

## WHEN NO MAN PURSUETH

"Yes, indeed, m'boy," wheezed old Colonel Enderby-Thwaite, blinking at his cards, "if you want to get a real education before you get to Secundus, you've certainly picked the right way to go about it. Riding a tramp like *This Train* will teach you more about life with a capital 'L' than all the seminars and professors on Secundus, I daresay."

"Precisely my thought," Fleming agreed in what he hoped were mature tones. Although he faced the potbellied Colonel to whom he was teaching poker, he was aware in every nerve ending of the impossibly beautiful girl in blue seated across the passengers' lounge, at whom he had been sneaking glances ever since her arrival. In point of fact, he had booked passage on the *I.V. This Train* because it represented a saving of over a hundred credits; but before this girl he wished very desperately to appear worldly—or, if he could not pull that off, at least eager to be. The frequent glances at her were no help either, for she stared right back at him; and while she was *not* staring the sandy-haired student between the eyes, that rhymes with what she was staring between. Fleming racked his brains in vain for a means of introduction, even as he took the Colonel for two-credits-six.

"Not many realize what it's like out here," the Colonel rumbled on in the fond belief that Fleming was listening. "Fringe worlds. The incredible diversity. Ultimate solution to the minority opinion problem, actually. Someone's got a crackpot idea on how things should be run, give him a planet and let him try it out. Makes for some interesting planets. Why, over on Why Should I, they've actually done away with taxation. Except on a voluntary basis, of course—but if a politician has some project he thinks should be undertaken, he has to convince people to pay for it—and any project that people aren't willing to lay out cold cash for is scrapped. Only time will tell if it's viable, naturally, but it certainly is one of the most streamlined governments I've ever seen. And for centuries it was only a crackpot idea.

"Yes, m'boy, there's room out here on the Fringe for just about any kind of society. You don't see that sort of thing on the big passenger liners, nonstop jumps from Federation planet to Federation planet with their bland, homogeneous 'culture' to make them identical. Out here there's variety. You meet people who think differently, live differently than you. Stimulating."

"Sometimes," said the girl in blue in a voice like the mellowest of clarinets, "it can be very stimulating indeed."

This seemed to Fleming a clear-cut invitation to repartee, and he did not hesitate. "Huh?" he riposted, shuffling the cards.

She smiled, and both men shivered slightly. "Well, I do not understand it myself. But I have discovered that for some reason, many men find the customs of my planet extremely stimulating."

"What customs, my dear?" asked the old Colonel, clearly in better control than Fleming, though not by much.

"Well," she said demurely, "on Do It—my home planet—we have a society based on total sexual freedom. The theory is that if we can eliminate absolutely every sexual inhibition, we'll achieve a truly happy society."

Fleming put down the cards, got outside a couple of ounces of bourbon with

considerable alacrity and dialed another, mashing down savagely on the button marked *Triple*. "Does it work?" he croaked.

Her smile disappeared, and he hastily searched his assets for something that might bring it back again. "Well, we do have one little problem. One of the first inhibitions to go was the incest taboo, and there weren't an awful lot of us to begin with. Daddy keeps saying something about our gene-pool being too small—anyway, we started having a lot of babies that weren't... quite right, one way or another." She frowned, then smiled again, and Fleming turned his triple into a single with one gulp. "But we figured out the solution, and that's when we instituted the custom that I was talking about.

"You see, Do It law requires any and all females to become impregnated by any off-worlder who offers them half a chance."

There came a sudden clatter as of dueling castanets, but it was only the sound of ice rattling furiously in two glasses at once.

The girl rose, traveled to the bar by a method that "walking" does not even begin to describe, and seated herself on the empty stool between Fleming and the Colonel, dialing a sombrero with a blood-red fingernail. Fleming essayed a gay smile and produced a simpering grimace; the Colonel tried to clear his throat, and plainly failed.

"Why don't you gentlemen come and visit me in stateroom 4-C tonight, say about 2300? Perhaps I can show you more of the customs of my planet." She turned to Fleming and added softly, "... and I may have a business proposition for you, young man. If you are interested..."

Fleming allowed as how he might be interested, and finished the remains of his drink. She rose, smiled at them both, and left.

Fleming and the Colonel looked at each other. As one they turned back to the bar and dialed fresh tripies, bourbon and stengah. Raising their glasses in silent toast, they drank deep, then smashed the glasses against the bulkhead.

"2300 hours, she said?" asked Fleming at last.

The Colonel looked pained. "I say, old boy, I mean... dash it, both of us? Together?"

"How do we know what her customs are?" Fleming reasoned. "It may be necessary. Or something."

"Yes, but..."

"You want to blow it?"

The Colonel closed his mouth, opened it, then closed it again.

"Come on. Let's get back to your poker lesson."

Curiously, Colonel Enderby-Thwaite had a run of beginner's luck after that. At the close of the lesson, Fleming was a little startled to realize that he was down by about thirty credits, and what with one thing and another, he had much to preoccupy him as he made his way above-decks to the passenger level. But when his head cleared the hatchway of C-Deck and he saw a large, ferocious-looking Greenie tiptoeing down the corridor away from him with a blaster in its fist, he came instantly alert.

Greenies—natives of Sirius II—were the first and so far only alien race ever encountered by man; and the history of that encounter was not a happy one. Captured Greenies had been used as domestic animals for years before it was learned that they possessed intelligence, and even then it had taken a war with Sirius and several determined slave-revolts before men learned to see the green humanoids as equals. Even now, a hundred years later, many Greenies were still a little surly about it, and college students like Fleming had learned not to mess with them. This Greenie was large even for his race, and he was armed in the bargain.

But Fleming was not an uncourageous lad—there was, in truth, a streak of romanticism in him that yearned for glory and danger, battle and sudden death. He silently eased himself the rest of the way through the hatch and began shadowing the Greenie.

From behind, a Greenie resembled nothing so much as the fabled, perhaps mythical Incredible Hulk, said to have walked the face of Old Terra centuries ago in the Age of Marvels—that is, roughly human, if one used Hercules as a comparison. From the front, Fleming knew, its humanoid look would be somewhat modified by the long, gleaming fangs and trifurcate nose, but it was otherwise remarkably similar to a human. One of the problems that Greenies had faced in fighting for equality was that they turned out to be cross-fertile with human beings—and the males had enormous genitals.

This one wore native Syrian garb, shorts, and a fringed doublet, with an armband around its right bicep. As he padded silently behind the alien, Fleming noted uneasily that the armband would have been too big around to serve him as a belt. He hoped this Greenie was not one of those thionite-addicts. They were said to be violent and unpredictable.

