever the reason, rogue Warriors swirled around the bridgehead in great numbers, wrecking havoc with the dominated formation attempting to join the battle on the west bank.

Peric instantly realized that the tanks could not be used to blast a path through the Warriors on the bridge, for even a single misplaced cannon shell might sever this sole
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link with the west bank of the Roul and leave his force stranded here in this vast pit of twitching decorticated filth.

He therefore drew the Great Truncheon of Held and signaled with it to his troops. The lead square of tanks fell back, then the tanks supporting the spearhead of elite motorcycle SS, so that the vanguard of the strike force behind Feric and Best was now composed entirely of black motorcycles reddened with gore, driven by the most heroic specimens of true humanity, their scarlet cloaks streaming in the wind of passage, their faces visages of fanatic determination, their truncheons drawn. This band of heroes would cut a path through the monstrosities on the bridge with naked steel and iron determination,

Howling a battle cry, Feric led this solid phalanx of SS men straight into the herd of grunting, drooling, rioting giants clogging the entrance to the bridge. With a swipe of the Steel Commander, he decapitated a slaving, red-eyed Warrior, finishing the mighty stroke by smashing right through the barrel-like thighs of two more of the creatures, who fell in agony in an ocean of their own blood. At his side, Best beat a huge Warrior to its knees with a rapid series of truncheon blows, then dispatched the creature with a swipe that broke its spine. All around, the SS men layed out scores of the creatures with fire and precision; scarcely a truncheon blow was aimed that did not hit its mark with telling effect.

The SS troop fought its way through the melee, slaying hundreds of the foul creatures and finally throwing the rest into a terrorized panic, so that howling, slaving giants ran madly from the fray in all directions, scattering out of the path of the Helder troops, and clearing the way

for Feric and his men to fall upon the rear of the marching formation on the bridge itself.

Before the Dominator on the war-wagon could begin the clumsy maneuver of turning his troops about in this confined space, Feric himself had already attacked the exposed backs of, a score of Warriors, smashing their heads open with the Steel Commander, while the SS, their battle fervor raised to fever pitch by the sight of their leader's heroic efforts, pulped heads, crushed legs, and otherwise dispatched hundreds of the creatures, clearing the first fifty yards of the bridge and allowing the vanguard of tanks and motorcycles behind the spearhead to enter upon it.

By the time the Warrior formation had been turned to
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confront the onrushing Helder, Feric and his men had fought their way nearly to the great creaking wooden wheels of the war-wagon. A great wall of Warriors pressed literally shoulder to shoulder barred further advance with a deadly threshing machine of giant truncheons. With a final sweep of the Great Truncheon, Peric lopped the arms off a dozen of the creatures, sending their truncheons flying, and their tiny drooling mouths to shrieking.

He then drew his submachine gun and fired a long burst at the mutants atop the flatbed of the war-wagon; from this vantage, it was impossible to tell which was the Dom, so all must be speedily slain. Six of the Zind soldiers were instantly ripped apart by Feric's blast; then Best opened up, and all around him the SS men hammered away at the creatures atop the war-wagon with their blazing sub-machine guns.

After only a few moments of this withering fire, the last denizen of the war-wagon was a riddled corpse, and chaos overtook the Zind slaves on the bridge. The huge, nearly armless Pullers drawing the war-wagon vented great howls into the air and began running in diverse directions still leashed to the battle cart, which began to totter and weave as it was yanked every which way at once. As for the remaining Warriors on the bridge, they were thrown into the same crazed state as their fellows east of the Roul, thrashing about in all directions, smashing at each other, grunting, urinating, heaving, and shoving their fellows and themselves off the bridge and into the carnage-filled river.

It was child's play for Feric and his men to hack their way through this twitching mass of effectively decapitated muscle; the task was made that much easier when the bulk

of the Pullers suddenly chanced to run in the same direction, dragging the war-wagon and themselves over the edge of the bridge and down into the depths of the Roul with a gigantic splash. The great sound alone seemed to add to the panic, and scores of Warriors actually leapt off the bridge into the river, where their rudimentary brains proved quite unequal to the task of swimming.

Led by Feric and his SS elite guard, the Helder column brushed aside all residual opposition and roared across the bridge to join the climactic battle on the west bank of the Roul. Five tanks were the last to cross, and when their treads were firmly on the soil of the west bank, they swiveled their turrets to the rear, and with three quick

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barrages blew the bridge to bits, stranding the decimated rear half of the Zind horde behind the wide watery barrier of the river.

As for the rest of the horde, it was now trapped between Waffing's men to the west and Feric's to the east, halved in size, cut off from relief, and surrounded.

Waffing's troops were dug in along a wide front in the flattened suburbs of western Lumb. From behind the cover of trenches and rude earthen embankments, thousands of Helder troops sent a continuous hail of bullets at the waves of Warriors that the Zind horde ceaselessly launched against their positions. From far behind the lines, the old Helder steam dreadnaughts lobbed high explosives onto the horde without fear of retaliation from the shorter ranged mortars of the Zind war-wagons. Thick clouds of acrid smoke obscured the air for miles along this front, and the din was nothing short of terrific.

By the time Feric's force approached the Zind rear echelon from behind, the horde, by sheer force of numbers, had established forward positions no more than a hundred yards from Waffing's front trenches, quite literally behind a huge embankment of dead Warriors, and directly in the face of withering machine-gun fire. As Feric watched from the crest of a rise, rank after rank of Warriors marched forward firing their rifles in synchronized mass volleys. Almost immediately, these creatures were torn to pieces by the Helder machine guns, but they were just as rapidly replaced by yet another rank of robotized ten-foot giants. Each new surge of Warriors brought the horde a foot or two closer to the Helder lines, though at enormous cost in manpower. The horde moved forward by a process of slow erosion, as imperceptibly, but as irresistibly, as a glacier moves down a mountain.

The vast horde that stretched before Feric marched steadily westward, endless rank after rank, straight into the barrels of Waffing's guns. Feric grinned wolfishly at Best. "The last thing the Doms expect is an attack from the rear!" he exclaimed. "We'll crush them between us like the insects they are!"

Feric waved the Steel Commander thrice overhead, and the SS shock troops went into terminal battle formation:

thousands of motorcycles spread out along a broad front on either side of Feric, with the tanks evenly interspersed amidst this forward wall.

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Feric swung the Great Truncheon down through the air, gunned his motorcycle engine and led this grand troop of men and metal down the rise and across the charred and broken ruins of Lumb straight for the rear of the Zind horde. As the SS force swept forward, the tank cannon fired barrage after barrage into the ranks of the enemy, concentrating their fire on the war-wagons, blowing scores of them sky-high in a few short minutes, so that by the time the motorcycles and tanks actually reached the horde, dozens of Warrior formations had already been converted into mobs of drooling, panicked animals.

Feric fell on a score of Warriors from the rear, smashing their skulls from behind with a heroic blow of the Great Truncheon. Amazingly enough, the ranks of ten-foot giants continued to march forward toward Waffing's line, ignoring the SS motorcyclists and tanks even as this force tore them to pieces. The motorcycle SS mowed down rank after rank of Warriors with their machine guns without encountering resistance. Best cut down a score of the creatures with a single burst of his submachine gun, a look of utter incredulity on his face.

By the time the remaining Dominators managed to turn their rear echelons around to cope with the SS attack, Feric had led his men deep into the horde, inflicting incredible carnage on the enemy; moreover, so many war-wagons had been destroyed and Dominators slain that there were more rogue Warriors thrashing about insanely than there were disciplined troops. The Zind advance toward Waffing's positions fell apart in a mad melee of thrashing, shrieking, defecating animalism.

Seeing this and therefore knowing that Feric's men had arrived on the scene, every last man in Waffing's army erupted from the trenches and stormed forward in all-out do-or-die charge.

The Zind horde, already thrown into utter disarray, was now caught between two great advancing lines of Helder steel and heroism. The outcome of the battle under such conditions was a foregone conclusion.

Slashing his way through veritable seas of sour-smelling crazed Warriors who thrashed about pointlessly as they died, Feric was filled with a fierce elation. Each great blow of the Steel Commander felled another brace of obscene monstrosities; each Warrior slain was one less enemy left alive to bar his way to total victory. All around him, the SS mowed down Warriors with an ever-increasing frenzy, sum-

moning up vast reservoirs of hysterical strength, perhaps somehow drawing on the resources of the racial will itself. Feric and his men were united in a battlefield communion of heroic and triumphant struggle in which time and fatigue were empty words devoid of meaning.

Feric had no concept of how long the battle had gone on. He drove his motorcycle forward into the boiling chaos of the totally panicked Zind horde slaying everything before him with the Great Truncheon. His black leather uniform was virtually dyed red with gore; blood ran down the silvery shaft of the Steel Commander soaking his right hand in rich camelian ichor. Yet he felt no sense of time's passage nor hint of waning strength. The Warriors before him existed to be slain, and he slew them;

these were the only parameters of the universe of battle through which he moved.

Finally, there were clearly more dead Warriors strewn over the landscape than live ones milling about; soon Feric was dispatching the foul creatures one by one instead of in bunches because live targets for his mighty weapon were few and far between.

Peric spied two Warriors a few yards before him standing on a pile of their fallen fellows and half-heartedly belaboring each other with their huge truncheons. He drove his motorcycle toward this brace of giants, and swung the Great Truncheon of Held toward their heads for the kill. But before his weapon could strike home, one of the creatures suddenly shrieked and fell with its brains dashed out; Feric had to content himself with dispatching the other.

And quite suddenly, there before him stood the ponderous figure of Lar Waning, his field-gray uniform stained with blood, holding a large truncheon liberally caked with

gore.

Feric brought his cycle to a screaming halt in front of the beaming Waffing and dismounted. A moment later Best pulled up at his side. The three men stood together silently for a moment as SS men in black leather greeted army troops in field-gray. The jaws of the trap had come together—the horde of Zind had been destroyed.

It was the ebullient Waffing who broke the solemn silence. "We've done it!" he exclaimed. "Heldon is saved! This is the greatest moment in the history of the world!"

"No my dear Waning," Feric corrected him, "the greatest moment in the history of the world will be that
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moment in which the last Dominator takes his last breath. Rejoice at a battle well won, but don't mistake it for the end of the war."

Waning nodded, and the three men stood there in the setting sun regarding the late battlefield. Between the point at which they stood and the river Roul was a vast stretch of countryside completely carpeted with bodies of the enemy and the ruins of his equipment. SS and army mop-up squads were beginning to move about this huge midden; occasionally bursts of sharp gunfire fractured the solemn silence. The rich red rays of the setting sun seemed to form halos around the figures of Feric and his two paladins and bathed the triumphant battlefield in heavenly fire.

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With the hordes of Zind temporarily confined behind the Roul, the building of the New Heldon proceeded at a pace that could only be called breathtaking. The victory of Lumb had buoyed the spirits of the Holder race, while the realization that it was only a matter of time before the Dominators would once more unleash their ghastly minions against sacred human soil moved them to incredible feats of fanatic self-sacrifice and unprecedented energy.

The Classification Camp program was the finest example of the qualities that the New Order embodied. Nothing pleased Feric more than to tour these Camps, for here the patriotic fervor sweeping the country was given its highest and most concrete expression.

It was therefore with a sense of keen anticipation that Feric entered the main gate of Heldon's newest Classification Camp near the northern margin of the Emerald

Wood for an informal inspection conducted by Bors Remler himself. By his side, the SS Commandant fairly radiated patriotic fervor, and Feric reflected that not even Waning—who had worked wonders with the army and the armaments industry—had performed feats on a par with those

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of Rentier and the SS during these two months of feverish activity.

PhysicaBy, the Camp was a modest enough construct. An oblong perimeter of electrified barbed wire surrounded a large processing shed and row after row of plain wooden barracks, the whole presided over by machine-gun towers at each corner. The barracks were spacious enough to accommodate perhaps ten thousand Helder at any given time; it was a measure of the superhuman efficiency of the SS that Remler had promised a complete turnover of the population in each of the three dozen Camps every five days, and thus far had if anything bettered this projected performance.

Needless to say, none of this would have been possible without the fanatic support of the people of Heldon, such as the two thousand or more folk whom Remler had lined up in neat ranks for Feric's inspection in the main exercise yard of the Camp. These were for the most part apparently blemishless specimens who had temporarily doffed their civilian clothes for the plain gray numbered tunics of the Classification Camp. Though the sojourn in the Camp was something of a hardship even for the overwhelming majority who gained recertification, Feric was pleased to note that there wasn't a sour face in the lot. No doubt the possibility of gaining admission to the SS was an important contributing factor to the high morale in the Camps, for hardly a moment passed when the inmates did not have the dashing sight of a tall, blond, physically perfect specimen of SS manhood in tight black leather and scarlet cape before their eyes as an inspiration and an example.

As Feric halted about ten yards from the front rank of Camp inmates, Remler came to a precise heel-clicking halt at his side, and gave a silent Party salute.

Immediately, a veritable forest of arms shot into the air, and the hearty shout of "Hail Jaggar!" reverberated throughout the length and breadth of the Classification Camp.

Peric returned the salute, and, as was his custom, made a few brief remarks to reward the inmates for their self-sacrificing patriotism.

"Fellow Helder, I congratulate you on your spirit of patriotic self-sacrifice. I understand that over half of you are volunteers. Such idealistic fervor is an inspiration not only to myself but to each and every true human living under the Swastika. Further, it is a message that will
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strike fear into the Dominators of Zind and all who serve them at home and abroad. May not a Dom be found among you! May you all achieve recertification! May many among you be found worthy of entry into the SSI Hail Heldon! Hail Victory!"

With the answering roar of "Hail Jaggar!" still ringing in his ears, Feric led Remler toward the processing shed to complete his inspection of the Camp.

The processing shed was a large, low, rectangular building constructed of galvanized steel sheeting. A large crowd of Camp inmates presided over by tall blond SS men in spotless black leather milled about to one side of the main door. More SS men guarded four neat lines of inmates entering the building. As these lines moved rapidly inside, the SS continuously fed new inmates from the crowd into them, while SS squads now and then ushered groups of inmates from elsewhere in the Camp into the waiting area. The effect was of a continuously running process, an assembly line, as it were. Feric noted that the folk milling around in the waiting area talked among themselves quite animatedly, while those already queued up adopted a solemn dignity appropriate to the import of the occasion.

"I'm glad to see that the lines move so rapidly," Feric remarked to Remler. "For humanitarian considerations as well as those of efficiency."

Remler nodded crisply. "Some of these young fellows are so confident of admission to the SS that they try to trade off their rations for an earlier place in line," he said. Feric beamed as Remler led him around to a side door;

he could well sympathize with such fervor. Still, it would not do to have the best potential SS candidates sap their physiques by starvation!

"Issue an order that any man caught trading off his rations will be put back ten places in line," he commanded. "We can't let our best genetic purebreds starve themselves through misguided enthusiasm."

"Yes, my Commander!" Remler replied as they entered the corrugated-steel shed.

The unpainted interior of the shed was starkly functional. Each of the four lines filed past a long counter which ran half the length of the building; behind these were long ranks of SS genetic analysts in trim black leather armed with batteries of tests which were administered in sequence to the inmates. The four lines debouched into a small open area well guarded by a dozen SS armed with

truncheons and submachine guns. Beyond this, the rest of the shed was hidden by a sheet-steel wall broken only by four unmarked doorways. As each man completed his tests, he was directed through one of the doors for further processing. Feric noted that most of the men were ushered through the doorway on the extreme right.

"We've recently developed four additional tests," Remler told Peric proudly. "Each Helder must now meet twenty-three genetic criteria, and of course the entrance requirements for the SS are infinitely more stringent. Since we've already uncovered close to seventy thousand SS recruits in the Camps, we've been able to upgrade the SS criteria once more. The women's Camps have produced nearly forty thousand females found genetically suitable for mating with the SS. Can you imagine what incredible specimens the next generation will produce, my Commander?"

"There's no doubt about it, Remler," Feric said, "you've worked wonders."

Glowing with well-deserved pride, Remler led Feric through the extreme left-hand doorway, and into a small cubicle where two SS men armed with submachine guns and truncheons snapped to instant attention and saluted smartly at the sight of the Supreme Commander. In the floor of the cubicle was a drainhole; a water-hose was attached to a spigot projecting from a wall. The concrete floor was nevertheless stained a subtle reddish-brown.

"Thus far, we've uncovered only a few thousand Doms," Remler said. "However, SS scientists are very close to developing a specific test for the Dominator genotype. As it is, I'm afraid that some Doms do escape with the more ordinary mongrels and mutants."

Feric returned the salutes of the SS exterminators and nodded to Remler. "When a foolproof specific test has been developed, it will be a relatively simple matter to reprocess the sterilees and thus expunge the last Dominator gene from the face of Heldon."

"At any rate, the problem will be solved in the next generation one way or the other," Remler pointed out.

Remler led Feric through the far door of the extermination chamber, across a corridor, and into a large room filled with grinning, excited Helder queued up before a wall of storage bins to receive their new certificates of genetic purity and their street clothes.

Before the SS Commandant could make a move to call
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for a salute, Feric was noticed and a slightly ragged massed chant of "Hail Jaggar!" accompanied by somewhat individualistic saluting broke out among these exuberant folk. This was followed by over a minute of spontaneous cheering.

Feric could not help breaking into a grin himself as he saluted in return. These Helder had good cause for rejoicing—they had passed the new stringent genetic tests and had been readmitted to the communion of true humanity. Feric was deeply moved by their infectious joyousness; it renewed his iron determination to insure that true humans and only true humans inherited the future of the world.

Next Remler conducted him across the corridor again and into a long rectangular room that was obviously his pride and joy. The portal leading from the main processing area debouched directly in front of a counter behind which stood five SS genetic analysts, tall blond specimens all. Beyond this battery of genetic experts was an SS doctor equipped with all sorts of precision medical paraphernalia. The rear of the room was occupied by a series of desks at which sat tall, blond young men busily writing in test booklets under the supervision of an SS captain. The sense of patriotic fervor and excitement in this room was all but palpable, for here those inmates who had given indication in the general testing were given the opportunity to pass the incredibly stringent genetic, somatic, mental, and patriotic rigors of the SS entrance examination.

At the sight of Feric, everyone in the room snapped to rigid attention, saluted, and roared "Hail Jaggar!" Feric saluted briefly in reply, and then indicated with a motion of his hand that the solemn testing should be carried out without taking note of his presence by further demonstrations. He himself led Remler out of the room through a side door, for these lads deserved to have their attention undivided at a time like this, and certainly the presence of their Supreme Commander at such a moment could hardly be called undistracting!

As he stepped through the doorway, Feric found himself confronting a queue of white-faced, stricken-looking specimens. SS men armed with truncheons and sub-machine guns guarded this line of unfortunates at regular intervals. At the head of the line stood an SS major with a clipboard and a scribe; beyond him were two doorways.

As Peric entered, he heard this functionary addressing
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the grim-faced Helder at the head of (he line, a decent-looking specimen by superficial appearance.

"It is my duty to inform you that you have failed to entirely measure up to the standards of the pure human genotype. You have two options: exile from the Fatherland forever or sterilization. Which do you choose?"

The fellow hesitated a moment; Feric spied tears in his eyes. Then suddenly Feric's presence was noted and everyone—SS men and sour-faced inmates alike—snapped out Party salutes and shouted "Hail Jaggar!" with a vigor and enthusiasm that left nothing to be desired. Feric was deeply touched by such a demonstration of racial solidarity, coming as it did from those called upon to sacrifice their hope of future progeny for the good of the Fatherland.

A moment later, the Holder at the front of the line squared his shoulders, clicked his heels, came to attention[^] and replied to the SS major clearly and firmly: "I choose sterilization for the good of the Fatherland!" He then gave a letter-perfect Party salute and marched resolutely through the right-hand doorway.

"Eighty-five percent of the rejects choose sterilization over exile," Render whispered quietly in Feric's ear.

Tears of mingled joy and sadness came to Feric's eyes, for as reject after reject marched stoically through the right-hand door to be shorn of their generative powers, he knew that before his eyes was the ultimate proof of the justice of his cause and the triumph of the Swastika.

Field Marshall High Commander Lar Waffing arose somewhat ponderously to his feet, glanced at the great map behind Feric's elevated chair, nodded at the generals assembled in the War Room of the Star Keep, smiled directly at Feric himself, then made his formal report.

"My Commander, it is both my honor and my pleasure to report that the renovation of the army may now be considered complete. Our forces now boast over three

hundred tanks and the new factories continue to pour out scores more every week. We now have over two hundred fighters and dive-bombers and scores more rolling off the assembly lines. Half a million fine new men have been added to the ranks, and I'm proud to say that every Helder soldier is now equipped with a spanking new sub-machine gun as well as a formidable truncheon. Ammunition is in copious supply, and we've stockpiled enough
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petrol for a month of all-out war. Army scientists are in the process of reconstructing guided missiles and many other weapons of the ancients.

"In short, my Commander, you now have at your disposal a force awaiting only your orders to spring into action!"

"Well done, Waffing!" Feric said with considerable enthusiasm as the High Commander reseated himself. The army and the SS needed only quick action in order to hone their fighting edge. The only question now was where and how.

"Do you think we're ready to annihilate Zind, Waffing?" he asked.

Waffing lost himself in thought for a few moments. "I have no doubt we could defeat Zind if we attacked now," he said. "But the war would be a long and arduous one. Give us six months and our army will have doubled its size, we'll have thousands of tanks and planes, and the speed of our advance across Zind will be limited chiefly by the velocity of which our tanks are capable. We'd pulverize the swine in a lightning war."

