

## ***EXTREME PREJUDICE***

*The difference between a shark and an assassin is a matter of motivation.*

by **JERRY POURNELLE**

There were only nine people on the airplane, but the stewardess forgot to serve me coffee. I should have been nattered. In my job, being inconspicuous is an important talent; but I hadn't been trying to be invisible, and it infuriated me. By the time we were six hundred miles southwest of the southern tip of Baja California, I'd made a scene and the girl wouldn't forget me, ever.

I was ashamed of myself long before it was over. The whole point to my job is to make the United States a better place to live. We've no business spreading unhappiness for our own gratification. We do enough of that as official duties.

Dansworth station sits seven hundred miles southwest of Baja, and we'd been flying over blue water for hours. I remembered the old days of fast jets and squirmed around lit a match to all that oil. There wasn't anything to look at below, no islands, and from our cruising altitude I couldn't see waves or whitecaps. There was just that deep blue and the steady rumbling whine of the engines to lull me toward sleepiness but keep me from sleeping. Then the water changed color.

It was many shades of blue, and green, and red, and yellow, all boiling up blue-white in the center of each patch and then the colors spreading outward in great streaks. Most of Dansworth is under water, so those, enormous color patches were all I could see.

The plane circled lower as the stewardess, still not looking at me, gave her little spiel about seatbelts and having a pleasant trip. There was an airstrip floating in the water. It wasn't very wide, but over three thousand feet long, and there were buildings along its sides at the lee end. A dirigible mooring mast floated on its own platform not far away. The plane rolled to a stop at that end of the runway.

A regular grid of concrete domes dotted, the sea around the airstrip, and farther away were big floating docks. A couple of newly painted—"oceangoing ships were alongside. The whole place was clean and bright, different from any city I'd been in recently. Somehow the new planned cities, the "arcologies," never seem to look this bright and new; but we're getting there. We have to.

Dark kelp patches grew between the isolated domes, and the water was so clear that I could see platforms about fifty feet below the surface. Silvery torpedo-shapes flashed through the kelp, and sail-boats cruised among the domes, their bows throwing up white spumes as they raced with the wind. They didn't have "the look of yachts. Just a means of transportation.

Dr. Peterson himself was there to meet me. I strutted a bit for the benefit of the other passengers, and the stewardess looked worried, as she should have. Ignoring passengers Who rate a planeside meeting from the civilian director could get her into a lot of trouble, and jobs are pretty scarce. She wasn't wearing any rings, so she was reasonably safe from the new "One Job Per Family" program, but I understand the Federal Employment Commission is looking into that, too. Married women voters don't appreciate single girls who have jobs when there are still many families with no job at all...

Peterson wasn't wearing anything but a pair of shorts and a wide-brimmed hat, and he looked at my lightweight drip-dry suit with sym-"pathy. I've worn it on so many assignments that it seems like an old friend, and even in hot weather I'm comfortable in it. I thought I'd lost it once when Hertzog's blood spurted all over me, but it washed out all right. I've never got any of my own on it, maybe that's why I like it. A good luck charm.

I was surprised at how cool it seemed there- in the tropic mid-afternoon. The sun was high and bright overhead, the sky impossibly blue with only tiny white fleecy clouds scudding across. I haven't seen a sky like that since I last went hiking in the Sierras. Yet, despite the hot sun, the west wind was cool.

Peterson had a tan like old "leather. So did everyone else moving around the floating airstrip. It made me feel that I must look like something that had crawled out from under a rock. A part of me said that might not be too bad a description, and I thrust it away. It's bad enough getting doubts in the middle

of the night; I can't afford them in bright daylight. I wondered if that was what happened to the man I'd come to see.

Dr. Peterson had a funny habit of brushing his beard with the tips of his fingers, the way a man might test a wall to see if it had fresh paint. He had no mustache, and I found out later that few people at Dansworth do, although beards are common. Mustaches get in the way of your diving mask. They cause leaks.

I shook hands with Peterson and walked over to the edge of the airstrip to look down into the kelp. I hadn't expected anything like that in the middle of the Pacific, and I said so. "It only grows in cold, shallow water, doesn't it?" I asked.

"Right." Peterson seemed pleased that I knew that much. "That *is* cold, shallow water, Mr. Starr. The kelp's anchored to platforms below the surface, and the water's pumped up from the deep bottom. The kelp is brought in from all over the world so we can experiment with different varieties—the stuff right here comes from the Los Angeles area."

I couldn't look away. The water was clear, and millions of fish swam in the thick kelp beds. There were long, thin, torpedo-shaped fish with bright blue stripes down their sides, moving dartingly in schools, every fish turning at precisely the same instant. Each thick clump of kelp held a brilliant orange dam-selfish warily guarding its territory. There were a few sea urchins among the kelp, and as I watched, a swiftly moving shape darted past to snatch one—an otter, I thought.

A school of dolphins played among the fish. Two detached themselves from the rest and came over to examine me. One rose high on his tail, lifting himself out of the water to stand there churning while he splashed water on me. I ducked back in alarm, but it was too late. I was dripping wet.

Peterson clucked and whistled, then shouted, "Jolly! That's not nice."

The dolphin whistled something, and then, garbled but clear enough so I could understand it, it said, "Sorry, boss." And laughed.

Peterson was still trying to explain when we got to Admiral Kingsley's office.

"They've always been able to imitate speech," Peterson said. "The stories about dolphins talking and singing go back to classical Greek times. But nobody ever took the trouble to systematically teach them before."

"Yeah, well, look," I protested, "we get stories about intelligent fish all the time. Used to take 'em pretty seriously, and I know how useful the dolphins are. But does that thing understand what he's saying?"

"They aren't fish," Peterson said. "OK. Cetaceans. Toothed seagoing mammals. They breathe through lungs, and they've never been known to attack a man, and the Navy and fishermen have been systematically using them, as messengers- and herders since the Fifties anyway. I've had the standard briefing, Dr. Peterson. But nobody told me the damned things could talk!"

"Not many can," Peterson said. "At least not so that an untrained, man can understand them. Tell me, Mr. Starr, do you speak any foreign language?"

"Yeah." It was safe to admit that. I wasn't about to tell him just how many I could get along in. He wouldn't have believed me anyway. "And was it difficult to learn?" "Sure."

"Well, to a dolphin, any human language is much more difficult. You'd find it easier to learn Urdu or Yakut than Jolly did to learn English. Dolphin grammar isn't like any language we speak. Couple that with the fact that he has to suppress over half the frequencies and sounds he normally makes to communicate, and maybe you'll appreciate why so few dolphins ever manage to be understood."

We'd reached the admiral's office ten fathoms below the surface, and the conversation trailed off. There was a watertight door to the office, and a Navy yeoman as receptionist. Admiral Kingsley didn't have a beard, and his tan looked pasty, as if he'd been out of the sun for a while after a long stint outdoors. I was told he'd just come up from a seven-week tour of duty with the "deep mining operation below Dansworth.

The pallor bothered me. I'd had one like that myself after the worst assignment I ever drew. The FBI caught an economic saboteur and put him away at Lewisburg. Our director decided he knew too much

and would probably be exchanged, so they sent me in after him. I tagged him in two weeks, but it took another six to spring me, and by the time I came out I looked like a slug. I felt like one, too. Ever since then, I've been sure prisons don't rehabilitate anyone. Problem is, what does?