The giant creature stopped before a stateroom door, and Fleming hastily ducked into an alcove. It placed an ear against the door and listened. Then it stepped back, brought up its blaster, and burned the lock off the door, leaping quickly through the smoldering doorway as it burst open. Fleming scurried down the corridor to the doorway, but stopped outside.

"Did you think you'd be allowed to keep all this money to yourself, Carmody?" he heard the Greenie boom within. "That's pretty selfish of you."

"You'll never get away with this," a human voice responded.

"You think not? You think perhaps you have friends on board? If so, they will be taken care of, Carmody. This is the end of the road for you." The human voice rose in a shriek, there was a harsh, metallic *zzzzzap!* and then silence.

Fleming waited, paralyzed, in the corridor. From within the stateroom came the sounds of drawers being torn open, closets being ransacked. At last there was a triumphant exclamation, followed by a rattling noise.

Fleming remained hidden behind the opened door, frozen with fear. It was too late now to think of flight—the Greenie had found whatever it was looking for and would exit at any moment. He cursed his curiosity.

The alien stepped out into the hallway and stopped, separated from Fleming only by three inches of bulkhead door. It paused there a moment, and Fleming's heart yammered mindlessly in his chest. Then it strode off down the corridor in the other

direction without closing the door behind it.

Fleming realized of a sudden that he had not breathed for some time, and debated soberly whether he ought to resume. He tried to move, discovered that he could, shrugged his broad shoulders and inhaled deeply. It cleared his head somewhat; he stepped round the bulky pressure-door and entered the room that the fearsome Greenie had left.

A stocky, balding man lay on his back on the floor of the room, an expression of agonized despair frozen across his features. His tunic was of extremely expensive cut and fabric, and his outflung hands were uncalloused and well-manicured. He did not appear to be breathing.

Fleming slowly crossed the room, bent down and reached for the man's wrist, intending to take his pulse. He recoiled at the touch and stood up. Carmody's wrist was quite cold. *Omigod*, Fleming thought, *omigod, what do I do now?* He was suddenly overcome with terror at the realization that the Greenie might return to the scene of the crime at any moment, and scrambled back to the doorway. Hearing nothing, he risked a look—no one there.

He fled.

Without taking time to reason it out, Fleming found himself making for Colonel Enderby-Thwaite's stateroom. He felt a desperate need to share his secret with someone, and the old gentleman had reminisced convincingly and at great length during the poker lesson about dangers and intrigues that he had known in his day. He modestly admitted a public career spanning three interplanetary wars and two revolutions, and hinted delicately of a familiarity with interstellar espionage, although of course he was "retired from all that now." Fleming had found him rather glamorous. Surely the Colonel would know what to do.

But as he reached the old man's stateroom, Fleming paused, struck by a thought. Sooner or later, the Greenie was going to get around to realizing that its crime was not especially well-concealed. Perhaps it was skulking around right now, trying to see if anyone was behaving unusually. If he contacted the Colonel overtly, he might be inadvertently placing the old soldier in jeopardy. What would such a seasoned campaigner think of him if he did that?

No, he had to think like a pro, like the steely-eyed spies in the romantic fiction to which he was addicted. *Subtlety*, he told himself. Without so much as pausing at the Colonel's door, he strode on past to his own stateroom and went in.

Once inside he carefully locked the door, sighed with relief, and lit a filter-tip Grassmaster, inhaling deeply. *How can I do this cleverly*, he thought, *like the legendary Bond?* Inspiration came; he took out pencil and paper and wrote, "HAVE OBSERVED CRIME. THIS IS SERIOUS. MESSAGE TO CAPT. AT ONCE." He folded the note endwise, stood and looked round the room. Books lay scattered everywhere. He picked one up at random: "Captain Galaxy Meets His Match." Inserting the note at page 134, he closed the book, walked to the door and opened it gingerly. Looking carefully up and down the corridor, he stepped out and strolled to the Colonel's door with maximum nonchalance, whistling a popular air just a bit too loudly. He knocked purposefully and waited.

Colonel Enderby-Thwaite *harrumphed* into view, his fowls flapping like twin

saddlebags from his lower lip. "What? What? Fleming, my boy, how are you? What do you want? Nothing gone wrong with the young lady, I trust?"

"No, Colonel, nothing like that," Fleming said heartily. "Just thought you might enjoy a bit of light reading. I just finished this one, and it was awfully good. I'm sure you'll enjoy it." He thrust the volume at the Colonel with an elaborate wink.

The Colonel blinked back at him in astonishment and glanced at the book. "'Captain Galaxy'? My dear boy, this isn't exactly my cup of *chai*, you know. Grateful for the thought, of course, but..."

"I'm certain you'll like this one, Colonel," Fleming broke in, winking furiously. "Very interesting battle scenes, *especially on page 134*. Be sure and check that one out, if nothing else."

"I say, Fleming, what the devil is the matter with your eye?"

"Eyestrain, I couldn't put that book down. Especially the part on page 134, be sure and read that chapter. In fact, start there. Look, I have to run back to my room, now, I just remembered I left a joint burning, I'll see you in 4-C at 2300, don't forget to read page 134." He turned and fled to his room, slamming the door behind him.

"Most extraordinary," breathed the Colonel, and looked down again at the gaudily-jacketed book.

"'Captain Galaxy Meets His Match'?"

He shrugged, and closed his door.

Fleming passed the rest of the afternoon in an almost ecstatic state of anticipation. Glory was certain to come from this! Perhaps the Captain would decide to place the Greenie under arrest, have the Galactic Patrol send a ship to rendezvous with *This Train* instead of waiting until planetfall was reached. That would be lovely, as then the girl in blue, not to mention whatever other passengers were on board, would know that he was a hero, a witness to a serious crime and an accomplished conspirator. The Captain might even require his help in subduing the Greenie; you never could tell. Fleming waited feverishly to be contacted by the Colonel.

But by suppertime he had heard nothing at all—no cryptic message under his door, no hue and cry from without, nothing. Puzzled, but determined to be patient. Fleming made his way belowdecks to the lounge for the evening meal. By the time he was halfway there, he had convinced himself that the Colonel was merely waiting for a plausibly coincidental opportunity to run into him, to avoid the appearance of anything out of the ordinary. He decided that the Colonel was a genius.