Feric pondered this assessment of the situation. It would certainly be better to wait a few months until the hosts of Heldon were up to projected full force before launching the final attack on Zind. On the other hand, the army could use some immediate action.

"Waffing, would it be possible for Zind to attack us within the next six weeks?" he inquired.

"Hardly," the High Commander replied. "Their logistical system is quite sluggish. We would know of such an assault far in advance. No such preparations are now under way."

Feric rose to his feet, his mind made up. He turned to face the huge war map on the wall behind him, and addressed his commanders.

"Within two weeks, Heldon will march. One great column will sweep through Borgravia, take Gormond, and proceed westward into Veton. At the same time, the northern arm of our forces will march into Veton through Feder, linking up with the southern army at the capital. The combined force will then storm across Husak along a wide front, smash all opposition, and drive the remnants of the Husak forces into the western wildlands to perish. As our troops secure Borgravia, every mud hut in Cressia, Arbona, and Karmath will be leveled by the air

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force and the vermin driven into the southern wildlands. Thus we will secure our rear for the final showdown with Zind. Should this entire operation take more than a month, I will be sorely disappointed."

The jaws of the old generals fell open at the audacity of this plan; Waning, however, pounded his fist on the table, grinning with pleasure. "If the operation takes more than a month, my Commander," he declared, "I will personally shoot every officer in the army, then demote myself to the rank of a common foot soldier, put the muzzle of my submachine gun in my mouth, and execute myself for high

treason!"

Feric chuckled with good-natured appreciation of Waffing's drollery. Waning himself could not contain his own high spirits and burst into guffaws. In a moment even the dour generals joined in the merriment.

Still, Feric realized that the very spirit that moved Waffing to make such an extreme vow would move him to carry it out in the inconceivable event that such expiation should prove necessary. What a fine troop of heroes it was his honor to command!

As the hour of midnight approached, Feric Jaggar assumed his position in the observer's seat of the lead Helder tank. Beside him in the driver's position, Ludolf Best's eyes shone with excitement and fanaticism. The true battle in this campaign would be with time itself, for the Borgravian army hardly qualified as a joke. Therefore the vanguard of the force that Feric had assembled just inside the southeastern margin of the Emerald Wood consisted of a hundred and fifty tanks, well stocked with incendiary and high-explosive shells. Combined with the devastating force of a hundred dive-bombers even now winging their way toward the Borgravian capital, these tanks would be enough to pulverize all organized opposition within Borgravia in a matter of hours. As the tanks swept eastward

across Borgravia, motorized infantry and motorcycle SS would mop up in their van, and by the time the tank force reached the Vetonian border. Render would already have Classification Camps under construction.

Feric had decided to lead the initial advance into Borgravia himself and remain at the head of the Helder forces cleaning out that cesspit until Gormond was leveled; this for personal reasons as well as considerations of general morale. He could conceive of few sights that
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would please him more than that of the wretched Borgravian capital in which his youth had been wasted smashed flat and going up in flames.

Best had been checking his timepiece eagerly almost every thirty seconds. Once more he checked it; then, with a boyish grin, he started the tank engine. "It's time, my Commander!" he said.

Smiling at Best's youthful enthusiasm, Feric drew the Great Truncheon of Held, stood up, and thrust the shaft of his weapon high over his head through the open hatch of the tank, its gleaming headball catching a silvery flash of moonlight. Abruptly, the night came alive with the chattering thunder of scores of gas engines sputtering and catching. The powerful thrumming of the engine of Feric's own tank set the very molecules of his flesh marching to a stirring martial beat. Feric sheathed the Steel Commander, dogged the hatch above him shut, strapped himself in, turned on his throat microphone, and gave the long-awaited command to Best and to his forces: "Forward!"

Grinding earth and shrubbery beneath its massive iron treads, the tank leapt forward, out of the clearing which served as the marshalling area. As Best slowly brought the tank up to speed, Feric looked through his rear periscope, and saw a solid sea of tanks following close behind, surging across the clearing and onto the road that led to the Ulm fording. The formation was simplicity itself:

Feric's tank at the point, and behind it ten ranks of fifteen tanks each. The motorized infantry and motorcycle divisions would not begin their advance behind this shield of Steel until two hours later.

At Bogel's instigation—though certainly not without Feric's wholehearted approval—the tanks had been decked out for this occasion in heroic grandeur. The body of each was painted a glossy black, while the turrets were scarlet with great black swastikas in white circles on either side. In addition, a red swastika flag streamed proudly

from the radio mast of each dreadnaught. As the formation of tanks reached the broad plain that debouched upon the Ulm, this inspiring spectacle was being televised not only throughout Heldon but to Husak and Vetonias as well, the better to paralyze their forces with well-justified fear of the armed might of Heldon. What a grand sight this phalanx of gleaming black might accented with bold scarlet and heroic swastikas made as it swept toward the Ulm, filling the air for miles around with man-made

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thunder and surrounding itself with a great cloud of boiling dust!

At this longitude, the Ulm was little more than a shallow stream; the Borgravian border fortifications on its far bank consisted of little more than a few trenches filled with mongrels behind rolls of barbed wire. Nevertheless, as the tanks ground toward the river through the darkness, the night was suddenly lit up by flashes of fire from the Borgravian positions, and Feric could hear a few random bullets spatter harmlessly off the impenetrable armor of his dreadnaught. No doubt the squadrons of aerial dreadnaughts that had crossed the border half an hour ago had alerted the pathetic wretches, for all the good it would do them.

Feric thumbed his microphone switch and gave the order to the crew of his own tank and to the formation simultaneously: "Fire at will until all resistance is crushed!"

A low whine could be felt as well as heard in the tank as the turret crew aligned the cannon with its target. Then a great blast and shudder went through the dreadnaught, and a moment later Feric saw an orange explosion blossom in the darkness on the far side of the Ulm. At once, the deafening rolling thunder of continuous massed cannonfire shook his body even through the steel walls of the tank, a meteor-swarm of shells soared overhead, and the Borgravian positions erupted in great fountains of fire.

Once more Feric's tank fired as the formation hurtled forward; the massed fire of the black dreadnaughts continued to pound the Borgravian positions to pieces. A final fusillade sent clouds of earth and flesh flying in all directions, and then the treads of Feric's tank were splashing through the shallow waters of the Ulm. Feric thumbed his machine-gun stud as the tank tore through the Borgravian barbed wire; behind him, the tank formation filled the air with the clatter and sparkle of bullets as they squashed what little was left of the fortifications totally flat.

Of the Borgravians themselves, little was to be seen

save a few bloody fragments scattered among the still-steaming shell holes. Those few worthless wretches who had not been blown to pieces by the cannon had fled shrieking and howling in terror into the night. When the sun rose, the motorized infantry and the motorcycle SS would hunt down, and annihilate these stragglers one by one, if need be. The more ruthless precision demonstrated at the outset, the sooner it would be obvious to all mu-
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tants and mongrels in the path of the Helder advance that resistance was less than useless. Thus, a well-executed policy of total annihilation of the enemy would prove the most merciful course possible in the long run.

All through the night, the tank force surged eastward through the rolling countryside of Borgravia toward Gormond without encountering anything that could reasonably be termed organized resistance.

Feric had ordered the decimation of all villages, farms, and other structures in the path of the advance, and the slaying of any Borgravian rabble stupid enough to show its corrupted face. For the most part, the habitations in these parts consisted of solitary peasant huts crudely constructed of timber held together with dried mud or dung. A single incendiary shell was more than enough to convert one of these sties to a roaring bonfire, and another shot or two sufficed to set the fields ablaze. Occasionally, crabbed creatures would scuttle from the ruins like dung-beetles to be cut down by a burst or two of machine-gun fire, but for the most part the Borgravians in the area took to their heels well in advance of the tanks, leaving it to the mop-up troops to round them up for processing. Even the occasional villages that the column encountered were deserted and undefended, so that the tanks were able to cut a wide swath of total destruction through the countryside without seriously depleting their supply of ammunition.

About an hour before sunrise, Feric spotted a red glow on the eastern horizon that seemed to flicker and crackle like a far-off conflagration.

"Look, Best," he said, "that must be Gormond!"

"Our dive-bombers are certainly teaching the swine a lesson."

Not much later, the dim far-off rumble of explosions could be heard, and by the time the sun had fully risen, the bombs falling on the city filled the air with a sound very much like thunder, great flames were clearly visible over the far-off ruins, and Feric thought he could barely

make out individual aerial dreadnaughts diving on the city in their bomb runs.

Suddenly Best was pointing due east. "Over there, my Commander," he said. "I believe that's the Borgravian army."

Across the broad plain between the Helder tank force and Gormond, Feric discerned a kind of gray mottling on
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the scraggly gray-green landscape; this was apparently the Borgravian army assembled to put up some sort of resistance to the Helder advance.

As if to confirm this observation, a few flashes of fire blossomed from this gray scum, and a few moments later a half-dozen shells exploded harmlessly nearly a thousand yards short of the Helder tanks. The Helder gunners, for their part, knew better than to waste ammunition by firing at this range. Feric thumbed his microphone button and contacted the leader of the aerial dreadnaughts attacking

Gormond.

"This is the Supreme Commander speaking. Divert a score of your planes to attack the Borgravian troops to the east of the city."

"At once, my Commander! Hail Jaggar!"

Thus by the time the gray mottling resolved itself into a sordid assortment of Borgravian mongrels in dull gray uniforms scattered across the line of advance in ragged disorder, twenty swift, sleek, black aerial dreadnaughts were already diving on the foe, one after another in a continuous series of strafing swoops, pinning the creatures down and ripping them to pieces with a steady rain of machine-gun bullets. Like great metal eagles, the planes dipped and soared, catching scores of mutated wretches dead in their tracks as they ran and leapt stupidly in panic, blowing to bits with aerial bombs the few cumbersome old dreadnaughts that the Borgravians boasted; altogether a magnificent and inspiring performance.

"Open fire!" Feric ordered his tank commandTs. "Fire at will as long as there are targets!"

Thunder shook his tank as the cannon fired, shells whistled overhead, and a forest of explosions mushroomed in the ranks of the Borgravians. Again and again and again, the tanks dropped fusillades of high explosive shells on the ragged rabble, while the aerial dreadnaughts continued to strafe the mutants with their machine guns.

Then at last the tanks themselves reached the Borgravian army, such as it was.

A vast untidy mess of trenches and foxholes had been hastily dug on the plain before the burning capital; rolls of barbed wire had been strung almost at random among these rude and ridiculous fortifications. The entire area was pocked with hundreds of smoking bomb and shell craters; the battlefield was cloaked in a pungent gunpowder mist. Fragments of smashed Borgravian equipment

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were everywhere—shards of howitzers, bits of ruined dreadnaughts, broken and twisted machine guns—and all manner of revolting mutants in gray uniforms lay strewn all about in bloody bits and pieces.

"Hardly anything left worth bothering with, my Commander," Best observed with a certain disappointment.

This was something of a slight exaggeration, for from the cover of trenches, foxholes, craters, and twisted bits of wreckage, Parrotfaces, Blueskins, Toadmen, dwarfs, and creatures with every other conceivable genetic affliction fired rifles uselessly at the tanks, their bullets clattering off the armor plate like so many pebbles.

Feric held down the firing stud of his machine gun, sending a continuous stream of fiery lead into the monstrosities before him as the treads of his tank smashed through a roll of barbed wire and crushed a Parrotface, a hunchbacked dwarf, and a Blueskin huddled behind the wreckage of a dreadnaught. "Use machine guns!" he ordered his tank commanders. "Cannon switch to incendiary shells!"

The tanks advanced swiftly across the battlefield behind a solid wall of machine-gun bullets, crushing wire, trenches, foxholes, and Borgravians beneath their massive steel treads. At point-blank range, the cannon lobbed phosphorous shells into the ranks of the mutant rabble. Hundreds of crabbed creatures shambled, shuffled, ran and crawled madly in all directions, their uniforms and flesh aflame. The Borgravians in the path of the tanks began to leap up out of their positions insanely, running a few yards in a cowardly frenzy of fear, only to be mowed down by machine guns and pulped beneath the treads of the onrushing tanks.

The Holder Juggernaut rolled across the plain toward Gormond, driving the remnants of the broken Borgravian army before it; a tight formation of black dreadnaughts and streaming red swastika banners pulverizing everything

in its path, leaving behind it nothing but flame, ashes, and the dead bodies of the enemy.

"What a magnificent sight, Best!" Feric exclaimed. "Can you imagine the effect this will have in Vetonia and Husak?"

"Perhaps they will now surrender without further resistance, my Commander."

"Surrender will not be tolerated in this war!" Feric said. "We must make an example of all these mutants states."
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In a few minutes, Feric's tank entered the outskirts of Gormond, or rather what was left of the Borgravian capital: heaps of smoldering rubble here and there enlivened by a wooden building still brightly aflame. The corpses of mutants and mongrels were everywhere, many of them decently burned beyond recognition, but all too many clearly displaying the most ghastly genetic degeneration—tiny pinheads, long dangling arms, mottled skin, of blue, green, brown, or even purple, disgusting hairy humps, chitinous beaks or even carapaces, limbs terminating in clusters of wormlike tentacles, an altogether stomach-turning display of warped and twisted protoplasm.

As the tanks stormed through this flaming chamel heap of genetic refuse, occasionally smashing a freakishly intact structure with their cannon or routing a gaggle of grotesque survivors with their machine guns, Feric's mind was drawn back to the horrid days of his exile, when these foul warrens were alive with disgusting vermin who made his every waking moment an offense to his humanity.

A Blueskin darted from one heap of rubble to the next, and Feric ripped it to pieces with a burst of his machine gun. "One less bag of twisted chromosomes to contaminate the world gene pool!" he exclaimed. "Best, you cannot conceive of the personal satisfaction it gives me to finally wipe this reeking cesspit from the face of the earth!"

Within an hour, the tank force had crunched its way through the ruins of Gormond, taking great care that not one structure was left standing, not one foul monstrosity left alive to spawn its unclean kind once more. Feric had not the slightest doubt that Remler and the SS were fully capable of purging the former territory of Borgravia of its last contaminating element and rendering it fit for incorporation into the Domain of Heldon. But it was a matter of personal honor that his own tank force should complete the purification of Gormond itself down to the last fetid

structure and twisted gene. The cesspit to which the treachery of Karmak had condemned him for so many years must be expunged by fire from the face of the earth as if it had never been.

And as the tank force swept westward across the plains beyond what had been Gormond driving a horde of refugees before it like the subhuman swine they were, Feric peered through the rear periscope and saw nothing but a
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great pillar of smoke and fire boiling into the sky behind him where the dung heap of Gormond had been.

"I wonder if you can understand the personal satisfaction I feel at finally having totally removed this blot on the honor of my pedigree. Best," he said softly.

"But my Commander, your ability to wield the Great Truncheon of Held is clear proof that your pedigree is the finest in the world!"

Feric smiled. "You're quite right, of course," he said. "Still I somehow feel that a personal affront has been removed, and this redoubles my pleasure at a job well done."

At this Best nodded enthusiastically. "That I can readily understand, my Commander!" he exclaimed.

The sun shone brightly over the clear waters of the Ulm as Feric's newly polished black command car, escorted by a squad of equally spotless motorcycle SS, dashed across the Ulmgam bridge and into the province of South Ulmland, which only a month ago had been the mutant pestilence of Borgravia. At his side, Bors Remler beamed with pleasure, for even at this early stage, the industry and the fanaticism of the Helder people under the direction of the SS had performed miracles toward transforming the former genetic dung heap into a wholesome province suitable for true human habitation.

The border town that had been known as Pormi and was now Bridgehead had been completely renovated. Helder engineers had completely razed the squalid huts and hovels of the Borgravian town and laid out new streets paved with concrete in a pleasing pattern that combined a regular grid with a series of avenues radiating out from five great circular plazas. Many new buildings had already gone up and scores more were under construction. The public edifices were of black stone or pink-veined marble, constructed on an appropriately grand scale and suitably embellished with gleaming bronze trceries and heroic

statuary in which the theme of continuity between the heroes of the past and the greater heroes of the Swastika predominated. The more mundane structures were of glazed brick in cheery hues of yellow, blue, red, and green, and more of them than not boasted artfully carved wooden facades. Bridgehead already boasted several hundred Helder colonists. These, along with the construction crews, lined the streets of the half-finished model town,
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waving little paper swastika flags, cheering, giving impromptu Party salutes, and shouting "Hail Jaggar!" as

Feric's car promenaded by.

For his part, Feric could not help grinning with pleasure as he stood erect in the back of the open car returning the salutes. Having just returned from a triumphant tour of Westlands, the new province which only a week ago had been Vetonian, he knew with total accuracy just how well the war was going. The southern and northern wings of the Helder army had linked up two weeks after the opening of the campaign, well ahead of schedule, and had squashed the Vetonian army flat within three days, and then utterly demolished the capital of Barthang with Waffing's newly operational guided missiles. This took the remaining backbone out of what was left of Vetonian and sent the rabble screaming into the southern wildlands or into Husak. Now Waning was leading the army across Husak, and Kolchak was expected to fall in a day or so. Once the Husak capital was pulverized, the war would have reached its successful conclusion, and all that would remain would be the task of purifying the conquered lands and colonizing them with true humans.

And now he beheld the irrefutable evidence of the vigor and speed with which the Helder people, led by the SS, could purify conquered land and make it fit for incorporation into the Domain of Heldon.

As the convoy moved on out into the open countryside, Remler turned to Feric with perhaps a slight hint of trepidation on his face. "My Commander," he said, "I've taken the liberty of ordering the driver to take us to a nearby Classification Camp. We have a minor problem that I believe requires your personal decision, and I feel you should see a Borgravian Camp before you act."

Feric nodded agreement somewhat absently, for he was absorbed in the Helder ingenuity and industriousness which were clearly in evidence here in the country as well. The surface of the road was now hard gray concrete instead of Borgravian dust and mire. Here and there

sturdy wooden Helder farmhouses dotted the landscape and homesteaders were in evidence putting the newly reclaimed human soil to the plow. Feric's convoy toured on for more than twenty miles along the spanking new road through a countryside that was even now more Helder than Borgravian.

Indeed, of the former mongrelized denizens of Borgra-

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via, nothing was in evidence until the convoy approached one of the great Classification Camps that had been set up throughout South Ulmland, carefully segregated from centers of human habitation.

This Camp, typical of those constructed in the conquered territories, was of far greater extent than those within old Heldon though built along the same basic lines, for the task here was proportionately greater. In this Camp alone, nearly a hundred thousand Borgravians were confined in a huge rectangle of electrified barbed wire and housed in a vast warren of barracks within this perimeter;

moreover, such a Camp population was by no means atypical of the conditions that obtained in the new provinces.

As the command-car driver brought the vehicle to a halt outside the high fence, Feric was presented with a spectacle as revolting as any he had ever been forced to witness. Crammed together behind the barbed wire was a seemingly endless throng of grotesque creatures of every nauseating description. Thousands of Parrotfaces clicked their beaks at each other. Humpbacked dwarfs of every variety scuttled about like herds of monster crabs. Creatures with arms longer than their bodies shambled about aimlessly like jungle apes. Skins were of every cancerous hue: green, blue, red, brown, purple. Pinheads rubbed shoulders with loathsome Toadmen. Moreover, dung, offal, and filth were everywhere in evidence, and the stench that arose from the Camp was nothing short of terrific.

"I wanted you to experience the reality of the problem firsthand, my Commander," Remler said. "We've rounded up every last Borgravian, and the SS is more than equal to the task of confining them to the Camps, and even a blind man would have no trouble separating the true human stock from the genetic rubbish provided he still had use of his nose. But what are we to do with all these sordid creatures? We hold millions in the Borgravian Camps, and the situation in the other conquered provinces is no bet-

ter."

Beyond the barbed wire, Parrotfaces, Blueskins, Toadmen, and all varieties of other monstrosities picked through dung and filth with their fingers for morsels of edible material which they transferred directly to their mouths. Feric's gorge began to rise.

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"It's obvious that they must all be sterilized and then exiled into the wildlands," he said.

"But my Commander, what is to prevent millions of the wretches from simply wandering back to their former habitations? You've seen the wonders we've worked here;

in a few months, this land will be indistinguishable from the rest of Heldon. But how can this be accomplished with hordes of pauperized mutants shambling about the countryside?"

There was no denying that Render had raised a cogent point. What a contrast between the civilized air of Bridgehead and the surrounding countryside and the fetid sty the same environs had been when rabble such as was confined behind the wire infested the area! How would it be possible to encourage Helder to colonize the new provinces if they were presented with the foul spectacle of degenerate vermin at every turn?

"Perhaps it would be better to confine the creatures to the Camps for the duration of their lifespans," Feric said, as a dull-eyed Toadman not ten yards from the car dropped his pants and proceeded to defecate.

"Such is my feeling, my Commander," Remler replied. "But the expense of feeding and housing millions of such useless wretches for decades staggers the imagination, and to what useful end?"

"I see your point," Feric said. "From my own experience among the Borgravians, I know that they lead uniformly sordid lives of great misery; they are genetically incapable of anything better. No doubt euthanasia would be a humane service to the wretches as well as our most pragmatic course. But I absolutely insist that the task be carried out with a minimum of pain and as efficiently and cheaply as possible."

"Of course, my Commander!" Remler said. "SS scientists have developed a gas which saps the subject of consciousness and then of vitality without so much as a

trace of discomfort. Moreover, it is effective in very small doses, and not unduly expensive to manufacture. We could process the inmates of every Camp within the new territories in this manner for the cost of maintaining the Camps as they are for six weeks."

