

TELETEMPORIAN!

A MUTANT with a unique ability.

An event of the First Magnitude.

"Hades calling Terra!" The year is 2044, the call emanating by hypercom from Terrania's secret base in the Druuf universe.

The message: that the mutant who long ago in the formative stages of the New Power mysteriously disappeared, the only teletemporian of the Mutant Corps has come back. Bringing wondrous knowledge with him.

There's excitement galore in store as—

ERNST ELLERT RETURNS!

1/ DISTRESS CALL TO HADES!

RESISTANCE was useless. They came in such overwhelming numbers that he abandoned the idea of fighting back. Their airships landed by the dozens on the hard, rocky surface of the desert. They aimed their energy guns at the cliff walls behind which his subterranean laboratory was concealed.

He could see them in his telescopic viewscreens. How they had found the place was beyond him. The hideout had been carefully chosen and no one besides himself had known about it.

His speculations were suddenly interrupted as the outside microphone pickups brought the voices of the besiegers into the laboratory. They were sounds that no human ear would have been able to perceive because they were above the normally audible frequency range. But he whom they sought and had now discovered was able to understand them.

"You're surrounded, Onot! If you come unarmed to the surface we'll listen to what you have to say. If not, we'll destroy you and your laboratory."

Onot shrugged mentally. He had suspected something like this would happen. In the past his life had not always turned out the way he would have preferred. He had often done things that were against his better judgement and for that reason they had seemed to be incomprehensible. Sometimes he had acted as though he were an enemy to his own people and a friend of his bitterest foe. It had really been his fault alone that the combat robots of the attackers had been able to destroy the great computer centre—and later the special space station.

"I'll come up there," he said into his microphone as he looked somewhat sadly at his surroundings.

It was a giant rocky chamber which heavy-duty raybeams had once gouged out of the mountain. The only access to the surface was a narrow corridor that led upward like a ramp. This had been his secret laboratory where he had always come to work when he needed quiet and seclusion for his researches and discoveries. And since he was the most outstanding and capable scientist of his race he had made some very significant inventions.

But for the moment all that seemed to have been forgotten. All that mattered now was his treason. Treason which he had committed!

He felt of his clumsy-seeming and rather misshapen wrist. There he could detect a tiny protuberance that no one else would have noticed. With a slight pressure he activated the 1-celled battery of the tiny micro-transmitter that lay beneath his skin. For a fleeting moment Onot pondered why he possessed this transmitter and to whom he might be sending a distress call. But then he shrugged his giant shoulders and went to the exit ramp in order to give himself over to the police.

Meanwhile the airship crews had swarmed out around the cliff and covered the area with their weapons. In the deep-hued sky were other aircraft which hovered in readiness to support the surprise raid on the rebellious scientist's hideout.

These police troops were not human.

Towering about 10 feet in height, their squarish, unwieldy frames were supported by heavy, pillar-like legs. Their hairless skin was like thick leather. Their huge round heads, almost a foot and a half in diameter, possessed 4 eyes with a good 300° of vision. Their ears and noses were not outwardly visible.

Although appearances were deceptive in this case, the Druufs had evolved from the insect phylum. In fact they communicated on an ultrasonic level. The high-pitched soundwaves were sent out and received by natural antennas which were a part of their bodies. Another feature was their ungainly-looking arms, especially because of their hands which were well-shaped with finely articulated fingers and seemed to be unrelated to the rest of their bodies.

A crevice appeared in the wall of rock and quickly widened, after which Onot stepped out onto the desolate plateau. He opened his arms in a wide gesture to show that he was unarmed. On his face was a mixed expression, a sort of embarrassed perplexity with perhaps a touch of curiosity. "Here I am," he announced. "What do you want of me?"

A police lieutenant emerged from cover with his beamer aimed at the scientist. "Do you surrender?"

"Would I be standing here otherwise?" retorted Onot somewhat sarcastically.

The officer gave a signal to his men. "Search him for weapons," he ordered.

They found nothing, overlooking the micro-transmitter that was buried under his skin.

"May I ask what I'm charged with?" inquired Onot.

The lieutenant shrugged. "You'll find out soon enough. But this much I can tell you: you're going to have a hard time clearing yourself of a suspicion of treason. We have you to thank for the destruction of the

computer centre. But that was just for starters. Then there was the space station... but enough for now! Follow me!"

Onot appeared as though he were about to say something but then thought better of it. His triangular mouth closed tightly as he walked away with the lieutenant. A glance at the sky revealed a lowering sun and he knew that it would soon be night. It was a giant red sun that shone down on the dreary landscape but it did not rule this system alone. Close beside it was a smaller, greenish companion which was almost lost to view in the greater orb's baleful red glow.

After a half-hour's flight the police aircraft landed at the spaceport of the capital city. An armoured car brought Onot to the building of the Supreme Tribunal. The scientist had an opportunity to observe his surroundings through a small window. To his amazement he noted that most of the buildings and houses in the city exhibited heavy signs of damage. Some of them had been fully levelled to the ground.

A vague sense of guilt assailed him at first but then came that reassuring inner voice again which seemed to maintain that he was completely innocent.

What about that inner voice...?

Onot sought to remember what he knew about it but his memory failed him. Nevertheless, something had been there, he thought darkly to himself, but try as he might he could not have told anyone what it had been. Someone was with him but he could neither see him nor feel him.

He awoke as from a dream when hard hands grasped his arms and jerked him out of the car. He stood in a high-walled courtyard.

"You can do your daydreaming later," said the lieutenant scornfully. He seemed to have forgotten how easy the scientist had made his task for him by not putting up any resistance. "The prison cells here are quiet and solitary."

"Thank you," replied Onot, still lost in thought.

They led him through wide hallways past a countless number of doors and then downstairs into his prison cell. When the cell door finally closed behind him and he was alone, he breathed a sigh of relief. Maybe now they'd give him some time to think in peace. Above on the ceiling there was a grating—the air ventilator. Perhaps also a hidden remote camera eye. In the corner was a narrow cot and next to it were a table and a chair. That was all.

Onot sat down. He supported his head in his hands and sought to recapitulate the past. So much time had gone by, perhaps 100 or 200 days. He wasn't sure of anything anymore. Once he had been the celebrated Onot, the leading scientist among the Druufs. He had given them many discoveries and inventions.

Inventions...?

Onot felt a surge of new hope. Of this *hecould* be sure! He recalled his last piece of scientific work. He had built in the spatial stabilizer on board the giant space station. This apparatus had been unique, his latest invention. It might also be called a time stasis machine. With its help it was possible to build up a force field in which time became stationary.

Time stasis...?

It seemed to Onot as if a light were being cast into the darkness surrounding the happenings for which he was being held responsible. Perhaps now his memory would return and he would find an explanation.

But when the strong headache suddenly returned to him which had hounded him during the past number of months he lost hope again. He knew that this headache phenomenon was his greatest enemy. It was then that the voice had often spoken to him. He remembered that there had been a time when he knew who belonged to that voice but at present it still escaped him.

Later perhaps...

* * * *

Capt. Marcel Rous had really been assigned to a lost outpost.

As its name implied, the planet Hades resembled the gates of Hell. It was the 13th planet of the most colossal solar system that human eyes had ever beheld. The giant binary star Siamed possessed a family of 62 planets, almost all of which had their own system of satellites. Planet #16 was Druufon, the home world of the Druufs.

Which was also the reason why Capt. Marcel Rous was stationed on Hades, the 13th planet. Terra's military base here had been hollowed out of the solid rock by the energy beams of heavy ship's cannons and now lay deep beneath the surface of the twilight world where life was practically impossible except for the narrow twilight zone between the light and dark hemispheres.

But they had nothing to do with the surface areas where they could be spotted by possible patrol units of the Druufs. After their heavy defeat in the Einstein universe the Druufs had retreated into their own time plane and had abandoned all further attempts to expand their power. Their enemy had even taken advantage of the retreat by destroying the space station where Onot's latest weapon had been installed.

Just the same, Marcel Rous remained alert. If the Druufs were to discover that a Terranian stronghold existed in their own solar system, they would strike with every force in their possession. So now the base served only a single purpose: it must not allow the connection with Ernst Ellert to be severed.

Over 70 years ago Ernst Ellert had been a member of the Mutant Corps. His faculty of being able to project his mind into the future had also shaped his destiny. An accident had separated mind from body. Restlessly his mind had wandered astray in time and space, ever seeking its own plane of the present but never finding it. What it did find, however, was a new present, which was a future plane by comparison to its own time.

Now it possessed a body again but it was not his own. The latter lay in a mausoleum on Earth near Terrania. Perry Rhodan, Administrator of the Solar Empire, had kept it preserved there. So the essence of that which was Ellert lingered on Druufon, the chief world of the Druufs. He had promised to send a signal when the time had come for him to leave his host body and when he would be able to return to the Earth.

Approximately 1 light-year distant from Hades yawned the great rift in the universe which joined the two

time planes with each other. Only by this means was it possible to change from one plane to the other without special technical assistance. But now this rift—a so-called discharge cone—was wavering and becoming narrower. It wouldn't be long before it would be a thing of the past. Then the Druufs would be gone, once and for all, from the time plane of the Terranians, unless they were to discover on their own a method of bridging the time wall.

There were 12 matter transmitters at the base on Hades. They had made it possible to build and equip the secret station. From a distance of more than a light-year, weapons, material, provisions and personnel had been transmitted from Terranian ships to Hades. When it became necessary, these same transmitters would bring the Hades personnel back to safety again.

At the moment, the time had not yet arrived for it.

Marcel Rous was on his daily rounds in the stronghold, talking here and there with crewmembers and checking the guards, the communications installation and the warning system. When he was leaving the tracking and observation room he heard voices in the wardroom and mess hall. One voice in particular was that of a man who had arrived on Hades only a few days before as part of the relief crew. Men who were off duty spent their time in the large wardroom, drank their whiskey rations and related their experiences.