"This is Gideon Starr," Peterson said. "Admiral Kingsley."

We exchanged pleasantries and Kingsley offered drinks. I took mine and sat in a big government-issue easy-chair, the kind they have in the Pentagon, or at Langley. It seemed like an old friend.

"Mr. Starr," said Kingsley, "you've got real pull. We've never had a visitor here with an endorsement like yours, from the Secretary."

And if you're lucky you won't again, I thought, but I said, "Well, it's getting close to budget review time. A few enthusiastic articles wouldn't hurt your research appropriation."

He smiled at that, and Peterson practically beamed. "That's a fact," Peterson muttered. "Actually, if they'd just let us keep some of the profits we'd be all right. How many research efforts actually make money?"

I shrugged. "I'll do my best, anyway."

Kingsley beamed this time. "Well. We're to show you around and then let you direct yourself," he said. "Orientation'll take a while, though. There's a lot here, Mr. Starr. And a lot of ways for a man who doesn't know what he's doing to get killed."

"Yeah." There were a lot of ways for a man who did know what he was doing to get killed, too. Most of 'em had been tried on me at one time or another. "I've got a diver's card, and some underwater experience," I said. "I think I know what to look out for."

"It's a start," Kingsley agreed. "Well, you may as well begin sightseeing." He reached out to his desk console. Sad pushed a button. Curtains opened on the wall behind him.

There were artificial lights, as well as the sunlight filtering down to this depth. Big fronds waved in slow motion, an underwater forest just outside his office. I could barely see the grid that held the kelp below us. There were shelves sticking out of every structure and shaft, and lots of shafts. Coral in bright reds and blues grew from the shelves, and barnacles, and shellfish—there and on long lines that dangled down from the surface. Fish darted through the kelp fronds. It was a dynamic color picture that'd never come through on a TV screen. I couldn't wait to get out there in it, and I told them so.

They exchanged grins. I expect every tourist says the same thing. If anybody could visit that place and not want to get outside, he was dead or might as well be.

"Yes. Well, perhaps first an orientation tour?" Peterson said. "I really don't know how familiar you are with what we're doing here at Dansworth."

"Not at all," I told him. "I'm primarily an aerospace writer. I've done some diving, but not much serious study of seapower stations. You'd better assume I don't know anything at all."

The nice part about it was I was telling the truth. Not all of it, but no lies.

The admiral hit another button and more curtains opened. There was a 3-D map behind them, a holograph tank, and by manipulating his desk console he could show things at different levels. He started with the bare floor of the Pacific. It was crosshatched with very regular lines, a checkerboard of racks in the bottom, and about sixteen thousand feet deep. Dansworth Seamount rose steeply from the floor to within seven hundred feet of the surface. It stood there all by itself, with nothing around, at least not on that map.

"Dansworth," Peterson said. "The deep gash next to it is Shatterton Fissure. The geologists are having a field day here."

"Um." I wasn't really interested in the geology. The theories change every year, so what's the point in studying up on them? I like technology, though, and I'm a pretty good writer. I think I could make a living at it even if Langley didn't use influence to get my stuff placed in important magazines. I'll never find out, of course. You don't quit in my job. I didn't want to, anyway.

Kingsley did something to the console and the scale changed to show only Dansworth Seamount and a little area around it. A grid appeared, a 3-D chessboard, with part of the grid below the top of the mountain, and the rest above that going on to the surface. "Dansworth Station," Kingsley said. "Our city

in the sea.”

“Impressive” I meant it “What’s the grid?”

“Corridors, mostly. Concrete cylinders strung together. Labs, quarters, processing ”plants.“

The place was big, and they had color codes on the different structures in the map. It would take a long time to learn everything, but I wouldn’t have to. We’d found the traitor after five years, and I wouldn’t be here long at all. It seemed, a pity, because Dansworth was a very interesting place. I wondered what it would be .like to live here.

“Now for your guide,” Dr. Peterson said. “I understand you asked for Hank Shields. Any reason why?”

I shrugged. “A couple of sailors in San Diego told the editor he was a good man who knew a lot about Dansworth. Anybody else would do, if it’s inconvenient.”

“No, nothing like that,” Peterson said. “Just that Hank doesn’t want any publicity. Something about his wife. He’ll be glad to show you around if you won’t put him in the story.”

“Suits me.” I needed to think “ that one over, and cursed the damn fools who’d asked for Shields in the first place. I like to plan my own operations, and I don’t need help from the goddamn deskmen. I’ll take their orders, but I don’t need them trying to run my life. ”When do I meet him?“

Hank Shields was about five-eleven, a good three inches shorter than me, but he weighed nearly as much, one hundred and ninety pounds. He matched the description perfectly: blond, blue eyes, thick matted beard like most people have at Dansworth. Except for the beard he hadn’t made any attempt to change his face. The pictures at Langley might have been taken last week, once the artists had airbrushed the beard.

He looked me over carefully, then we shook hands and stood there sizing each other up. I looked to see anything in his eyes—recognition of my face, or my name, but if he’d ever heard of me he was pretty good at hiding it. That didn’t mean anything, of course. So was I. He had a powerful grip, as good as mine, and that figured too. He’d had my job once. Finally we let go and Peterson waved us out of the admiral’s office.

“What would you like to see first?” Shields asked.

I shrugged. “Better let you decide, Mr. Shields.”

“Hank,” he said automatically. “Fine. I’m Gideon. Where we going? I can’t wait to get outside.”

“We’ll spend today on the inside tour and go out tomorrow. OK?”

“Sure.” As we talked he was leading me through a maze of corridors. There were watertight doors at intervals, some open, some closed, and we’d have to stop and open them, step through and seal up behind. The corridors were about ten feet high rounded on top, and rough inside. He pointed out various laboratories as we passed.

“How long does it take to learn your way around here?” I asked.

“Years. And they keep adding to it. Well, they used to keep adding to it,” he caught himself. “Budget’s been rotten the last couple of years.”

He had a hearty voice, and was eager to explain things to me. Hank Shields would be an easy man to like. I decided he didn’t know anything about me or why I was here, and I could relax.

We reached an elevator shaft and went down. “I’m taking you to the number-one power plant,” Hank said. “It’s the only one at sea-level pressure. The rest are just like it, only they’re pressurized to ambient. Saves construction costs.”

We went through another water-tight door and out onto a catwalk. There were turbines below, big Westinghouse jobs, and it was noisy as hell, but otherwise it didn’t look a lot different from the generator house at a dam. I said so.

He motioned me back into the elevator shaft and closed the door so it was quiet. “It isn’t any different, really,” he told me. “Surface water, twenty-five degrees Centigrade. -Seventy-seven if you like it in Fahrenheit. Down at the bottom the water’s five degrees Centigrade.

We take the warm water down to heat exchangers and boil propane with it. Propane steam goes through the turbines. On the other side we've got condensers. They get cooled by another set of heat exchangers with water pumped up from the bottom. Turbines spin, and out comes electricity. Works like a charm, and no fuel costs." "Sounds like perpetual motion." "It is. There's a power source, of course. The sun. It heats water pretty good in the Tropics. What it amounts to, Gideon, is that we have a temperature difference with the same power potential as a ninety-foot water drop. Lots of dams with a smaller pressure head than that. And we've got all the hot water we could ever want."