But although Fleming dawdled over his dinner for well over an hour, the old warhorse never appeared. To his great consternation, the Greenie did. It shouldered brazenly through the door about halfway through Fleming's dessert, and took a seat in a far corner, facing the room.

Fleming tried to become absorbed by his chair and, failing, looked about wildly. At that moment the girl in blue also entered the lounge, still in blue and as desirable as ever. Fleming learned the ancient truth that there is nothing like being in immediate personal danger for hiking up that old biological urge.

Seeing him, she smiled, and made her way to his table by the same preternatural means she had used once before, seating herself in a manner remarkably similar to a hummingbird coming to rest. With a major effort of the will, he tore his gaze from

her momentarily and looked over at the Greenie.

It was staring intently at the two of them, and it was frowning.

"Hello," she crooned, recapturing Fleming's eyes. "Where is your friend, the old gentleman? You're both coming tonight, aren't you?"

His mind raced. Fleming was not really an idiot, but the books he had read had instilled in him the notion that it was somehow *de rigueur* to spill deadly dangerous secrets to unarmed, helpless girls—besides, this conspiracy was getting intolerably lonely. "Look," he blurted, "something's come up."

"Well, you'll just have to save it until 2300," she said. "Right now I'm hungry." She slid the table's console open and dialed steak, extra rare, with everything.

"No, no," said Fleming, "you don't understand. Colonel Enderby-Thwaite has disappeared."

She made a face. "Your companion? Such a shame. He seemed like such a courageous old gentleman," she said wistfully. The table finished synthesizing steak and plate; she picked up the former and began tearing at it with even, white teeth. *Different customs*, Fleming reminded himself wildly, and tried again.

"No, listen, uh... gosh, I don't know your name."

"Nandi."

"Listen, Nandi. There's been a serious crime committed on this ship. Migod, you've dropped your steak. Oh, the hell with it, listen Nandi, will you please? Colonel Enderby-Thwaite may even now be in terrible danger. We've got to get word to the Captain at once." He described the day's events, blurring the outlines of the actual murder scene—and his personal reactions at the time—with all the skill of an airbrush wizard turning pornography into artistic statement. He allowed her to retain the impression that only concern for possible innocent bystanders had prevented him from taking on the Greenie there and then. Fleming understood Art.

For all that, Nandi appeared exceedingly skeptical throughout Fleming's tale. "What would the Captain do if we got word to him?" she asked when he was finished. "Would he start a panic, perhaps endanger his passengers by trying to arrest the demon?"

"Of course not," said Fleming, who favored this alternative himself. "He could call the Patrol and have them send a cruiser to match speed and course with *This Train*. Let them capture the Greenie; they'll have sleepy gas and hypnodrene and vibes by the case. And in the meantime, we concentrate on lulling the Greenie into a false sense of security by preserving an air of normalcy."

"Why not just wait until we ground on Forced Landing and have it picked up as it debarks?"

"No good. We don't reach Forced Landing for at least seventy-two hours. Sometime between now and then, it may remember that it left that damned airtight door open. Even if nobody happened to glance in, sooner or later a meteorite-drill would make it pretty conspicuous indeed."

"Well, there goes your air of normalcy."

"Maybe; maybe not. That Greenie may be wasted on thionite, not thinking clearly. They often are. If we move fast..."

"Have you known many?" Nandi asked softly.

"Eh? Anyway, one way or another we've got to get word to the Captain before it

decides to clean up after itself."

"I suppose you're right," the girl said grudgingly. She tossed cascades of lush brown hair casually back over one white shoulder and puffed a joint into life. "All right then. First, where is the Greenie now?"

Fleming had been waiting patiently for this line for five minutes. Precisely as Humphrey Bogart would have done it, he deadpanned, "Ten feet behind you," and *rolled* a joint of his own.

Her eyebrows rose quite satisfactorily, and if the orbs below them twinkled, Fleming failed to notice.

"How then shall we communicate with the Captain without tipping it off?" she asked. "I don't even know how one gets to see the Captain. Are you certain we've got one? My travel agent was a trifle vague."

Still Humphrey Bogart, Fleming essayed a humorless grin, producing a hideous grimace. "Relax. It's a snap. I've already taken care of it."

"You have?" she asked with new respect. "How?"

"Wrote a message on one of my rolling papers while I've been talking. I leave it in my plate, and the steward passes it up the chain of command to the Captain." In the ancient and bloody wars that had accompanied the birth of commercial space travel, the powermen's union had fared much better than that of the cooks. While cheap machinery was good enough to feed the passengers and crew, a human crew-member would feed the Converter with the leftovers, as well as the day's output of trash, performing valet duties in between to earn his keep.

Nandi's eyes widened, the increased candlepower melting the fillings in Fleming's teeth. "What a brilliant idea, Mister... what is your name?"

"Ayniss, Fleming Ayniss. My friends call me Flem."

"Listen, Phlegm, what do you suppose actually happened to Colonel... Benderby? Engleby?"

Fleming's dead pan acquired rigor mortis. "Enderby-Thwaite," he mumbled. "I don't know." He looked grimly across the room at the Greenie. "But that damned thionite-head was late for dinner."

"No, no. I mean, how do you know that the Colonel simply hasn't been taken with indigestion?"

"I knocked on his door on the way here," explained Fleming, stung that she thought he was jumping to conclusions like some romantic adolescent.

"Perhaps he has diarrhea, then, and ignored you. Or or suppose he's in conference with the Captain right now? Let's..."

"Let's go to his room and wait for him," said Fleming, fighting to retain control of the situation.

They rose and left together, brushing past the Greenie with utter aplomb. Behind them, on the table, gravy began dripping lethargically across a cigarette paper half-buried in mashed potatoes, that read, "THIEF ON BOARD. CAPTAIN MUST KNOW. WASTE NO TIME."

Although the pair waited vigilantly in a lounge across from the Colonel's stateroom, Enderby-Thwaite had not returned by the time the ship's computer darkened the corridor lights for evening. Fleming and Nandi sat silent and motionless

in the reduced light for ten seconds, then spoke simultaneously.

"My place or yours?"

Both blushed, but the phenomenon looked much more natural on Fleming. To his credit, however, his gaze never trembled, and if his knees did somewhat, that seemed only natural. A man's knees were supposed to tremble around girls like Nandi.

They ended up in her stateroom by Hobson's Choice—his was a mess. Hers was considerably neater; only the bedclothes were rumped.

Nandi flicked on the light and crossed the room to the bed, sliding a trunk from beneath it. "You'll find some pot on the dresser behind you," she said over her shoulder as she attacked the clasps of the trunk, the part of Her nearest Fleming describing a graceful figure-eight.