Rous grinned to himself as he entered the place unnoticed and sat down at a small table in a booth.

"You're a heck of a story teller, Kranolte!" shouted someone amusedly. "According to you, Rhodan would never have been able to knock out the robot Brain without your help!"

The man named Kranolte was a sergeant wearing the uniform of Solar Intelligence. He nodded his head emphatically. "I don't want to exaggerate, Myers, but you can take it from me—we were really in a helluva fix. We were hiding out in a cave in the middle of the desert on Zalit, standing guard on a transmitter, and any minute we were afraid of being discovered by the Arkonides. Man, they really could have made it hot for us!"

"That may well be, Kranolte, but you can't convince me that your mission alone was what made it possible for Atlan to get to Arkon and become the new Emperor of the stellar empire. During that time you were squatting in a cave and waiting for things to clear up, while Rhodan was conquering Arkon with his 150 special troops."

Kranolte appeared to bristle at this. "Putting it bluntly, that's an insult, my friend! After all, you weren't there!"

"But I know you," retorted Myers, undisturbed. "The way you tell it, you sound like Pucky. He's also claimed in the past that the Earth would have long ceased to exist without his help because he's saved it at least 10 times from annihilation already."

"That's all just talk," retorted the other. "Who was it that said jealousy is crueller than the grave?"

"Alright then," said Myers, although he failed to grasp Kranolte's Biblical quotation, "tell us what you did on Zalit that was so great!"

Sgt. Kranolte didn't need a second invitation. "Well, you know as well as I do that the Arkon situation under the Regent couldn't go on much longer, so Rhodan decided to pull the plug on that robot Brain. Rhodan and I and 200 men were dumped into Zalit, which is only 3 light-years from Arkon. And now

comes the part about the cave. Inside was our transmitter receiver and through it the *California* sent backup supplies and equipment to us. We had to see that nobody located the transmitter in that cave and we organized the caravans that brought the materials to Tagnor, the capital city. Without that material the whole operation would have been impossible. We were sitting there in the middle of the desert..."

"You've said that twice already," interjected Myers.

"...and we had to watch out so that the Hhracks didn't gobble us up. In the meantime Rhodan and Atlan and the others went to Arkon and put the Regent out of business. Atlan became Imperator and Rhodan gave him recognition. Yes, that was a real wild time we had that time on Zalit. Back in the cave, we..."

"You and your stupid cave!" shouted Myers, finally losing his patience. "If you hadn't been stationed there it would have been somebody else. You were just a small cog in the machinery—and that includes any of us! Nobody is indispensable, you know!"

Kranolte seemed to shrink a few inches. "Well, just don't get carried away!" he challenged Myers, much to the amusement of the other men in the room. "You can be replaced!"

Myers' mouth dropped agape. He was suddenly flabbergasted. "But—didn't I just get through saying...?"

Kranolte nodded patronizingly. "Sure, but you didn't quite put it *that* way. Anyway, take it easy, nobody's infallible. Isn't that right, Capt. Rous?"

Marcel Rous realized he'd been discovered. He had to admit to himself that Kranolte had cleverly squirmed out of the hole he'd gotten himself into. He stood up and nodded. "Of course you're right, Sergeant. At least concerning that last point you made. Carry on, men."

The men had sprung up to stand at attention. Rous smiled as he left the mess hall. Even at a distance he could still hear the storm of rebuke crackling down on Kranolte's poor head. They thought that he had been aware of his superior officer's presence for some time and had sought to take him in with his exaggerated heroic deeds.

Back in the com room Rous made certain that the message receiver section was in working order. The first incoming pulse would cause the recording tapes to turn on so that any piece of news would be stored for access later. But the indicators were still showing green. No news yet.

The communications man on duty greeted him. "The, cruiser *Ohio* is still on picket point outside the discharge zone. Nothing special going on."

Rous merely nodded acknowledgement and returned to his quarters after making one short visit to the main Control Central of the base. All quiet on Hades. The Hell planet lay in a deep spell of peacefulness. And yet doom was only light-minutes away.

When Rous lay down on his bed he thought that boredom came more quickly to men when they were so close to the heart and hearth of danger without anything happening. Later, however, he was to wish that he had never had such a thought.

* * * *

Onot spent 2 days and 3 nights in his cell without event. No one bothered about him. A silent caretaker brought him food but refused to answer any questions.

His memory slowly returned to him. So far it had not yet occurred to the scientist that he might be suffering from amnesia. Of course he admitted he might have forgotten one thing or another but to suspect an actual gap in his memory was out of the question. Granted, there had been times in the past when he had acted very strangely, especially that time when hostile robots had destroyed the computer centre. He couldn't explain even to himself why he had acted so strangely, yet he knew that he had done so.

It was all a tangled mess. His mind sought to draw a straight line from the present to those events of the past but it failed. It was as though impenetrable veils of forgetfulness drifted between the events and obstructed his attempts to look backwards. All of which only served to accentuate his intolerable headaches.

It became clear to him that he was sitting in a trap. They would be able to hold him responsible for things that he couldn't even recall anymore. Had it really been he himself who had brought about the destruction of the great computer centre beneath the city? And if he had done it, *why*? Why had he given the enemy robots access to the centre so that they could finish their task?

He felt as though suddenly he might be able to grasp the past with both his hands. But then when he reached out toward it, those impenetrable shrouds would close in again—as if someone were drawing the veils across his vision.

Someone...?

He remembered suddenly that this 'someone' had certainly had a great deal to do with it. It was someone he couldn't see but whom he was probably able to hear. Someone who was next to him—or more likely *within* him. Ah yes, now he was aware of this again!

On the morning of the third day, Onot began to remember.

A voice had spoken to him. It seemed to come out of nothingness and yet it spoke from within himself—to him. It was an eerie voice without sound, inside his brain. It had told him of having dwelled within him for years and of having watched and controlled his work. The voice had even said that Onot had only its presence to thank for the fact that he had become the greatest scientist of his race.

After that, Onot got to his feet and walked restlessly back and forth in his cell. Five steps one way and five steps back.

The voice...

It told him once more that he must do what it told him to do. He must obey no matter what was asked of him. And he recalled that the voice had commanded him to commit treason. Yes, he had been the one who had activated the transmitter-receiver so that the alien robots could get into the Central—and only because the inner voice had demanded it of him.

Onot sat down again.

If he were to tell the judge of the Supreme Tribunal about the voice, would he believe him? Or would he consider it to be a poor alibi, a fabric of fantasy? The great unknown nemesis—a voice! Onot could already hear the entire courtroom laughing at such a statement. The Druufs were a sober and calculating species. They did not believe in ghosts and voices.

But then he searched further into memory.

Had not the voice also told him that if it were to leave him he would die? Well, so now it had left him and he was still alive. Also, wasn't his memory also slowly returning to him? Perhaps if he could convince the judge of his innocence everything would still be all right. He would build up another computer central and also construct another time stasis machine. He could make amends for his previous mistakes.

The voice had once told him that it was a mind or entity of some kind that had lost its body and that it had since taken up a new residence in Onot's body. Further, said the voice, Onot's own intellect must not resist it; it must be obedient at all times.

Onot had obeyed because he had to—and because at that time he had no suspicion of what was really happening to him. From a moral point of view, he was not guilty of the crimes he was accused of. How it would appear in the ruthless eye of Druuf judgment, however, was another question.

"I'm master of my own mind again," Onot told himself, "and therefore of my body as well. No one can command me to do anything. I am Onot, the scientist! I shall build a weapon with which we can conquer the universe! Time... what secrets does it still hide from me? If I want to I can reverse the stream of time itself and cancel out the events of the past. I'll track down the owner of the voice and kill him, before his mind or entity can leave my body. The Earth was its home planet and we're going to know where that is located. Some of us were there already. If you can hear me, voice, then answer me. Admit that I am stronger than you..."

Instead of receiving an answer, however, he saw a view-flap open in the door and the dungeon keeper looked in at him. Then he closed the flap and went away.

Onot leaned back against the wall. The voice isn't there anymore, he thought triumphantly. Before, whenever I'd have the slightest thought of rebellion it would come immediately to threaten me. Then it would cause me headaches and torture me in other ways. It would push my thoughts aside and make me its slave. But today...

No, the voice was no longer there.

Now the hour had come for which he had waited so long. The past was clear to him once more. He would be able to explain everything to the judge—and he would have to believe him.

But then, as though from the blow of an axe, the house of cards of all his hopes was shattered asunder. Soundlessly the voice spoke to him!

"You are mistaken, Onot. I am still here! But perhaps you will soon be alone—indeed, quite alone. It could well be that you would even be happy if I were to return."

In a shock of horror, Onot continued to listen. But the voice said nothing more.

* * * *

For seconds or millenniums—there was no temporal point of reference to use as a guide—Ernst Ellert's disembodied mind whirled through the stream of time, rudderless and adrift, until he was finally washed onto the time strand of the Druuf plane. Here he first became aware that there was not only one stream of time and not only one plane of time but many. He had traversed a number of them and broken through their otherwise impenetrable walls. But the holes had closed behind him again, sealing off the possibility of return.

And thus he had found Onot the scientist. Cautiously he had penetrated his body and taken possession of him. At first the Druuf had opposed this domination but then he had been forced to cease his resistance. Onot became Ellert's involuntary slave. From time to time, of course, he would attempt to shake off this irksome and dangerous visitor from nowhere but he did not succeed. Ellert had found a new body and therefore a new home.

Once he had made contact with his old time plane but didn't realize it. It had been at the time of Arkon's colonization of Venus and when Earth had witnessed the submergence of Atlantis. It was not until 10,000 years later—only a matter of weeks for Ellert in the Druuf universe—the second and most decisive contact was made.

Perry Rhodan discovered the Druuf time plane—and he found Ellert.