The stench of the massed Borgravians lay heavily in Feric's nostrils like the miasma of some unimaginably vast manure pile. Clearly the program that Remler had suggested was the most practical way of dealing with the
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former denizens of the new territories; the Helder people could hardly be expected to expend vast sums for decades on the upkeep of these wretched monstrosities, and to let such creatures run wild on true human soil was equally unthinkable. Moreover, these poor creatures certainly had the right to expect that their true human superiors would put them out of their misery as quickly and as painlessly as possible, rather than leave them to rot in their own offal. On this question, the dictates of pragmatism and absolute morality coincided. The humanitarian duty of the Helder people was identical with the economic necessity.

"Very well, Remler," Feric said. "You will procure the necessary materials and complete the processing of the Classification Camp inmates within two months."

"Within six weeks, my Commander!" Remler promised fervently.

"You're a credit to the Swastika, Remler!" Feric exclaimed.

Although he knew full well that the struggle for the preservation of the true human genotype was hardly over as long as the Doms and their minions brooded in the vastness of Zind, Feric felt that the Helder people had more than earned a celebration. He therefore declared a day of national rejoicing one week after the fall of Kolchak completed the final victory of the Swastika over the last remaining mongrel state in the west.

All over the Domain of Heldon, Party rallies were scheduled; in Heldhime itself, Feric determined to put on the largest and most inspiring spectacle of all time, which would be televised to the far corners of the expanded nation as a treat and an inspiration for all.

In an open field not far from the city, an enormous reviewing stand had been erected. As the sun began to sink toward the western horizon, this construct by itself presented a sight of considerable grandeur to the hundreds

of thousands of Helder who crowded the field around it as far as the eye could see. The reviewing stand was erected as a series of cylinders of ever-decreasing diameters, one atop another. The base of the tower was a circular grandstand of steps fifty feet high upon which stood a thousand SS purebreds, the absolute cream of the elite: none under six and a half feet tall, all with flaxen hair and piercing blue eyes, and decked out in spotless tight black leather uniforms, the chrome fittings of which had been polished

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to the point where the setting sun flashed orange fire off thousands of diamondlike facets. Each of these superhuman specimens held a flaming torch, the crimson brilliance of which matched the hue of their flowing swastika capes. Atop this giant pedestal of flame was a smaller cylinder draped with scarlet swastika bunting upon which stood the high Party officials—Waning, Best, Bogel, and Remler—magnificent in their black Party uniforms. Finally, the central spire of the reviewing stand was a long narrow shaft of bright scarlet a full fifty feet tall at the summit of which stood Feric in heroic black leather and scarlet cape, the Great Truncheon of Held, newly polished and dangling from his wide leather belt. He was lit from below by a hidden electric globe with a subtle reddish tint that gave him the appearance of a living heroic bronze as he stood there looking down upon the endless sea of his followers from a height of more than a hundred feet.

Across the wide expanse of open parade ground outlined with torches which cut an arrow-straight path through the watching multitude, Feric faced an enormous wooden swastika a hundred and sixty feet tall.

At the precise moment that the bottom edge of the solar disc touched the western horizon line, casting a rich red dusk over the countryside, twenty sleek black aerial dreadnaughts roared over the parade ground not five hundred feet in the air; the echoing thunder of their swift passage merged with the mighty cheer of the crowd. At this spectacular signal, the giant swastika burst into flame with an explosive roar that set the soul humming.

Across the wide expanse of parade ground, Feric could still feel the warmth of this ensign of glory setting his blood afire as the great parade began with five thousand gleaming black SS motorcycles dashing past the reviewing stand at sixty miles an hour in rank after precision rank, each cyclist bearing a scarlet swastika flag that stood stiff in the breeze of passage like a frozen flame. As each rank of motorcycles shrieked by far below him in black-and-red glory, the SS men delivered massed salutes and shouted "Hail Jaggar!" so that the effect from Feric's viewpoint

was that of a continuous standing wave of saluting arms and a rolling thunder of salutations that merged with the roar of the engines to shake the hills and valleys and echo

grandly for miles around.

Feric responded to this mighty, uplifting greeting with a long series of sharp, crisp Party salutes, so that each rank

of motorcycle SS was treated to its own personal acknowledgment from the Supreme Commander as it sped by.

Hot on the heels of the motorcycle SS came a formation of two hundred black-and-scarlet tanks, moving at speed in ranks of ten. As each rank of tanks passed the reviewing stand, the cannon saluted with blank shells, filling the air with continuous reverberating thunder and the heady aroma of gunpowder. Feric responded by drawing the Steel Commander and holding the mighty weapon rigidly aloft until the last tank had passed, its gleaming shaft catching a thousand sparkles and highlights from the great flaming swastika across the parade ground.

Far, far below him, Peric could see an ocean of Helder spreading to the far horizons, shouting, leaping, and saluting in a frenzy, completely swept up in the glory of the moment. Barrels of beer were broken open, and here and there spontaneous folk dancing took place. Thousands of impromptu torches were lit and waved wildly in the air. Fireworks were touched off, adding to the gay spirit of carnival.

Huge formations of regular infantry marched by in their field-gray uniforms, kicking their booted feet clear up to eye level at every step, and delivering massed salutes of bone-snapping vigor and hearty salutations. The sound of the celebrating multitude became a palpable force that Feric could feel with every atom of his being; a soul-soaring amalgam of cheering, fireworks, music, dancing, marching boots, roaring engines, cannon firing into the air. Squadron after squadron of trim black fighters soared overhead trailing streamers of blue, green, red, and yellow smoke.

Motorized infantry sped by in powerful half-trucks, firing their machine guns in the air, a sound like the drumfire of the gods. More tanks followed, saluting with their cannon.

For his part, Peric was as swept away in the glory of the moment as the simplest Helder. Again and again, he saluted his passing troops, his arm snapping up and down

in tireless precision, its very flesh locked into the mystic racial power that filled the air, a power compounded of the fervor of the huge crowd, the might of the marching legions, the triumph of the moment, the glowing flame that seemed to be everywhere and in every Helder soul.

Each time Feric raised his arm in salute, the preternatural din reached a new crescendo, a new height of en-

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thrilling sound which coursed through Feric's being bearing him to ever-greater transports of ecstasy, which in turn made his next salute an even more fervent gesture.

Now Waffing's pride and joy passed the reviewing stand: long, sleek, smooth, silvery missiles on trailers drawn by trucks, the ultimate expression of Helder potency, capable of screaming down on targets at supersonic speeds from hundreds of miles off. These were followed by a massed formation of regular army motorcyclists who did then- best to surpass the motorcycle SS in dash and in the fervor of their saluting. More dreadnaughts flew by, dropping flares that lit up the sky with rainbow colors.

SS foot troops marched by in skin-tight black leather, kicking their boots high over their heads then slamming them down with incredible force at every step, saluting with utter precision and shouting "Hail Jaggar!" with a fierce vigor that seemed almost supernatural.

On and on the great parade went, far into the night, as the might of Heldon paraded by the great tower of the reviewing stand. The crowd seemed to grow ever larger and ever more fervent, as if in some mystic manner all Heldon were flocking to this glorious occasion.

Atop his scarlet pedestal, Feric stood erect and tireless, saluting each formation as it passed with a rigor and exhilaration that was undiminished even as the first rays of dawn began to creep up the eastern horizon. His entire being was engorged with the racial glory that filled the air, that merged all Helder hearts into one.

A moment before the dawn, Feric drew the Great Truncheon of Held and pointed the great gleaming metal fist that was its headpiece straight at the eastern horizon. As the sun peered up over the hills, a titanic, climactic, ecstatic cheer went up from the multitude. For at this moment it seemed only appropriate that the sun itself should end the parade by passing in review and thereby

displaying its own undying loyalty to the sacred cause of the Swastika.

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It was with a sense of deep satisfaction and keen anticipation that Feric called his High Commanders together for a private strategy session in his quarters one month after the fall of Kolchak, for the fanatic determination and heroic self-sacrifice of the Helder people had not slackened for an instant during what every true human recognized as the temporary peace.

There was not the slightest doubt that Remler, Waning, and Bogel were fully entitled to the sense of pride that they radiated as they sat sipping beer in Feric's chambers waiting to give their situation reports. As for the loyal Best, he had made himself indispensable in a thousand small ways.

"Well, Remler," Peric said, laying aside his mug of beer, and getting down to business, "suppose we start with you. What is the situation in the Classification Camps of the new territories?"

"The inmates will all be completely processed within the next two weeks, my Commander," Remler said crisply. "After that we can close down the Camps and concentrate our resources on more positive eugenic projects."

"I hope you aren't wasting sound genetic material in your haste to speed the processing, Remler," Feric said. "Every true human gleaned from the dung heaps of the former mongrel states is a potential soldier of Heldon."

Remler's thin features showed a certain hurt, almost indignation. "My Commander," he said rather primly, "it's my honor to report that we've sifted nearly a hundred thousand true humans from the genetic rubbish heaps! In fact, we've actually unearthed a few dozen SS candidates, as unlikely as that may seem!"

"Well done!" Feric exclaimed, impressed by the figures and wanting to make amends for his earlier skepticism. "You've certainly worked wonders with this processing, Remler."

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"My Commander, the processing is a minor detail compared to what SS genetic scientists have recently accom-

plished. We've drawn up a complete set of genetic criteria for the SS supermen of the future. These marvelous specimens will be a full seven feet tall, with fair skin, golden hair, and the physiques of gods, and an average intelligence surpassing that of present-day geniuses. By regulating the breeding of the present generation of SS with the utmost rigor, such a master race may be produced in as few as three generations."

At this, the jaws of the High Commanders all but fell open. "Fantastic!" Feric exclaimed. "Why once we have a sufficient stock of such genetic purebreds, we'll be able to upgrade the entire Helder people to their godlike level in a single generation simply by making the SS the sole sires of the next crop of Helder offspring."

Remler could hardly contain himself. "Exactly, my Commander!" he cried. "But our more visionary scientists believe they are well on the way to developing something even better: the technique of cloning. A tissue sample from SS of the highest pedigree is taken. In nutrient vats, a new SS man is grown from this somatic tissue, genetically identical to the donor. Thus, the vagaries of sexual reproduction are entirely bypassed. Further, one donor can produce hundreds, even thousands, of genetically identical clones. Thus the master race may be achieved within a single generation! The research, however, is presently in an early stage."

Throughout this exchange, Waffing had been fidgeting in his chair, drinking deeply of his beer, obviously anxious to match Remler's tale of achievement with one of his

own.

"I can see that you're bursting with more than beer, Waffing," Feric said with a grin. "Give us your report before you explode."

"The army hasn't exactly been sitting on its hands while the SS worked wonders," Waffing said. "We're getting production out of the workers that even I find hard to believe, and our scientists are rediscovering the martial arts of the ancients by leaps and bounds. Our latest tanks are equipped with devices capable of throwing great tongues of flame against the enemy as well as the usual cannon and machine guns. Soon our new jet fighter-bombers will be operational; these dreadnaughts will be capable of speeds greater than that of sound! As for

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production, we've now got over a thousand tanks and as many aerial dreadnaughts, modern weapons enough for a

million-man army, as well as mountains of ammunition. Once we get our hands on the oil fields of southwestern Zind, our logistical problems will be solved for all time."

Waffing paused to fortify himself with a great swallow of beer and perhaps for dramatic effect as well. "But I've saved the best for last, my Commander," he said with a triumphant grin. "Our rocket scientists have developed missiles capable of dropping a three-ton payload on the enemy over a distance of four thousand miles. All Zind now lies within our range."

"Well done, Waffing!" Feric exclaimed.

Once more Waffing brought his beer mug to his lips, this time clearly for dramatic emphasis, for when he laid it down, he was grinning like the cat that ate the canary.

"That's only the half of it, my Commander!" he said. "One of our research groups has discovered techniques for obtaining the legendary ingredients of the Fire of the Ancients: enriched uranium, plutonium, and heavy water. Give us a few months, and we'll be able to burn all Zind from the face of the earth with the ultimate weapon of the Ancients—nuclear missiles!"

It seemed to Feric that in the utter silence that followed he could all but hear the fall of dust particles through the air.

Nuclear weapons! The Fire of the Ancients that had devastated the earth, created the radioactive wildlands, thoroughly polluted the gene pool, caused the Dominator mutation! The Fire was directly responsible for the state of affairs that it was the sacred duty of all true humans to remedy. What madness to think of once more unleashing this force! One experiment gone wrong, and the purification of the gene pool might be set back generations. As for waging nuclear war, the prospect was unthinkable! How could one purify the earth with the very Fire that had polluted it in the first place?

Best and Bogel were properly aghast, but Remler had some grim, unreadable expression on his face.

Feric finally broke the awful silence. "Waffing, I absolutely forbid this line of research. Bringing back the Fire is unthinkable."

Waffing opened his mouth to protest, but it was Remler who got the words out first: "To us, my Commander, but not to the Doms."

"I find it difficult to believe that even Dominators would stoop to such abysmal evil," Feric muttered.

"It's common knowledge that the creatures expose the germ plasm of their slaves to radiation for the purpose of breeding new and ever more ghastly perversions of protoplasm," Render pointed out.

The point was well taken. Feric had little hope that monsters capable of this ultimate obscenity would be restrained by moral scruples when it came to employing nuclear weapons. "You're right, of course," he said softly. "But surely the matter is academic. The technological level of Zind is rudimentary by our standards."

"Perhaps," Remler said uneasily. "But on the other hand, there are certainly some unsettling reports coming out of Zind. We know that the Doms have sent an expedition of slaves deeper into the eastern wildlands than their minions have ever penetrated before; these wildlands are so contaminated that these creatures will perish horribly in a matter of months. There must be something there of great importance to the Doms for them to expend so much protoplasm. And it is common knowledge that many powerful nuclear weapons were stored in those environs in the day of the Ancients."

"Surely the nuclear weapons of the Ancients will not still be operational at this late date, even if Zind should uncover them," Feric said.

"Quite so, my Commander," Remler said. "Perhaps this is merely an act of desperation on the part of the Doms, for they must know that their hour of destruction is close at hand."

"But on the other hand," Waning said, "my scientists inform me that the nuclear materials do not deteriorate for thousands of years, and manufacturing these arcane substances is the most difficult aspect of building nuclear weapons. Even the dolts of Zind could eventually renovate Ancient nuclear weapons if such were discovered."

Feric's heart sank, for Waffing's logic was irrefutable. If Zind discovered the weapons of the Ancients, they could bring back the Fire; if the Doms had the Fire, they would use it. Yet he retained his absolute moral determination that Heldon would never risk the final irreparable contamination of the gene pool by toying with the Fire. There must be some way out! A sudden thought struck him.

"Assuming the worst, Waffing," he asked, "how long

would it take Zind to actually come up with an arsenal of usable nuclear weapons?"

Waning sipped at his beer for long moments. "Who knows?" he finally said. "They must find the weapons of the Ancients, discover their principles, then renovate them. If our luck is foul, and theirs is good, they might be in possession of such working weapons within six months."

"But not within two weeks?"

"Utterly inconceivable!"

Feric suddenly bolted to his feet, drawing the Great Truncheon of Held. "Very well!" he declared. "It's decided! Ready or not, we will throw our full force against Zind within the next ten days and expunge the filth from

the face of the earth before the Fire can even enter the question!"

Instantly, Best, Bogel, Remler, and even the portly Waning were on their feet with their beer mugs in their hands and fire in their eyes.

"Death to the Dominators!" Best shouted.

"Long live final victory!"

"Hail Heldon!" cried Bogel.

"A toast to our glorious leader, Feric Jaggar!" Waffing roared, raising his mug high in the air. The other High Commanders clinked their mugs with his; all shouted "Hail Jaggar!" and poured the beer down their throats.

For his part, Feric felt a wild joy wash away all doubt;

there was nothing like a life-and-death struggle to raise a man or a people to superhuman heights of glory. He elevated his own beer mug and proclaimed a further toast: "To the force of evolution! To blood and iron and the total victory of the fittest!"

Following Waffing's lead, the High Commanders gave a great spontaneous cheer and smashed their beer mugs against the wall.

There was not the slightest doubt in Feric's mind that the key to victory over Zind was the lightning seizure of the great oil fields to the southeast. With this vast reser-

voir of petrol in the hands of Zind, the mighty mechanized army of Heldon would expire within a month of all-out combat from thirst, whereas the early capture of the oil fields would enable Heldon to grind the forces of Zind to gruel with massive armor and air power.

Unfortunately, this situation must be as obvious to the Doms as anyone else. Therefore, the only course open to
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Feric was to feign an all-out dash across north Tien Zind for the capital of Bora; if the Dominators were convinced that the Helder strategy was to win the war quickly by rolling across the northern Zind heartland and sacking the capital, the bulk of their forces could be tied down in an effort to protect Bora in the north. A task force of tanks and motorcycle troops backed up by the first squadrons of the new jets could then sweep south and east out of Borgravia and seize and secure the oil fields before Zind could properly react.

The key to this strategy was the credibility of the Helder march on Bora in the eyes of the Doms; this would have to be an all-out attack by the major part of the army upon the very stronghold of the enemy. Heavy casualties, fighting of incredible ferocity, and massive resistance were certain. A spectacular display of fanaticism and heroism on the part of the Helder forces would surely be called for. For this reason alone, Feric knew that he would have to lead this attack and leave the seizure of the oil fields to Waning. Further, his conspicuous presence in the forefront of the march on Bora would lend the final touch of credibility to the operation in the eyes of the masters of Zind.

Thus, as the first rays of dawn began to light up the sky over the rolling hills of east central Heldon, Feric sat anxiously beside Best in his tank at the head of the greatest armed host Heldon had ever fielded, awaiting the penultimate moment. A hundred and fifty miles to the north, two Helder armored divisions were even now crossing the Roul on pontoon bridges in the vicinity of Lumb. This small force had been augmented by hundreds of empty motorized troop carriers, giving the appearance of a much larger army; by now the Doms would be convinced that the main Helder assault would be through Wolack and would be marching west to meet the attack. Thus when the real attack came from a hundred and fifty miles to the south through the rump state of Malax, the Helder army would be able to fall on the exposed southern flank of the horde a hundred miles or more inside Zind itself. Feric hoped that this feint-within-a-feint would lend even more credibility to his strategem, while at the same time allowing the war to begin with a fine

flourish and a stunning defeat for Zind.

"Two minutes' to zero hour, my Commander!" Best called out. Feric nodded, and peered up through the open
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hatch of the command tank, behind which was an army that surely would have made even the Ancients cringe.

Seven hundred swift black-and-red tanks—most of them equipped with the-new flamethrowers—formed the forward phalanx, a front fifty tanks wide. Behind this wall of steel, and flanking it on both sides, were two full divisions of motorcycle SS, and then three divisions of regular army motorcycle troops surrounding hundreds of fast armored troop carriers and supply trucks. Completing the totally motorized vanguard force were two score of the old heavy dreadnaughts. A vast aerial armada operating from safe fields inside Heldon would fill the skies at the first sign of serious resistance. In the van of the motorized troops, a quarter of a million infantrymen would march into Zind, ready to add their weight to any fixed battle, and meanwhile carrying out Feric's order to leave no artificial structure standing and nothing left alive. Quite literally, all that was Zind would be scoured from the face of the earth!

"One minute, my Commander," Best called out as the upper edge of the sun peered up over the eastern horizon, painting the rolling hills in scarlet and orange as if in anticipation of the battles to come. Feric dogged the hatch shut, adjusted his harness, thumbed his microphone, and ordered: "Start your engines!" The roar of the starting engines was all but drowned out by the thunder of wave after wave of fighter-bombers sweeping low over the great Helder army and soaring into the sunrise.

Best nodded to Feric. "Forward!" Feric shouted.

Best engaged the throttle, and with a mighty lurch, the command tank hurtled eastward, and the earth shook with the weight of the massed Helder armor sweeping forward behind it. To the east, fountains of thick black smoke and rich red flame spouted along a wide front as the planes atomized the pauntry fortifications along the Malax border. A few moments later, the long rolling rumbles of the bombardment could be heard even above the terrible din of treads and wheels and engines.

The planes continued to wheel and dance in the sky as Feric led his juggernaut forward across the rolling hills and gentle valleys, pulverizing everything that grew in its path, sending a captive thunderstorm of dust miles in extent into the air above it. The bombs continued to fall as the motorized attack force rumbled and roared like an avalanche of men and steel toward the border; it seemed to

Feric as if he were leading his troops straight into a wall of billowing smoke and sudden explosions.

When Feric's tank was a mile or two from this terrible inferno, the thunder of planes could once more be heard overhead as wave after wave of Helder dive-bombers flew westward back to their bases, their bombloads expended, their work well done.

A few minutes later Feric led his forces across the Malax border and into a surreal landscape of destruction.

"Thus might the surface of the Moon have appeared to the Ancients," Best whispered.

Feric nodded. As far as he could see, the land was torn and pitted with great steaming craters, strewn with jagged fragments of rock, metal, and trees; every inch of the soil was overturned and naked as if some gargantuan plow had prepared it for seeding. A dense pall of acrid smoke gave the air a chemical reek, completing the other-worldly illusion. As for the rabble of Malax, nothing was in evidence save a red smear here and there.

"The air force has certainly done its job to perfection!" Best exclaimed.

"Yes, Best," Feric said, "a new era in warfare has begun—lightning from the skies, then an irresistible surge of armor, the two mighty steel fists of Heldon acting in close coordination."

"It appears that one fist alone was enough to dispatch Malax, my Commander!"