Fleming came back from a far place. "Er, no thanks."

"Oh, go ahead," she giggled. "It has to be all smoked up before we reach Forced Landing anyway. It's illegal there, remember? Go ahead and light up while I change into something more comfortable."

Eyes bulging with the sight of what she considered comfortable, Fleming turned obediently and began puttering with an elaborate water pipe. When he turned back, she was just stepping, out of the blue dress, humming ethereally. The narghile slipped from his nerveless fingers and landed on the floor with a crash.

She looked up; dimpled. "Oh, I hope I haven't upset you. It's only that I have nowhere else to change. Do you mind?"

"Not... not at all," croaked Fleming. A grapefruit seemed to have become lodged in his larynx somehow, and he strove mightily to swallow it. "G-go right ahead."

"You're so understanding." She beamed, slipping gracefully into what Fleming instantly realized was the most comfortable-looking garment he had ever seen. Intangible as a promise, its surface rippled with changing colors, flesh being the predominant tone. Wax began running out of his ears. "There, now, that's better." She lowered her gaze, drew in her breath suddenly. "Why, Fleming. I've... I've aroused you, haven't I?"

"Well... yes. I mean, yes, you have... uh, yes," he stammered.

"Oh, Fleming, how flattering." She grinned. "Do you know what I'm going to do to you?" She paused, looked thoughtful. "That reminds me, Fleming, I have a small favor to ask of you."

Fleming indicated a willingness to fetch a comet barehanded.

"No, nothing like that. I want you to keep something for me. My jewels." She returned to the bed, bent over the open trunk again (kicking Fleming's adrenals into overdrive), and removed a large package about the size of a shoebox. Opening it, she spilled fire onto the bedspread: several dozen gems that blazed with an unquenchable inner brilliance.

"Why, those are Carezza fire-diamonds," gasped Fleming, who had thought himself already as awestruck as possible. That many fire-diamonds would suffice to buy a fair-sized planet; one of them would have purchased *This Train* with enough change to pay for the balance of Fleming's education.

"Yes, my brave one. The hope of my planet. I have been sent to convert them into credits for the planetary coffers of Do It, so that we can begin a massive galaxy-wide advertising campaign to encourage immigration. The gene-pool, you



know. Will you take care of them for me, until this inhuman thief has been disposed of?"

Fleming stood on one leg, opened his mouth, and made a gargling sound.

"I knew I could count on you." Nandi bubbled. "Lock them away somewhere, as tight as the Fist of Venus."

"The Fist of Venus?" asked Fleming weakly.

"You don't know the Fist of Venus? A standard accomplishment among my people. Among the women, that is. Here, let me show you."

She swept the bedful of diamonds to the floor, let her negligee join them. The floor became a riot of pulsing color. Smiling, she beckoned.

Fleming actually paused for a second. "If we were going to do this all along, why did you go through that business of changing into something more comfortable?"

"I thought you might enjoy the show." Nandi giggled. "Was I wrong?"

Fleming demonstrated that she had not been wrong.

Morning brought no word from the Captain, no sign of Colonel Enderby-Thwaite, and no steward at breakfast. To Fleming, who had begun the day with no sleep, it seemed that a definite negative trend had been established. In less than twenty-four hours he had become involved in at least one and possibly three murders, had taken on the responsibility of guarding more wealth than he could comprehend, and had learned that most astonishing and disappointing of truths: that there is such a thing as an overdose of pleasure.

The sandy-haired youth had annihilated six eggs, half a pound of home-fries, and two quarts of coffee before he felt reasonably safe in attempting rational thought. Now he rather regretted the undertaking. It seemed obvious that the Greenie knew Fleming had witnessed its crime—the disappearance of the only two men to whom he had imparted his secret had to be more than coincidence. But how had it found out, in spite of all his circumspection? Fleming buried his head in his hands, and the answer smacked him in the face: his iridescent yellow boots, reportedly all the rage among the collegiate set on *Secundus*, gleamed up at him with a brilliance that was matched by no other footwear on the ship. At once Fleming remembered that the stateroom doors stopped four inches short of the deck, for a tighter airseal. The Greenie could scarcely have overlooked Fleming's toes—the mystery was that it hadn't murdered him there and then.

Well, that was that. Time to break cover and get to the Captain *fast*. Fleming had no idea where the Captain was to be found at this hour—his travel agent had been as vague about *This Train* as Nandi's—but he seemed to recall that anything above C Deck was "officers' country." *This Train* had been a luxury liner before she was a freighter, before all but one of her passenger decks were ripped out for maximum cargo space, and she bore quarters for a far larger crew than an automated tramp needed or could support. Considerations of mass distribution made converting that cubic footage into cargo room impractical. Consequently, finding the Captain could take on some of the salient aspects of finding the proverbial football in the asteroid belt.

"Unless he's actually in the Control Room," Fleming mused aloud, putting down his eighth cup of coffee.

"Beg pardon?" said Nandi, who had been absorbing considerable fuel herself. "Who's in the Control Room?"

"The Captain, I hope," Fleming replied, then looked frantically round for the Greenie. It was not in sight. "Or one of the other officers," he finished in a whisper.

"Well, as I understand it, there's only one other officer *up* there," Nandi whispered back, "the Executive Officer."

"My God," gasped Fleming. "You mean they're the whole crew?"

"Well, there's the Chief Engineer, but I think he stays below with his converters and things. And the steward, of course, but we don't know where he is. The rest of the crew goes *clank* when you kick it."

"Well, how many passengers are there?"

"Aside from us, the Colonel and the Greenie are the only ones I've seen. The murdered man makes five."

Fleming had been counting on considerably more allies. He briefly considered stealing the Greenie's gun and blowing his own brains out with it. Being a hero was incredibly hard work.

But there was no help for it—no turning back. Resolutely he stood up, drawing Nandi to her feet. "Let's go," he said tersely, "before the Greenie shows up for breakfast."

They left, began climbing for officer country. Fleming paused when they reached A-Deck, frowning. "Look," he said, "the Captain or the Exec could be in any one of a couple-dozen staterooms—but either of them *might* be up in the Control Room. Why don't you pop up and check while I start searching here? That way we may save some time."

Nandi nodded. "All right, but be careful, my hero."

"My sentiments exactly."

He had tried about nine rooms unsuccessfully before it occurred to him that Nandi was a long time returning. Either she had found one of the officers, or... he sped back to the stairshaft, swarmed up three levels to the Control Room, and burst through the hatchway in classic unarmed-combat stance, ready to deal sudden death in any direction.