"Yeah, OK." We started up in the elevator. It sounded impressive as hell but there hadn't been anything to see. "Just a minute. The water by the airstrip was cold."

"Right. That's used cooling water. We dump it high because it's full of nutrients. Artificial up-welling. You know, like Peru? Over half the fish caught anywhere in the world are at natural upwellings. We've made our own. Lot of profit in fish, fish meal, frozen fish, game-fish, you name it."

I could appreciate that. With meat prices where they were in the US, we're getting to be a nation of fish-eaters anyway, and Dansworth supplies a lot of the fish. "But where do you get the hot water, then?"

"Bring it in from up-current of the station, where there are black platforms below the surface to help get it hotter. No problem. It has to be pumped anyway. With dolphin-hide liners on the pipes, it's about as easy to pump the water a long way as a short."

I gave him a blank look. "I must be dense—dolphin hides? You kill them for that?"

He laughed. It was a real long laugh, hearty, and after a second I joined in because it was infectious, even if it was obviously on me. "What're we laughing about?" I asked him.

"Dolphin-hide's a process name," Hank wheezed. "You'll see. We've got a way to duplicate the effect that dolphins use to control water flow across their skin. They get true laminar flow, if that means anything to you."

I nodded. It did, just. "Smooth water flow, no friction."

"Yeah. We haven't got it worked out for boats yet, but we're trying. Easy to make it work with steady flows, like pipes. You'll see tomorrow."

We toured the station. Fisheries, where they used graded nets to catch fish at just the right sizes and let the others through. There were dolphins involved in that too. They chased the fish into the nets. The men in charge used little boxes with keys to play dolphin-sound tunes and direct their partners. The dolphins seemed to be having more fun than the men, but nobody was working very hard and I could see a lot of grins.

In another place they had plant-research farms. Different kinds of kelp and other seaweeds, and different creatures living in them. Shrimp, fish, shellfish—anything that might be edible, and some that weren't. Everything grew like crazy, and Hank said it was because of the nutrients in the water they brought up from the bottom. "Infinite supply of that, too. All free since we need it in the power plants to begin with."

We took an elevator to the surface at the downwind end of the airstrip, and watched the big ships loading up at the floating docks. I asked how they'd survive in storms, big structures like that exposed to the waves.

"They wouldn't," Hank said. "So we sink 'em if there's a big enough blow coming. Ships stay way the hell away unless there's good weather. We get good predictions from the satellites."

It was a whole new world. Everything was bright and clean. The shops along the airstrip had no iron bars or reinforced doors. I hadn't seen a policeman since I arrived. Hank told me the Navy Shore Patrol did all the policing they needed—mostly drying out sailors who'd had one too many.

I'd never known people could live like that. "Why can't we, back in the States? One day we will, if we can hang on long enough."

We went through hydrogen plants, where they electrolyzed water into its parts and liquefied the hydrogen and oxygen. The compression and electrolysis made heat, and they pumped that back into the system with heat exchangers. No stage of the Dansworth operation was very efficient, but overall it was fabulous. I knew the hydrogen was important to California, where they pipe it through the old natural gas

pipelines and people burn it in floor furnaces and stoves.

“We’re starting to get salable quantities of metals out of seawater, too,” Hank said. “That wouldn’t be economic if it was the only reason for the system, but we pump a *lot* of water through here. Power’s free except for building the equipment to get it.” He went on about Dansworth and how it was the wave of the future until he stopped suddenly and grinned.

“I’m an enthusiast,” he said.

“I’ve noticed.” I grinned back. “You’re making me one.”

“Yeah. Now let’s go home and have dinner. Judy’s expecting you to put up with us while you’re here.”

“Well, I’ll be all right at the YOQ. Wouldn’t want to put you to any trouble.”

“Crap. No trouble. Only problem with Dansworth is we don’t get many visitors. There’s three thousand people here and we know every one of them, or it seems like it anyway. Judy’d kill me if I didn’t give her a chance to hear the latest gossip from the States.”

“Yeah, I suppose—look, you’re sure it’s no problem?” I wasn’t being polite. My father had a big thing about hospitality. It was about the only thing my father taught me that I hadn’t sacrificed to the job; but Hank gave me no choice, just as the job gave me no choice. No choice at all.

Judy Shields was a willowy brunette, thin but with muscles. She had an aristocratic look and the same deep tan everyone seemed to have, but the effect was partly spoiled by freckles on her nose. My kid sister had freckles like that, and she hated them. I can remember her making unhappy sounds at the bathroom mirror while the rest of us waited outside for our turn. A rapist finished her on her eighteenth birthday.

Judy Shields was happy to meet someone from Outside, as they called it. I also got introduced to Albert Shields, age nine and called “Hose-nose” for no reason I could understand.

“Mr. Starr’s a science writer,” Hank told the kid.

“Sure! I’ve seen some of your books, Mr. Starr. You going to put Dad in a book?”

I lifted an eyebrow and looked at Hank. “According to Dr. Peterson, your father doesn’t want to be in a book.”

“Aw,-why not? I’d sure like to be in a book. Jimmy Peterson’s father’s in a lot of books, and he’ll never let you forget it, either.”

“Off to your room, Hose-nose,” Judy said. “Out, out, out.”

“So you can drink, huh?” The kid winked and went out.

“He’s got a point, you know,” I said. “A little publicity never hurt anybody’s career.” I looked over at Hank with complete innocence. It seemed like the right thing to say. He looked back helplessly.

“It’s my fault, Gideon,” Judy said. “My family never wanted me to marry Hank. It’s—well, it’s all very unpleasant, and I’d rather they didn’t know we were here, that’s all. I suppose it would do Hank some good to be written up.”

“Not as much as that, and by damn I don’t need your mother dropping in for a visit,” Hank said. He poured me another drink.

“Well, forget it, then.” I hoisted the martini. “Here’s to Dansworth. It’s quite a place.”

It was, too. Although we were a hundred feet under water, the Shields’ apartment wasn’t small or gloomy. There was a big window looking out just like the admiral’s, and the same unending color swarms of fish around the coral. Inside, the walls were concrete, and they’d hung them over with woven mats, needlework tapestries, pictures, and the like. There was a shelf of books on one wall and a shelf of ship models on another. It was nothing like homes in the States where the TV dominates the room. You could tell that the people who lived here liked to talk, and read, and do things together.

“We like it,” Judy said. “Now. What’s the latest gossip? Is Gregory Tolland going to hang on as President? Whatever happened to Aeneas MacKenzie?”

I shrugged, and told her what the press people were saying. “MacKenzie’s gone off to Baja. Probably joined up with Hansen Enterprises,” I told them. “And they say Tolland’s going to hang in there. The press supports him—don’t you get any news here at all?”

“Very little? Judy said. ”We like it that way. No TV, and we don’t read the Stateside papers. Is it true that MacKenzie found Equity Trust people in the White House itself?”

“It looks that way.” I didn’t really want to talk about it, although I suppose half the people in the country were having the same conversation at just that moment. Usually Agency people have about as much interest in politics as they do in Donald Duck, but some of us really thought Tolland and his People’s Alliance would put some new pride into the United States. He’d started off well, and certainly MacKenzie’s investigations had cleaned up a lot of dirt accumulated in Washington for thirty years. We’d helped in that. And then MacKenzie got too close to the White House, and he was out, and Tolland sat there alone in the Oval Office. “The consensus is that President Tolland was as surprised as anyone. At least the press thinks so.”