Feric chuckled wryly, but he knew full well that the vast hordes of Zind would not be swept away from the sky with such foolish ease. Before long, the new style of warfare he had developed would be tested to the ultimate. He anticipated with relish the thought of bringing his air power and armor fully to bear against the might of Zind, for here was an enemy more worthy of the immense destructive power now at his command.

Feric found the unopposed sweep across Malax an exercise in boredom; there was nothing to be seen but rolling hills, pockets of cancerous radiation jungle which

grew ever more numerous and larger in extent as the army moved eastward, fields of pathetically twisted crops, occasional pens of six-legged cattle or grossly bloated swine with vile mottled skin, and here and there a collection of reeking mud huts. Organized resistance simply did not exist; indeed hardly a Malaxian was to be seen since the 196

dust cloud of the Helder army alone was enough to scatter the mongrels long before Feric's lead tank hove into sight.

Intelligence had indicated that a modest Zind force had occupied the eastern regions of Malax; it was these Warriors that Feric expected to be the first to quench the keen thirst for combat that was building in every Helder soul. They would not offer more than passing resistance, but at least they could be counted on to hold their ground and fight to the death.

It was therefore something of a surprise when the first contact with the forces of Zind came from the air.

Feric's lead tank had reached an area no more than seventy miles from the border of Zind itself; here the patches of radiation jungle were thicker and more extensive than what paltry grasslands remained. For nearly an hour, all manner of monstrosities had fled from the cancerous jungle as the flamethrowers of the tanks set these cesspits of genetic putrescence aflame: giant featherless birds with four clawed legs and dripping carcinomas where their beaks should be, loping skinless obscenities trailing pulsating organs that flopped about in all directions, pus hounds, swine, and packs of assorted tiny horrors that might be deformed weasels, or badgers, or hedgehogs, or more likely mongrelized hodgepodes of all three.

Therefore, nothing seemed out of the ordinary when Best pointed out some twenty specks flying toward the Helder army out of the eastern horizon. "Some sort of vile mutated bird, no doubt," Feric observed, and paid them no serious heed, for they seemed small and slow.

But a few minutes later, his perspective underwent a sudden shift: rather than small and slow, the things were swift and huge, for quite suddenly they were flying over the tank.

"What nauseating horrors!" Best cried. This was, if anything, an understatement. The creatures consisted primarily of huge fifty-foot wings composed of loathsome translucent slime tissue stretched tight over frameworks of thin bone. Slung under the wing was an almost vestigial

torso, also covered with translucent slime tissue, through which pulsating internal organs were clearly visible. There were no heads or other appendages to speak of, save enormous distended sacs hanging obscenely on either side of the thin body.

As the monstrosities passed over Feric's tank in a tight
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formation, sphincters in the bottoms of the huge bulging sacs opened, and a dribble of noxious green fluid began to fall on the tanks immediately behind Feric's. As this putrid rain contacted the armor plate of the tanks, dense clouds of vile yellow smoke sizzled from the metal.

"Open fire!" Feric cried. He himself opened his hatch, snatched up his submachine gun, and poured a stream of bullets into one of the horrors, tearing scores of holes in the slimy membrane of the wing. Instantly and soundlessly, the creature folded up and the great sacs burst like pustules, showering a tank below with acid rain, before the thing crashed to earth to be pulped beneath the treads of scores of on-rushing tanks. The tank that had been under the monster sent a pillar of lung-searing smoke into the air and seemed to dissolve.

"Try the flamethrower!" Feric commanded his own turret crew, as he continued to fire at the things with his submachine gun, downing yet another of the monstrosities at the cost of one more tank. Even as he spoke, the air above the Helder tanks became filled with red-hot machine-gun bullets; six more of the creatures burst their sacs and crumpled, destroying four tanks in the process.

A moment later, a great tongue of orange flame sprang from a nozzle atop the turret of Feric's tank and caught one of the flying things in a bath of fiery petrol. The thing crisped to blackened ash before it could hit the ground, its acid sacs exploding in mid-air harmlessly.

Seeing this, the commanders of the other tanks opened up with their flamethrowers and caught seven more before the remaining monstrosities abruptly wheeled in unison like a flock of geese, climbed for the sun, and turned tail to head back to the east from whence they came.

"My Commander!" Best shouted, pointing high in the air above the formation of monstrosities as they dwindled into the distance. Five hundred feet above the things was a similar flying creature; instead of acid sacs, this one had a kind of metal basket slung beneath it in which a humanoid shape was clearly discernable.

"A Dom!" Feric exclaimed. "Of course! There had to be a Dom to control the beasts!" He spoke into his command microphone: "Open fire! There's a Dom in that basket up there, and it's getting away!"

At once the air was filled with whistling cannon shells, tongues of flame, and an incredible hail of machine-gun bullets, all of which were futile. The flying thing was out
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of range of all but the cannon, and since the cannon shells were not fitted out with proximity fuses, the chances of a hit were a million to one.

After a few moments of this gigantic barrage, Feric saw that nothing was being accomplished but the wasting of ammunition, and he ordered his forces to cease fire.

"Well, we destroyed plenty of the things, my Commander," Best said somewhat dispiritedly as the flying things dwindled once more to specks on the eastern horizon.

"But not the one that counted. Best," Feric said. "No doubt this was more of a scouting foray than a serious attack. Now the Dom who led them will report in detail on our approaching army."

"That's hardly likely to improve their morale," Best pointed out brightly.

At this, Feric's own annoyance was lifted. Best was a good battle companion; the lad always saw the sunny side of things!

With every man in the army keenly alert, Feric led his troops further eastward toward the border of Zind itself. By now the Zind forces in the border area must be fully alerted and as ready for action as they would ever be, and in a few hours the huge Zind horde to the north would be notified of the true situation and would begin to swing south. A great battle was clearly in the offing; it was essential that it take place as far north as possible and deep inside Zind itself.

Therefore, Feric wheeled his army slightly northward;

once the border defenders had been smashed, it should be possible to penetrate several hundred miles into Zind toward Bora before the massive Zind horde to the north could swing around to block the advance. No time must be wasted dealing with the Zind forces at the Malax border; every hour of delay would place the great battle

that much further from Bora. Leaving nothing to chance, Feric called for a fifty-plane air strike to pave the way into Zind itself with the broken bodies and smashed equipment of the defenders.

Half an hour later, ten V-fonnations of sleek, black dive-bombers roared over the Helder army, dipped their wings in gallant salute, and headed eastward across rolling hills thick with rank radiation jungle. Before the planes had disappeared over the hills, there was a sudden loud
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whistling, and a brace of shells exploded in gouts of turf and smoke not three hundred yards in front of Feric's tank.

"Zind artillery!" Best exclaimed.

Looking east and upward, Feric spotted a tiny black speck high in the sky. Instantly, he was on the radio to the commander of the planes. "There's a Zind artillery spotter above us! Send a plane back to dispatch it. Send another plane forward above the Zind horde to broadcast range and bearings to our tank gunners."

"At once, my Commander! Hail Jaggar!"

Another barrage of shells burst in front of the tank, these several score yards closer. Then, low on the horizon, Feric spied a single flash of gleaming blackness zooming in from the east. Another barrage fell, closer still, peppering the armor of Feric's tank with bits of gravel. The tiny flash of black grew rapidly into a sleek black Helder fighter-bomber; the plane arced upward into the sun, then fell nearly straight downward at the Zind flyer in a swift power-dive. Feric could see the bright orange sparkle of the plane's machine guns; then the noxious Zind flyer folded and fell like a stone. The fighter roared low over the Helder army, executed a smart victory roll, then made a one-hundred-and-eighty-degree turn and returned to the fray in the east.

A fusillade of Zind shells ripped up the ground harmlessly nearly three hundred yards short of Feric's tank. "The Zind gunners are blind now. Best," Feric said. "Increase our speed by five miles an hour and veer five degrees south; the swine will then be firing at phantoms."

A moment later, the Helder artillery spotter was on the air broadcasting coordinates. Over a distant rideeline, Feric could see flashes of explosions lighting up the sky and billows of smoke as the Helder dive-bombers pounded the enemy.

Then the very universe seemed to tremble with the incredible massed thunder of seven hundred Helder tank cannon firing in unison. The fusillade was visible as a flashing steel meteor swarm tearing through the sky toward the east. A moment later the sky beyond the hills became a vast aurora of orange flame and rich black smoke. Then a mighty rumble was heard; this was immediately wiped out by the gargantuan roar of the next barrage being fired.

Firing nearly once a minute, the Helder tanks swept
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forward at fifty miles an hour, smashing through radiation Jungle, grinding pallid bluish grass beneath their massed treads, an irresistible juggernaut of fire and flesh and steel sending holocaust before it and leaving a wake of total destruction in its van. Soon Feric had led the massive strike force over the last ridgeline; the Warriors of Zind were suddenly visible in the valley below.

Havoc had already been wrecked upon this Zind horde. The crest of the far ridgeline was a steaming junkyard of mangled and fragmented dreadnaughts and war-wagons. In the valley itself, perhaps ten thousand Warriors had been arrayed in long ranks facing the Helder advance. The bulk of these vile creatures had been converted to a midden of bloody bits and pieces that set off the gray lunar landscape of smoking shell holes and bomb craters with great smears of bright red. As for the rest of the ten-foot giants, more of them than not were running about aimlessly in all directions firing their rifles wildly in the air, spattering their fellows with acrid yellow urine, grunting, pummeling, and gibbering, for the valley floor was littered with the burnt-out hulks of dozens of war-wagons upon which their Dom controllers were now naught but charred corpses.

One last quintet of dive-bombers plummeted through the air, dropped their loads in the midst of a formation of naked brawny Warriors, swooped above the resultant explosions, and then rejoined their comrades winging back to the bases in Heldon. One of the final bombs landed squarely upon one of the remaining war-wagons, blowing it and the Dom on it to scattered atoms. Immediately, the surrounding tight formation of Warriors broke ranks and began running around in individual random circles, colliding with each other at every turn, hitting each other with aimless rifle fire, defecating, drooling, thrashing, and grunting.

As the vast armada of black-and-red Helder tanks surged down into the valley, cannon were leveled at point-

blank range, and a massed barrage of high-explosive shells blew thousands of the brainless giants into the air to return to earth as a red rain of bone and gore. Two more devastating fusillades were fired; then Feric led his troops straight into a boiling cloud of gunpowder, dust, rubble, and flesh. Machine guns opened up with a shattering clatter, and flamethrowers spurted rivers of clinging fiery petrol at the enemy.

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Feric homed the firing stud of his machine gun and held it there as the mighty weapon bucked and screamed in his grip like a thing alive. There was no point in aiming at anything in this roiling chaos. The tank was inundated in a vast sea of huge naked creatures with tiny, virtually faceless heads and limbs like tree trunks. These monstrosities fired their rifles wildly, clubbed at everything within reach with great truncheons, clawed blindly at their fellows or even the armor plate of the tanks, spitting and mewling. It was like plunging into a vast nest of enraged vipers.

The wall of Helder tanks pressed forward into this huge herd of mindless rampaging filth-caked protoplasm behind a river of flame and a gigantic drumfire of machine guns. Warriors burned like tallow candles, screaming, urinating, and setting their own comrades aflame in their death throes, filling the air with the oversweet stench of roasting flesh. Like scythed grain, the putrid creatures fell before the massed machine guns of the tanks, and were ground to a thin bloody gruel beneath the steel treads of the Helder juggernaut.

Within five minutes, Feric's tank had gained the crest of the far ridgeline, with the huge phalanx of tanks close behind. In their wake was a vast steaming ditch filled with the crushed, mangled, and burnt bodies of ten thousand Warriors, nothing more than an immense smear of blood and flesh ground into the shell-pocked landscape. For the endless wave of motorcycle troops that roared along in the van of the tanks, there was no mopping up to speak of to be done. The ten thousand Zind Warriors guarding the border with Malax had been reduced to a carnage heap of pulverized bone and reeking gore by the overwhelming might of Helder air power and armor.

Best turned to Feric, his blue eyes shining. "My Commander," he said, "this is the greatest moment of my life. To have fought at your side in this grand and glorious battle!"

Feric clapped the lad on the shoulder. "This is nothing

compared to what lies ahead," he said. Nevertheless, his soul vibrated with joy at the thought of the manner in which the host of the Swastika had swept at last into Zind: on the heels of glorious and total triumph.

The countryside of Zind was a landscape of nightmare. Vast putrid patches of purplish radiation jungle which
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sprawled across the land like formless amoeboid carcinomas alternated with scabbings of scoured rock and bleak poisoned earth upon which not even the rankest mutated travesty of vegetation would grow. Here and there were fields of gray grass or scraggly rows of some crop mutated beyond all decent recognition clawing its way desperately through the surrounding matrix of seared wasteland and pestilent jungle.

These pathetic farms were presided over by the same sort of motley rabble that had made up the extinct Wolack and Borgravian peasantry—Blueskins, Parrotfaces, assorted crooked dwarfs, spindly giants, half—men with hides that seemed pure cancer, Toadmen; the usual revolting assortment of mutants. However, the slaves of Zind, unlike the countryside rabble in the conquered territories, stood their ground pointlessly, trying to hold off the Helder juggernaut with scythes, clubs, rocks, and an occasional firearm. No doubt each farmstead was enmeshed in the dominance pattern of the local Dom; the mutant rabble flung itself under the treads of the tanks by psychic order, not by choice. All to no avail, for every bit of farmland and radiation jungle in range of the huge army was purified with flame; the Helder force drove deep into the western farmlands of central Zind leaving a wake of fire ten miles wide and scores of miles long blazing like the shaft of some immense flaming arrow behind its sharp point of steel.

Into the afternoon and through the night, the Helder army barreled through Zind without meeting any serious opposition. The Zind horde assigned to defend this area was a bloody pulp far to the rear, in countryside now thoroughly pacified by the advancing Helder infantry. In effect, the border of Heldon was now the prow of Feric's tank as it thrust into the territory of Zind at forty miles an hour.

Scout planes had reported that there was nothing of significance between the Helder army and the great Zind horde a hundred miles to the north, which even now had wheeled about and was moving south to greet the conquerors along a wide front. Feric estimated that the great battle would commence shortly after daybreak, about four

hundred miles inside Zind and five hundred from Bora; at dawn, he would pivot his army to the north to meet the Zind counterattack.

To the north, wave after wave of Helder dreadnaughts
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pounded the advancing Zind horde. The pilots had reported that this gargantuan force outnumbered even the huge Helder army by almost ten to one. Although the Helder planes had blasted every last Zind aerial dreadnaught from the sky and ranged over the forces of Zind at will, vast formations of the mutated flyers hovered over the horde like swarms of huge venomous insects. In addition to the usual Warriors, war-wagons, and dreadnaughts, the scout planes had spotted several hundred tanks, Puller-drawn artillery, and vast troops of Warriors who seemed somehow different from the usual variety. Truly, the hosts of Zind were on the move in unprecedented force;

upon the coming battle would hinge the future of the world for all time.

The first rays of dawn illumined a ghastly landscape. Here nothing grew but scraggly and putrescent patches of radiation jungle. Huge ponds had been dug in the unyielding, contaminated earth; these were choked with slimy gray-green scum which no doubt was processed for slave fodder. The reek of these algae pools was overpowering, indistinguishable from that of open cesspools. Among these ponds were scattered rude wooden corrals which confined a revolting assortment of genetically twisted livestock: bloated legless swine wriggling about in the muck like giant pallid worms, six-legged cattle with tiny vestigial heads and cloacae from which dribbled green-brown ooze, hairless purple goats that trailed gross blue udders in the mud, chickens with a syrupy coating of viscous green mucous in lieu of feathers.

The slaves tending this perverted travesty of farmland more than fit their surroundings; a more revolting collection of mutants it had never been Feric's misfortune to see. Here such as Parrotfaces, Toadmen, and dwarfs stood out as paragons of genetic virtue! Skinless creatures covered with red ooze through which bluish blood vessels could be seen pulsing were a common sight as were green bipeds with empty insect-eyes and arms ending in clusters of tentacles. Warted, frog-skinned mutants with flapping rubbery lips abounded as well as perambulating mounds of wiry black hair through which naught was visible save flaming red eyes and lipless drooling mouths.

Despite the importance of time, Feric slowed the

Helder advance in order to assure that every last one of these abominations was blasted to bits, burned, or mashed
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beneath the treads of the tanks and every putrid scum-pond blown sky-high with purifying explosives.

Only when his tank had left this ghastly farmland and entered a rolling plain of lifeless gray desolation, did Feric feel clean again. "I can scarcely believe that such horrors exist even in Zind," he said to Best. "How do the Dominators stand themselves?"

Best's face was pale, his lips trembling. "I can't imagine, my Commander," he said grimly. "My very cells cry out in nausea at such a sight."

"Enough!" Feric said. "Let's put an end to this filth once and for all. Head due north. Best! It's time to confront the putrescence of Zind with the full might of the Helder army!"

Soon the northern horizon glowed with orange flame along a wide front, and an immense pall of dust and dense black smoke hung over the dead gray hills like a monster thunderhead, replete with the flickering lightnings of the falling bombs. No doubt the Zind horde had spotted the dust cloud of the approaching Helder army—the two mighty juggernauts were at last within sight of each other.

As the wall of Helder armor hurtled toward the onrushing Zind horde, a spotter plane continuously broadcast updated coordinates, and the earth shook with the rumble of the tank cannon as wave after wave of high-explosive shells ripped through the leaden sky to smash the enemy. Zind shells came crashing down in the midst of the Helder army, blowing tanks apart in sudden bursts of bright flame and metal fragments, filling the air with bits of pulverized motorcycles. Now the Helder dive-bombers were clearly visible over the ridgeline, dropping almost perpendicularly at incredible speeds, letting fly with their deadly cargo, then zooming upward beyond reach of the resulting explosions. Hundreds of these magnificent dreadnaughts filled the sky—diving, swooping, soaring, raining death on the enemy like avenging eagles.

"Here it comes. Best!" Feric shouted, getting his first sight of the enemy. Out of the north soared a huge flock of nearly a hundred of the Zind flying monstrosities, their membranous wings glistening wetly, with a dozen Helder planes in hot pursuit, machine guns blazing. In moments, the aerial battle was directly overhead. Acid dribbled down from the creatures' bloated sacs, sending clouds of

choking yellow smoke into the air where it touched the metal of the tanks. Flyers crumpled and exploded in 205

midair as the fiery bullets of the Helder planes ripped them to pieces.

But there was no leisure to contemplate the battle in the air, for in the next moment, the great horde of Zind was visible hurtling straight toward the onrushing Helder armor; Best cried out in wordless awe tinged with something akin to terror.

The army of Zind filled Feric's field of vision from east to west and covered the gray desolation to the north as far as the eye could see. A skirmish line of giant muscular Warriors backed up by reserve ranks that seemed literally infinite marched forward along a front too wide to display end points; interspersed in this front line of ten-foot giants were dull green tanks not dissimilar to the Helder design. Behind the front, thousands of war-wagons were drawn along by Pullers amidst a solid sea of Warriors marching along in that daunting Zind unison. Dimly visible far to the rear behind Puller-drawn artillery, trucks, and steam dreadnaughts were huge swarms of Warriors that seemed to be moving forward with simultaneous randomness and overall direction like soldier ants. The sky above this monstrous horde was thick with Helder planes and Zind flyers; boiling clouds of thick black smoke were everywhere. Patches of the horde were huge flaming infernos;

vast numbers of uncontrolled Warriors ripped and surged mindlessly through the rear ranks of the enemy. From the war-wagons, tanks, dreadnaughts, and artillery came a continuous barrage of shells that began to take their toll of the Helder tanks at this close range.

As the two armies closed to within a hundred yards of each other, Feric saw that Best's face was frozen into a determined battle mask. "Spread out!" he ordered his tank commanders; the gaps between the Helder tanks widened and into them poured the vast divisions of motorcycle troops. Feric rammed home the stud of his machine gun and roared "Fire at will!" into his microphone as his weapon spurted fiery death at the onrushing horde. The tanks lowered their cannon and sent a final wave of high explosives into the front rank of the Zind horde, sending an avalanche of earth and flesh and metal fragments into the air.

Then the two armies were upon each other, a ringing clash of massed flesh and metal. The Zind battle tactic had not changed, save that the huge Warriors who marched

forward in unison in wave after limitless wave were now
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armed with submachine guns. The wall of bullets into which the Helder army plunged chattered harmlessly off the armor of the tanks, but took a heavy toll of the motorcycle troops who roared at top speed straight into the fray, with heroic disregard for their own safety.

Flamethrowers inundated the marching Zind horde with flaming petrol; thousands of the creatures became shrieking torches who nevertheless surged forward to be smashed to pieces by the Helder machine guns and ground to a pulp beneath the treads of the tanks, helplessly loyal even in their terminal agonies to the psychic commands of the Dominators.

Zind tanks surged forward, firing their cannon straight through the bodies of their own troops to blast Helder tanks to pieces. Still firing his blazing machine gun into the solid press of protoplasmic robots that surrounded his tank, Feric issued terse orders to his tank commanders:

"Fire cannon at point-blank range! Knock out the enemy tanks at all cost!"

The Helder tank cannon roared defiance; shells ripped through the riot of flesh, smashing Zind tanks to atoms. Apparently, these tanks held the Dominators, for as they were destroyed, great formations of front-line Warriors suddenly became drooling, undisciplined animals, running amok in the very forefront of the battle and adding to the incredible chaos.