A mustached, competent-looking man in ship's uniform blinked amiably at him from one of the pilot's couches. "Sorry," he apologized, "I don't dance." He produced a green, odd-shaped bottle: three chambers hooked in parallel to a common spout. "Prepared to offer you a shot of Triple Ripple, though."

Fleming shook his head.

"Sure? Great stuff. Can't let the ingredients mix until you're ready to swallow, but when they do... oh, boy. I'm the Executive Officer, by the way. Name's Exton." He put out his hands.'

"Where's Nandi?"

"Never heard of it; must be Capella way. Check the astrogational computer."

"No, dammit. Nandi, your female passenger. Hasn't she been here?"

"Nobody been here, no women for *damn* sure. Nandi?... don't believe I recall the lady."

"Then you've never met her," Fleming said positively. "Never mind, the important thing is that she's in deadly danger. Where's the Captain?"

"Aw now, the Captain wouldn't hurt no *passenger*. He's a gentleman."

Fleming gritted his teeth, then counted to ten and told Exton the whole story. The Exec listened attentively, tugging alternately at the Triple Ripple and his mustache. When the youth had finished, he leaned back on the acceleration couch and slapped his thigh. "Old son, that's the craziest story I ever heard. No wonder you don't want any Triple Ripple—it'd just bring you down. Let me tell you one about my Uncle Jed—true story too."

"Dammit, Exton, I'm telling you the truth. We've got to find Nandi before it's too late—and we've got to have the Captain flash the Patrol, so they can send a cruiser to rendezvous with us." He broke off, distracted by a sudden, indescribable sensation in his loins.

"Well now," drawled the Exec, "Captain Cavendish is something of an independent gent. Take a lot to make him call in the Patrol."

"You've lost sixty percent of your passengers and twenty-five percent of your crew," Fleming barked, tugging inconspicuously at his crotch. "What do you think the Captain would consider serious?"

The Exec blinked, looked thoughtful. "Well, your story certainly deserves checking, young fellow. Let's go below."

"Now you're talking."

"Reckon we'd best go to passenger country first and start checking staterooms."

"No," Fleming said decisively. "This Greenie is smart. We should go all the way down to the Converter Room and work up through the holds to the passenger deck."

"Sounds like a whole lot of work," Exton demurred.

"Listen, dammit, this Greenie snatched Nandi somewhere between B-Deck and here. It's obviously mobile and clever. The only way to nail it is to start at the bottom and work upward until we flush him out. If we let him get behind us we're finished." There was a peculiar look on Exton's face, but Fleming was too bemused by the drawing feeling in his groin to notice.

"All right," the Exec said reluctantly, "we search below." He rose, loosening his blaster in its holster. The sight of it reassured Fleming considerably.

"Whatever you do," he said as they left the Control Room, "look natural. We mustn't make the Greenie suspicious if we can help it."

"Okay," said the Exec agreeably, and began to sing a duet with himself.

Seeing Fleming's astonishment, he broke off. "Forgot, you don't know. I was born on Harmony, a pleasant little place where we feel that music is the bedrock of true culture. Most of us have had biomod work done on our larynxes, sort of improved on nature. I've got a five-octave range myself, and I can handle up to three voices at once. Handy—gets the women. And I guess it's how come I'm so partial to Triple Ripple, now I think about it."

Fleming puzzled over this as they made their way below. He had heard of biomodification even on the rather provincial planet of his birth, but he had always considered it a rather blasphemous attempt to distort the Creator's intentions. Now, however, he admitted to himself that there were advantages to more versatile vocal cords, at least. Exton was pretty good *a cappella*.

When they reached the Converter Room, the Chief Engineer was nowhere to be

found. "Probably sound asleep somewhere, if I know Reilly," chuckled the Exec, but Fleming was filled with dark suspicion. They searched the Power Room thoroughly and found nothing.

"Well," said Fleming at last, "I guess that makes it fifty percent of the crew gone."

"Oh, listen here, young fellow. Reilly's around somewhere. He's got a lonely job; probably off brewing himself some rocket juice someplace or other." They started up the ladder.

"Listen, Exton," Fleming insisted as they reached the cargo level, "I don't think you're taking this whole thing seriously enough. There's a *killer* on board."

"That remains to be proved, son."

"But by the nature of the problem it may be almost impossible to prove before we're dead. *Won't* you call the Patrol?"

"With no evidence to show the Captain? Hah! I'll take my chances with this killer of yours."

"Well, keep your gun handy," grumbled Fleming, disgusted with the Exec's refusal to behave by adventure-story standards. Exton snorted, but drew his blaster. Together they began to search the cargo hold, a huge steel cavern piled high with stacked crates and tarpaulin-covered machinery of all sizes and shapes. The lighting was dim, and Fleming imagined crazed Greenies in every pool of shadow, but none materialized. Neither did Reilly. Finally every cranny had been poked into, unsuccessfully, and Exton started to return to the stairshaft.

"Wait," said Fleming suddenly. "I've got an idea. It seems to me that if I wanted to hide on a ship like this, I'd stay right here in the hold."

"But we've looked..." Exton began wearily.

"Not in the cargo itself," Fleming broke in. "I can see five crates from here that are large enough to fit the two of us in."

"Now hold on, young fellow," Exton protested. "I'm not about to start breaking open crates of merchandise that ain't mine to look for a killer I'm not sure exists."

"Well, I'm sure," snapped Fleming. Turning to the nearest crate of sufficient size, he slapped its pressure seals. Exton yelped in protest, but it was too late—the top of the crate slid open.

Fleming levered himself up on his elbows, peered down into the crate. "No luck with this one. Full of some kind of white powder."

"There, you see?" said Exton, wiping sweat from his forehead. "Sugar or something."

"No, wait!" gasped Fleming, excitement in his voice. "This is no sugar, Exton—it's thionite! Kilos of it."

"No crap?" the Exec said weakly.

"Sure. That lemony odor is unmistakable. Well, I'll be damned. There's more here than meets the eye. *Now* will you call the Patrol?"

"I reckon I'll have to do *something*," said Exton, looking grim.

Very suddenly a dark form detached itself from the shadows, landed on Exton's shoulders and knocked him sprawling to the deck. A gun-butt rose and fell, and Exton gave three cries simultaneously and lay still.

As Fleming dropped to his feet, numb with terror, the attacker rose and covered

him with a vicious-looking little handgun. It tempered the relief with which Fleming noted that his assailant was human.