From that moment on, Onot had worked under Ellert's domination for Perry Rhodan and the Terranians. He did it against his will. The Druuf rebelled and sensed that he had become stronger. He had not been able to prevent the act of treason but he knew that his inner foe—the voice—had become weaker.

Ellert knew this also.

With growing apprehension he had been forced to realize that his power over Onot was fading. It was only with the greatest of effort that he could keep from being ejected from Onot's thoughts. He didn't want to be Onot forever but the time for his return had not yet arrived. His real body was waiting for him, more than 6,000 light-years away. But would he still be able to bridge over this enormous distance?

Through Onot's four eyes he observed his surroundings the desolate bare walls of the cell to which the scientist had been brought. He still thought of the return to Earth. Perhaps he should attempt it. The secret of the linear translight space drive was completely in his hands, visually speaking. He would be able to construct spaceships that could fly a million times faster than light without any need for dematerialisation. He would bring this secret with him as a present for Rhodan.

In recent days he had avoided provoking Onot. Only earlier today he had been forced to make it clear to the Druuf that he was still with him.

However, now there was much to do. In the cavern laboratory were the records and designs concerning the linear space drive. It was true that he knew their most important details by heart and was certain of what he could do with them but it could hardly hurt anything if he were to go over them once more. Later perhaps there wouldn't be time for it.

Carefully he began to withdraw from Onot. The Druuf had no sensation of it. Suddenly Ellert could see him beneath him, sitting on the bed. The walls of the cell became blurred and yielded to his penetration. Their molecular composition offered no resistance to Ellert's mind. He pushed through the 'solid' matter before him and floated a few moments later above the Tribunal building.

He remained where he was for several minutes, which enabled him to determine that his time sense was not deceiving him. Not here and now!

The capital city of the Druufs had been severely damaged. In some places advances had been made with the reconstruction. The circular capitol dome of the Council of 66 had hardly been scarred at all. Ellert knew that the most important installations were hidden beneath the surface. But the war had reached even there. The combat robots transferred from Hades by transmitter had done their work well. Onot would have to atone for that.

He concentrated on the stony desert and the secret laboratory in the mountain—and was there in the same instant. He floated high above the plateau. Several vehicles stood close to the laboratory entrance. Druufs were coming out of the rock passage and hauling equipment and cartons to the ground cars. Apparently they were in the process of gathering up all the evidence they could find.

Ellert was startled. Hopefully they hadn't shoved the spacedrive data somewhere to one side. Of course it wouldn't make a decisive difference, really, he consoled himself. Nevertheless...

He sank downward and hung invisibly above the Druuf. The officer's rank insignia revealed that he was a member of the Security Service of Druufon. He commanded his troops with the usual arrogance of an authority who was accustomed to giving orders. It appeared that he was intending to clean out the whole laboratory.

If Ellert had possessed a face, a chance observer might have noticed that he was smiling now. It was not difficult to penetrate the unprepared brain of the Druuf. There was not the slightest sign of any resistance. But the hard-working police officers could not believe their ultrasonic organs of hearing when they suddenly received an order to bring everything back down into the laboratory.

Ellert forced the officer to revisit the laboratory chambers, where a terrible confusion was in evidence. Everything stood or lay about in a tangled mess. The chaos increased proportionately as the Druufs began to bring back the things they had taken away.

The officer wandered through the rooms as though searching for something. He leafed through whole stacks of blueprints and designs, regarding them with uncomprehending eyes, only to put them aside again. It took him a half-hour to find what he was unconsciously looking for.

If he had had lungs, Ellert would have breathed a sigh of relief. The sketches were all still there. They consisted of an extremely thin sheet of metal foil which had been scribbled over with almost illegible formulas. However, its value was incalculable.

After folding it, the officer put the sheet into his pocket. At the same time he ordered his troops to continue with their original task and again take everything back up to the surface. The order was promptly obeyed. Here as in all other universes one, was accustomed to taking much from officers, even senseless commands. They followed orders without a word.

After several hours their task was completed. Ellert remained in the officer's body as the latter got into an aircar. He flew back to the city where he reported to the authorities that his assignment had been

carried out. Then he asked for permission to speak to the prisoner.

The superior officer looked up from his desk in astonishment. By terrestrial standards he might have been a general. "Onot? What do you want with him? His investigation has not been concluded yet."

Ellert put the answer in the officer's mouth, or more accurately in his antennas. "I don't believe we have found everything yet that could be used as evidence. I was thinking I might pick up a few clues by questioning him."

The general pondered this for a moment and then nodded. "I'll request a visitor's pass for you from the Superior Judge."

Ellert waited patiently. It was not until late afternoon that his patience was rewarded. The officer received permission to speak with the prisoner.

Onot was startled out of his thoughts when his cell door opened and the police officer entered. Having been free from Ellert's presence for several hours, his memory had returned completely and he knew what had happened. Of course he could not guess that his nemesis now faced him in the form of his visitor.

"I must speak to the judge at once," he said even before the officer could say a word. "It was not an act of treason as everybody might suspect. I..."

"Not another word!" said the officer, prompted by Ellert. "You will do what I tell you to do. I was in your laboratory and I've brought you something that you must conceal on your person. Here, take these notes. They must not be lost." He handed Onot the metal foil.

The scientist looked at it and was surprised to recognize notes and sketches in his own handwriting which contained the essential secrets of the linear space-drive. It didn't quite make sense to him. The translight system of flight had long been in use. What good were these early details and designs? To any Druuf they were worthless.

But priceless, perhaps, to someone from another universe...?

He began to understand. "Take these notes back and destroy them!" he said.

Ellert perceived the danger of his position. It was impossible now for him to control two Druufs at once. It was time to bring Onot under his influence again. And the officer? Wouldn't he remember what had gone on here? Would a weak amnesia block suffice to make him forget everything?

He'd have to try it.

After about 10 seconds of deliberation, Ellert left the officer and penetrated Onot's brain once more. He became aware of a stronger resistance than before but ruthlessly shoved it aside. Every second counted.

Onot yielded. "Very well, I'll do what you require," he said expressionlessly. "And now please go."

The officer appeared to awaken as though from a dream. How had he come here to the prisoner's cell? What was he doing here with Onot the traitor? Without a word, he turned and left the cell. The dungeon keeper carefully locked the door and then escorted the officer upstairs. The latter kept walking, still as though in a trance, until he stood before the superior judge.

The latter wanted to know what success he had had. "Well, what did you find out?" he asked.

The officer shrugged. "Nothing, Your Honour. Absolutely nothing!"

"I thought as much," the judge nodded and made a gesture of dismissal. "You may go."

The officer went away. In vain he sought to remember what had happened between now and the time when he had been stripping down the laboratory.

Once more Ellert succeeded in dominating Onot. The Druuf had felt his temporary release from coercion and had prepared to blabber out all of his dangerous secrets. If that were to happen and they believed him, the Druufs would be alerted. They must never learn that Perry Rhodan had such an invincible agent as Ellert. Especially they must not find out that Rhodan was behind every assault against Druufon or that Hades was his secret base in their system.

"For you it's a matter of life and death, Onot," he imparted to the scientist. "As long as I do not leave you, nothing will happen to you. You have helped me, so I will also help you."

"I don't want your help!" retorted Onot stubbornly. It was obvious that he did not wish to bend again to the influence of the voice. His resistance grew. "I know what I've done and I'll explain everything to the Tribunal. They will believe me."

"You think so, do you?" said Ellert doubtfully. "But even if they do believe you, won't you always have to fear that I will return—and cause you to commit treason again?"

"You're not strong enough for that anymore!" exclaimed the scientist triumphantly. "Our mutual strengths have become equalized. Go ahead—try to coerce me. You will not succeed!"

"I can kill you," Ellert reminded him.

"Then do it!" the Druuf challenged him.

Ellert chose not to answer. He was suddenly assailed by fear and a sense of doubt. He himself could feel that he had grown weaker. He suspected that his disembodied excursion to the secret laboratory had been about his last chance of separating himself successfully from Onot without falling again into the stream of time and being lost in Eternity. In this condition of incipient weakness it was out of the question to consider reaching the Earth on his own initiative.

His total being signalled: danger!

For him there was only *one* method of salvation: he had to transfer from Onot into his own body. That would only be possible, however, if his body were here on Druufon.

"There is still another alternative."

"What is that?"

"When the right time arrives, I will leave you. You have my promise that I will never return to you. You will be free."

"So what is your price?" The Druuf could not imagine that freedom might be obtained without some kind of payment in return. "What do I have to do?"

Ellert felt relieved. "Under the skin of your left hand you will be able to feel a slight protuberance. Press on it with your finger. You need do nothing more."

Onot was not at all willing to accommodate the voice but curiosity forced him to search for the thing under his skin. It was easy to locate it. "What is it?" he asked.

"Don't ask questions, Onot. Just press harder on it—that's it. Now I can tell you. It's a micro-transmitter which is making contact with some good friends of mine. They are being alerted now by a red indicator lamp. Either my thought impulses or yours—or both—will be converted into electrical wave patterns and another apparatus will translate them into the words of my language. And now relax and remain passive for a few minutes. I don't think I can force you to do that anymore, but believe me, it's your only—and your last chance—to remain alive."

As a scientist, Onot was curious. He cherished his life even though at the moment it was not too promising. True he had boasted that he'd prefer to die rather than to submit to the voice again but at the moment that grandiloquent gesture appeared to him to be foolish.

Willingly, then, he surrendered himself to the voice.

But he promised himself irrevocably that it would be for the last time.

* * * *

The alarm catapulted Capt. Marcel Rous out of a deep sleep.

Almost instantly his feet hit the cold metal floor of his room and he was running while still pulling his clothes on toward the com room where the alarm had originated. If it had come from the Command Central he might have expected to be under a direct attack from the Druufs. So in this case, Rous was assured, the Druufs were not directly involved.