Feric found himself isolated with Best in a timeless universe of fiery battle, a world filled with foul Warriors surging forward, firing their machine guns, tearing their bare fingers to pieces against the steel armor plate, bursting into flame, ground to a thick red gruel beneath the treads of the tanks. His nostrils were filled with the aroma of roasted flesh mingled with the heady stench of gunpowder. His ears were deafened by a continuous surounding of machine guns, cannon, engines, shrieks, grunts, groans, and squeaks. His flesh was a direct extension of the machine gun he fired; the bullets seemed to emerge in a fiery stream from the depth of his own being, he could all but feel them ripping into the flesh of the Warriors who went down before his spurting weapon. Through the tremors of the onrushing tank, he could feel the bodies being crushed beneath the treads.

He chanced to look at Best; the young hero was married to the controls of the tank and to his machine gun.

His face was set in a steel grimace of determination; in his
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blue eyes was a fierce and iron ecstasy. For an instant their eyes met and they were united in the comradely communion of battle, transfigured together in a red mist beyond time or fatigue. Through the metal of the tank, the common weapon which they shared, their souls seemed to touch and merge for an instant in the greater communion that was the racial will. All this took place in the blink of an eye; their beings were not for an instant distracted from the sacred task.

The individual acts of heroism of thousands upon thousands of Helder soldiers merged into a racial epic of superhuman fanaticism, and transcendent glory. Motorcycle SS in sleek black leather plunged straight into the guns of the enemy, smashing reeking hairy legs and crushing Warriors with their machines, dispatching dozens of the monsters with their truncheons even as bullets tore their flesh asunder. Helder tanks rammed their Zind counterparts, overturned them, then set them ablaze with flame-throwers. Dive-bombers dropped death on the enemy from above; crippled planes deliberately dove straight into Zind tanks and war-wagons, going out in a bright blaze of glory. The motorized infantry left their trucks and dashed straight into the battle in wave after wave, perish'ns; in great numbers, but taking thousands upon thousands of Warriors with them down to final destruction.

The mystic merger between Peric, his heroic troops, and the racial will of Heldon was total; the Helder army fought as one unified organism with the will of Peric Jaggar at its heart. Not a man paid the slightest heed to his own life or personal safety; fear and fatigue were

unknown.

Slowly, foot by foot, the Helder army pushed its way forward against the full weight of the gargantuan Zind horde. The forward ranks of the horde were reduced to an enormous herd of puking, gibbering, spitting, defecating, brainless red-eyed monstrosities running totally amok, hurling their huge naked bulks straight at the steel tanks, dashing directly into the muzzles of the Helder guns, slaying Helder and their own comrades with equal abandon. Flames were everywhere and the air was one great cloud of reeking smoke. Every Helder tank, each individual true human hero, was covered with a thick coating of enemy blood. Feric felt the racial will course into his body, through his muscles, and out the red-hot
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muzzle of his roaring machine gun. He himself was naught but a weapon fired by something beyond himself. The hundreds of tanks and hundreds of thousands of men ripping the enemy to bloody fragments were extensions of his own being, fingers, arms, pseudopods, as he himself was in turn the highest expression of the racial will of his people. Together, this vast organism was Heldon, the hope of the world, the master race of destiny, chewing its way into the vitals of the foul racial enemy.

Through the night and into the next day, the incredible carnage wore on. Merged as he was into the communal organism that was his army, Feric could viscerally sense that the Helder forces were pushing their way north and east toward Bora. Like sense organs of his own body, the aerial scouts reported that the far east and west flanks of the great Zind horde were flowing around either end of the Helder line like the enveloping pseudopods of a great amoeba.

"It's hard to say whether we're being enveloped or whether we're cutting the horde in half," Feric observed to Best.

"My Commander, I've got Waning on the radio!"

"Let me hear him on the tank circuit."

Waffing's hearty voice filled the tank; in the background, Feric could make out the sounds of battle. "My Commander, we've reached the oil fields and are engaging the enemy. I hope to be able to report the capture of our objective by tonight at the latest."

"Good work. Waning!" Feric said. "I must sign off now: as you can hear, we've got some action of our own here!"

Waffing's call gave Feric pause. Perhaps the Zind flanking maneuvers were nothing less than an attempt to go around the obstacle that the Helder army imposed so as to reinforce their small battered forces holding the key oil fields. In this case, they must be thwarted at all cost!

Flying in the face of his own battle instincts, Feric went on the radio and ordered the redeployment of his forces into defensive positions; a line must be established and held south of the Zind horde that could be neither outflanked nor broken. The horde must be pinned down until Waffing had completed his mission and linked up with the main Helder army.

Therefore, behind a screen of tanks and motorcycles,
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the Helder infantry dug in along a broad front a mile to the south, setting up machine guns, cannon, howitzers, and mortars, digging trenches and foxholes, and anchoring either end of the line with a division of the most fanatic SS troops. Once this had been accomplished, the front-line motorcycle troops disengaged and retreated behind the fortifications, shielded by the tanks, which were the last to withdraw, behind a wall of fire created by their own cannon and machine guns.

Only when these maneuvers had been completed and his own tank secured behind an earthen embankment, did Feric pause to make an overall assessment of the strategic situation. Peering up through the open hatch of the tank, he saw that the Zind horde had not followed on the heels of the retreating Helder army, for its entire front line was a chaotic disaster area. Even at this distance, he could still see the solid dike of bloody mangled corpses that clogged the front to the north all along the line of battle to a depth of several miles. Hardly any Zind tanks were still in action and the Helder dive-bombers were dispatching these. Behind the great front of dead Warriors was a boiling chaos of uncontrolled Warriors, appearing at this distance for all the world like a vast swarm of crazed killer ants. Far behind this riot of brainless muscle was an endless sea of more disciplined forces. As for the Zind artillery, it had been entirely silenced by the Helder air force, and these same sleek black dreadnaughts had also swept the sky clear of Zind vermin.

The Helder motorcycle troops and infantry had sustained quite heavy casualties, but the Helder artillery was virtually intact, no more than fifty tanks had been lost, and the air force was as good as new. A great deal of ammunition and petrol had been expended—to telling effect—but when Waffing's reinforcements arrived, that problem would be ended.

"Our present task is crystal clear," Feric told Best. "We must hold this position at all costs until Waffing's troops arrive."

Best's reaction to this was something less than enthusiastic. "I'd far rather advance against the enemy no matter what the odds than hold a defensive line no matter how impregnable, my Commander," Best said.

Feric could only nod in agreement; this was nothing less than his own deepest feeling and the proper attitude for a Helder soldier. Still, there were times when the good of

the Fatherland required the relinquishment of one's own fondest desires. No doubt the troops, too, were less than happy at this defensive deployment. Something must be done to maintain morale.

In order to maintain the fire of his troops, Feric quit his tank, donned a fresh black uniform and spotless scarlet cloak, and conducted an inspection tour of the front lines mounted on the black-and-chrome motorcycle of a fallen SS hero, with Best following behind on another cycle. He kept the Steel Commander always in prominent view, its thick silvery shaft and mighty headball newly polished and shimmering in the sun.

Although these troops had fought with ceaseless ferocity for nearly two days without sleep, to a man they expressed nothing but the keen desire to once more have at the enemy. This was evident in the fanatic determination burning in their eyes, the loving care they lavished on their weapons during this respite from combat, the snap and dash of their salutes, the fire with which they shouted "Hail Jaggari!" and the spontaneous cheering that went up each time a Helder artillery barrage sent cannisters of death whistling overhead to burst in the midst of the enemy.

Feric had not been touring the lines for more than half an hour when a vast surge of forward motion became visible all along the front of the Zind lines.

"What is it, my Commander?" Best asked.

"It appears that we're about to have our thirst for battle quenched once more," Feric said. Wave after wave of Warriors bulled their way through the great carnage heap of their own fallen comrades and came running across no-man's land toward the Helder line with blazing submachine guns.

Feric set his own submachine gun in its firing rack; all along the line of Helder fortifications, tank cannon and field pieces were leveled at the onrushing enemy sea and tremendous barrages of high-explosive shells tore the creatures to pieces as they dashed across the desolated earth, while an endless chain of plummeting dive-bombers blasted great gaping holes in the backup formations.

Soon the great horde approached machine-gun and flamethrower range. "Open fire!" Feric roared.

At once, hundreds of thousands of machine guns

opened up all along the Helder line. The first rank of
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Warriors was quite literally blasted off its feet and smashed backward. The next rank suffered the same fate as the Helder troops continued to put out solid walls of hot lead all along the front, and the rank after that. But all the while the total Zind force advanced inexorably over the fallen bodies of their comrades straight into the mighty teeth of the Helder guns.

As he watched his own bullets rip through half-a-dozen barrel-thighed naked monsters sending gobbets of flesh into the air as the creatures fell, Feric suddenly realized that there were no war-wagons in evidence.

"These are no ordinary Zind Warriors, Best!" he called out. The creatures were not marching forward in the usual utterly precise formations. Further, their heads, though shrunk far below the human standard, had larger craniums than those of the fighting creatures the Helder had thus far faced, and there was something about the jaws and mouth that set Feric's teeth on edge. Then the flamethrowers of the tanks obscured the front of the Zind assault with a tidal wave of flaming petrol, through which Feric could hear a terrible shrieking, howling, and moaning even above the sound of the guns.

Half-smoldering Warriors erupted through this curtain of flame, firing their submachine guns savagely in their death throes and pushing the Zind advance to within a hundred yards of the Helder trenches. Feric drew the Great Truncheon of Held, waved it grandly over his head, gunned his engine, and roared out of the protection of the fortifications straight at the onrushing masses of feral giants.

With a great cheer, a hundred thousand SS and army motorcyclists dashed out to join him. Thousands of these heroes were instantly felled by the guns of the Warriors;

Feric could feel bullets whistling all around him. But in a few moments, the wave of motorcyclists had reached the Zind monstrosities. Guns were useless, and it was truncheon to truncheon.

Feric found himself in a forest of huge, filthy, hairy legs. Power surged through his being from the Great Truncheon; he swung his weapon through the air like a switch. The superhuman blow smashed through dozens of the vile limbs like so much rotten cheese, toppling a score of the howling obscenities to the earth, where they thrashed about like decapitated snakes. As he smashed the

skulls of the crippled creatures like so many melons, he

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noted that their eyes were glowing coals, their mouths frothed with blood and filled with razor-sharp teeth.

These creatures were a far different breed from the Warriors Heldon had previously faced. Each fought independently, and with the frothing battle frenzy of an enraged catamount, fearlessly pitting their massed brawn against the iron will of the Helder fanatics on their steel machines.

With great swipes of their huge truncheons, they dashed cycles and riders alike to pieces, a camelian drool spewing from their vile lipless mouths. But huge and ferocious as these monsters were, they fell far short of the superhuman heroism of the Helder soldier fighting at the side of his beloved Supreme Commander. These magnificent specimens in trim field-gray or tight black leather threw themselves at creatures twice their size with battle cries on their lips, fire in their blue eyes, and truncheons arcing through the air like hammers of doom. Attacking these racial heroes was like dashing into the whirling teeth of some great buzz saw.

Monster after slobbering monster ran howling at Peric only to be dashed to a pulp by the Great Truncheon of Held; soon the shaft of the Steel Commander was lubricated with thick red blood and the shiny black leather of Feric's uniform was set off with a hundred scarlet splatters. The hand-to-hand fighting went on for what seemed like days, but could hardly have been an hour. It was impossible for Feric to judge the course of the battle, for his universe was contained by solid walls of hairy, stinking, drooling giants with an unquenchable thirst for true human blood. As fast as these creatures smashed through the barricade of corpses that Feric had piled around his motorcycle, they themselves felt the bone-crushing wrath of the Steel Commander. Nevertheless, the creatures kept coming, as if filled with some crazed and powerful longing to meet their own dooms.

At length, Feric began to notice that fewer and fewer Warriors were coming at him with each minute that passed. A half-dozen giants ripped aside the bodies of their comrades shrieking wordlessly; these Feric felled with almost foolish ease. Three more fell a few moments later. Then long moments passed during which nothing whatever happened. Feric was alone inside a great crater whose walls were the broken and bloody corpses of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of the enemy.

With hefty strokes of the Steel Commander, Feric smashed a path through the dike of dead Warriors and drove his motorcycle through the gap.

As far as he could see, the earth was piled high with dead bodies; most of them Zind Warriors, but not a few gallant Helder heroes who had given their last full measure of devotion to the Swastika. Moving throughout this massive midden were tens of thousands of Helder motorcyclists polishing off the wounded Warriors with their sub-machine guns.

From several hundred yards off, Ludolf Best came roaring toward Feric on his motorcycle, gesticulating wildly and shouting with joy at the sight of his Supreme Commander, alive and triumphant. As Best sped toward Feric shouting and waving, he drew the attention of hundreds of Helder soldiers to Feric's person; these in turn began to cheer wildly and wave their truncheons in the air or fire their guns with sheer exuberance. In moments, the entire battlefield was aware both of the survival of their Supreme Commander and of his approximate location.

Over a hundred thousand triumphant Helder heroes shot their blood-caked truncheons skyward in the Party salute and roared "Hail Jaggar!" with a ferocity and fervor that thoroughly put to shame anything that Feric had thus far experienced.

As Feric leaned against the side of a tank beside Ludolf Best during a brief respite in the fighting, the Dominator strategy seemed all too clear. For two days now, the Doms had sent suicide waves of the new breed of Warriors against the Helder positions; each succeeding wave had been thoroughly annihilated, but at great cost to the Helder army in terms of life, ammunition, and especially

petrol.

"They have no hope of matching us in mobility or firepower," he muttered. "Yet still they persist in the same tactic."

"I don't see why they don't try a flanking maneuver, my Commander," Best said. "Obviously, their goal must be to get around us and stop Waffing's troops from reaching us with petrol and ammunition, now that the oil fields have

fallen."

Feric smiled at this naTvet. "No, Best," he said, "even the Doms know that the superior speed of our armor and our air power could cut off any serious flanking attempt
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before it got properly under way. My guess is that they hope to overwhelm us before Waffing's forces arrive."

"What fools they must be to think that they can overrun the Helder army!" Best exclaimed.

Feric nodded agreement; there was no point in troubling the lad with the true situation. The Dominators had a limitless supply of twisted protoplasm at their command. After two days of terrible carnage, the Helder losses were heavy indeed. Twenty thousand motorcycle troops and forty thousand infantry had made the supreme sacrifice. Casualties among the fanatic heroes of the SS were particularly heavy, an irreplaceable loss to the gene pool which Feric deeply regretted. But the worst of it was that the unforeseen magnitude and ferocity of the fighting had used up vast quantities of ammunition and had virtually exhausted the petrol supply. Another attack or two and the entire Helder army would be reduced to fighting with truncheons alone. Waffing had better arrive soon!

Still, the morale of the Helder army had never for an instant wavered. The higher the casualties, the greater the ferocity with which the true humans pounded the Warriors to pieces. After two days, it could still be said that not a Zind monstrosity had succeeded in fighting its way to the Helder trenches, nor had one of the creatures survived its suicidal assault on the Helder positions. Moreover, Waffing's troops were only hours away with vast quantities of ammunition and a limitless supply of petrol. The situation, after all, was hardly hopeless!

Best, Feric suddenly noted, had been studying his face with some concern during these musings. "Is something wrong, my Commander?"

"No, Best, nothing is wrong! Let's inspect the troops!"

As he drove his motorcycle up atop a small hummock after accepting the fervent salutes of a weary but inspired battalion of motorcycle SS, Feric noticed some great commotion going on in the body of the Zind horde a mile to the north. Best pulled up beside him and the two men stared across the desolation of no-man's land at the vast sea of naked mutated flesh which seemed to suddenly have been galvanized into frenetic mass motion, like a gigantic

swarm of army ants.

"The entire horde is on the march!" Feric exclaimed.
"It's an all-out-win-or-lose climactic attack on our positions!"

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Best broke into a wide grin; his eyes lit up like blue coals, and his body radiated an almost mystical heroic strength. Feric understood what the lad felt exactly, for the last vestiges of his own fatigue had been annihilated by a surge of fierce joy. At last the climactic moment had truly come—the Helder people would engage the forces of Zind in one mighty final battle to the death for ownership of the earth. No man could ask for greater glory than to lead the forces of true humanity into this final Armageddon!

Scant moments later, Helder soldiers all along the front became aware of the vast Zind horde sweeping toward them, and a great spontaneous cheering went up. Without the necessity of an order, every motorcycle engine roared into life, tanks readied themselves to charge, every infantryman in the entire troop of heroes leapt to his feet, eyes shining, weapon at the ready. A massed chanting of "Hail Jaggar!" began somewhat raggedly, then merged seamlessly into the racial voice of Heldon itself bellowing its hatred and defiance at the enemy. There could be no question of holding a single man in reserve now; no true Helder could rightfully be called upon to accept such dishonor.

Feric drew the Great Truncheon of Held, the focal object of the racial will, and held this mystic weapon as high above his head as his arm could reach, feeling the power in the huge gleaming shaft merge with the power of his own will, and with the racial consciousness uniting him with his troops in this moment of destiny.

Then he gunned his engine, exchanged a final glance with Best, pointed his great weapon defiantly at the on-rushing enemy, and with a savage battle cry, led the hosts of Heldon forward into battle.

There was no point in worrying about petrol or ammunition reserves now; the immense Helder army advanced behind a tidal wave of flame as well as solid walls of artillery shells and machine-gun fire. Inspired by the stirring spectacle below, the Helder dive-bomber pilots redoubled the speed and ferocity of their attacks, plummeting to within a hundred feet of the tiny heads of the Warrior horde with machine guns blazing, letting fly with high

explosives or incendiaries, soaring through the crown of the ensuing explosion and into the sun, then diving once more to strafe the enemy until their machine guns were empty. The Zind horde advanced straight into an inferno

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of bullets, explosions, and flame; each foot of ground was paid for with the mangled bodies of thousands of Warriors.

As Feric's motorcycle roared to within a hundred yards of the onrushing sea of blood-drooling giant Warriors, the Helder tank cannon ceased firing, and the flamethrowers were stilled, having expended the last drops of precious petrol in their reservoirs. Nevertheless, the incredible massed firing power of nearly two hundred thousand Helder machine guns was still enough to cut every successive rank of Warriors to bloody pieces 'the moment they became the front wall of the advance. Zind machine-gun bullets whistled all around Feric as he led his army over the last hundred yards, but there was no fear in him, only the absolute iron conviction of his own invulnerability; he was Heldon, he was the instrument of destiny, he was the Swastika, and nothing could harm him.

Then he plunged into a world of screaming, reeking, madmen who foamed bright red at the mouth, and swung huge steel truncheons through the air without regard for anything but the chance to destroy one more true man before perishing.

Advancing slowly in low gear, Feric swung the Great Truncheon of Held in a steady rhythm before him—right, left, right—without skipping a single beat or giving any red-eyed Warrior the least chance to get a stroke in past his guard. At each swing, a score or more Warriors were clove in twain at the waist, erupting gore and slimy greenish intestines. In moments, the blood on the slick shaft of his mystic weapon was so thick that it ran down his arm and baptized the spotless black leather of his fresh uniform with the life juices of the enemy.

Taking a sidewise glance, Feric observed Best close behind him, hammering away at Warriors with total ecstatic abandon, his eyes blazing with ruthless, self-sacrificing fanaticism. To either side of Best, tall blond SS motorcyclists advanced in an unbroken line, throwing themselves upon the enemy with superhuman courage and true Helder dash. Great swarms of grunting, drooling giants smashed at the Helder tanks with their truncheons in a futile frenzy, and ripped their own hands to bloody tatters trying to claw their way through steel armor plate, while

the machine gunners snug inside the mobile fortresses riddled their bodies with a million bullet holes and the
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heavy steel treads of the dreadnaughts rolled inexorably forward over their still-thrashing corpses.

For Feric, the death struggle took on a mystic beauty. Heldon and Zind were locked in climactic combat in this desolate place, not individual Warriors or human beings;

the true human genotype fought the genetic perversion of the Dominator mutation for nothing less than sole mastery of the earth and the universe for all time. Every Helder soldier fought with the full meaning of this struggle burning like a naming swastika in his brain, his soul afire with the fighting racial spirit that Feric had kindled, his being and will totally merged into the racial identity that was Heldon itself. This immense reservoir of racial courage, will, and consciousness was channeled directly through Feric's own soul, so that Feric Jaggar was Heldon, and Heldon was Feric Jaggar, and both rode a juggernaut of fate that could not fail.

The blood of the enemy that covered Feric and his metal steed and ran in rivers from the uniforms of his men united them in the holy communion of righteous battle. Every inch of advance was a concrete step forward toward the goal of an earth inhabited entirely by tall, blond, genetically purebred supermen totally free from even the possibility of racial contamination. Every drooling monstrosity that fell beneath Helder truncheons was one less cancer cell in the body of the world gene

pool.

What was the life of any man compared to the magnitude of this sacred cause? To die in this battle was to attain the ultimate pinnacle of heroism in the entire history of the world; to survive it victorious would be to bask in the gratitude of a million generations of humanity to come. No moment in human history had ever or would ever offer a man glory to match this. Those who fought here today would become racial paragons for all time; the contemplation of his own place in the pantheon of the future filled Feric with a wonder that transcended both humility and awe.

Thus fired to glorious acts of superhuman heroism and tireless fanaticism, the racial entity that was Heldon tore like a god possessed by demons into the vitals of its total antithesis, the obscene carcinoma in the world gene pool that was the soulless, life-denying anthill of Zind. For their

part, the Warriors of Zind fought with a ferocity that
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had been imprinted in their genes by a foul mutant race which held all flesh in total contempt save its own.

The battle, therefore, was the most ferocious confrontation that the world had ever seen, a true Armageddon between all that was noble and uplifting in man and the basest perversion imaginable of what were once human genes. Good waged absolute war on evil under the banner of the Swastika, and evil replied in equally uncompromising kind.