"Who... who are you?" he stammered.

"Chief Engineer," snarled the other, "as if you didn't know."

"Listen, Reilly, give it up. You'll never get away with this."

"Shaddap and come here. You're going to carry this sleeping beauty right up topside to the lifeboats, and then the two of you are going for a nice little ride. Without an astrogational computer."

Fleming went cold. This sort of thing happened all the time in the adventure stories, but the hero was always prepared with something: a special plan, an unsuspected ally, a concealed weapon. Fleming had none of these; it had never occurred to him that the Greenie might have human confederates. The fact disgusted him.

Under the unarguable direction of Reilly's gunbarrel, Fleming heaved Exton awkwardly over one shoulder and began climbing. When they reached C-Deck he set the Exec down as gently as he could and began dragging him past the passengers' cabins to the lifeboat locks, noticing with numb indifference that two of the six locks were empty. "Out of shape," he gasped, and Reilly sneered.

When he had dumped Exton's limp and, by now, dusty form inside the first lifeboat in line, number three, he turned to face Reilly, who stood just outside the airlock with his gun leveled at Fleming's midsection.

"Can't we talk this over?" he asked. Reilly smiled, tightened his finger on the firing stud.

Suddenly voices came from behind him, and the Chief Engineer froze. "Hold it right there."

"Patrol, put 'em up." "Drop it, Reilly."

At the last voice, Reilly suddenly unfroze again, and his grin returned. "Nice try, Exton, but it won't work. That fancy throat of yours makes you a better ventriloquist than a Denebian Where-Is-It, but you can't fool me. If the Patrol really was behind me, they'd be calling me by my real name—which is *not* Reilly."

Exton sat up, shrugged. "Can't blame a fellow for trying."

"Maybe not," said Reilly, "but I can kill you for it" He broke off as the sound of shod feet on deckplates came from behind him. "Say, that's pretty good. I didn't know you could imitate sounds too."

"He can't," said Nandi as she brought an oxy-bottle down hard across Reilly's skull.

The Greenie, Nandi explained, had spotted her on her way up to the Control Room and taken a shot at her that barely missed. Fortunately, she was able to elude the monster and hide in number four lifeboat, where she had remained in terror until the noise of Fleming dragging Exton into the neighboring boat had drawn her out.

"You've been very brave, Nandi," Fleming said approvingly as he checked the clip on Reilly's gun.

"Well, Exton, now do you believe me?"

"Guess I sort of have to," the Exec drawled. "Wasn't for the young lady here, we'd be trying to astrogate through deep space by eye about now."

"What I don't understand," Fleming mused, "is why the Greenie took Reilly into cahoots with it. There's something going on here I don't understand. Well, anyway, it's past time we notified the Patrol."

"Suppose you're right," Exton agreed.

"Where do we find the Captain?" Nandi asked. "He should send the message."

"He usually hangs out on A-Deck," Exton decided. "We'll probably find him in the crew's lounge there, playing whist with the computer."

"Okay," said Fleming decisively, tightening his grip on his gun. "Let's go."

The three ascended together cautiously, Fleming in the lead, Exton covering their rear. As they climbed, they conversed in whispers.

"How do you suppose all that thionite you boys found ties in with Carmody's murder?"

"I don't know, Nandi. There are more questions than answers in this case." Fleming was a little short-tempered; the peculiar not-quite-pain in his groin was still troubling him.

"Maybe Reilly, Carmody, and the Greenie were in partnership on the thionite," suggested Exton from beneath them.

"Could be," Fleming agreed, pausing to peer cautiously over the hatch-coaming before exposing himself. "Then Carmody tried to doublecross them somehow—the Greenie said something about him trying to keep all that money to himself." He clambered through the hatch and reached down to help Nandi up, looking around for the Greenie.

"But where are all the bodies?" Nandi asked. "You found nothing in the Converter Room or the hold, and it would make no sense to hide them where there are more people around."

"I dunno, maybe the Greenie spaced them all. What you think, Exton?"

No answer.

"Exton!" Fleming stuck his head down through the hatch and looked around. The Exec was nowhere in sight.

Nandi gasped, began to tremble. Fleming set his jaw grimly and closed the hatch, dogging it as tightly as he could. "Let's go," he rapped, and began climbing again, pulling Nandi after him.

They found the Captain just where Exton had guessed they might, in a lounge on the uppermost of the two crew-levels, engrossed in a card game with a relatively simple-minded recreational computer. He was a patriarchal figure, massive and heavily bearded, authority obvious in both the set of his broad shoulders and the disrupter that hung at his hip. He rose as the two entered, bowed to Nandi, and raised a shaggy eyebrow at Fleming. "Yes? What can I do for you?"

"You can call the Galactic Patrol," said Fleming, and without preamble launched into his third retelling of the past day's events. The sincerity in his voice was unmistakable, and when he finished the Captain had a dark look on his craggy face.

"Your story is easily checked, young man," he rumbled. He closed a switch on the wall beside him and said, "Exton. Reilly. Report on the double to A-Deck rec lounge. Hop." His voice seemed to echo in the distance, and Fleming realized he had cut in the command intercom.

They waited for a minute or two with no result. Then the Captain rose to his feet

and put his right hand to the butt of his disrupter. His mouth was a tight line and there was thunder in his eye. With his other hand he removed a remote control unit from his tunic, dialed a frequency, and said clearly, "Computer: broadcast, this frequency. 'Emergency. Emergency. Interstellar Vessel *This Train*, Captain Cavendish speaking. Killers on board, crew captured or killed. Request Patrol lock onto this carrier and rendezvous at once, repeat at once, prepared for armed resistance. Cavendish out.' Repeat and maintain carrier."

Fleming breathed a sigh of relief. Whatever happened now, the Patrol would be here soon. He began to relax—then stiffened as he realized that the intercom was still on. The Greenie must have heard every word! He waved frantically to get Captain Cavendish's attention and pointed to the wall-switch. Cavendish paled, put down the computer-relay link, and slapped the switch open, but the damage was done.

"Look," rapped the Captain, "I've got to get down to the lifeboats and make sure that damned creature doesn't escape before the Patrol arrives. You stay here, barricade the door, and don't stick your head out until I knock shave-and-a-haircut. You've got to keep this young lady safe," he put in as Fleming began to object. "I'll be all right—I've had some experience with hijackers before."

Fleming reluctantly agreed. He hated to lose out on potential heroics, but protecting the fair maiden was definitely a duty no hero could dodge. Besides, it was safer.