Breathlessly he dashed into the communications centre and saw that Sgt. Masters was just turning off the pickup recorder tapes. It was too early for him to tell whether it had to do with a hypercom dispatch from the *Ohio* or some other incoming communication. As for the special micro-receiver that tied the base to Ellert's transmitter, he thought of this last of all.

"What is it, Masters?"

With a final adjustment of the keyboard, Masters straightened up. "Message from Ellert on Druufon. Still running it through the decode-translator, sir."

Rous could only nod an acknowledgement, after which he began to pace back and forth nervously. He knew that the message from Ellert would be important and urgent. The mutant never announced himself without special reasons. He knew from experience that the automatic deciphering and translation process would not take more than 10 minutes. It didn't make any difference whether the message was long or

short.

Sgt. Masters remained silent. He continued to stare doggedly at the final tape reel, listening for the click of the decoder machine. Then, finally, the tape clicked into rewind.

"Ready!" announced Masters.

"Play it back!" said Rous.

After a few more clickings of switches a voice was heard in the room which was unique. Although its intellectual origin was Ellert, it was not actually his real voice. The special receiver had converted his transmitted thoughts into audible sounds:

"This is Ellert in Onot's body. Calling Perry Rhodan! We have here a critical possibility of discovery. I am becoming too weak to be able to resist the power of Onot's mind much longer. He is slowly getting the upper edge. Onot has been arrested and is being ordered before the Supreme Tribunal. If I can't control him he will reveal my presence here. He also has knowledge of the base on Hades. I am not able to transfer from here to Earth and into my own body. Bring my body to Hades or take Onot to Earth. There is no other alternative. Please rush this message to Rhodan. He will know what to do. Only a few more days and it will be too late. Help me! Ernst Ellert."

2/ A MATTER OF CORPSE

The Solar Empire had given diplomatic recognition to the new Emperor of the Arkonide realm. Behind the once all-powerful robot Brain was Atlan the undying Arkonide, Rhodan's friend and ally. Both empires were now working together in the complex task of bringing all the various races and civilizations of the galaxy 'under one roof'—as Reginald Bell was fond of expressing it.

Perry Rhodan was presently on Arkon 3 and was preparing for his return to Earth. The battleship *Drusus* was standing by at his disposal. Basically, Rhodan didn't have much faith in premonitions but during the past few days he had not been able to shake off an unpleasant sense of impending danger. He had discussed it with Bell but the latter had been impudent enough to laugh at his fears.

"You're seeing ghosts, Perry. Recent events have gotten to you. Your nerves are frazzled, that's all! I can certainly understand that. What's bothering you? The Druufs have been clobbered and aren't likely to recover and soon they'll be locked back inside their own time plane. No, I think you're getting carried away..."

"You're forgetting Ellert, my friend," replied Rhodan. He glanced indifferently at the abstract colour patterns on the viewscreen. Arkonide signal checking left him cold. "He's still on Druufon. Sooner or later we have to see to it that he gets back to Earth. When the discharge funnel closes, it will be too late."

"Why? We can still reach him if...?"

"But under more difficult conditions. I'd like to avoid that."

"OK—then what are we still waiting for?"

This turnabout was even too fast for Rhodan. He stared in some surprise at Bell for a moment before he finally smiled back at him. "That's right—what are we still waiting for, actually? It's what I've also been asking myself. We have no further business to attend to here for the time being, and if I know Pucky he'll be happy to raise and harvest his own batch of carrots in Terrania."

Pucky the mousebeaver lay sleeping on a couch at the rear of the Control Central. At least so far he had appeared to be sleeping. But now he raised up his head with its big mouse ears and permitted his single incisor to gleam with pleasure.

In a squeaky voice he commented: "You don't have a very green thumb, Perry. It's been so long since I've been able to take care of my truck garden that I've figured on a complete loss of the harvest. Those little monsters—whatever they're called—must have gobbled up all of my carrots by now."

"Those little monsters," interjected Bell, "are known as mice. They happen to be relatives of yours, Pucky."

The mousebeaver raised up indignantly to his full stature. Of course his incisor tooth could still be seen, which betrayed the fact that he was still being good-humoured, but the gleam in his eyes was a signal for caution. "If I'm related to Earthly mice," he announced, "then you have a strong resemblance to the Gloobies, back on Vagabond, my home planet!"

Bell looked imploringly at Rhodan. He had never heard Pucky mention these Gloobies before. Who knew what kind of beasts they might be, he thought in startlement. When Pucky had his dander up, you had to handle him like a raw egg.

"I don't seem to recall these Gloobies of yours," put in Rhodan, attempting to give his beleaguered friend an assist. "If I'm not mistaken, outside of you mousebeavers there was *nothing* on Vagabond. So...?"

Pucky returned a triumphant grin. "That's right—nothing! And that's what Bell reminds me of!" With a malicious giggle he again rolled up into a ball, signifying that he did not wish to be disturbed any further.

Rhodan raised a brow appealingly at Bell and then changed the subject. "I'm waiting for a clear signal from Terra and then we'll take off. By tomorrow, anyway. Atlan has things pretty well buttoned up here. Of course we'll have to expect more disturbances here and there but working together we can always take care of such matters. What I'm more worried about is my son."

Bell didn't answer. He knew how heavily this subject weighed upon Rhodan. He considered it best to make no comment.

After several minutes of staring silently at the viewscreen, Rhodan suddenly got up. "I'm going to get some sleep. Would you tell Sikerman to wake me up immediately if we hear something from Terra."

Bell looked at him closely. "You expecting anything special, perhaps?"

Rhodan was evasive. He smiled. "Not at all, Bell, but something might come up. It could be that Sikerman wouldn't even think it was important. But in any case I want to know about it."

"Gotcha," said Bell. His suspicions seemed to have been dispelled.

Which was just as well, thought Rhodan, for he had no desire to discuss his premonitions further. Besides, he himself considered them to be only his imagination.

Just as he was about to exit from the room, Pucky raised up his head from the couch and muttered sleepily: "I wouldn't think of it that way, Perry!" And then he continued his snoozing.

Out in the corridor, Rhodan smiled. So Pucky had spied on his thoughts again. In the presence of such a perfect telepath it was best to screen one's mind. But Bell wouldn't know and that was the main thing. At least he wouldn't find out from the mousebeaver.

The *Drusus* stood at the edge of the giant spaceport on the hard plastisteel pavement. The incredible weight of the vessel could not dent the tough surface by so much as a millimetre. On Earth it would have broken through if the antigravs were off but here the ship stood sound and firm. It was spherical in shape and almost I mile in diameter. A person not familiar with its interior could wander around in it for days and still be lost.

Rhodan utilized several antigrav lifts and reached the corridor where his cabin was located. On the way he encountered some of the men coming from the messhall. He responded to their respectful salutes and greetings but other than that continued onward without a word. He was tired and looked forward to getting some rest.

What could be happening to Ellert?—he thought apprehensively and for no particular reason. The last time he was on Earth he had wanted to visit the mausoleum but hadn't been able to. Something bothered him about that but he didn't know what it was. He had called and talked to the guards at the tomb but they had reported nothing unusual. Ellert's body was still resting 50 meters under the surface, waiting for its restless mind and spirit to return.

Fully dressed, Rhodan threw himself on his bed.

Why then should he sense this uneasiness? Certainly if something had happened more than 30,000 light-years away he wouldn't be able to feel it at this distance.

In spite of his weariness he did not fall asleep immediately. His thoughts wouldn't let him relax, even though in past weeks so much had been accomplished. Granted, success hadn't exactly fallen into his lap. The way to victory had been paved with difficulties, with personal disappointments and even mortal dangers. But he had reached the goal and that was all that mattered.

The two empires of the galaxy were now a single power. If there were actually still individual races and peoples who couldn't go along with that, it didn't much matter anymore. In time they would change their views—if the battlefleets of both stellar empires had not done it for them by then.

Above him sounded a muted buzzer. Under the vidcom screen a green light flashed. Rhodan got up with a deliberate slowness, thinking of his premonition. Was it going to prove to be true?

When he touched the receive-button an officer's face appeared on the viewscreen. His expression was one of astonishment, as though he were not sure he was doing the right thing.

"Sir—reporting from Com Central. We have a hypertransmission."

"Fire away, Tompetch—or don't you have the text unravelled yet?"

"Of course, sir. The dispatch comes from Marshal Freyt, Terra. Transmission date: 5 August 2044. Time: 17:48 Terrania. The message follows: Hades alert—Ellert. Capt. Rous indicates Ellert's mind too weak to return to his body. He is asking for Rhodan's help. Immediate action imperative. Request instructions. Freyt.

Rhodan stood there for several seconds without moving a muscle but in that time he arrived at his decision. His words were clear and unmistakable. "Dispatch to Freyt, Terrania. *Text: Instructions will follow in due course* . A second dispatch to Hades. *Text: Activate transmitter-receiver in exactly 5 hours. Arriving personally.* Rhodan. Tompetch, see that both of those messages are sent out as soon as possible."

"Right, sir!"

"One moment—there's something else. Wake up Col. Sikerman. The *Drusus* takes off in I hour."

Tompetch's eyes widened. "We... uh... yessir!"

The screen darkened.

Rhodan's face was unusually grave when he entered the Control Central 10 minutes later. After receiving confirmation that the two special messages had been transmitted, he then requested a hypercom connection with Atlan. The Emperor of Arkon was probably in the Crystal Palace but if he wasn't they would still have to locate him.

Rhodan waited personally in the Corn Room. There was a slight interruption when Bell stuck his head in and said: "Sikerman sends his compliments and says the *Drusus* can take off, Perry. All men at their stations as ordered."

"Hold the takeoff. Still no contact with Atlan."

Bell came all the way into the room. "Then simply leave a message for him. Who knows where he might be carousing tonight?"