At the very point of the Helder forward thrust, Feric found himself set upon by twenty, forty, even fifty Warriors at a time. No doubt the Dominators directing the horde realized that to slay Feric Jaggar was to slay the racial will of Heldon itself, for the great presses of Warriors virtually clubbed each other aside with their truncheons in their savage frenzy to fell him.

For his part, Feric welcomed this concentration of the forces of the enemy upon his own person, for it only fired the fanaticism of Heldon to ever greater heights of heroism and ferocity, and the incredible speed and vigor with which the noble weapon in his hand dealt with the challenge and annihilated the enemy buoyed up the fighting spirit of the greatly outnumbered Helder warriors.

In his grip, the Steel Commander seemed imbued with Feric's own mighty life-force, metal come to godlike life through the transcendent power of the racial will it served. Effortlessly, he swung the weapon whistling through the air, leaving a comet's tail of smashed flesh and flying gore.

But still the Warriors of Zind came at him with undiminished fury, spitting blood, rolling their fiery pig eyes, and swinging truncheons as thick as a man's thigh and as long as he was tall. Twenty of the creatures came at him from the left. Feric met them with a swipe of the Great Truncheon that tore through their barrel chests, bursting lungs, and tearing the still-beating hearts out of their bodies. At the same time, ten more came at him from behind; as he finished his swing, he pivoted his motorcycle about his right foot, and instantly reversed his swing to catch these mad-eyed giants at groin level, hewing their legs from their bodies so that they fell like stones and lay thrashing in agony on the bloody ground while scores of Helder motorcycles ground them to pieces under their wheels.

But as Feric successfully fended off this assault, a score
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more Warriors were upon him from yet another angle, and as he dispatched them with an over-the-shoulder sweep of the Steel Commander, the huge truncheon of one of the creatures landed squarely upon the rear wheel of his motorcycle and smashed it to flinders, forcing him to dismount and fight afoot.

This spurred the Zind Warriors on to even greater frenzies, but almost at once, Ludolf Best had leapt from his own motorcycle to fight at Feric's side. At this, a score of tall, blond, blue-eyed supermen in tight black uniforms spattered with blood as red as their swastika capes followed suit and formed a phalanx of SS heroes flanking their Supreme Commander, inspired by him to feats of valor that nearly matched his own. This squad of racial heroes rallied about the incarnation of the racial will hacked then-way through the onrushing Warriors with a force and fanaticism the sight of which spurred all the surrounding troops to fervent emulation.

Soon a whole great section of the Helder advance had crystallized into a superhuman brotherhood of racial heroes around the person of Feric Jaggar. Motorcyclists rammed their machines into slaving giants, leaping off them into the air to fly at more of the Warriors with their truncheons, moving with a speed and hysterical strength which made them seem invincible. Infantrymen dashed fearlessly into veritable forests of massive hairy legs, smashing furiously about with their truncheons to bring the Warriors down to their level, then crushing heads and stomachs with their truncheons, steel-soled boots, and fists. Tanks barreled forward at greater and greater speeds, grinding their way through solid walls of Zind protoplasm like armored bulldozers.

The incredible feats of heroism performed by tens of thousands of ordinary Helder soldiers inspired the SS elite guard around Feric to ever greater fanaticism and ferocity, which in turn spurred on the masses of the troops to redouble their already superhuman efforts, further inspiring the SS elite—an ever-increasing feedback of racial heroism which turned a whole section of the army into a juggernaut before which no power on earth could stand. As for Feric, there were not Zind Warriors enough in the universe to adequately quench his thirst for blood.

The center of the Helder line became a bulge, then a great dagger ripping straight through the body of the great Zind horde, seeking out its vitals. This irresistible
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racial juggernaut tore through the sea of drooling monstrosities with greater and greater force and speed, plunging deeper and deeper, opening the gap up wider and wider, as the inspiration to superhuman fighting frenzy spread among more and more Helder troops.

Feric himself was filled with an energy and exhilaration that transcended the flesh and filled the soul as he hacked his way through a score of Warriors with the smell of impending victory sweet in his nostrils and suddenly found himself standing on open ground. Before him were forty dull green Zind tanks in tight formation, and nothing else.

As Best made his way to his side, Feric realized the true import of the situation. "We've done it, Best!" he cried, clapping his great arm around the lad's shoulders. "We've cut the Zind horde in half!" Moreover, there was no doubt whatever that the formation of tanks, situated as it was in what minutes before had been the safest position on the battlefield, held the craven Doms controlling the entire horde.

Hundreds of tall blond SS heroes emerged through the rent in the Zind ranks, then a dozen Holder tanks, their cannon roaring. Ten of the Zind tanks exploded in great pillars of reddish-orange fire and billowing black smoke. A few of the remaining Zind tanks got off panicked shots. Then a score more Helder tanks poured through the gap with thousands of motorcyclists in their van; three more quick massed fusillades cracked open the rest of the Zind tanks like so many walnuts. Feric waved the Great Truncheon wildly overhead, sending spatters of Warrior blood flying, then led Best and his SS elite guard forward as dozens of humanoid figures in gray uniforms scuttled from the wreckage. Behind came the entire Helder army.

Feric was the first to reach the smoking ruins, with Best hot on his heels. Two rodent-eyed Doms dashed out from behind the smoldering wreckage of a tank with sub-machine guns in their hands, slobbering in anger and dread and shrilling "Die human filth!" As Feric reached for his submachine gun, a hail of bullets whistled close by him and tore the loathsome Doms to pieces. Feric turned and saw Ludolf Best grinning at him, with his smoking sub-machine gun in his hands.

Three more Dominators scuttled amidst the rubble to Feric's left, seeking to escape; Feric cut them to ribbons with his submachine gun in a shower of blood and flesh, then grinned back at Best. Following this example, the SS

made short work indeed of the remaining Doms, with a few short seconds of relentless submachine-gun fire.

Even as the sound of this firing died, an incredible shattering thunderclap rent the air as if the heavens themselves had opened up to shout in triumph, and forty sleek black jets, streaked across the sky, then executed a 'one-hundred-and-eighty-degree turn to swoop down with blinding speed and a deafening shriek upon the enemy.

"Waffing's troops have arrived, my Commander!" Best whooped with joy.

Indeed, the significance of this splended aerial promenade was not lost upon a single Helder soldier. Throughout the vast battlefield, a cheer went up that drowned out even the roar of the jets as they fired their rockets into what was left of the enemy.

As for the Warriors of Zind, the sudden loss of their Dominators, combined with the sudden apparition in the skies and the massive feral roar of the Helder army, completely unnerved them. Still enslaved by the murderous rage that had been programmed into their very genes, but bereft of any overall mental guidance, these submoronic protoplasmic killing machines flew into a senseless frenzy, running about in all directions shrieking and howling, bashing their comrades with truncheons, tearing at the throats of their own fellows, sinking their teeth into the first available flesh, and throwing themselves ineffectually at the disciplined Helder troops almost as an afterthought.

Needless to say, the outcome of the battle was now a foregone conclusion. Inhaling deep drafts of the heady perfume of victory, the Helder troops surged through the gap that had been torn through the body of the horde, widening it further, then fell on the rioting Warriors on both flanks from behind, all but surrounding them.

To the south, a large phalanx of gleaming black SS tanks led a long column of fresh motorcycle troops into the fray, as hundreds of jets roared overhead, blasting great holes in the dissolving Zind formations with rockets and machine guns.

Soon the Zind horde had been split into two huge encircled enclaves. The tanks poured a continuous barrage of high explosives and incendiaries into the ranks of the Warriors, while the infantry and motorcycle troops tore the frenzied giants to pieces with their submachine guns. Unable to penetrate the Helder fire, the sordid creatures

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turned their insatiable bloodlust entirely inward, smashing each other to fragments of pulped protoplasm even as the Helder army annihilated them.

The full might of the Helder air force soon soared out of the west to join Waffing's jets in the aerial assaults. The precision bombing of the dive-bomber pilots was flawless, and for this final destruction of the remnant of the Zind horde, the planes had been armed with napalm cannisters. In a few short minutes of close-order bombing, the remaining Zind Warriors were reduced to a roasting sty of flaming protoplasm writhing and defecating in their death throes.

Watching the great pillars of greasy black smoke boiling into the sky, Feric knew that naught remained to complete the final and utter victory of the pure human genotype but to march across the now defenseless heartland of Zind on Bora and expunge this final nest of Dominators from the face of the earth.

Above the conflagration, hundreds of jets had formed themselves into an impromptu swastika formation, emblazoning the symbol of Helder victory on the very sky.

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The march on Bora was nothing less than a parade of triumph. The wounded had been shipped back to Heldon as infantry poured into Zind through Wolack to mop up stragglers and garrison the vast new conquered province, and the SS was already setting up Classification Camps for the mutant slaves of the Doms not two days after the annihilation of the Zind horde. Knowing that the last serious resistance in Zind had been crushed, Feric redeployed the vast forces at his command into a broad front several hundred miles wide sweeping eastward across the putrescent wastelands, pulverizing every installation, farmstead, breeding pit, diseased crop, and mutant in its path. Thus Heldon itself moved across the face of Zind, absorbing the territory and converting it forever to true
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human soil as its heroic troops marched gloriously upon the last citadel of the Dominators on the face of the earth behind their Supreme Commander, Feric Jaggar.

For this final push, Feric had had his sleek black command car brought to the front so that he might ride into Bora at the head of his troops in the company of his trusted High Commanders, Best, Remler, Waning, and Bogel, for surely these fellows more than deserved the

honor of accompanying their leader into the enemy capital.

These four men sat on the front seat of the command car's open cabin, and as the rotund Waning occupied the seat area of two normal men, they were jammed together like peas in a pod. Still, the mood was nothing less than jovial as the car drove eastward in the center of a vast line of tanks and motorcycles. Moreover, Waning had not neglected to provision the car with a keg of foaming beer to which they all had frequent recourse. Feric himself sat alone on the raised rear seat in easy sight of his troops, with the keg conveniently before him.

"We should be within sight of Bora soon," Waffing said. "Or at least what's left of it. I'm afraid the air force isn't leaving very much for us to destroy."

Two more wings of dive-bombers roared eastward across the empty wastelands on their way to Bora.

"My only remaining desire is to kill the last Dominator on earth with the Great Truncheon of Held itself," Feric said. "This seems only fitting. I hope that our pilots spare the life of one Dominator so that this final war may be ended with appropriate ceremony. As for the rest of Bora, they can turn it into a steaming ruin before we reach it, for all I care."

Waffing laughed. "You question the total efficiency of our pilots?" he japed. "I really don't think that the chances of anything surviving our bombing are very good."

"Surely we will be left one Dominator?" Feric said. "Are our bombers really as good as all that?"

Waning waved his arms in the air as if to take in all of conquered Zind in their sweep. Within sight of the command car, there was not a single trace of living protoplasm native to the putrid gray landscape, nor an intact artifact crafted by the minions of Zind. "The proof is all around you, my Commander," he said.

Feric laughed. "It's very strange," he said, "to be
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hoping that the Helder air force will be performing with something less than its accustomed efficiency"

An hour later, Waffing's boast concerning the efficiency of the bomber pilots proved to be more than justified. To the east, across a desolate gray plain studded with rank patches of radiation jungle, Feric saw a huge blotch of

fire, like the mouth of some gigantic volcano. As the command car and its flanking lines of troops roared toward this massive conflagration, crushing the radiation jungle under steel tank treads and then setting the rubble ablaze with flamethrowers, Feric could see swarms of planes circling and swooping over the burning city, dropping yet more napalm cannisters and high explosives on the funeral pyre of the Dominators of Zind. Even at this distance, the heat given off by the fire was clearly discernible.

"Not much chance of anything surviving that, my Commander," Waning said, quaffing an entire mug of beer in three gulps. "I'm afraid I must apologize for the prowess of our pilots!"

Feric could not find it in his heart to be really angry. Who could but rejoice at the sight of the last stronghold of the final enemy of true humanity going up in billowing flames! Beside the racial joy of this sight, his disappointment at not being able to dispatch the last Dominator on earth by his own hand was, after all, a trivial matter.

Across the plain, there was a sudden upsurge in the flames consuming Bora. The massive individual fires consuming the city seemed to merge into an enormous fireball, which the Helder planes had to hasten to avoid. This earthbound sun hovered over the doomed city for a long bright moment; then it soared upward as if seeking to return to its rightful place in the heavens. In its van, an enormous pillar of fire at least a mile wide and as tall as the clouds fountained into the sky. Amazingly enough, this flaming beacon persisted as the Helder army bore down on the city.

"Our planes have ignited a firestorm!" Waffing exclaimed. "Army scientists predicted such a possibility—that fierce enough bombing could generate a pillar of flame that would burn until all combustibles in the area are consumed. It seemed like an extravagance until now."

"It looks like the legendary Fire of the Ancients," Bogel whispered.

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Waffing nodded. "It's the next best thing," he said.

"For myself," said Remler, his blue eyes glistening, "the sight has an awesome beauty." He wet his lips with beer without for an instant taking his eyes off the great fountain of fire that gushed red-orange brilliance into the heavens.

Feric could well understand what the SS Commandant felt. For his part, the sight of the Bora Firestorm ignited two distinct pleasurable responses: the patriotic and the aesthetic. The total flaming destruction of the last scrap of resistance to complete Helder domination of the habitable earth was something that could only set any true human's heart to soaring. At the same time, the abstract spectacle of this magnificent, unthinkably huge gusher of fire turning the very universe a rich deep orange struck a deep chord in his aesthetic sensibilities, in and of itself. Thus Feric perceived the Bora Firestorm as a true and high work of art: noble and uplifting in its inner meaning for the true human spirit, and sensually stimulating in style and form. Only a final touch was needed to create a visual epic that would inspire the people of Heldon and immortalize this pinnacle of human history for all time to come.

"Bogel, do you have camera planes in the air over Bora?"

"Of course, my Commander! What sort of High Commander of Public Will would be foolish enough to miss the opportunity to film the climactic moment of human history? We are now broadcasting to every public square in Heldon as well as preserving the spectacle for posterity."

"Very well then, Bogel, I'll give your cameras something to fit the dignity and significance of the moment that will delight the eye as well!"

Feric chose to view the spectacle from a camera plane with Bogel, for this would be the best possible vantage from which to observe the work of art he had wrought;

moreover, this aerial view would be the image burned into the folklore of true humanity for all time.

The camera plane spiraled dizzily upward, high over the pillar of fire that was Bora, turning Bogel's face a sickly shade of green and giving Feric himself no little discomfort. Finally the plane reached a height of over ten thousand feet, leveled off, began circling the Firestorm, and turned its cameras on the spectacle below.

Feric had used SS motorcyclists and freshly polished

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black tanks to form an enormous swastika of men and machines centered on the fountain of fire that was the final funeral pyre of the putrescence that had been Zind. From this great height, the sight below took the breach

away: a huge gleaming black swastika with an enormous pillar of fire soaring toward the heavens out of its center and casting rich orange highlights off the burnished black metal of the massed fighting machines.

"It's beautiful, Feric," Bogel said softly.

Feric opened his microphone to give the final orders to Waning, who was supervising on the ground. "It's not quite completed yet," he told Bogel. Then he began issuing orders to the men below.

"March!"

Below, the glistening black swastika began to rotate about the central axis of the pillar of fire. A great Helder army formed into the sacred racial emblem executed a massive victory march around the burning capital of true humanity's final enemy.

"Open fire!"

From the huge swastika circling the great flame, there now erupted a universe of smoke and sparkle and flame, as every tank opened up with its cannon and every SS motorcyclist fired a stream of bright tracers with his submachine gun, all directed inward to feed the raging firestorm at the heart of the grand spectacle.

Now the incredible final victory pageant was complete and the transcendent glory of the moment properly celebrated. Far below, a swastika of smoke and fire revolved about the raging funeral pyre of the Dominator mutation, and in a large sense of every defilement, small or large, of the human gene pool. The vast sparkling swastika of ten thousand bright stars set off against gleaming black metal rotating about the immense pillar of billowing orange flames was a sight to stir the soul with its sheer immensity and physical beauty alone. But the symbolism pleased an even more noble level of the human spirit: the great circling swastika of fire and metal was the visual epitomization of Helder idealism and Helder power in the eyes of even the simplest of men; likewise no one could mistake the captive fountain of fire for other than what it was, the funeral pyre of Zind. Thus the spectacle was both perfectly symbolic of the final victory of the forces of Heldon over the putrescence of Zind and the actual historical moment of that victory itself; a pinnacle of human his-

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tory, and that event's celebration in a great work of art,

all in one.

Tears filled Feric's eyes as he beheld this sight. His fondest dreams were fulfilled. He had led Heldon to total victory and insured the posterity of the pure human geno-

type forever; soon the breeding program would convert the race of Helder into a race of purebred SS supermen. He had raised humanity to its former genetic purity and glory and would someday have the unprecedented honor of creating the next step in human evolution, a true master race. No man could conceivably ask to accomplish more.

Yet he had accomplished more, and that final feat was visible below him. He had ended the final triumphant Armageddon with a transcendent work of high art that would live for all time.

A day later, when the Firestorm had burned itself out, allowing the Helder army to enter Bora, there was nothing left but an endless vista of smoldering gray-and-black ash, enlivened here and there by sporadic flickering flames and glowing piles of still-smoldering embers. Although the city had held tens of thousands of nominators and millions of their slave monstrosities, not even their bones were distinguishable from the general ash heap.

Bora, Zind, and the Dominators had been quite literally scoured from the face of the earth.

Feric entered the city with Bogel, Best, Waning, and Remler in his freshly polished black command car, escorted by a score of prime blond SS specimens in trim black leather on spotless black-and-chrome motorcycles. Behind his vehicle, a long line of tanks, motorcycle troops, and infantry fanned out throughout the corpse of the city to sift the ashes for any sign of life.

"There's no doubt that the Dominators have at last been expunged from history," Remler said as the wheels of the car sent up feathery clouds of gray ash. Feric nodded; there was nothing to be seen from horizon to horizon but ashes, guttering fires, and glowing embers. The chances of even one Dom surviving this holocaust were indeed dim; not so much as a single building remained that was even remotely recognizable as such.

Suddenly Best was gesticulating wildly, then pointing off into the ruins to the left of the car. "My Commanderi

Over there!" •

Feric followed the line of Best's finger and spotted

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something hard and metallic intruding itself amidst the ashes a hundred yards or so from the car. He ordered the driver to approach the object, whatever it was.

As the command car and its outriders plowed through the ashes, Feric could see that what they were approaching was a small cube of steel perhaps eight feet on a side, burnt a livid blue-black and half covered by ash. The driver stopped the car immediately in front of the artifact; the SS elite guard sat on their thrumming motorcycles awaiting orders.

"Let's have a look at this thing ourselves," Feric suggested. Following the lead of their Supreme Commander, the four High Commanders quit the car and tromped their way through the ashes toward the cube of scarred metal.

Feric reached the nearest wall of the cube: a featureless slab of seared steel that gave the impression of being several feet thick. Circling the cube, he came upon a heavy round hatch about six feet in diameter, with a dogging wheel at its center.

As he attempted without success to turn the wheel and undog the hatch, Remler, Best, Bogel, and Waffing reached his side.

"Obviously an entrance to some underground chamber," Bogel observed.

"Let's have a hand with this hatch," Feric ordered. AH

five men threw their backs into the effort to turn the dogging wheel, with no more success than Feric had met by himself.

"It must be locked from inside," Remler said.

"Let me call for a tank to blast it open," Waning suggested.

"That may not be necessary," Feric replied, unsheathing the Steel Commander, the weapon which he alone could effortlessly wield, which had the effective mass of a small mountain.

Grasping the hilt of the Great Truncheon firmly, Feric aimed a mighty blow at the center of the hatch. There was an earth-shattering clang, a terrible metallic ripping sound, and the shaft of Feric's noble weapon thrust through two feet of steel as if it were so much cheese. The dogging wheel and the lock mechanism clattered inward into deep darkness. Feric dealt the hatch two more blows, and then it fell outward, kicking up a great cloud of ash

and exposing a gaping round hole beyond which was naught but impenetrable gloom.

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With the Steel Commander still tightly gripped in his right hand, Feric stuck his head inside the cubicle. In a few moments his eyes adjusted to the darkness and he saw that the interior of the thick steel cube held nothing more than a flight of stone steps descending into the bowels of the earth in even thicker blackness.

He withdrew and spoke to his comrades. "This is the entrance to some underground installation. There may be something alive down there."

"Why don't we have a look for ourselves, my Commander?" Best suggested brightly. "Perhaps if we're lucky, you may have the honor of personally slaying the last Dom on earth after all!"

Instantly, Remler was all for it. "If we're really lucky, we may encounter enough Doms for us all!"

For his part, Feric was all for the expedition. Even if there weren't any live Doms down there, it would be an excellent excuse to get some exercise after being cramped up in the command car for so long. "By all means!" he

declared.

Only Bogel seemed somewhat dubious. "It might be a good idea to take the SS guard with us," he suggested.

"Surely you're not afraid of a hole in the ground, Bogel!" Waffing japed.

"There's no point in risking the life of the Supreme Commander of Heldon needlessly," Bogel said. "What a fiasco if something should happen to Feric at this moment in history!"

Clearly, Bogel's point was well taken. Personal wishes aside, Feric realized that he had a sacred duty to the people of Heldon to take reasonable measures to protect his own safety.

"Very well," he said. "Waning, fetch ten SS lads and have them bring portable electric globes."