Hank laughed unpleasantly. He clearly didn’t believe it. Maybe he was trying to justify something, like running out.

“I’d rather talk about Dansworth,” I told them. “Hank, you never did tell me what you do here.”

“I’m a generalist. Sea-farming methods, mostly. Some clumsy engineering. Diving—academic training’s not worth a hoot compared to just getting down there and fooling around. We’ve still got a lot learn.”

“Do you dive too?” I asked Judy.

“Oh, sure. I have to. I’m the schoolteacher. A lot of the classes are out on the reefs.”

“Isn’t that dangerous for the kids?”

“A little. Traffic accidents are bad for children too. And we don’t have gangs and muggings or smog or enriched white flour.”

“Yeah.” Paradise. There was something else about Dansworth. Everybody was doing something he was interested in. I wondered when I’d last met anybody like that. There are a lot of go-getters with the big international corporations, but they’re in Short supply back home.

And yet. It’s my country. We *built* Dansworth. The arcology projects in the Midwest haven’t worked so well, but we’ll lick that too. We’re finding ourselves again.

Dinner was fish, of course. All kinds of fish. There was one thing that tasted like steak, and I asked about it. “Whale?”

They all shuddered. “No, it’s beef. Dr. Peterson sent steaks over in your honor,” Judy said. Her throat seemed tight. Hank didn’t look too good either, and I thought the kid was going to throw up. It was very quiet in the room.

“OK, what’s wrong?” I asked. “Obviously I put my foot in it.”

“You wouldn’t really *eat* a whale would you?” Hose-nose asked. His eyes were as big as saucers, I mean *really*“

“I never have, as far as I know,” I answered. “But—d thought they were raising whales for food out here.”

“No. That’s over,” Hank said. “Gideon—did you meet Jolly? Dr. Peterson’s talking dolphin?”

“Sure.”

“Would you eat him?”-

“Good Lord, no.”

“Whales may be at least as smart as dolphins. Killer whales certainly are—of course they’re a kind of dolphin anyway. But even ”if the bigger whales aren’t as intelligent as we are, they’re more like apes or gorillas than cattle. They’re *aware*. Would you eat monkeys?”

“I see what you’re getting at.” I saw it, but I didn’t have the emotions they did. It really disturbed them.

“The reason we can let the children swim without worrying about them is that the dolphins watch out for them,” Judy said. “We wouldn’t be able to operate this place without them.”

“But whales eat dolphins,” I protested. “Don’t they?”

“Killer whales do,” Hank said. “OK. I grant that, and the dolphins have no use for their overgrown cousins. But dogs eat sheep too, until they’re taught to take care of them. It’s the same thing.”

“You have killer whales here?”

“No. They’d be too hard to take care of,” Hank said. “We’re concentrating on training the dolphins right now. But there’ll come a time—”

“And what about sharks?” I asked. “Any chance of taming them?”

“No. They’re vicious and stupid, and you can’t even hate them. I suppose they have a place in nature, but there’s none for them here.”

Hank’s voice had an edge to it when he said that. I wondered if he was thinking the same thing I was. He’d been a shark, and he’d found a place here. A bloody traitor to the Agency, a man who’d run out, making it just that much harder for the rest of us.

After dinner we sat around watching the fish look in at us. They were attracted to the lights. There were dolphins too, including a baby that kept perfect station just behind and under her mother. I was, told I’d meet them the next day.

Hank and Judy kept asking me about the States, and they didn’t like what I told them. That didn’t surprise me. Even after a few hours here, I could feel the contrast with the way we lived at home. Everyone at Dansworth had a purpose, but back home everyone seemed to be like a man hanging on to a rope over the edge of a cliff, and nobody seemed to quite know what to do about it. Until somebody does, it’s my job to keep some Charlie from sawing the rope in two. God knows there are enough trying it.

They’d listen to stories about the Outside for a while, then they’d get off onto something else going on at Dansworth. Minerals. Ecological farming, fish and plants, pollution-free power, talking to dolphins. Hank was working on all of it, trying to keep track of the big picture, but there was so much going on he always had more to -do than he had time for.

That’s when I really hated Hank Shields. He was enthusiastic about his work. He had a wife and family. He had a job he really believed in. He slept nights, with none of those little doubts that grow and grow in the quiet darkness until you get up and turn on the lights. He had all the things I’d never have, and why should he?

He’d been one of us. He’d quit. We can’t quit, but Hank Shields had tried it. Now he sat smugly in his living room, with his lovely wife,“ and thought about this Paradise he lived in. He thought he was safe.

He’d soon learn different.

For our first day’s diving we used only masks and snorkels and fins. The water was clear, and there were fish everywhere. I was surprised to see Pacific barracuda swimming near us, and they made me nervous, but Hank said they wouldn’t hurt anyone. They hardly ever did back in the States, of course, and here they were well-fed and the vicious ones weeded out.

The dolphins did that. We’d no sooner gone off the platform into the water, Hank and me and Hose-nose, when five dolphins came around. Hank had a little box attached to his belt, and played a tune on some keys sticking out of it. The dolphins arranged themselves in front of us and I’d swear they were laughing at us.

“This is Jill,” Hank said,“pointing to the mother I’d seen the night before. ”And the little one’s Susie. Jill, meet Gideon Starr.“ He also made clicks and wheezes on the box.

“You telling me she understands English?” I asked.

“Quite a lot. So does Jumbo, the big male there,” Hank said. The dolphins laughed again- “But none of these can speak English, at least not so that you could understand them. We’re teaching Susie, but she’s very young. Actually she doesn’t speak dolphin very well either. She’s learning both languages together.”

Hose-nose was swimming around the big female dolphin, pushing Susie away from her mother. Jill turned in a tight circle, Susie following exactly, leaving Hose-nose behind and then coming up face-to-face with the boy. The dolphin chattered loudly.

“Stop it, Albert,” Hank said wearily. “You know better.” He turned to me. “Kids. He knows that dolphins don’t like people messing with their children. Jill won’t actually hurt him, and Hose-nose counts on it. Well, Gideon, you ready for a wild ride?”,

Hank produced harness things, big rigid rings with trapeze bars hanging behind them. The dolphins



stuck their bills into the rings, and we each grabbed a bar. Hose-nose had Jill and I drew Jumbo, while another male called "Fonso" towed Hank. We moved through the kelp beds at about five knots, with a kaleidoscope of colors flashing below us. The other two dolphins ranged around us in tight circles, charging toward me and then diving under just as it seemed a collision was inevitable. It took me a while to get used to it, and I saw Hank watching me out of the corner of his eye, while Hose-nose was openly laughing.

I was damned if I'd give them anything to laugh about, but there were a couple of times when I held my breath. A six-hundred-pound dolphin is *big*, and when he comes straight at you moving about twenty knots—it's scary.

It was also hard to manage my snorkel at those speeds. We made enough of a wake to swamp the thing quite often, so I was pretty busy keeping my mask clear of water and trying not to inhale too much brine. Eventually Hank made more clicks and wheezes on his box and the dolphins slowed down a bit. I was sure I'd been tested, and wondered if it were standard treatment for visitors. Dudes are fair game anywhere.