"There is no nightlife on Arkon 3," said Perry, reminding him of a state of affairs which the crew of the *Drusus* had deplored. "But if I can't find him I won't have any other choice than to leave a message for him." He pondered a moment. "Alright. We'll definitely leave in 40 minutes."

Bell nodded and disappeared.

Five minutes before the mighty propulsion engines of the *Drusus* started up, Atlan came through "You're taking off, Perry? Why so precipitate? What's happened?"

Rhodan gave him a faint smile. "That's three questions all at once, Admiral—oh, excuse me... *Imperator!* Only one answer is necessary: Ellert is in danger. I'm going to Hades. I was wondering if you'd like to come along...?"

Atlan sighed. "If these were the old times when we used to travel the spaceways together and visit alien worlds... But now all I know is my duty. I'll have to admit that this rulership business isn't so simple. One's life isn't his own..."

"Do you expect to spend the rest of your life on Arkon?"

"Of course not, Perry. But for now I must remain here. There are pressing matters of State, do you understand? Lots of luck to you—and come back soon! Until then, goodbye"

"I'll hurry back," Rhodan promised. He signed off and the screen went dark.

The *Drusus* took off on the minute of the appointed time. The engines roared to life and hurled the giant ship out into space. The antigrav fields neutralized the pressures of acceleration. With increasing velocity the space monster raced toward the speed of light and the outer fortress ring of Arkon while the central planet of the Empire dwindled into Infinity.

The hurtling pace continued for two hours. Then the robot-controlled space stations flitted by to the right and left of them and dropped behind. The correct code signal had prevented these latter from turning into fire-spitting fortresses which could have destroyed the *Drusus* .

The ship hurried onward unhindered, toward its calculated point of transition.

* * * *

Punctually to the second, Capt. Marcel Rous had one of the transmitters turned on for reception. Somewhere out there just beyond the discharge rift between the Einstein universe and the Druuf time plane the *Drusus* must have rematerialised and Rhodan would now be entering the sending station of a matter transmitter.

Rous stood before the door of the grid cage and waited to receive the Chief. The indicator showed green but there was still no sign of Rhodan. Then the panel lamp began to flicker. First pulse response from the *Drusus* , aligning the transfer fields. The ship's transport-transmitter was 'on the air'. And then—with hardly any perceptible time transition—the figure of a man appeared in the cage. It emerged from nothingness and materialized at once.

Rhodan stepped from the grid platform and stretched out a hand to Capt. Rous. "You gave me quite a scare, Captain. How come the message went through Marshal Freyt?"

They walked through the corridors toward the Base Commander's comfortably appointed quarters but before they arrived there Rous proceeded to explain:

"Immediately after receiving Ellert's distress call, I sent an emergency message to the *Ohio* , our contact ship beyond the Rift. I presume that they relayed it at once to Marshall Freyt, who then made contact with you on Arkon. Anyway it's astounding how fast messages can be propagated through the galaxy these days."

He opened the door for Rhodan, who went into the cabin. It was not until the two were seated at the table that Rhodan got to the point of his visit. "What's the situation with Ellert?"

Rous reached into his pocket and pulled out a sheet of paper. "That's the first message we've received from Druufon on the micro-transmitter hookup."

Rhodan read Ellert's message slowly and carefully. When he replaced the sheet on the table, his brow was furrowed. "So they've finally caught up with Onot and now Ellert is too weak to leave the body of his host and return to Earth. Actually there's nothing left for us to do other than to bring his own body to Druufon. Hm-m-m... that won't be any picnic. But fortunately there's still enough time. It will take several days yet for the preliminary hearings and the trial against Onot to get started."

Rous shook his head. He seemed a bit pale. "Sir, in the meantime another message came in from Ellert. I'm afraid there's very little time. Two hours ago, Onot went before the Supreme Tribunal."

Rhodan stared at him. "You waited until now to tell me?" When Rous said nothing, Rhodan leaned forward and placed a hand on his forearm. "What's the import of the second message, Rous? Do you have the full text with you?"

"I know it by heart, sir. Ellert reported that they had picked up Onot and brought him before the Court. He claimed he no longer had the strength to hold Onot to a specific line of testimony. He said that the Druuf was prepared to tell the judges everything—the whole truth. Ellert is trying to prevent it. He doesn't know how long he can hold out. If he has to leave Onot's body he doesn't know where he can go. He needs more strength than he possesses to leave Druufon."

Rhodan nodded. "I can't quite imagine what would happen if he were to leave Onot without sufficient strength. He might lose his temporal directions and slip back into the stream of time, which swallowed him up once before. At least we know that it requires a certain energy output to hold on to the present. Strange that I never thought of that before." He met Rous' gaze directly. "But here we're sitting around philosophizing when there's not another minute to lose. I'll get back to the *Drusus* but will remain in the vicinity. If there's an attack on Hades, you can count on me. That is, if Onot blabbers too much..." He stood up and waited until Rous opened the door for him. On their way back to the transmitter he added: "Let me know at once if you get a further message from Ellert."

"That's understood, sir," promised Rous.

Rhodan waved to him a last time before he dematerialised. One second later he was on board the *Drusus* again and stepped out of the receiver cage. He hurried at once to the ship's hypercom centre.

As always when the fate of Earth or the galaxy was involved, his instructions were issued swiftly and precisely.

* * * *

Marshal Freyt's similarity to Perry Rhodan was not alone in his outward appearance. Along with the Administrator he had also received the life-prolonging bio-treatment on the synthetic planet Wanderer and thus his aging processes had been suspended.

In the Fleet Headquarters of Terrania there was an unusual pressure of activity in the early afternoon hours. Hyperspace communications came in almost hourly from the ships that were stationed in the outer void. Now that the galactic position of the Earth was a matter of public knowledge everywhere, the old security precautions were no longer necessary.

But to Freyt, all these incoming messages were a matter of indifference just now. He was waiting for only one particular message. If he could only guess what its import would be! Rhodan kept him waiting a long time.

He sat and waited nervously in his operations room. His lean figure had a tendency to be stooped forward but it seemed to be due more to habit than to any kind of weakness. The profusion of communications equipment around him threatened to smother him. Everywhere there were viewscreens, control panels and cable leads. The room was a control network centre that not only guided the entire planet Earth but also the Solar System, not to mention a gigantic spacefleet.

Freyt had relayed the radio dispatch from Hades to Arkon, where he knew Rhodan was located at the time. He knew that a decision was pending. Since he was an excellent extrapolator, he had taken the precaution to instruct Prof. Haggard as well as Dr. Jamison and to hold them on standby alert. Both of the medical men were waiting at home for their assignment.

Assignment...?

Freyt shook his head and wondered if he were a doomsday prophet. Things wouldn't turn out to be all that bad with Ellert. The timeless wanderer would be able to find his way back to Earth all right, if he were forced to do it.

Or perhaps not?

A control lamp flashed on. It was Com Central!

But it was only the position report of a battleship that had been deployed to another area. Still nothing! The waiting seemed to be getting unbearable. But finally the hypercom centre contacted him and when they transferred Perry Rhodan's direct transmission to his home, Freyt suddenly became his calm and collected self again.

The oval-shaped viewscreen lit up. At first Rhodan's face was somewhat blurred but then the focus became recognizable. The hyperspace carrier waves instantly bridged an abyss of light-years.

"Marshal, it looks as if both of us expected to be talking to one another soon."

"That's quite true, sir." This direct hookup on hypercom made it seem as though they were sitting across from one another in the same room. "Your present location—is it still Arkon?"

"No. Hades Sector. I'm standing out here on the *Drusus* near the Rift zone, about 1 light-year from the main Druuf system. Ellert has sent us a second message. He can't leave Onot's body for any length of time without danger to himself. Onot himself has been brought before the Druuf Tribunal, stuck with a charge of treason. Ellert is trying to prevent a confession on his part that could be disastrous for us. It could provoke the Druufs to renewed conflict. I don't see any other solution than to bring Ellert's body out of the mausoleum and take it to Hades. From there we can do the rest."

"I suspected as much," said Freyt. "Haggard and Jamison are ready. When?"

A fleeting smile crossed Rhodan's face. "Freyt, the similarity between us isn't just skin deep," he commented. Then he frowned in earnest. "Begin at once! Make sure that body is handled very carefully. Both doctors are to go along and not let it out of their sight. Will you take care of everything?"

"I shall personally deliver Ellert to you, sir."

Rhodan stared at him in frank astonishment. "But you're my Deputy Administrator there! Who...?"

"I'll only be gone a few hours. Mercant will be able to take over any important matters for me. I think he can handle them."

"Yes, I think he can. Very well, Freyt, I'll be expecting you."

"You can depend on me," Freyt assured him. After a few final instructions from Rhodan, the two men signalled each other goodbye and the viewscreen suddenly darkened.

For a few brief moments Freyt sat motionlessly in his chair, then he came to life. Mercant was contacted and made aware of the situation. The two doctors were ordered to the mausoleum. Fast cruiser C-13 was ordered to stand by in takeoff readiness. Several aircars were called into action.

10 minutes later, Freyt landed in the desert beside the pyramid marker over Ellert's tomb. The structure pointed symbolically into the clear blue skies. Haggard and Jamison were already there, waiting for him. The permanent guard detail stood motionlessly at their posts before the entrance.

Prof. Haggard had also been one of Rhodan's earliest friends and was, like him and Freyt, a recipient of the rejuvenating bio-treatment. He came toward Freyt with great, energetic strides. "What the devil's going on?" he asked. "Has Ellert's corpse caught a cold or something?" Haggard was known for his rough humour, which everyone knew was always well intended. "Or is it trying to rise from the dead?"

"Something like that, in a figurative sense maybe," replied Freyt as he shook hands with his old friend. He greeted Dr. Jamison more reservedly but with equal friendliness. "I've received instructions from Rhodan to take Ellert's body out of the mausoleum and incidentally, my dear Haggard, could you refrain from referring to it as a corpse? Anyway, we have to bring the body to Hades."