As soon as the Captain had left, Nandi came into his arms and captured his lips in an urgent, demanding kiss. "Hold me, Fleming," she breathed, "I'm so afraid."

"Don't worry, Nandi," Fleming reassured her with all the bravado he had left. "I'll keep you safe." His arms tightened protectively around her.

"Of course you will, my hero," Nandi said. "Just as you are keeping my jewels safe. Where did you put them, by the way? I've been meaning to ask you since that Reilly almost... I mean..."

"I understand," he said quickly. "I should have thought of that. They're in my stateroom, under my pillow. Who'd ever..." He trailed off. Nandi's hands had begun to wander, and while that confoundingly indefinable sensation had not left his groin, Fleming discovered that whatever it was did not interfere with performance. *What the hell*, he was telling himself, when suddenly something caught his eye and made him go rigid from the waist up as well. "My God," he breathed.

"What is it?" asked Nandi, sensing that he was no longer responding.

"That communications relay the Captain used. It's not set for emergency band at all—way off, as far as I can tell. Cavendish must have accidentally dialed the wrong frequency. Good Lord, if I hadn't noticed..." He let go of Nandi, picked up the device and reset it, then repeated the Captain's message as best he could remember. "That was too damned close. We would have waited for the Patrol till we were old and gray." He frowned. "I'd better let the Captain know what happened, so he doesn't do something foolish if the Patrol is late in showing up."

He activated the intercom. "Captain Cavendish?" No reply. "Captain, this is Fleming. Come in, please, it's urgent." There was no response at all for a long minute, and then the speaker came alive.

"Mr. Ayniss," came the unmistakable booming voice of the Greenie, "I would advise you not to meddle in criminal matters. They don't concern you."

Fleming jumped a foot in the air, his pulse-rate tripling instantly. Somehow the giant killer had gotten the drop on Cavendish, turned the tables again. The youth made a quick decision, a decision based on pure heroism.

"Wait here," he barked, killing the intercom again, "and don't let *anyone* in. I'm going to do what the Captain failed to do—keep that damned creature here until the authorities arrive. We can't let it get away."

Nandi began to protest, but Fleming ignored her and stepped out into the corridor, gun in hand. He was genuinely terrified, but a cold anger sustained him and steadied his weapon in his inexperienced grasp. He felt partially responsible for the carnage that had resulted from his discovery of the original murder, and he meant to avenge the crew and passengers of *This Train*. The Colonel, the steward, the Exec, the Captain, Nandi, all had been innocent victims, ordinary decent folks attacked without knowing why, given no chance to defend themselves. The murdering alien would pay for its crimes—Fleming intended to see to it. He made his way to the lifeboat locks, his peripheral vision straining to meet itself behind his head.

Unfortunately, it failed in this endeavor. As he approached the lifeboat locks, agony exploded in the back of his skull and extinguished the corridor lights one by one. He never felt the deck smack him in the face.

The blow had been startling, but he was considerably more surprised to regain consciousness, alive and unharmed, his gun still nearby where he had dropped it. He reclaimed it, rose shakily to his feet and staggered to the locks.

All six lifeboats were gone.

*Got away, dammit*, thought Fleming. *Probably fired of all the other boats to make itself harder to track*. He was furious, with himself as much as with the Greenie. His only consolation was that the murderer had been careless enough to fail to finish him off. He decided to make sure Nandi was all right, and headed back up to the lounge.

Nandi was not all right. At least, she was missing from the lounge. Fleming knew one timeless moment of pure fury, the frustrated rage of undeniable failure. The Greenie had obviously taken her along as a hostage in case the Patrol caught up with it.

The youth sank down into a chair and buried his head in his hands. He was bitterly sorry that he had ever heard the word *adventure*, and he cursed the nosy curiosity that had precipitated this slaughter.

After a long, black time he began to think again. Numbly, he decided to go below and check whether the Greenie had removed the thionite from the hold. Perhaps it had been in too much of a hurry.

But when he reached the hold, he heard noises from close at hand and melted quietly into the shadows, his gun growing out of his fist.

It was the Greenie, it had to be! How, Fleming couldn't imagine and didn't care; the song of blood rushing in his temples had a one-word libretto: vengeance. He smiled grimly to himself and clenched his gun tightly, peering with infinite caution around the fender of a halftrack farming vehicle.

The Greenie was just resetting the seals on the opened crate of thionite, an ominous expression on its face. Fleming took careful aim at the massive, head, but before he could fire, the alien strode rapidly to the stairshaft and climbed above.



Fleming slipped from concealment and followed it, reaching the shaft in time to see the Greenie step off two levels above, on C-Deck.

Narrowing his eyes, Fleming ascended noiselessly to C-Deck, just quickly enough to spot the killer entering Carmody's stateroom, the scene of the original murder. He waited, hidden by the hatch cover, until the creature had exited and turned a corner. Fleming padded silently after it. As he passed Carmody's room, he glanced in, and was not even mildly surprised to discover that the corpse was missing. It figured. The Greenie was housecleaning.

Fleming intended to do a little housecleaning of his own.

He eased around the corner with care, but the corridor was deserted. The nameplate on the third door he came to read, "Rax Ch'loom, Sirius II." Jackpot!

Fleming took hold of the doorlatch, paused for a long moment to bid good-bye to his adolescence, then yanked open the door. The first thing he saw was the Greenie, surprised in the act of changing clothes, literally caught with its pants down. The second thing he saw was Carmody's body on the bed, neatly trussed up with nylon cord. A part of him wondered why the Greenie would tie up a corpse, but the majority of him simply didn't give a damn.

"This is for Nandi, you bastard," he said clearly, and aimed for the trifurcate nose.

And then something struck him between the shoulder-blades, smashing him to the deck. His chin hit hard enough to drive a wedge of black ice up into his brain, where it melted, turning everything to inky dark.

"Crap," Fleming said as consciousness returned.

"You bet, old son," said a pleasant baritone. "Several fans-full of the stuff, in fact."

Fleming looked up, startled. A smiling lieutenant of the Galactic Patrol knelt over him, smelling salts in one hand and a vortex disrupter in the other.

"Did you get him?" Fleming cried. "Did you get the Greenie?"

"Ch'loom? Hell no, Mr. Ayniss, but we got damned near everybody else. God-damnedest thing I ever saw—a freighter torching along practically empty, and six lifeboats full of crooks heading away from it in different directions like the Big Bang all over again. We picked 'em all up okay, but what I'd like to know is what put the wind up all of them? Their stories don't make much sense when you put them all together."