I saw how the barracuda-management program worked about an hour out. We were free-swimming in kelp beds, the giant fronded stuff that grows off Catalina Island, diving down among the fish and watching sea otters collect the spiny sea urchins to take them up to the surface and crack them. One of the barracuda got too interested in an otter, and the dolphins converged around it. The barracuda realized its mistake immediately and darted off, doing maybe thirty-five knots, much faster than a dolphin, but one of the dolphins had anticipated that. It had started on a converging course before the barracuda saw him, and snap!

I began to have a healthy respect for dolphin teeth. The barracuda made a nice meal for the five of them, a tidbit apiece with Susie getting most of the innards.

Well, people keep dogs, and they have big teeth. Families will trust their babies to the temper of an Alsatian that could take the kid apart in three bites, yet puts up with being sat on and ridden... but dogs have been bred for that behavior for thousands of years. The dolphins are only wild animals.

Or are they? They aren't really wild, and is it fair to call anything that smart an animal?

We went out again the next morning. The Shields had a lock system so you could go out from their home, twenty fathoms down; at that depth we were below most of the kelp, although there were some giant fronds growing up from platforms attached to the deep-layer corridors and labs. A couple of sailors brought over equipment for me and got it fitted properly, while Hank and Hose-nose put on their own gear. The kid was enjoying his respite from classes, and Judy Shields was mad because she couldn't come with us. She had to teach the school her son was playing hooky from...

They used helmets with a faceplate that covered the whole face, mouth and all. I'd never used that system before. The advantage was you could talk with it, and I could understand Hank a few feet away, although it was tough; but there was also a plug-in system to connect to the underwater sled, and when we were all attached to that everything was easy. There was a little garbling, but not much.

The sled was a four-man job with two pairs of seats protected by what I'd have called windscreens except that of course these were waterscreens. It was powered by batteries, and held air tanks so we didn't have to use the backpack air while we traveled around the station. When we got outside and Hank had showed me how the system worked, he used the dolphin-talker box to play a tune. Jumbo, Jill, and Susie showed up.

"We'll only need Jumbo," Hank explained. His voice sounded heavy, and a little mushy in my helmet phones. "Jill's off-duty anyway, of course, because raising Susie's a full-time job. The others have work to do."

It took a little while for our eyes to get accustomed to the light down that far, and I was surprised to see just how much filtered through to twenty fathoms. There weren't many reds or yellows, of course; water absorbs that end of the spectrum so that down that deep everything seems to be different shades of blues and greens.

We took the sled out to the edges of the great colored patches of diatoms and plankton that

surrounded the upwelling cold water with its nutrients. There weren't any structures out here and it was officially not part of Dansworth at all, but Hank wanted to show me the color changes. We were up to about sixty feet now, but we'd been down a couple of hours. On the way the dolphins played their game with the sled, darting ahead and then racing back to do a couple of right turns around us, urging Hank to get up more speed.

Finally I asked Hank about decompression.

"No problem," he said. "Judy'll have the whole apartment pressurized when we get back. We'll go in and- let the system take care of gradual decompression—or leave it pressurized if you want to go out tomorrow. That's one of the big advantages at Dansworth, the deep-water boys can get saturated and stay at pressure as long as they want."

"What do you do if you want to get down really deep?" I asked. As —, we'd cruised through the last of the experimental kelp farms a couple of miles back, I'd seen the winking lights of the mining operations far below, down at the top of the seamount itself.

"Have to use special gas mixtures," Hank said. "Expensive. He-hum's gone out of sight. We use rebreather systems so we won't waste it."

"I want to try that. The editors insist on coverage of the deep mines."

"Better to use the crabs," Hank said. "Little subs. The outside gear takes a lot of training."

"I've been down with Navy gear," I told him. "And out into space for that matter. It can't be all that different."

"It is, though. Well, OK, maybe next week. Can't take the boy down there."

Hose-nose mumbled disappointment. He'd seen all this before, although he said he hadn't been this far from the station itself before, and he wanted to see the mines.

We swam around the edges of the color patches. The cold water spreading out to here made distinct layered patches in the warm tropic waters, each layer edging downward away from the upwelling point. There were different creatures in each layer, and the layers were separated by twenty or thirty feet of water. The scene was fascinating.

We were about ready to turn back when we heard a shrill whistle and a loud scream. I looked around, scared stiff, then decided it was the dolphins playing games on us.

Hank had his box out and played a series of clucks and gobbles on it. One of the dolphins answered.

"Quick!" Hank shouted. "Into the sled! Shark!"

Hose-nose moved toward the sled fast. I was confused, not knowing what to do for a second, and stayed with Hank. We swam toward the sled, and then, just beyond it, I saw the thing.

It was a big blue shark, over twenty feet anyway, and it was charging toward little Susie while Jill tried to stay between the shark and her daughter. I didn't see Jumbo at all.

The-shark was beautiful. It raced through the deep water, a deadly blue torpedo, straight toward the baby dolphin. Jill would have had no trouble keeping away from it if she hadn't been worried about Susie, but now she was right in its path.

Even from forty feet away I could hear the underwater *crunch!* as the shark hit the big dolphin. Jill whirled away, tumbling and twirling, and the shark headed for the baby.

It was like watching a bad movie, all in slow motion, it seemed, although nothing was moving slowly at all. We were kicking hard to get to the sled and the shark took another tight turn and came back at the little dolphin and Hose-nose was screaming something and we couldn't get to the sled in time and even if we could I didn't know what to do—Jumbo came from nowhere and struck the shark just behind its gills. He had come on at full tilt, seven hundred pounds of dolphin moving at twenty-five knots, and the impact was terrific.

It didn't seem to affect the shark at all. The deadly blue shape was knocked off-course and missed Susie, but that was all. It started another tight turn, while Jumbo whirled with it, trying to get up speed and at the same time keep the shark off the baby.

Susie was making screaming clicks, and kept trying to jet to her usual station behind and below her mother, but Jill was tumbling out of control and I was sure she was dead.

We reached the sled and Hank took a king lance with a slender ice-pick tip from a rack along the

sides. There were other lances there and I grabbed one and followed.

“Stay with the sled!” Hank shouted. “Button her up!”

“Yeah, do that!” I told Hose-nose. I kept right with Hank. He looked back for just a glance to see I was with him, a twisted look of pain and rage and thanks all at the same time.

We got to the two dolphins and took up positions on each side, lances held out toward the shark. Once we were there, Jumbo streaked off to get up momentum.

The shark didn't like the situation now. I don't know just how conscious those things are, but it had three functional enemies—none as big as it, was, but all acting aggressively.

On the other hand, there was a faint trail of blood from Jill and that attracted the shark. I saw that Jill wasn't dead, but she wasn't under control either. The impact had done something to her, knocked her unconscious perhaps.

The shark circled. Jumbo flashed at it, and the shark dodged in a tight turn above us, then when Jumbo was past made up its mind“ and -started straight toward me. -I kept the lance pointed out at it. It seemed that I had plenty of time, although the whole battle hadn't lasted more than a minute.

The shark was moving *£s&t* and I didn't know if I could hit it straight on. Just before it got into range of the lance, Jumbo was there again, *wham!*, striking the shark at the same place, just aft of the gills, and diverting it. As it passed overhead I rammed the lance deep into “its belly.”