"Aha!" said the Professor. "To Hades, eh? Why?"

"Because Ellert can no longer bridge the long gap back to Earth—that's why! I know how to gain access to the tomb... will you doctors be so kind as to join me?"

He stepped between the two sentinels and placed the palm of his hand against the smooth wall of the pyramid. He moved it back and forth as though searching for something... then there was a sound close by. The surface of the desert gaped open, revealing a staircase that led downward into the depths.

"There's the staircase," he urged, and he led the way.

A second door below offered less difficulties and soon they beheld the actual crypt where the time-teleporter's undeteriorated body had lain for more than 60 years, waiting for the return of its 'awakening essence'. Freyt glanced at the complicated apparatus that was capable of giving an alarm at the slightest sign of Ellert's return to life. However, the mirror in front of the 'cadaver's' mouth was clear and uncoated by any trace of life breath. The air in the quadrangular room was somewhat close and stuffy although it had been constantly renewed over a period of 7 decades.

It was only then that the three men noticed a change in Ellert's face. The cheeks had fallen in, the eyes were sunken in cavities, the skin gleamed with a bluish tinge.

Prof. Haggard took a step forward and pointed with a trembling hand at the emaciated figure, the outlines of which were visible under the shroud. "That's the beginning of decomposition...!"

Marshall Freyt felt as though an iron fist had clutched his heart. Involuntarily he sniffed, testing the air. Then he shook his head in desperation. Was everything to have been in vain? Ellert had searched 70 years through time and space for his body and now that he had finally found it perhaps it was too late. Of course Ellert could take over someone else's body but...

"We have to hurry," he said tonelessly and he turned to one of the walls to manipulate certain controls that Rhodan had described to him. "Jamison, help Haggard bring the body to the surface."

In his silent despair he hoped that they would not be bringing up a corpse...

3/ IN THE SHADOW OF JUDGMENT

Cold and merciless eyes looked down at Onot.

Behind a long, elevated table sat 12 judges in fiery red robes. Farther behind them at a raised podium was the Superior Judge, who was simultaneously the prosecutor and chief counsel. Onot felt small and insignificant as he looked into the pitiless eyes of his accusers. He was forced to stand before them between two armed Druufs who looked at him grimly. Behind him he could hear the noises of the spectators—high personalities in the ranks of science and politics. His trial had excited considerable interest.

"I repeat," said the Superior Judge in cutting tones which could not have been registered in human ears, "what do you say to the charges which have been preferred against you? Do you plead guilty?"

"No!" retorted Onot and it was of his own free will. Ellert must not have been prompting him at the moment, even though he was no doubt on his guard. It had been inevitable that Onot's alert mind should have discovered some of his secrets, which he was not supposed to reveal under any circumstances. "As the indictment stands, I plead not guilty!"

The Superior Judge nodded as though he had expected as much. "Then I call upon the witness, Brodak."

Onot thought he remembered someone named Brodak. Wasn't he the assistant who had been in the auxiliary computer section near his secret laboratory? What could he know about any of this?

A Druuf was, led into the hall and brought before the judges. He seemed quite prepared to do everything possible to destroy Onot.

"On the day when the computer centre in the capital was destroyed," declared Brodak, "I saw Onot at our computer section near the desert. He was coming from the underground tramway and he was in a great hurry. An hour before that time the enemy robots had penetrated into the Central and destroyed it. Strangely, Onot had had time to escape. Since the raid was too swift, no one else had been able to get away. But Onot managed to escape—which is proof that, he knew about the attack."

There was a murmur and movement among the spectators. The judges put their heads together.

Triumphantly Brodak continued. "We now know that the robots broke in by means of the matter transmitter. It had been switched on to a receiving mode—exactly for the time of the raid. And by none other than Onot!"

The ensuing tumult was indescribable. Onot heard threatening shouts and shuddered. If it were left up to the spectators he would have been torn asunder on the spot.

The Superior Judge pounded for order. "What say you, Onot?"

Ellert concentrated his strength and forced Onot to answer: "It's a cheap lie! An intrigue against me! I did no such thing!"

"May I remind the defendant that every murderer protests his innocence? Now prove it!"

"No!" shouted Onot. "What is more to the point, can *you* prove my guilt?" For a few seconds Ellert had been off his guard because he had been confident of his control. Onot reared up mentally against the inner restriction. "Naturally I turned on the transmitter but allow me to explain..."

The Superior Judge appeared to be somewhat perplexed. First the traitor lied, then he confessed to the crime. Where could one begin with such testimony, since it had the earmarks of outside influence?

Ellert had fought Onot back under control. The Druuf added: "Of course I retract that! I don't know what made me confess to a deed that I did not commit!"

"*Why will you not obey me?*" asked Ellert. His struggle to hold on was like a physical pain. "*It would be better for you if you did.*"

But Onot fought stubbornly against his mental coercion. "I am not the criminal here," he shouted, "but rather it is the voice inside of me! It forces me..."

"The voice?" interrupted the Superior Judge, casting his colleagues a significant glance. He began to see the defendant's developing line of defence. "What voice is that?"

This time Ellert was on the alert. He made Onot answer: "Voice, opinion, whatever... that's what I call those who are envious of me. They accuse me of things I have never done. I insist that I am innocent. I have given my people many valuable inventions..."

"We will give this favourable consideration, Onot," said the judge with a curiously benevolent tone. "However, I believe that a frank confession on your part would considerably improve your situation."

By now Ellert realized that he couldn't continue to keep Onot under control without any letup. He could only manage it spasmodically over small intervals and in between he had to release Onot's mind. But perhaps this very alternative could be converted by a smart manoeuvre whereby his weakness could serve as a weapon...? If Onot could be thrown into self-contradictions, admitting his guilt in one breath and then denying it moments later, this would have to confuse the judges and the spectators.

He left Onot to his own resources.

"It was this voice that ordered me to turn on the transmitter. But I would not have done it, regardless, if it had not exerted its power over me. I could not defend myself, I couldn't resist. It took over my body and directed my nerves and muscles... It was this thing which guided my hands and forced me to activate the transmitter."

Onot fell silent, exhausted for the moment. He had hurried with his confession because he had feared he would be cut off. To his great surprise, however, he was not obstructed by his eerie foe. So before the judge could interject a remark he continued.

"It is a disembodied entity of some kind which has found a new home within me, using me as a host. It is not of this world but from a planet that is many light years distant. Just now it's lost its power and governs me no more. Its world is..." He broke off as Ellert moved in. Onot must not reveal too much. The spectators were thus amazed when Onot continued: "Don't listen to me, friends. I'm talking pure rubbish. Everything I've just said is not true. I am not a traitor."

The Superior Judge lost his patience. "Onot, you are attempting to deceive us with a pretended nervous breakdown. It will avail you nothing. In one moment you confess and then in the next you deny everything you've said. A voice—pah! Can we see this voice of yours?"

"It is invisible and everywhere, Your Honour! Even now it is in this room." Without pausing, Onot added: "Often I imagine that this voice is real and that it is inside my brain."

"Alright, alright!" interrupted the judge. He motioned to a court bailiff. "Have the medical examiners check into this claim of Onot's. Witness Brodak will not be needed further. The defendant is to be taken to his cell. This session is hereby suspended until the results of examination have been submitted to the Court."

Onot protested bitterly as the two guards took him between them.

But Ellert knew he would not be able to hold out under the forthcoming medical investigation—not without a miracle!

* * * *

The ball-shaped thing was perhaps half a meter in diameter. It was milky white like a television screen and hovered in the middle of the room, apparently weightless.

Perry Rhodan, Reginald Bell and Col. Sikerman, Commander of the *Drusus*, were sitting close to it and were observing the scenes that Harno was relaying to them from the planet. Harno, who was now a full-fledged member of the Mutant Corps, was gifted with a universal vision and could enable humans to see any desired locale by reproducing the scene on his 'surface'. At the same time he was able to pick up telepathic impressions from such locations and reproduce conversations audibly for non-telepaths.

So it was that the three men were direct witnesses of the court session that was being conducted on Druufon.

Rhodan was heard to mutter: "Ellert's waging a desperate battle against Onot, who is getting stronger. If

only we knew the cause of this weakness of Ellert's that has been coming on for such a long period of time, maybe something could be done about it. Harno, do you have an answer?"

The spherical creature remained motionless before them in the air. It understood the question and responded telepathically. "Ellert is a disembodied mentality. It is only the physical body that is able to hold to the present, since the mind is bound neither to time nor to space. He is like a man clinging to a rock in a swift river, who has to hang on with all his might so as not to be swept away. If his strength ebbs away, he will let go and be carried with the tugging stream. For years, now, Ellert has been holding on to Onot, who has been that rock in the flood."

Rhodan nodded. "That I can see—quite graphically. But what can anyone do about it?"

Harno replied: "There is only one solution: Ellert must return to his own body. He could still make the transition—perhaps. If not, he will have to remain with Onot, of course not as the dominant entity but as a sort of suppressed subconsciousness of the Druuf. Not a very desirable fate!"

Since Harno's telepathic communication was powerful enough for non-telepaths to receive it, Bell was also aware of the creature's thoughts. "Many intelligent beings have a subconscious mind," he interjected. "Is that supposed to mean that maybe..."

"Do not make premature conclusions!" warned Harno. "Every organic intelligent being has a mentality. This is their basic duality, that is all. The intellect on the surface is called reason, whereas the suppressed adversary is called the subconscious."

"Then supposing Ellert were to subside within Onot, wouldn't his hypothetical condition be comparable to that?"

"Have I implied that?"

"That's what it sounded like."

"If that were possible there would have to be two intellects in every being."

Rhodan considered it best to interrupt this debate. Whenever anybody got Harno started on philosophizing there was never an end to it.