Minutes later, Feric was leading his High Commanders and ten tall blond SS men down the flight of stone steps through a dank, cool shaft, with an electric globe in his

left hand and the Steel Commander at the ready in his right. Although Feric himself left his submachine gun slung over his shoulder, the others had their guns cocked, prepared, indeed eager, for action.

The stairs descended into the earth for well over a hundred feet, finally debouching into a passageway hewn from the solid rock, its walls dewy with moisture.

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"This has the look of some sort of bomb shelter to me," Waning said. "Be on your toes!" he told the SS men somewhat superfluously as Feric led the party down the corridor. The passage led away into the darkness for perhaps a hundred yards, then abruptly terminated in another steel hatch quite similar in design to the one that had sealed the entrance cubicle. Clearly, if there was anything alive in this dank grotto, it would be behind that hatch. Moreover, the doubly sealed structure of this final redoubt made it exceedingly probable that anything which had reached the shelter before the bombardment would indeed still be living.

Feric silently ordered the others to stand back, then raised the Steel Commander high over his head and struck the hatch a prodigious blow, while at the same time leaping sideways out of the possible line of fire of anything within. With a terrible clatter that reverberated all up and down the passageway, the Great Truncheon of Held cleaved the steel hatch in twain, and the pieces fell to the stone floor at Feric's feet.

Instantly, the ten SS men were at Feric's side, their submachine guns leveled, their icy blue eyes gleaming with hyper-alertness like chips of polished steel. But there was no gunfire from within; instead, a nickering orange light poured forth into the stone corridor. Cocking the Great Truncheon, Feric led his party through the hatch and into a small chamber carved from the rock and lit by a ring of guttering torches.

Inside the chamber was naught but a single small instrument console behind which stood an ancient, wizened, crook-backed Dom with huge sunken black eyes and the evil broken grin of a ferret. This monstrosity was garbed in Zind gray set off with all manner of gold braid, precious jewels, and golden brightwork, giving the effect of some fetid rodent stuffed into a royal uniform as part of a particularly vile schoolboy prank.

Nevertheless, the dominance pattern exuded by the sordid brain of this grandfather of all Dominators was the most powerful Feric had ever felt. It was all he could do

to keep from obeying the powerful impulse to toss away the Great Truncheon which ripped through his mind. Behind him, he heard a great clatter of metal on stone as the High Commanders and the SS guard discarded their weapons at the foul creature's bidding—only Feric's will was strong enough to resist this incredibly powerful Dominator

and even his muscles were frozen into immobility, paralyzed in the conflict of mighty wills between himself and the ancient Dom.

"Welcome human filth," the Dominator croaked in a grisly dry parody of a human voice. "Needless to say, I've been expecting a visit. However, the presence of Feric Jaggar himself was too much to hope for. I shall enjoy watching your face, Jaggar, as the human genotype is wiped from the face of the earth for all time!"

The creature was clearly mad, somehow mistaking the final destruction of his own loathsome kind for that of true humanity! Feric threw every ounce of his will into the struggle to break the dominance pattern long enough to dash the wretch's brains out with the Steel Commander, but succeeding in effecting only slight movement.

The Dominator threw a switch on the console before it, then laughed maniacally until a thin spittle sprayed from its leathery lips.

"Thus is sealed the fate of your worthless kind. Jaggar!" the old Dom cackled. "The activating signal has been sent to an installation of the ancients far to the east of here which our creatures have revived. In minutes, a huge nuclear explosion will take place in the wildlands, spewing millions of tons of radioactive dust into the air. The ancients here built the device so that no enemy might survive their defeat. We were not able to restore it completely, but we've made it work well enough. In weeks, the atmosphere of the entire earth will be so contaminated that no human will ever breed true again. The wombs of even your precious purebreds will bring forth nothing but hunchbacked dwarfs, Parrotfaces, Blueskins, and dozens of new mutations, perhaps even our own kind. You have destroyed the Dominator Empire, and now we destroy humanity for all time! Die, human filth!"

An enormous flare of rage burned through Feric's being, instantly breaking the dominance pattern as if it had never existed. He leapt forward swinging the Great Truncheon of Held, and brought the mighty weapon down on the skull of the drooling, cackling Dom, smashing it like a melon, spattering greasy gray brains everywhere,

ripping clear through the creature's torso, splitting it in half and spilling pulsing translucent organs all over the dank stone floor. With another swipe, Feric dashed the instrument console to pieces, the force of his enraged blow

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burying the headpiece of his weapon in the floor below to a depth of nearly a foot.

With the death of the last Dom, the others were freed from the dominance pattern and all began babbling furiously at once.

"It can't be!"

"The Fire!"

"The death of the human race!"

"They couldn't—"

"Silence!" Feric roared, with tears in his eyes and a red-hot rage burning in his heart. "Stop this gibbering at once! Let us hasten to the surface and see if the foul creature uttered more than empty words before we mourn our race!"

When they reached the surface, the scene was as before: an endless vista of gray ash and smoldering rubble, through which the army of Heldon moved unopposed, finding nothing whatever alive.

Feric's mood and that of his companions lightened somewhat as they stood in the open air once more, with nothing apparently amiss.

"I see no Fire of the Ancients, my Commander," Best said.

"Bah, the old monster was simply mad," Waning said, and Feric found himself agreeing with this estimate.

"Perhaps," Bogel said uneasily, "but you yourself told us that the Doms were attempting to exhume the nuclear weapons of the ancients."

This remark darkened the mood of the group once more, and Ferie realized that there was no point, one way or the other, in lingering in this grim place waiting for a catastrophe that might never come. He led the party back to the command car and continued with the tour of the ruined city as if nothing untoward had occurred.

For several minutes, the command car, with its motorcycle escort, drove on through the ashes, kicking up gray clouds, and sighting nothing. Feric and the others had refreshed themselves from the beer keg, and the mad Dom in his underground chamber with his threats of nuclear destruction seemed quite improbable and unreal.

Suddenly the very sky seemed to explode; an enormous burst of light flashed into existence on the eastern horizon, a glare brighter than a thousand noonday suns that filled
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half the sky with its brilliance and leached the rest of all color.

Feric's stomach filled with sickness even as he rubbed his nearly blinded eyes, for there was no mistaking such a thing for anything but the Fire of the Ancients. Moments later, the terrible, world-filling glare faded somewhat to reveal an enormous orange fireball ten times the apparent diameter of the sun hovering balefully over the eastern horizon.

Slowly, this enormous bubble of fire drifted upward, sucking a great boiling black cloud of rubble into the sky in its wake as it ascended. Moments later, the fiery, billowing cloud was fully formed and not a man within sight of it could fail to recognize the bone-chilling sight of the legendary ensign and dreaded incarnation of the Fire of the Ancients, the Mushroom Pillar Cloud.

No one could utter a word in the sight of this ghastly poisoned celestial toadstool. The size of the explosion and its power were beyond all human comprehension. There was no reason to doubt that the threat of the last Dominator had not been empty.

Many minutes later, the world was shattered by a clap of thunder that seemed to split the sky, that became an earthquake rumble without diminishing in intensity. At the same time, Feric felt the air smash at him with the force of a physical blow; the SS were swept off their motorcycles like so many scraps of paper, and the sturdy steel of the command car creaked and groaned.

The sighing, whining, roaring, hot caustic wind that followed seemed to Feric to be the last expiring breath of true humanity. He could all but feel the radioactive pestilence seeping into his germ plasm.

But even as the radioactive toadstool belched its genetic poison into the atmosphere of the earth, Feric Jaggar determined that the pure human genotype would survive because it must survive. Failure would not be tolerated from himself or anyone else. Humanity would be saved by a sheer act of will if need be. If a miracle were needed, every last Helder would be totally committed to bringing it about or to die trying.

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In the grim days following the detonation of the monstrous final weapon of Zind, only the fanatic will of Feric Jaggar and the iron discipline of the Helder people kept all humanity from falling into despair and apathy. As the fetid cloud dispersed its poison throughout the atmosphere of the earth, many plants began to sicken and die, the young, the old, and the infirm broke out in horrid sores and pustules, and nearly two million true humans expired in agony.

^ Rather than deal with these symptoms of radiation disease, Feric devoted the full resources of the new World Empire of Heldon entirely to the preservation of the true human genotype. Within two months, SS genetic scientists had fully confirmed the horrid truth: there was not a true human on the face of the earth with germ plasm capable of breeding true. Even Feric himself was affected. The last generation of humanity had already been born—the Helder gene pool was now capable of producing naught but vile mutants and obscene monstrosities.

Not three days after a sallow, thoroughly shaken Remler had delivered this racial death-warrant, Feric had made the hardest decision in his life, and stood before television cameras with Waffing, Remler, Bogel, and Best at his side to proclaim to his mourning and stricken people the course of action that Heldon would now take.

For the occasion, Feric had dressed himself in his sleek black uniform, and had had the chrome brightwork and the Great Truncheon of Held polished for hours so that every inch of metal on his person shone like diamond. He stood on a low dias with a great scarlet swastika flag behind him for a backdrop. At his feet, his High Commanders stood in similarly brilliant uniforms; it was essential that the heroism of the Helder people be raised to the utmost. Feric had told absolutely no one of his plan; he required a spontaneous demonstration of support from his

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High Commanders for all Heldon to see, for what he was ordering would be the greatest test of loyalty to the Swastika yet faced by the Helder people.

"My fellow Helder," he began simply, "what I must say today will be brief, inescapable, and brutally blunt. As has already been announced, the gene pool of Heldon has been completely and permanently contaminated by the perfidious last act of the wretched Dominators, who have paid for their evil and vileness by total extinction. This means that the germ plasm of each and every one of us is capable of producing no offspring but vile and degenerate mutants. Clearly, the production of such a posterity is an absolutely unacceptable anathema to everything that the Swastika stands for."

He paused for a long moment to let it sink in, to ensure that no Holder was unclear as to the full import of the situation. Then, when all Heldon was sunk in unbearable gloom, he gave his people hope.

"For some time, SS race scientists have been working on the technique of cloning. If a snippet of flesh can be used to grow a human being artificially, the exact genotype of our finest specimens—the purebred supermen of the SS—may be duplicated in the next generation without dilution. Thus, in one generation we can advance human evolution a thousand years and produce a race of blond giants fully seven feet tall with the physiques of gods and an average intelligence on the genius level. Out of the tragedy of genetic contamination, we can create the final triumph of human racial purity. For the radiation that has mangled our germ plasm beyond all hope of repair has not contaminated our somatic tissue whatever—from the cells of our SS purebreds may be cloned the new master race! The next generation of Helder will consist entirely of clones whose genetic endowment is that of the finest SS purebreds living today!"

Once more Feric paused, watching the gleam and sparkle return to the eyes of everyone present, technicians and High Commanders alike. From a vision of final doom, the Helder people had been transported to the raptures of a dream of ultimate racial glory. Surely they would now be ready to make the sacrifices such a goal required!

"Though SS scientists are close to perfecting his technique, much heroic effort is still called for on the part of the SS before the production of a master race of SS clones becomes assured. Therefore I have decided as your Su-

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preme Commander that every last Helder must involve

himself in a truly heroic act that will inspire superhuman fanaticism on the part of these scientists by making the price of failure the total extinction of sapience on this planet and the prize to be won by success the creation of a purebred master race capable and worthy of inheriting the entire universe for all time.

"Within the next three months every Helder will be processed through the Classification Camps. There, we will all be sterilized, rendered permanently incapable of succumbing to any foul temptation to reproduce our damaged genes by conventional sexual means. Either Heldon will produce a posterity of purebred SS clones, or no posterity at all! Racial transcendence or racial death!"

The backs of the High Commanders visibly stiffened. Feric was confident that the Helder people had been fired to a similar fanatic resolution all up and down the land, for although the SS scientists still remained the key to the situation, he had given every last Helder a means by which to contribute his own heroic dedication to the sacred cause. The glory of final triumph would be personally shared by all!

"As a personal demonstration of my own total loyalty to the sacred cause of the Swastika and the production of an SS master race, I myself will be the first to undergo sterilization, followed by my High Commanders, the entire SS, and then the Helder people. Hail Heldon! Hail Final Victory! Hail the Master Race!"

The last words had hardly left Feric's lips when Bogel, Remler, Waning, and Best clicked their heels with a vigor that took even Feric by surprise, snapped to attention with backbreaking force, shot out their arms like steel pistons in the Party salute, and shouted "Hail Jaggar!" with a superhuman fury, their eyes blazing with the transcendent power of the racial will.

With the fervor of the Helder people raised to incredible heights of racial consciousness and iron determination, destiny could hardly have denied to this race of heroes the success and dominion that such self-sacrificing patriotism commanded.

The entire Helder people marched straight through the Classification Camps without so much as a murmur of protest. Indeed the only major problem in completing the sterilization of the Helder people was that the good folk

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had some tendency to fight and bicker among themselves for early places in the Camps; this represented merely

good-humored contests in patriotic dedication rather than serious acrimony, and the SS completed the task well within the three-month deadline that Feric had set.

Soon thereafter, Remler jubilantly announced that the first viable SS clone fetuses had been produced. Eight months later, these experimental milestones were successfully brought to term. Soon after that, the first functioning clone factory was completed, and nine months later Feric, guided by the beaming Remler, arrived at the Feric Jaggar Reproduction Works to personally witness the decanting of the first full batch of SS supermen from the cloning vats.

This edifice was a huge spotless white cube adorned only by great black swastikas on each of its faces. With the SS honor guard standing at rigid attention, Render led Feric through the main entrance of the building and through a long and somewhat confusing series of halls, chambers, and corridors, all of which were tiled in gleaming white. The shining white walls reflected the trim black leather uniforms and scarlet swastika capes of the tall blond SS technicians who seemed to fill every nook and cranny of the Reproduction Works with bustle, energy, and determination, scientific acolytes in the temple of racial purity.

"There's no denying that this place is really humming, Remler!" Feric exclaimed, as Remler opened a white door and ushered him into one of the great cloning vat chambers. This was a large oblong room with white walls and tiny white tiles on the floor, each adorned with a miniature black swastika. It was almost completely given over to row after row of gleaming white porcelain vats, two hundred of them in all. At the head of each vat was a white porcelain console housing pumps, instruments, and other medical apparatus; in each vat a seven-foot blond giant floated in yellowish nutrient fluid, eyes closed in

blissful sleep.

A television camera had been set up for the occasion near the front row of vats; before these twenty ellipsoid porcelain wombs, twenty tall, blond SS scientists in black-dress uniforms with scarlet swastika capes and high black boots stood at perfect attention.

As Feric entered the chamber, these prime specimens snapped out a massed Party salute and shouted "Hail Jag-
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gar!" with utmost vigor and dash. Feric returned the salute smartly, then strode to the microphone that had

been set up facing the cloning vats.

"My fellow Helder," he said, staring straight at the twenty SS heroes whose eyes blazed like chips of the finest blue steel with the triumph they had wrought, "today, at last, we are to witness the emergence of the first of the new master race fully grown from the cloning vats of the first reproduction works to go into regular round-the-clock mass production of SS purebreds. These magnificent specimens, cultured from the tissues of none but the absolute genetic cream of the SS, will spring to life fully grown, with godlike "physiques and razor-sharp minds, needing no more than six months of intensive instruction and indoctrination to take their places as full-fledged members of the SS and citizens of Heldon."

Fire seemed to sparkle in the eyes of the SS scientists;

Feric favored these fellows by meeting their fanatic gaze with his own before he went on.

"Within six months, ten more reproduction works will begin operation, by the end of next year, there will be two dozen turning out a million SS purebreds a year, and within five years Heldon will have the capacity to produce the amazing total of ten million SS supermen per year! This should be a sufficient productive capacity to totally repopulate the habitable earth with the master race within twenty years. Today we begin this repopulation of the earth with the genetic supermen that humanity has dreamed of creating for a thousand years, and a master race that will continue to advance to ever greater heights of genetic purity and evolutionary brilliance, since its reproduction will be done strictly according to the highest eugenic principles in the strictly controlled conditions of the reproduction works, leaving nothing whatsoever to the vagaries of chance.

"SS scientists, I salute you for your great triumph of eugenic research! High Commander Remler, I salute you for the spirit of total self-sacrificing fanaticism that you have instilled in each and every magnificent specimen in the ranks of the SS! People of Heldon, I salute you for your selfless dedication to the cause of the Swastika and to my own person! Hail Heldon! Hail the Swastika! Hail the Master Race!"

"HAIL JAGGAR!" the SS scientists roared, slamming the heels of their high black leather boots together, and

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shooting out their arms in a bone-snapping Party salute.

Then these gallant blond heroes executed smart about-faces, and set to work on the first rank of porcelain cloning vats. The nutrient fluids were drained out of the gleaming white vats through flush holes. The strapping blond clones were then jolted to final wakefulness with galvanic shocks.

A few minutes later, there were twenty blue-eyed blond giants standing before their vats, their expressions bright with superhuman intelligence, but blank as virgin parchment.

Viewing these magnificent specimens made Feric's heart soar. Each of them shared his own great stature and perfection of physiognomy and physique, and the brilliance that shone in their eyes was unmistakable. Behind them were another one hundred and eighty specimens of no smaller perfection waiting to be decanted, thousands more in this reproduction works alone, millions in the next year, tens of millions soon after that. Within his own lifetime, he would see every last inch of habitable space on earth secured and occupied by the Master Race of Heldon, the magnificent SS clones. And after that—

The idea that came upon Feric overwhelmed him with its grandeur.

Before him, each tall blond SS scientist in black leather stood beside a naked giant with a genotype to match his own. These beaming SS heroes then delivered a silent massed Party salute.

To Feric's amazement and unabashed delight, fully half of the newly awakened SS clones mimicked the patriotic gesture of their tutors with a touchingly childish enthusiasm. Perhaps it was possible that loyalty to the Swastika could be impressed in the very genes!

"Today the world is finally and truly ours, my Commander!" Remler exclaimed buoyantly, his features shining with patriotic ecstasy.

"Indeed, Remler," Feric said. "And that is only the beginning. Tomorrow we shall conquer the stars!"

Never had so great a throng been assembled at one place at one time in the history of the world. The great soaring spaceship, a pointed cylinder of gleaming silvery metal two hundred feet high, stood on its fins on the broad plain of northeastern Heldon. A small platform had been erected at a safe distance from the rocket's mighty ex-

haust. Upon this platform stood Feric, and around it a ring of tall, blond SS clones in shiny black leather as perfect as themselves.

Two hundred thousand identical blond SS clone giants in black uniforms and red Swastika capes surrounded the central pillar of the rocket ship in rank after perfect rank, ready to begin the ceremonial circular march. Beyond this formation were perhaps a million more SS clones in trim black leathers stretching beyond the horizon in all directions, and beyond them, out of Feric's sight, were uncounted hundreds of thousands of the older generation of Helder gathered to watch the blast-off from afar.

Standing before the cluster of microphones on the platform, Feric was filled with an excitement unparalleled in his entire experience. Every atom of his body tingled with ecstatic anticipation as he began to speak.

"Today, having conquered the earth, and populated it with a Master Race of superhuman specimens whose perfection transcends that of any creature ever created by the brute process of natural evolution, Heldon now takes its first step to the stars!"

At this, an incredible spontaneous roar issued from the vast throng, a sound that challenged the heavens and seemed to make the very earth tremble with joy on its axis. This became the greatest massed chanting of "Hail Jaggar!" that the world had ever seen, and millions of arms pumped frantically in repeated Party salutes, a forest of waving homage that filled Feric's field of vision and overwhelmed his soul with happiness. Feric let this demonstration go on for a full two minutes before he raised his hand for silence, for none could deny that this magnificent folk had more than earned the right to this jubilation.

"Inside this spaceship—the most advanced achievement of Helder scientific genius—are three hundred of the finest SS clones, frozen in suspended animation. In this ageless state they will remain for the long years it will take this ship to traverse the immense distance to Tau Ceti. Once the ship has reached its destination, the automatic machinery will land it, and thaw out the colonists so that they may emerge and spread the seed of Heldon over the face of yet another planet. Within three years, we will be launching fifty such ships a year, adding fifty planets a year to the domain of the true human genotype, not for a year, or a decade, or a century, but forever! The universe is infinite and the Master Race of Heldon will spread itself

throughout the stars without end, filling the vast infinities

between the galaxies with our own noble kind!"

This time the demonstration of fanatic ecstasy surpassed even what had gone before, and it took Feric a full five minutes to still the massive chanting of "Hail Jaggar!" that all but threatened to topple the great rocket from its launching pad with its incredible force.

"But my fellow Helder, there is one final glory that I have withheld until now," he finally continued, unable to keep from breaking into a broad grin. "I myself have contributed cells to the cloning vats. This rocket and every one that follows it out into the trackless reaches of interstellar space for the next ten million years will be commanded by a clone grown from my own flesh and therefore my genetic equivalent, suited by destiny and pedigree to be a leader of men. Thus our colonies shall not fail no matter what manner of hostile aliens they may face under foreign suns, for the troops that will exterminate these subhumans horrors shall be none but the finest SS purebreds, and the leaders shall be created in my own genetic image! Hail Heldon! Hail the Swastika! Hail the Master Race! Hail the conquest of the universe!"

As the answering earthquake chanting of "Hail Jaggar!" reverberated every molecule in the air, the huge ring of SS troops began to march round the rocket and Feric's platform, kicking the heels of their steel-soled boots high in the air with every step and then bringing them down with a force that was quite literally earth-shaking. Faster and faster these magnificent specimens in snug black leather marched, kicking their heels ever higher, until the platform and the rocket were surrounded by a whirling circle of slick black leather, and the universe shook with the thunder of Helder boots.