It was a charged lance, and it should have injected a full bottle of CO2 into the shark. I cursed when nothing happened and realized I hadn't pulled- the goddam safety pin out. All I'd done was give the shark a tiny puncture wound, nothing that would hurt it at all.

It did the job, though. The shark flinched in surprise and turned slightly. Hank was right there with his lance, and he hadn't forgotten. The needle went in and there was a loud whooshing sound. The shark wriggled for a second, then started floating upward, fast, its insides blown up and compressed and great bubbles of bloody gas coming from its mouth and gill slits. Jumbo came screaming around in another tight circle and rammed it amidships, forcing out more blood, but the monster was dead and headed topside, buoyed up by the gas injected into its innards.

Hank was still shouting. He was under the unconscious dolphin, pushing it upward toward the surface, kicking hard. Jill had neutral buoyancy; she wasn't heavy, but she was very massive, and it was slow work. I swam alongside and kicked upward, pushing at that great heavy body. She felt warm and hard, almost rigid. Susie kept swimming around us, screaming plaintively. Then Jumbo was there pushing upward as well.

“Get back down!” Hank ordered. “You'll have the bends.”

“So will you.” I kept shoving upward. It seemed to take forever, but the light was getting brighter.

He didn't say anything else, and after a long time we broke surface. I had managed to keep the pressures equalized and breathe out steadily on the way up, only taking in a few breaths at intervals. It would be a while before we felt anything, I decided. We didn't have any embolism problems. Or if we did, I didn't feel anything. Yet.

When we got the blowhole above water, Jill let out a long whistle of breath and started breathing again. She was thrashing around feebly, unable to keep herself above water without help. “The only blood I could see was from an irregular tear just below her fin, whether shark-bite or just abrasion from the sandpaper sides of the blue shark I couldn't tell.

Hank played another tune on his call-box and Jumbo darted away from us, swimming in a big circle that kept widening before coming back and making clicking grunts.

“No more sharks in sight,” Hank translated. He stuck his helmet down below the surface and shouted. “Hose-nose!”

“Yes, sir.” The kid's voice was faint but we could hear it. I couldn't- make out any expression in it, but I could imagine what the boy was thinking. He was well-trained, to stay down there while his father brought his friend—Jill was certainly more than a pet—up to the surface.

“Go get help. Jumbo will stay with us.”

“Yes, sir.” There was a pause. “Is Jill all right?”

“She's alive. Get going.”

“Yes, sir.”

I heard the sled motor start up, a high-pitched whine, and then it receded. We were alone up there, saturated with nitrogen and holding up a bleeding dolphin, while more sharks might come around at any moment. I thought I remembered that blues hunt alone. I also remembered that sharks can smell blood for miles.

“All right, get back down to forty feet,” Hank ordered. “Jumbo and I’ll hold her up. Stay five minutes and then come up and relieve me. Your lance is still armed, isn’t it?”

“Yes. OK.” I let air out of the buoyancy compensator and sank slowly. It didn’t need two to hold up the dolphin. At least not two men; Jumbo was doing most of the work anyway, but he couldn’t quite hold Jill alone. It took someone on the other side to do that, to keep her from rotating and falling away. The five minutes took forever, then I surfaced again. Hank made more noises on his call-box, sending Jumbo on another long patrol out around us. When the dolphin returned, Hank gave me his place. He seemed a bit gray and sweaty under his faceplate and I thought he had a touch of the bends, or an embolism, or both. The only thing we could do for that was to get him down again, and I pointed emphatically. He nodded.

“Thanks,” he said. Then he sank out of sight, and I was alone on the surface.

Not really alone, I decided. There was Jumbo on the other side of our burden, and Susie just under us, still clicking and whistling but not so plaintively now. Jumbo clicked at her, and she was quiet. There were swells, about five feet high, with tiny whitecaps on them, and it was hard to hold the dolphin upright so the blowhole was above water. I kept getting saltwater into my mask and it was hard to clear. I was still on tanks; a snorkel would have been flooded. The sun was hot, but the water was only warm, friendly, comfortable except for the waves. I cursed them.

We floated there, Jumbo and I, holding up the wounded dolphin, and I thought about Hank Shields. We’d worked well together, and the only mistake had been mine. A stupid one at that. Shields had been a good man. He was doing a good job here at Dansworth. He wasn’t hurting anyone; he and the work at Dansworth were helping make life better for people in the States.

That wasn’t a profitable way of thinking. Shields was a goddam traitor. He’d run out on the team.

Maybe what he was doing now was more important, but that wasn’t my decision.

Jumbo made more sounds at me, but I couldn’t understand them. “*No comprende*” I said, then laughed at myself. For some reason I’d used a language foreign to me thinking Jumbo might know that. Of course he wouldn’t understand any language I knew. Except perhaps English. “I don’t understand,” I said as clearly as I could.

“OK,” the dolphin replied. It was quite clear and distinct. He began nudging Jill, and she responded a bit, moving her tail about to help keep herself above water. She breathed noisily. After a while she could hold herself up with only a little help. I pointed out toward the sea and made a big circular movement with my arm. “Sharks?” I called.

Jill clicked something that sounded scared. Susie clicked back.

“No. OK,” Jumbo said. Again it was quite clear enough to understand. He darted away, leaving me to hold up Jill with her help. He tore off in a big circle and stayed out there a long time. When he got back he made clicking noises.

“Another shark out there,” I heard. “Probably a lot of them. They’ll eat the dead one first.” This wasn’t from the dolphin but it took a moment to realize I was hearing Hank’s voice from seventy feet down. “I can’t come up, I’m afraid. Can you hold on?”

“Sure!” I called. I wondered. But Jumbo was racing around us in a tight circle now, and I had my lance. I took the bright red ribbon hanging on the safety pin and pulled it out, then held the lance warily. The thing was as dangerous to humans and dolphins as it was to sharks.

I thought about the sharks. Come to blood from miles away. Eat each other. Stupid, single-minded killers. I didn’t like the thought.

After a while I saw Hank rising from below. He hadn’t given me any warning, and my lance was pointed slantingly downward, just where he’d come up, the point probably invisible because he’d be

looking up at the bright surface and the lance was shadowed by the dolphin and her daughter...

It was simple. An accident, and no questions. He was swimming badly, and I was sure he was suffering, how bad I couldn't tell.

An accident. No witnesses. Terminate with extreme prejudice. He was almost to the point of my lance now. A tiny movement and he'd be a closed-file entry-No. He was a goddam traitor, but he'd fought to keep the dolphin alive. He'd earned that much. The sharks might come back, and I'd need him. The job could come later. Right now, I wasn't risking the dolphin. It made an ironic joke, because my supervisor hated dolphins more than he hated Hank. "Get your ass down there under pressure!" I shouted. "You're in no goddam condition to come to the top." I shifted the lance point so that it missed him. "And give me warning when you come up. You almost impaled yourself."

He looked at me funny. It was a knowing look, and it said a lot. I frowned. "Get below!"

He sank back down without a word. A Navy recovery boat with a-compression chamber reached us about twenty minutes later, but it was only ten minutes before a whole school of angry dolphins was around us, looking for sharks to kill. They found two.