"You have a point," he said, and he watched the court scene as the two Druuf guards took Onot away. "It would be a good idea for us to make use of that court recess. Freyt is due here any time."

Harno's surface altered its appearance. Coloured patterns swept across the spherical field of vision and slowly formed a steady picture: the outer void. Millions of stars seemed to convert the immensity of space into a velvet cloth that was covered with countless sparkling gems. So thickly were the stars clustered against the dark background that at a greater distance space might have appeared to be white instead of black. A small sphere hovered close to another sphere that was 15 times its size.

"That's the *Ohio* and us," muttered Rhodan. "Freyt's not out there yet. According to his radio message, it ought to be about time..."

Even as Rhodan spoke, a small Fleet cruiser materialized not more than 2 light seconds away. It raced forward at a wild velocity but Harno's formless 'camera eye' followed it and closed in.

"It's Freyt!" Rhodan exclaimed with relief. He watched the ship as it made a sweeping curve back toward the spot where it had emerged from hyperspace. "Harno, from now on I want you to watch Onot continuously—and let me know as soon as the Druuf is picked up for his medical examination. We may not have too much time left."

Harno diminished in size as he calmly rose up to the ceiling. His surface images faded out. Bell jumped to his feet. Col. Sikerman also got up but with a bit more dignity.

Together with Rhodan they left the cabin in order to prepare for the next phase of action.

* * * *

Marshal Freyt didn't waste time on any arrival speeches. The cruiser had hardly landed inside the giant hangar of the *Drusus* before an exit ramp emerged from the under portion of its hull. A hospital-type stretcher cart was rolled down the ramp on which was a body wrapped in white sheets. Freyt, Haggard and Jamison followed. They were standing beside the roller cot when Rhodan hurried up to them and shook hands with Freyt.

"That's fast work, Freyt. How's Ellert?"

The marshal's expression was doubtful. "I don't know. I don't like his appearance. Haggard's not happy about it either. The skin colouration of his entire body has taken on a bluish discoloration."

Rhodan's personal physician and friend, Eric Manoli, had just come into the hangar and had caught Freyt's last words. "The mind maintains a connection with the body," he said, "even when separated from it." He greeted the three men. "Ellert is the best proof of that."

"Why do you say that?"

Manoli looked in some surprise at Haggard. "Seems fairly simple to me. Previously, Ellert's vital essence had transmitted a small fraction of its energy to his body—through time and space, down into the tomb. Now that essence itself has become weak, or blocked in some way. Its power may have been used up. The subconsciousness or whatever you may want to call it—is unable to spare any energy. The abandoned body then begins to deteriorate."

Harno had also expressed something like this, quite independently of Manoli.

"And why is Ellert's mind-force becoming so weak?" asked Rhodan.

"Because Onot's own vital essence is becoming stronger," replied Manoli.

Rhodan asked no more questions. He stepped to the stretcher cot and lifted the sheet. His first impression shocked him when he saw Ellert's altered appearance. The closed eyes were deeply sunken into their sockets. The skin was a pale blue.

For 70 years no changes had occurred in Ellert's body. It had seemed as though the time teleporter had only been lying there sleeping but now this state of rest appeared to have ended. Ellert's body already

had the look of a dead organism.

Rhodan pulled himself together. Within seconds he arrived at a decision. "I want Bell to take over command of the *Drusus* in my place. Ras Tschubai and Pucky will accompany me. Yes, you too, Manoli. We're going to Hades. We're taking Ellert's body with us."

Bell was about to say something but he fell silent. Perhaps he saw by Rhodan's expression that any attempt to change his mind would be doomed to failure. Sikerman only nodded his acknowledgement of the arrangement. Freyt seemed to be disappointed.

"Is everything in that much of a rush?"

"Unfortunately, yes—but I want to thank you for acting so swiftly. That may turn out to be the main key to our success, if we do succeed. Fly back to Earth now and I hope we'll see you there soon!"

The departure was brief. Within 10 minutes Rhodan stood in the transmitter cage along with the African teleporter Ras Tschubai and the mousebeaver Pucky. The stretcher cart supporting the deteriorating body was rolled inside by Manoli and the grid door closed behind him. A green indicator lamp flashed on, signalling that the Hades receiver was in operation.

Rhodan shoved home the activator switch, which appeared to change nothing—at least outside the cage. But outside was another story. Bell, who had been standing near the transmitter, suddenly disappeared and in his place was Capt. Marcel Rous, waiting to receive the expedition. He stepped forward swiftly and opened the door of the receiver cage.

"That was fast," he blurted out in a hurry. "We've picked up another distress signal from Ellert's transmitter. Unfortunately there's no way of answering him. His tiny micro-transmitter has no receiver."

"We'll soon be contacting him ourselves," replied Rhodan and he watched while two men under Manoli's guidance shoved the roller cart out of the cage. "Order one of your Gazelles to be ready for takeoff, Captain. A long-range scout ship is best for our purposes now.

"With crew?"

"No—just a pilot. This operation isn't any milk run and I don't want to place any more people in danger than I have to. The fewer crew, the better."

"Then I'd recommend Lt. Werner Mundi."

"The Hungarian?"

"Actually he's more of an Austrian, sir. A very reliable pilot. I believe you can depend on him."

"I'll have to, Rous. OK, tell Mundi we're taking off in half an hour. Before that I want to take a few things on board the Gazelle."

The somewhat obsolete scoutships of this class were disc-shaped, with a 30-meter diameter. Pole to pole, they were 18 meters in height. Aside from a normal lightspeed capacity, the Gazelles had a hyperjump capability of only 5 light-years.

Lt. Mundi was already seated at the flight controls, and awaiting orders. He had a ruddy, friendly face,

was slightly on the stout side, and appeared to be unusually congenial. When he spoke English, a charming touch of accent betrayed his origin.

Ras Tschubai and Pucky also took their places in the Control Central. They were not in a conversational mood because they weren't greatly enthused over the task which lay ahead of them. There were too many risks involved and there was nothing definite to go on. They had no assurance that they might succeed in escaping from Druufon a second time.

Finally Rhodan entered the control room of the Gazelle, which still lay in an underground hangar of the Hades base. He had seen to it that a large commando case from Solar Intelligence had been stowed away in the hold. In addition to hand weapons, time bombs and other sabotage items it also contained good rations and medical supplies. Beside it had been placed the roller cot containing Ellert's body.

"Lt. Mundi," he ordered, "you may leave Hades now and head for Druufon at normal light-speed. Do not go into transition until I give you the signal."

Mundi responded with a friendly smile and gave the necessary instructions to the airlock crew. Seconds later the disc-shaped scoutship was afloat on its antigravs, rising slowly at first but then with increasing speed as it glided up through the wide shaft to the surface of Hades. The upper locks opened before it and then the Gazelle shot outward into the dark sky of the twilight planet, where it disappeared into the star-fields at a hurtling pace.

* * * *

The Druufs were taking their time.

Onot sat hunched on his bed in his prison cell and contemplated the near future with misgivings. Whether or not his invisible tormentor was still present made little difference now. His judges had decided on making a medical examination and a psycho-hypnotic test. It could well be that during such a procedure he might lose his powers of recollection and acquire a new personality.

Perhaps, he thought bitterly, it would have been better if he had listened to the voice. At least then the Superior Magistrate might not have assumed that he had lost his mind. At the most they would have checked him out with a lie detector and found out that he was telling the truth. Ellert would have told him what answers to give and he would have planted a suggestion that he spoke the truth, No lie detector would have been able to tell the difference.

But now it was too late to regret the mistakes of the past.

"*It's your own fault,*" came Ellert's thought. He was still able to monitor Onot's mind effectively. In fact it seemed to him that he was slowly recovering slightly from his recent exertions. If Onot would cease his resistance it might even be possible to get out of the Druuf's body without any detrimental side effects. "*Why couldn't you trust me?*"

Onot responded mentally and his thoughts were like spoken words: "*Why should I trust you, knowing everything about you as I do? You're not concerned about my life since your own is in danger. Didn't I have to assume that whatever you did would be solely for your own benefit? I wanted to*

be done with all this continuous falsification."

"And that's what has gotten you into a serious situation. I can't feel bodily pain—but you can. What are you going to do?"

"I can't do anything but just sit here and wait."

Ellert knew that Onot wasn't lying. The Druuf had definitely given up the fight. But it was also too late even for him, Ellert. If Onot were to suffer a powerful shock it could well be that Ellert's mind and spirit would be forcefully ejected from the Druuf's body and what the outcome would be was anybody's guess.

Suddenly Ellert realized that his already abnormal existence was in danger. He made a small test and found out that he still had enough energy to be able to leave Onot's body. He was sure he'd be able to find another host body he could penetrate. If he remained there silently and passively he'd be able to hold out until Rhodan came for him.

Perhaps that was the best and most reasonable of all solutions.

He shared his thoughts with the scientist but was surprised to see that Onot was opposed to the idea.

"Now you wish to leave me after I've gotten into this terrible mess because of you! No, you must stay! If you can you must help me! Somehow, there must be a way!"

"I don't see any possibility of it," Ellert was forced to confess. "Besides, it's just as much your fault as it is mine. If you had listened to me..."

"If I had the chance again, I'd definitely do so," confirmed Onot.

It was at that moment that the right solution entered Ellert's mind.

4/ PRISON BREAK

Just as the first Druuf patrol units appeared in the far distance, the Gazelle slipped into the protecting realm of hyperspace. It only remained in a dematerialised state for a fraction of a second, however, before it returned to normal space—at least a continuum that was normal for the Druufs. The 16th planet loomed gigantically before them, circled by its 21 moons and a sentry fleet.

A cold smile touched Rhodan's lips as he gave the pilot his instructions. "Keep your residual energy dampers operating and turn on the defence screen. Keep going to the night side of Druufon and take up a holding position there."