Fleming shook his head confusedly, allowed the Patrolman to help him to his feet. "I don't understand," he said weakly. "Lifeboats full of crooks?"

"Sure," said the Patrolman, holstering his sidearm. "First one in line was a Colonel Underwear-Waist or some such, claimed you were the first sucker in ten standard years to catch him stacking the cards."

"Huh?" gasped Fleming, thunderstruck.

"Yep. Old-time card-sharp, according to our computer records. Been working the tramps for years, ever since the regular lines got on to him. How'd you tumble to him, Ayniss?"

"Uh," Fleming explained. He tried to recall the exact wording of the message he had slipped into "Captain Galaxy Meets His Match" a hundred years ago. "Who was next?"

"Next was the ship's steward, chap named Blog. Says you found out he was rifling staterooms and threatened to tip off the Captain, so he lit out as soon as he could. We found a lot of boodle with him—guess you've got a reward or two coming. Then there was an engineer who claimed his name was Reilly, but he turned out to be a guy named Foster, wanted for murder over on Armageddon. Had his fingerprints changed, of course, but he couldn't afford biomod work on his retinas. According to him, he heard you and the Executive Officer talking, realized you were on to him and stuck the two of you up. Then, he claims, somebody else sapped him, and he woke up alone in number three lifeboat, which he did not hesitate to use.

"But the next customer was the Exec himself, Exton is it? And under questioning he broke down and admitted smuggling thionite on board to sell at Forced Landing. We found the thionite just where he said it would be. Say, did you know he's got a modified voice-box? Cursed you out in three-part harmony.

"But the strangest of the bunch was Captain Cavendish himself. He was really surprised to see us—kept insisting that he'd called us himself and he was *sure* he'd used the wrong frequency, which doesn't seem to make much sense. But he was so flabbergasted he slipped up and mentioned what frequency he *had* used. Just for fun we broadcast, 'All clear, come ahead,' on that frequency, and a whole gang of pirates walked into the surprise of their life. Apparently Cavendish was in cahoots with them on some kind of insurance fraud scheme, figured to let them rob the ship without a fight. We've got 'em all, and we didn't lose a man."

"What about Nandi?" Fleming asked groggily. "She has to be honest—she gave me a fortune in jewels for safekeeping."

"Nandi *Tyson*—'honest'? Say, we've been looking for her for years, ever since she started passing out counterfeit Carezza fire-diamonds in the outworlds. She was the last one we picked up—she had those diamonds with her, by the way—and boy, was she ever mad at you."

Fleming's head spun. "Does this mean that the diamonds are worthless?" he asked.

The Patrol lieutenant had studied classical humor in college, but even as the phrase "Ayniss and Nandi" exploded hilariously in his brain, he felt a flash of compassion for the crestfallen youth and kept a straight face.

"Put it this way, Ayniss," he said gravely. "Yes."

"But—but what about the Greenie? Didn't you get him too? He's the one that started all this madness."

"No, my friend," came a booming voice from the doorway, "I am afraid you did that all by yourself."

Fleming whirled. The Greenie stood there smiling, a gun at its hip, a Patrol officer at its side. "Get it," Fleming screamed at the lieutenant, "it's a murderer."

"Ch'loom a murderer?" the officer said dubiously. "That's a little hard to believe."

"I tell you I saw it," gibbered Fleming. "The damned thing killed a man named Carmody."

The Greenie's smile deepened, exposing more fang. It stepped aside, to reveal Carmody standing behind it, demonstrably alive. Their wrists were handcuffed together. Fleming's mouth opened, and stayed that way.

"Allow me to introduce Rax Ch'loom, Official Equalizer of Carson's World,"

said the lieutenant. "My name's Hornsby, by the way, pleased to meet you."

"Equalizer?" mumbled Fleming dazedly.

"Sure," Hornsby replied cheerfully. "Rax showed up on Carson's World about thirty years back and commenced stealing from the rich and giving to the poor. The idea caught on so well they institutionalized him—gave him legal immunity from prosecution, quasigovernmental status, subsidies, the works."

"What did the rich do?" exploded Fleming.

"Squawked like hell," Rax grinned. "There wasn't much else they could do."

"But don't the rich hold the political power?" asked Fleming, stunned.

"Hey," Rax replied, "we got democracy. *Lots* more poor people than rich people on Carson's World."

"Sounds like a crazy place to me," Fleming snapped, his confusion turning to unreasonable irritation.

"Oh, I dunno," Homsby intervened. "You get hungry, you go see Rax. You start hogging, Rax rips you off. Sounds pretty comfortable to me."

"Suppose you rob a rich man, and for want of capital he's utterly ruined the next day?"

"You get hungry, you go see Rax."

"But there's more to life than food."

"Hey, listen, Rax don't steal no women..."

"Other things."

"Like what?"

"Carmody here thought he could take thirty million credits out of circulation," Rax boomed contentedly. "Not a chance." Carmody snarled impotently.

"But I felt his wrist," Fleming objected feebly. "It was cold."

"... as a corpse's wouldn't have been for at least an hour," Rax pointed out. "I put him in a cryonic stasis for my own convenience, and spent the whole rest of the voyage trying to figure out what in the name of the seven bloody devils of Old Terra you were doing."

Fleming gave up, began shaking his head. "Then it's all over?" he asked resignedly.

"Er... not quite, Ayniss," Hornsby said with curious reluctance. "There's one more little matter. Did you and the Tyson woman...? I mean, did she? Did you...?"

"Well, yes," Fleming admitted, remembering that he did have at least one thing to be proud of. "She's from Do It, you know."

"You knew that and still let her?" gasped Hornsby, his jaw dropping.

"Hell, yes. She said Do It was based on total sexual freedom, so as to eliminate tension and frustration. It sounded like a good idea to me."

"It sounds like a good idea to me, too, but that's not what Do It is like. It's a world full of fanatical feminists, not hedonists. All the women have had the same biomod work performed on them."

"What kind?" Fleming asked, feeling that strange and indescribable feeling in his crotch again.

"Uh... well, you may as well know. It has to do with modifying the ovum, giving it the mobility and the seeking instinct of a sperm cell, with some of the parasitic characteristics of a tapeworm. Only a psychotic female-supremacist could have

conceived of it." He broke off, embarrassed.

"Well?" said Fleming. "*Tell* me, dammit."

"I'm afraid, Mr. Ayniss," said the Creenie with genuine compassion, "that you are pregnant."