They let Hank come home for dinner. He'd suffered a painful mediastmal emphysema, but nothing permanent. We ate dinner in the Shields' apartment pressurized to fifty feet. It was a quiet dinner, and afterwards he sent the boy off to his room.

"Thanks," he said. "Don't think I could have saved Jill by myself. The babies always die if they lose their mothers, and Susie's the best prospect we've ever had. You did a good job today." "So did you."

"I try. Maybe I'll earn my way back into the human race."

Before I could say anything, Judy came back into the room. She looked at Hank sprawled out in a reclining chair and clucked at him.

A bubble had formed inside his chest cavity, and another under the *skin* at his neck. Decompression forced them back into solution, and now we were paying the penalty by being confined while the pressure was slowly reduced. It wasn't really a problem, since large parts of Dansworth stay under pressure all the time.

"Guess you can't take me diving tomorrow," I said.

"No. Surgeon says it'll be a week. I expect you don't want to go without me," Hank said slowly. "Be no point to it. Right?"

I looked up sharply. Judy was frowning, not really understanding. I couldn't keep from watching her. She reminded me of my sister, all right, but even more of the last girl I'd really been serious about. The one I'd driven away because of the job. It would be easy to be in love with her, and she was going to be alone pretty soon.

"We'll dive together next week," Hank said. "Can't put it off forever. If I don't take you, there'll be somebody else to show up for the same dive. Right?"

"Yes." So he understood. I wondered what had given me away.

"We're pretty heavily insured here," Hank said slowly. "The Navy pays staggering premiums, but our families are well provided for if there's an accident." He saw Judy about to say something, and continued, "So if you haven't filled out the forms yet, you ought to. You'll be covered, be a pity if you haven't set things up properly. Morbid subject, of course. Let's change it."

We did, talking about dolphins, and about sea-farms and the power plants. And sharks.

"They adapt," Hank said. "We've tried the lot. Electric signals, noises, chemicals—nothing stops them all. But most avoid this place. The dolphins hunt them. If sharks weren't so stupid they wouldn't come around at all; but there're so many fish here, and the wastes from the processing plant can't be completely disposed of without getting some blood and guts in the water. We were up-current of that, and usually the sharks don't come there. I doubt it would have attacked us anyway, except for Susie. Baby dolphin's a tasty dish to a shark."

Judy shuddered. "I've never seen a shark attack," she said. "But Hank, you were out of your-mind to take Albert out beyond the perimeter. Close to the station we've always got plenty of dolphins on patrol, but out there with just Jumbo—I wish you wouldn't take the boy out that far again."

“I won’t,” he said. He stood and put his arm lightly around her. “It’s been a good five years,” he said. He wasn’t talking to anyone in particular. He kissed her. “I’m a little tired. Gideon, if you’ll excuse me, I’m sure Judy can entertain you—”

“No, of course not,” I said, and went off to my own room. I had a lot to think about, and I didn’t want Judy’s company just then. I, wasn’t sure I wanted my own.

They put me through a week of training before they’d let me take a deep dive to the mine sites. It was another week after that before the surgeons would let Hank go with me.

We went down in a concrete shaft that contained a series of elevators. Every hundred feet we’d have to get out and pass through a pressure-tight door. Not only did the pressures change at each depth, but the gas mixtures as well, and at the third we had to put on our hearing aids.

They weren’t really hearing aids, of course. They were tiny computers and electronic speech-filtering devices. The gas mixtures that let men live at the lower depths and higher pressures contained a lot of helium, and a man talking in a helium-oxygen mixture sounds like Donald Duck. Some of the old-timers could understand each other without hearing aids, or claimed to, but most people couldn’t make out a word.

The hearing aids take that gobble-gobble and suppress some of the frequencies while amplifying others, so that the result sounds like normal speech in a flat mono-tone. It’s impossible to get much expression into a voice, but you can be intelligible.

We went on down until we were at the lowest level, seven hundred and eighty feet below the surface. There was a large structure there, with laboratories and quarters for the workmen, mostly Navy people. It was also cold. They heated the structures, and they had plenty of power to do it with, but helium conducts heat better than normal air. You feel heat losses and feel them fast. When we went outside we’d need heated wetsuits too. The water at that depth is quite cold.

The first couple of days we took it easy, going out with a gang of Navy men to watch the mining operations. They were just getting a good start, sinking shafts into the sides of the seamount, taking samples for the scientists as they dug. Everybody was excited about what they were learning. This was the United States’ first chance to catch up with the big international corporations who had a big edge in undersea mining technology.

On the third day we went out alone. It was dark and gloomy except where our lights pointed, and there were ghastly streaks of phosphorescence everywhere. It reminded me of some big city, deserted at night, and it had the same air of undefinable menace. The dolphins couldn’t come with us, although Jumbo and “Fonso” were overhead, and once in a while one or the other would dive down to our level, chatter at Hank for a second and get a reply from his belt call-box, then head back topside. The depth was extreme for dolphins, Hank said, and although they were breathing surface air rather than high-pressure stuff as we did, so they could go up and down without decompression problems, at that depth nitrogen will go into solution quite rapidly; the dolphins had to watch out for embolisms and bends themselves.

It wasn’t quiet down there, and we weren’t alone. There were hundreds of tiny clicking sounds, which I didn’t understand until Hank took me to the seamount itself and I saw little shrimp, or things that looked like them, scuttling along on the bottom. They made snapping noises with their pincers.

There were also eel-like things, not very large, and strange-looking fish, also small. The real deep-bottom monsters are much farther down, of course, down, where men can’t get at them without bathyscaphes and protective equipment; but these were strange enough. There was one thing about seven inches long, dark blue in the yellow-glaring lights, and it seemed to be all teeth and eyes. I’m told it can swallow fish larger than itself.

Nothing seemed interested in us one way or another. We could get quite close to the fish—not that I’d want to touch any of them. It was a fascinating scene, but a little scary, and the knowledge that anything going wrong with the gear would kill us instantly didn’t help. I don’t like situations where I have to rely on equipment some unknown tech has made.

We swam around the bottom until we were out of sight of the station lights and mining operations. The top of the seamount was fairly flat, and rocky, scoured clean of mud, with small pebbles between the larger rocks. Even down this far were anemones and barnacles with feathery flowers waving gently in the current. Once in a while larger fish up to a couple of feet long would cruise by. I kept watching for squid or octopus but I didn't see any.

There was a light well ahead of us and Hank waved me toward it. We cruised gently along, conserving energy. The rebreather apparatus didn't even leave bubbles behind, and despite our lights nothing paid much attention to us; I began to feel like a ghostly intruder, unable to affect anything, an observer in a plane of existence I didn't belong to.

The light turned out to be a shelter. It was a hemispheric dome held up from the bottom on stilts. The hatchway underneath swung upward and opened at a touch. We came up inside a space about thirty feet in diameter and fifteen feet high. Cabinets lined the walls, and there were more lockers under low benches. Plexiglass windows looked out onto the seamount and its surprising inhabitants.

The shelter was heated, and we could disconnect our batteries. I took a seat and gratefully removed the scuba gear with Hank's help. Then he was taking off his own, his back toward me, and I had the long shark dart, safety still on because I didn't want him to float. I aimed it just under the diaphragm and my hand wouldn't move.

He finished taking off his gear and sat across from me. We didn't say anything for a long time.