Then, as a single man, these two hundred thousand tall blond SS clones snapped their arms out in the greatest massed Party salute in history and held them in this outstretched position as the chant of "Hail Jaggar!" continued to rise toward the heavens from millions of fervent throats.

Faster and faster the marching troops whirled around Feric, kicking their heels skyward with ever increasing vigor and force, as if attempting to smash through the vault in the sky^with the steel soles of their boots while the massed chanting merged with the rhythm of the falling boots, a staccato thunder that filled and shook the uni—

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verse and pounded with the blood racing in Feric's skull.

Feric felt the sound and the glory permeate every cell of his body with an incredible joyous fire; his blood pounded like racial thunder through his veins, faster and faster. It seemed finally as if he must fly apart and burst in a million pieces with ecstasy.

At this climactic moment, when he could bear the preternatural joy no longer, he threw a small switch.

With a deafening bellow, a magnificent billow of orange flame spurted out of the rocket. Every throat in Heldon joined with Feric's in a wordless cry of joyous triumph as the seed of the Swastika rose on a pillar of fire to fecundate the stars.

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AFTERWORD TO THE SECOND EDITION

The popularity gained by Adolf Hitler's final science-fiction novel, *Lord of the Swastika*, in the five years since his death is an indisputable fact. The novel won the Hugo award given by the inner fraternity of science-fiction enthusiasts as the best science-fiction novel of 1954. While this may be a somewhat dubious literary credential, it surely would have pleased Hitler, who lived among these "science-fiction fans" throughout his career in the United States, and considered himself one of them, going so far as to edit and publish his own amateur "fanzine" even while working as a full-time professional writer.

Of wider significance is the book's popularity and the adoption of the swastika motif and colors created in it among as diverse a spectrum of social groups and organizations as the Christian Anti-Communist Legion, various "outlaw motorcycle gangs," and the American Knights of Bushido. Obviously, this science-fiction novel has struck some chord in the contemporary non-communist mind that raises its appeal far beyond the limited bounds of the science-fantasy genre.

On a purely literary level, this phenomenon seems rather inexplicable. *Lord of the Swastika* was written in the space of six weeks under contract to a paperback publisher in something of a frenzy shortly before Hitler's death in 1953. If we are to believe the gossip rife in the science-fiction "fanzines" of the day, Hitler had been behaving erratically for several years, being subject to fits of trembling and bouts of uncontrollable rage that frequently lapsed into near-hebephrenic rantings. Although the actual cause of Hitler's death was a cerebral hemorrhage,

these symptoms at least hint at complications of tertiary syphilis.

Thus, the literary totem of the present devotees of the

swastika and its peculiar code was, in cold point of fact, written in six weeks by a commercial pulp writer who never displayed serious literary talent, and who may well have written the book while suffering from the early stages of paresis.

While the prose may display a certain praiseworthy competence, considering that Hitler learned English as a mature adult, one cannot for a moment seriously compare Hitler's mastery of his adopted literary language to that of Joseph Conrad, for instance, a Pole who came to our tongue at a similarly advanced age. Awkward traces of Germanic sentence structure and usage are evident throughout *Lord of the Swastika*.

There is admittedly a certain raw power in many passages of the novel, but this seems to be more the result of psychopathology than of conscious, controlled literary craftsmanship. Where Hitler may be said to excel as a writer is in his visual conceptualization of basically unrealistic or improbable scenes—notably those of extravagant battle, or the grand guignol military pageantry which festoons the book. But this power of visualization can easily be traced to Hitler's prior career as a magazine illustrator, rather than to any specific conscious mastery of prose style.

The imagery of the novel is something else again, an area of legitimate dispute. As anyone with even a cursory layman's knowledge of human psychology will realize, *Lord of the Swastika* is filled with the most blatant phallic symbolisms and allusions. A description of Feric Jaggar's magic weapon, the so-called Great Truncheon of Held:

"The shaft was a gleaming rod of ... metal full four feet long and thick around as a man's forearm ... the oversize headball was a life-sized steel fist, and a hero's fist at that." If this is not a description of a fantasy penis, what is? Further, everything about the Great Truncheon points to a phallic identification between Hitler's hero, Feric Jaggar, and his weapon. Not only is the truncheon fashioned in the shape of an enormous penis, but it is the source and symbol of Jaggar's power. Only Jaggar, the hero of the novel, can wield the Great Truncheon; it is the phallus of maximum size, potency, and status, the sceptre of rule in more ways than one. When he forces Stag Stopa to kiss the head of his weapon as a gesture of fealty, the phallic symbolism of the Great Truncheon reaches a grotesque

apex.

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But the phallic symbolism hardly stops with the Great Truncheon of Held. The outstretched-arm salute which forms an obsessive motif throughout the novel is patently a phallic gesture. Jaggar reviews one of the orgiastic military parades from the pinnacle of an enormous cylindrical tower which is described in rather obviously phallic terms. Later, the pillar of fire in the center of the burning city of Bora becomes an immense phallic totem around which Jaggar parades his victorious troops. And in the final scene of the novel, a rocket quite literally filled with Jaggar's seed rises "on a pillar of fire to fecundate the stars," as the orgasmic climax of a bizarre military spectacle which Jaggar clearly experiences as a somewhat heavy-handed analog of sexual intercourse.

There is no doubt that a great deal of Lord of the Swastika's appeal to the unsophisticated comes from the blatant phallic symbolism which all but dominates the book. In a sense, the entire novel is a piece of sublimated pornography, a phallic orgy from beginning to end, with the sexuality symbolized in terms of grandiose fetishistic military displays and orgiastic bouts of unreal violence. Since this phallic sexuality of violence and military pagantry is a common transference in western society, the book gains great power by keying itself into one of the most prevalent sexual pathologies of our civilization.

What is open to dispute is whether or not Hitler was consciously aware of what he was doing.

Those who would claim that Hitler employed his systematic phallic imagery as a consciously calculated device can rightly claim that its consistent application points toward an act of self-conscious creation. Further, Hitler displays a cogent understanding of how visual symbols and events may be used to manipulate the mass psyche. One can believe that the mass torchlight rallies he describes in the book would in fact inflame the passions of real mobs in a manner roughly akin to what takes place in the novel. The adoption of the swastika colors by groups in our own society is additional evidence that Hitler knew full well how to devise visual images capable of having a powerful effect upon the viewer. Thus, by extension, it becomes superficially reasonable to suppose that Hitler deliberately invested Lord of the Swastika with phallic imagery in order to capture the rapt attention of the unsophisticated.

A cursory study of commercial science fantasy would seem to confirm this contention. The hero with the magi-

cal sword is a common, indeed virtually universal, feature of so-called sword and sorcery novels. Such novels are written according to a simple formula whereby this super-masculine figure, aided by his unusually potent weapon, with which he has an obvious phallic identification, overcomes great obstacles to gain his inevitable triumph. Hitler was active in the microcosm of "science-fiction random" for decades, and in fact many such fantasies were reviewed in his own fanzine. It is therefore reasonable to assume that he was quite familiar with the genre; in fact two or three of his earlier novels approached the sword-and-sorcery vein.

Lord of the Swastika is at least schematically a typical pulp sword-and-sorcery novel. The hero (Jaggar) receives the phallic weapon as a symbol of his rightful supremacy and then triumphantly fights his way through a series of gory battles to final victory. Aside from the political allegory and the more specialized pathologies which I will deal with later, it is the obsessional consistency and intensity of the phallic symbolism which distinguishes Lord of the Swastika from a host of similar science-fantasy novels. This leads to the conclusion that Hitler made a straightforward study of the nature of the appeal of the sword-and-sorcery genre, and self-consciously increased the pathological appeal of his own book beyond the ordinary by strengthening the phallic symbolism and making it that much more blatant and pervasive. This would make Lord of the Swastika a cynical exploitation of sexual pathology quite common to this genre, though of such a thorough-going nature that its power far exceeds that of its more timid models.

However, I believe that this theory may be disproved both by internal evidence within the novel and by the nature of the science-fiction genre itself.

For one thing, Lord of the Swastika displays abundant evidence of mental aberration on the part of its author quite aside from the question of phallic symbolism. The fetishism which permeates the novel could hardly be consciously designed to appeal to the average unsophisticated reader. Throughout the book, an obsessive amount of attention is paid to uniforms, especially the tight black leather uniforms of the SS. The frequent conjunction of repetitious description of "shiny black leather," "gleaming chrome," "high-steel-soled boots," and similar articles of clothing and adornment with phallic gestures such as the

Party salute, heel clicking, precision marching, and the like is dear indication of unselfconscious fetishism on the part of Hitler of a particularly morbid sort, hardly likely to appeal to any but the most thoroughly disturbed personality.

Indeed, in the book Hitler seems to assume that masses of men in fetishistic uniforms marching in precise displays and displaying phallic gestures and paraphernalia will have a powerful appeal to ordinary human beings. Feric Jaggar comes to power in Heldon through little more than a grotesque series of increasingly grandiose phallic displays. This is undoubtedly phallic fetishism on the part of the author, since the alternative conclusion is to accept the ridiculous notion that an entire nation would throw itself at the feet of a leader simply on the basis of mass displays of public fetishism, orgies of blatant phallic symbolism, - and mass rallies enlivened with torchlight and rabid oratory. Obviously, such a mass national psychosis could never occur in the real world; Hitler's assumption that it not only could happen but would be an expression of so-called racial will proves that he himself was suffering from such a malady.

Beyond the fetishism, the novel displays internal inconsistencies even on the gross level of commercial science fiction that are sure indications that the author's contact with reality faded more and more as he became involved with his own obsessions while writing what no doubt started out as simply another commercial potboiler.

The novel opens in a world where the highest technology is represented by the steam engine and the crude flying machine and progresses in a ridiculously short stretch of fictional time through television, machine guns, modern tanks, jet fighters, artificially grown human beings, and finally an interstellar spaceship. Hitler makes no attempt whatever to justify any of this; it is wish-fulfillment from beginning to end. Admittedly, unjustified and inconsistent wish-fulfillment fantasies are common in low-grade science fiction, but hardly to this ludicrously obvious extent. Hitler seems to assume that the very existence of a hero like Feric Jaggar would call into being these quantum-jumps in science and technology. Given the close author identification with a hero of this sort, this is a symptom of the grossest narcissism.

Perhaps even more pathological are Hitler's secretional and fecal obsessions. "Foul odors," "pestilences," "reeking

sties," "fetid cesspools," and the like abound in the book.

Again and again. Hitler displays his morbid dread of body secretions and processes. He is forever describing the hated Zind Warriors as "drooling," "defecating," "urinating," and so forth. Monsters are covered with slime clearly reminiscent of nasal mucous. The forces of evil are described in terms of noxious secretions, filth, foul odors and excretions, whereas the forces of good are "spotless," "gleaming," and "precise," their equipment and persons having shiny surfaces burnished to sterile glosses. The anality of this dichotomy should be clear even to the layman.

The violence in the book verges on the psychotic. Hitler describes the most ghastly slaughters as if he not only finds them attractive but assumes that his readers will be likewise enthralled. There is no doubt that the treatment of violence in *Lord of the Swastika* adds a special morbid appeal to the book. Here the reader is treated, if that is the word, to something that may be unique in all literature:

the most ghastly, perverse, and loathsome violence described by a writer who obviously intends such hideous spectacles to be edifying, uplifting, and even expressions of nobility. De Sade himself did not go so far, for his horrors are at worst meant to be sexually titillating, whereas Hitler equates mass destruction, ruthless slaughter, nauseating violent excesses, and genocide with pious self-righteousness, honor and virtue, and, moreover, writes as if he fully expects the average reader to share his point of view as self-evident truth. Surely this is clinching evidence that the power of *Lord of the Swastika* lies not in the skill of the writer but in the unbridled pathological fantasies which he has unself-consciously committed to print.

And if this were not enough, consider the astonishing fact that not a single woman appears as a character in the book. It may be fairly said that asexuality is a hallmark of the typical science-fantasy novel; women appear only as chaste stock figures, token romantic interest for the hero, prizes to be won. However, *Lord of the Swastika* not only lacks this traditional romantic interest, it goes to incredible lengths to deny the very need for the female half of the human race. Finally, all reproduction is to proceed from the cloning of the all-male SS, a weird sort of male parthenogenesis. <

It is tempting to add this denial of the very existence of women to the phallic fetishism and come up with a diag-
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nosis of repressed homosexuality on the part of Hitler. It is true that although Hitler never married, he had a certain reputation as a Don Juan at science-fiction conventions.

On the other hand, repressed homosexuality is frequently an element in Don Juanism. Nevertheless it would be somewhat presumptuous to make such a post-mortem diagnosis from the available evidence. Suffice it to say that Hitler's attitude toward women and sexuality was hardly wholesome.

Thus, far from a cynically written formula novel cunningly devised to appeal to the phallic urges of the masses like so many other science-fantasy novels, *Lord of the Swastika* emerges as the obsessional product of a deranged but powerful personality. Its power derives not from the skill of the writer but from the very richness of the pathological self-display with which he invested the novel in an entirely unself-conscious manner. It is well known that the art of psychotics may appear as brilliant and appealing even to the perfectly normal mind. Such art gives us a frightening glimpse into a baleful reality fortunately beyond our personal experience. Thus we come away deeply moved and disturbed by intimate contact with the unspeakable.

Those unfamiliar with the commercial science-fiction genre may be startled to learn that such pathological products are not that uncommon. The literature of science fiction abounds with stories of all-powerful phallic supermen, alien creatures rendered as fecal surrogates, penile totems, vaginal castration symbols (such as the monster with the many sucking mouths filled with razor-sharp teeth in *Swastika*), subliminally homoerotic or even pederastic relationships, and the like. While a few of the better writers in the field make sparing and judicious use of such elements on a conscious level, most of this material bubbles up from the subconscious into the work of writers writing on a purely superficial surface level.

Lord of the Swastika varies only in intensity and to some extent in content from the considerable body of pathological literature published within the science-fiction field. One must look to Hitler's somewhat unusual background to fully explain the unique appeal of this particular book.

Adolf Hitler was born an Austrian and migrated to Germany, in whose army he served during the Great War, before emigrating to New York in 1919. During the period between the end of the Great War and his move to
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America, Hitler was involved with a small radical party known as the National Socialists. Very little is known about this obscure group which disappeared around 1923, a full seven years before the Communist coup made the subject academic. However it does seem clear that the

National Socialists, or Nazis, as they were sometimes called, anticipated the machinations of the Soviet Union by many years and were confirmed anti-Communists.

The subject of the National Socialists and Germany remained sore points with Hitler for the rest of his life; he discussed them only with great reluctance and bitterness and, as it were, in his cups. The National Socialists he dismissed, no doubt with entirely sufficient justification, as a pathetic beer-hall debating society. But his early, fiery, and continuing devotion to the cause of anti-Communism was well-known, and involved him in many heated debates and feuds within the small world of science-fiction fans in which he moved, until the takeover of Britain in 1948 made the imperialistic appetite of the Greater Soviet Union crystal clear to even the most naive Communist apologist.

Thus, while the imagery, violence, fetishism, and symbolism of *Lord of the Swastika* are clearly manifestations of Hitler's unwholesome unconscious obsessions, it is reasonable to assume that elements of political allegory within the novel were conscious creations on Hitler's part, and products of a mind deeply concerned with world politics and the unhappy fate of his ancestral Europe.

The Empire of Zind bears obvious similarities to the present-day Greater Soviet Union. Zind represents the logical extreme end-product of Communist ideology—an anthill of mindless slaves presided over by a ruthless oligarchy. As the Dominators of Zind seek a world in which every sapient being has been reduced to their subhuman slave, so the present Communist leaders seek a world in which individualism will be entirely annihilated and every man reduced to subservience to the Communist Party of the GSU. As the power of Zind resides in its great size and huge pool of manpower which the Dominators feel free to expend without humanitarian scruples, so does the power of the Greater Soviet Union derive from its vast extent and enormous population, which the Communists tax cruelly with total disregard for individual need or dignity.

Heldon would seem to represent some resurgent Germany that never existed, a wish-fulfillment on Hitler's part, or possibly the non-Communist world in toto.

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Beyond this, the political allegory seems hopelessly muddled. The Dominators seem to stand for the world Communist movement; in the novel, the "Universalist Party" seems a straightforward surrogate for the Communist Party, with its base and cynical appeal to the sloth of the lower classes.

Yet there seems to be something more to it, something bound up with the entirely inexplicable genetic obsessions of the novel. It is impossible to draw any viable parallel between the degenerated mutants that infest the world of Lord of the Swastika and anything in contemporary reality. Of course the world of Swastika is the product of an ancient atomic war; perhaps Hitler's depiction of the genetically deformed descendants of our own age is simply a cautionary note. But the Doms themselves seem to be a genuine paranoid element. It is hard to escape the conclusion that they stand for some real or imagined group that Hitler hated and feared.

There is some flimsy evidence that the Nazi Party was to a certain extent anti-Semitic. Thus there is the temptation to conclude that the Dominators are somehow symbolic of the Jews. But since Zind is obviously meant to stand for the Greater Soviet Union, in which anti-Semitism has reached such rabid heights in the past decade that five million Jews have perished, and since the Dominators, far from being the victims of Zind, are its absolute rulers, this notion falls flat on its face.

Despite the confusion in details, however, the fundamental political allegory of Lord of the Swastika is quite clear: Heldon, representing either Germany or the non-Communist world, totally annihilates Zind, representing the Greater Soviet Union.

Needless to say, this particular political wish-fulfillment fantasy strikes a chord in the heart of every American at a time when only the United States and Japan stand between the Greater Soviet Union and total control of the globe. Further, the manner of victory also appeals to our deepest desires. Heldon destroys Zind without recourse to nuclear weapons. The heroic individualism of Heldon defeats the mindless hordes of Zind, i.e., the free men of the non-Communist world defeat the slave masses of Communized Eurasia. Only the loathsome Dominators, the Communist surrogates, stoop to the use of nuclear weapons and it avails them nothing. Although such an outcome to the present bleak world situation seems impossible, it can-

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not be denied that it represents our fondest hope for world peace through world freedom.

Thus the mass appeal of this rather crudely written science-fantasy novel stands revealed as a unique combination of political wish-fulfillment fantasy, pathological fetishism and phallic obsession, and the fascination of watching a strange, morbid, and quite alien mind unself-consciously displaying itself under the bizarre delusion that

its most violent and perverse impulses, far from being causes for shame, are noble and uplifting principles righteously adhered to by the bulk of humanity.

Further, these diverse elements of visceral appeal tend to reinforce each other. The phallic fantasies imbue the unsophisticated reader with a sense of limitless force and potency, which makes the wish-fulfillment annihilation of Zind seem that much more plausible, thus enhancing the enjoyment of this political fancy. The identification of Zind with the Greater Soviet Union allows the unsophisticated reader to revel in the excessive violence without feelings of guilt. Too, the near-psychotic intensity of the violence allows the reader a catharsis, a momentary purging of his feelings of fear and hate toward the world Communist menace.

Finally, there is the total certainty which permeates the novel. Feric Jaggar is a leader utterly without doubts. He knows what must be done and how to do it, and he proceeds accordingly without a trace of error, misgiving, or remorse. Zind and the Dominators are the enemy of true humanity, therefore they are deserving of no mercy and any action taken against them is morally beyond reproach. In these dark times, who in his heart of hearts does not secretly pray for the emergence of such a leader?

Not only is Jaggar without doubts. Hitler himself writes in a manner which at least gives the impression that he, too, was totally convinced of everything he said and that any contrary views were utterly without foundation. For him, the military virtues, with their powerful overtones of phallic obsession, fetishism, and homoeroticism are simple, timeless absolutes, not to be questioned by writer or reader.

In these times when we are torn between our own civilized complexities and doubts and the need to confront an implacable foe not noticeably encumbered by excessive moral scruples, such an attitude, even coming from a
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warped personality like Adolf Hitler, seems somehow perversely refreshing.

The Greater Soviet Union bestrides Eurasia like a drunken brute. Most of Africa is under its sway, and the South American republics are beginning to crumble. Only the great Japanese-American lake that is the Pacific stands as the final bastion of freedom in a world that seems destined to be inundated by the red tide. Our great Japanese ally has the time-hallowed traditions of Bushido to stiffen its resolve and imbue its people with a sense of

mission and destiny, but we Americans seem hopelessly sunk in apathy and despair.

No doubt many of Hitler's readers must find it tempting to imagine what the emergence of a leader like Feric Jaggar could mean to America. Our great industrial resources would be channeled into producing armed forces the equal of anything on earth, our population would be galvanized into a state of patriotic resolve, our moral qualms would be held in abeyance for the duration of OI-death struggle with the Greater Soviet Union.

Of course, such a man could gain power only in the extravagant fancies of a pathological science-fiction novel. For Feric Jaggar is essentially a monster: a narcissistic psychopath with paranoid obsessions. His total self-assurance and certainty is based on a total lack of introspective self-knowledge. In a sense, such a human being would be all surface and no interior. He would be able to manipulate the surface of social reality by projecting his own pathologies upon it, but he would never be able to

share in the inner communion of interpersonal relationships.

Such a creature could give a nation the iron leadership and sense of certainty to face a mortal crisis, but at what cost? Led by the likes of a Feric Jaggar, we might gain the world at the cost of our souls.

No, although the spectre of world Communist domination may cause the simpleminded to wish for a leader modeled on the hero of *Lord of the Swastika*, in an absolute sense we are fortunate that a monster like Feric Jaggar will forever remain confined to the pages of science fantasy, the fever dream of a neurotic science-fiction writer named Adolf Hitler.

—Homer Whipple, New York, N.Y., 1959