"It's not going to do either one of us any good," he said finally. "Why the hell don't you get it over?"

"Get what over?"

"I've had you made out since you came here. Gideon Starr. Science reporter able to move around and interview almost anybody—great cover, Gideon. I knew about you before I left the Agency."

"I see. They don't know that, back at Langley." I watched him warily now. We couldn't just leave here and go swimming again, not with it out in the open like this.

"I thought they might not. I can't run, you know. Where could I go? And I'm sure your people are watching the transports."

"Humph." I didn't say anything else but he knew what I was thinking. Anybody as good as he was couldn't have any trouble outwitting gate-watchers.

"Yeah. OK, I'm tired of running. I like it here Gideon. and what good does it do Judy? That how you spotted us? She's not too good at this game."

"No, it was the dolphins," I said. "Turner. You remember Turner?"

He grimaced. "Sure. Holier than thou. America for the Good Americans, whoever the hell they are. I think he likes termination orders. What's he got to do with this?"

"He hates dolphins," I said. "Afraid they'll replace people or something. Reads everything he can find on them. Something he read made him wonder if you were out here at Dansworth. I don't know what it was, but he had Plans take a look. *Then* we spotted your wife."

"I see. Yeah, there was a *Science* article that might have given me away, but I didn't think anybody in the Company would read it..."

"He "did. And really got mad. Double traitor, he called you. Traitor to the Agency, and traitor to the whole human race. Not that the dolphins made any difference,-Harold Braden. OK, you cut and ran. There's a few get away with that. But not when they warn their subject first. We can't allow that, Bra-den." I shifted the shark dart in my hand, turning it over and over, wondering what would happen if he decided to fight. He was nearly 38 big as I am, and he'd been a good man in his day. But he was out of training, and he seemed to have given up.

I had to remember that a man hasn't really given, up until he's dead. Not a real man.

"Call me Hank," he said. "I killed Harold Braden five years ago. Did the tell you who the subject was? The man I warned?" "No."

"Aeneas MacKenzie." I whistled. It didn't come out as such; the hearing aids weren't designed for that. The whole conversation had an eerie quality, as we talked of life and death in flat monotones. "MacKenzie. Greg Tolland's manager. If you'd got him, Tolland wouldn't have been President..." I thought for a moment. Five years. "It was *after* the election! Tolland's orders!" Again the exclamation

points didn't come through. All Hank could have heard was another monotone. "Yeah. I know."

But I'd believed the story. Tolland made Aeneas MacKenzie his Solicitor General, and MacKenzie found graft and corruption all through Tolland's People's Alliance. It had nearly destroyed President Tolland, but we all believed he hadn't known any of it until MacKenzie uncovered the mess...

Only Tolland had ordered MacKenzie terminated with extreme prejudice before he even started his investigations.

"You know MacKenzie's gone over to Hansen Enterprises?" I asked.

"You told me." Hank kept watching me, and every now and then he'd look away, out the windows, to watch the fish and shrimp cruising past; and when he'd look back again, he did it with surprise that he was still alive. "I guess it figures. Laurie Jo Hansen never had much use for Greg Tolland to begin with." He laughed. The hearing aids made it come out "Ha, ha, ha," and a snort. "Funny. We always thought the big corporations were the enemy."

"They are. You know how they work."

"Sure. How do we work?" "It's different. We have no choices. We're soldiers. How else can the people fight that kind of power? Don't play games with my head, Shields. It won't work."

"Didn't think it would. You can't admit you're wrong. You've spilled too much blood for the cause. Admit you're wrong and you're a monster. I know, Gideon. I *know*." We were quiet for a while. Finally I said, "Hansen's got a setup like this in the Sea of Cortez. Experimental. Not full production scale."

Hank nodded. "Pity I didn't run to her in the first place. You'd have had your problems getting to me. Too late now. Not even Hansen could keep your people away from me. Not forever. And I'd always come out in the open if the family was involved..."

Family. I thought about Judy. She'd be alone soon. And that was stupid, because I'd always be alone. "Nobody'd look for a dead man."

I don't know why I said that. In my business you do your job and that's all. Hank was right, you can't question your orders. If the people at the top don't know what they're doing, if it isn't worth it, what are you? A goddam hired killer, a criminal, and I'm not that, I'm a patriot. A soldier.

Hank gave me another funny look. "If you report me dead and I turn up again—"

"Yeah." If that happened, I was meat. I *should* be. One day I'd find myself across a room from somebody like Gideon Starr. Get it over, my mind said. Hank was looking out the window again. One quick thrust. Or the right blow, and push him out without the scuba gear. Without the gear he'd go straight up, and nobody had ever survived a free ascent from these depths. He'd float, lungs ruptured, embolisms all through his blood and brain. Quick, painless, and easy to explain.

And I knew I wasn't going to do it. "If a man bought it with his gear on down here, he'd go right to the bottom," I said. "No way ever to find a body."

"But he'd have to leave Dansworth. You think I'd get past your people?" He turned to face me again, but this time he didn't look surprised. Just tired. "I told you, Gideon, I killed Harold Bra-den. Hank Shields doesn't let his friends trade their lives for him."

"Friends?"

"By me, yeah." He didn't say anything else, but I remembered how it was with the two of us swimming Jill to the surface, watching for sharks, waiting for the flash of pain in the head that signals embolism, or the crippling stab in the joint from bends...

We sat there some more, thinking. "If you got to Hansen's outfit off the Baja coast, you'd be OK," I said finally. "Seven hundred miles. Open water. Don't dolphins go that far?"

This time he really looked at me.

"There are spare air bottles in here, aren't there?" I asked. "Air and helium-oxy? Enough to let you decompress? And you've got the call-box. Trust the dolphins to take you seven hundred miles?"

He thought about it. "We'd make about ten knots. Three days. Warm water." He started rooting around in the lockers and came up with canteens. "Fresh water. I won't need food. The dolphins can catch fish, and a man can live a long time on fresh raw fish. How'll you explain the supplies missing from here?"

"Who's to know we were ever here? I'll have good stories, for the Navy and for the Agency."



You're down in that muck, in five hundred fathoms."

"You're crazy. They'll watch Judy. I have to send for her, Gideon. When she comes to Hansen's outfit, they'll Suspect. Then we've both had it."

"They won't bother with her. Not if you're dead."

"Why, Gideon?" he asked,

"Get the hen out of here. Just do it." Please. Before I change my mind, before I get my sanity back. For God's sake, Hank, go...

He put on the scuba gear and gathered up water bottles. Then he made a neat towing package of the other stuff, heli-oxy bottles, and some pure oxygen for when he got closer to the surface and wouldn't get oxygen poisoning. He could stay down a long time with those. Much longer than the decompression time he'd need. If there were storms, he'd just go under. The dolphins would take care of him.

"Dr. Peterson's going to hate losing Jill and Susie .-. ." He looked back at me for a second. "You'll tell Judy?"

"She'll know. Not at first. Later." He winced. It was going to be tough on the family. His only other choice would be tougher. He waved, just a quick flash of a hand, and dropped through the bottom of the shelter.

A long time after, as I swam alone back to the mining station, I saw a whole school of sharks. One was wounded, and the others were tearing him to pieces, eating him while he was still alive.

I wondered if they'd see me, but I didn't really care.