Lt. Werner Mundi also smiled but rather than cold, his smile was friendly and full of confidence. "The Druufs are going to be surprised if they don't discover us," he said with a disarming lack of logic. "Do we defend ourselves if they attack?"

"And how!" replied Rhodan.

So to that extent the situation was clear.

Pucky sat on a narrow couch in the corner and listened inwardly. Because of his enormous telepathic faculties he was able to pick up thought-impulses over distances of more than 10,000 km and understand them. Of course at this proximity to Druufon he was picking up a river of thoughts but it was impossible to differentiate Onot's thoughts among them. It was the same as if a person were to hear all radio broadcasts at once and be faced with the task of identifying the program of a specific transmitter.

The mousebeaver sighed with a mixture of vexation and resignation. "You really should have brought Harno along," he chirped reproachfully, opening his eyes momentarily. "He could have made it easier to locate Onot."

Rhodan spoke gently but firmly. "Harno had to stay with Bell on board the *Drusus* so that they can be constantly advised of our whereabouts. And besides, what about Ellert? Why don't you try to find *him*?"

"That's much harder!" protested the mousebeaver, closing his eyes again. "That phantom just isn't putting out thoughts anymore."

Rhodan refrained from making a comment that wouldn't have been very much in Pucky's favour, but Pucky caught it nonetheless.

Ras Tschubai was a teleporter but he was no telepath, so his question to Pucky was strictly that of a layman. "But don't you know where the prison is located in the capital city? Why don't you search there?"

Pucky opened his eyes again, showing patient resignation. "Now that's real sharp. What makes you think I haven't covered that already? But it seems good old Onot isn't behind bars any more."

Rhodan whirled to stare at him. "What's that, Pucky? Onot isn't in his cell?"

"I can't find him there," said Pucky, rephrasing his report carefully. "Naturally it was the first place I looked but either Onot and Ellert have forgotten how to think—or they're someplace else."

"You could have told us sooner," said Rhodan reprovingly.

"I wanted to find him first," Pucky countered defensively. "Why worry you with only half a report? Maybe they've picked up Onot and taken him to some kind of research institute or something. Don't worry, I'll still find him." Without waiting for a reply, he sank again into his meditations.

Meanwhile, Lt. Mundi pointed to the viewscreen. "If we're going to land we'd better make up our minds soon. We'll soon be through the night zone."

"Any blockade units around?"

"Only far out over the planet. We've already come in under their cover. I hope nobody's tracked us. If our luck holds out, maybe we can sneak into a landing without being noticed. After all, I do have the new anti-tracking screen on."

Rhodan nodded to him. "Make a landing but first turn on the infrared sensors. I'd like to have a look at

the terrain. Fortunately there are large portions of the planet covered with mountains and high plateaus—mostly uninhabited. If we can find a safe hiding place, we can operate better from there."

They discovered that they were not far from a small city, which was in a lateral position from their trajectory. They picked up speed and glided several hundred kilometres to the north of it where they found a mountainous area in which there were many deep valleys and canyons. Mundi dropped the Gazelle into a vast declivity until the cliff walls rose on either side of them and the patch of night sky narrowed overhead. Finally the ship landed with hardly a jolt. The engines died down and became silent.

"That was a good landing," said Ras Tschubai appreciatively. "Let's hope nobody finds us here."

"Check this map and see how far we are from the capital," said Rhodan. "We've prepared this according to details from Ellert. Not very exact but it should do for now."

Lt. Mundi got busy and had soon estimated their landing position. "In the capital city it's late at night, sir—about 15,000 km to the West of us. Where we are now it will soon be light."

"Nothing like getting in a good night's sleep!" commented Pucky but he hurried back to his concentration as if to indicate that nobody should take the remark seriously. "I'll give it another try."

"Lay off of that for now," Rhodan told him. "I'd rather have you scout the area around our landing place so that we won't be taken by surprise. Who knows how long we may have to wait here for Ellert?"

"You mean—scout it alone?"

"No. Ras will go with you. Make sure there aren't any Druufs in the near vicinity. Maybe you can also find a hiding place for the Gazelle. I don't like to leave it here in the open, even though we're in a deep gorge. A low-flying patrol ship could easily discover it."

The two teleporters disappeared on their mission to reconnoitre the surrounding terrain. Mundi decided on getting a little sleep. But first he ate a small snack. It was noticeable that he did not relinquish his seat at the controls either to eat or to sleep. Both were accomplished where he sat.

Rhodan sought out the small sickbay of the ship where Dr. Manoli had established himself. After the landing he had brought Ellert's body here, since the hold didn't seem to him to be the right place for it. In fact he had transferred it onto a bed. Rhodan was able to observe that the bluish colouring had increased—not much but to a disquieting degree nevertheless. "How much longer will the cell structure be capable of responding to resuscitation, Doc?"

Manoli had been present the better part of a century before when Maj. Perry Rhodan of the U.S. Space Force had landed a rocketship on the moon. He too had received the biological cell-shower treatment on Wanderer.

"I can't say definitely but I'd consider even 3 more days to be a dangerous time span. Tomorrow or at the latest the day after, Ellert had better be back in his body. Otherwise it may be too late."

"The day on Druufon is 48 hours long—so by tomorrow it has to be accomplished. We can't do much during the night."

"If we at least had a telepathic contact with him! I don't understand why Pucky couldn't manage it."

"He hasn't exactly failed us," replied Rhodan in the mousebeaver's defence. "The circumstances are against him. Apparently Ellert is so weak that he can hardly radiate his thought-impulses. We can only hope that luck will be on our side." He looked thoughtfully at Ellert's face. "What worries me is the fact that Onot doesn't appear to be in the prison anymore. Pucky can't track him, as he calls it. He has to sort out his thoughts from millions of others."

"Why doesn't he just teleport into the cell where Onot was located? Perhaps he could find a clue."

"He can do that later but not now. We must do everything possible to avoid suspicion on the part of the Druufs. They must not know that their star scientist has any contact with us. Otherwise it would be logical for them to assume that we also possess Onot's discoveries and they would have to take action accordingly. A renewed invasion of the Earth would be inevitable. No, for them Onot must continue to be the traitor—but apparently of his own volition. A mental aberration, perhaps—fine. But possessed by the mind of a Terranian? Never!"

"I understand all that," said Manoli while he paced back and forth in the small clinic. "But I can't figure out how we're going to find Ellert without attracting attention."

"Maybe you're right. While it's still night I'll teleport into the capital with Pucky. Then maybe we'll have a chance to locate Onot. If any Druuf sees our mousebeaver he certainly won't mistake him for a Terranian. Of course I'll have to keep in the background, myself."

Manoli smiled significantly. "No, they would hardly take Pucky for a human but his appearance among the Druufs would not be without its dangers for us. Someone may have heard of him."

"Pucky will be careful," promised Rhodan and he again sank deep into his thoughts.

He suddenly had a feeling of having wandered into a blind alley. And they only had until tomorrow noon to get out of it!

* * * *

Uppermost in Ellert's mind were the notes and sketches of the translight linear space drive which Onot carried in his pocket. He knew that he once more had sufficient strength to be able to leave Onot's body without endangering himself but he had no idea of how far his disembodied excursions could extend. And if he didn't have enough strength remaining to penetrate another body...

He didn't dare imagine the results. His bodiless wandering through Eternity would begin again.

"Alright, Onot," he finally informed the Druuf, "if you will listen to me we will work together and see if we can't play a trick on the Superior Magistrate. I'll save you from the medical examination and I'll also fix it so that later, after I have left you for good, nobody will be able to have anything against you."

"How is that possible?"

"I will provide you with a new memory and though it will be superimposed on your old one you will still be left with your own personality. However you will know nothing of me. For you it will be as though I

had never existed. And when you stand before the judge you will be speaking the truth. The lie detectors will indicate as much. You will no longer be a traitor."

Onot wasn't particularly enthusiastic about having a new memory but he could see the logic of it and that it was actually the best solution for him. "I accept," he said.

"In another hour it will be night. It's too late now today for them to be coming for you, so tonight we'll escape. We'll try to reach your old laboratory where we can supply ourselves with what we need. Maybe by that time I'll have received news of where my friends are. As soon as I find them, you are free. You'll be able to go before the judge with your new memory."

Onot felt uneasy under his thick hide. "So why should I escape when I'm going to make a new court appearance?"

"Because returning of your own volition will be proof of a clear conscience. Believe me, you will convince them."

"So how do we get out of the prison?"

"That, my dear Onot, you can leave for me to worry about."

The Druuf appeared to be satisfied. Following Ellert's instructions, he lay down on his bed and tried to sleep for awhile. As soon as he had closed his eyes and his conscious mind had become quiescent, Ellert made his first attempt.

Once more Onot lay beneath him while he floated free in space—bodiless, weightless. He penetrated the ceiling and found himself in another prison cell. A Druuf bound in chains lay on the bare floor and stared at nothingness as though with unseeing eyes. They didn't appear to have treated this prisoner as well as they had Onot but obviously he was not a famous scientist.

Ellert refrained from choosing this pitiable creature as his trial host. When he made his choice, it would have to be the right Druuf.

Without difficulty he went through the walls and emerged into the corridor. Actually it would have been easy to simply 'disappear' now. But then Onot would remain in his cell along with his valuable notes and Ellert didn't wish to abandon those except in the most extreme emergency. Of course he might also be able to locate the Superior Judge right now and place him under his influence but that seemed to be too bold a move. Some insignificant attendant or bailiff wouldn't attract much attention if he bumbled or made mistakes—but if in addition to Onot the Chief Magistrate of Druufon should turn out to be mentally disturbed as well, then certainly suspicions would be aroused.

It had to be made to look as though Onot had gotten away by ordinary means.

Ellert descended through the floor and came into the corridor that led to Onot's cell. He was again able to regulate the swiftness of his 'flight' and he was now confident that he could bridge over greater distances. However, he still would not trust himself to venture from one planet to another.

The Druuf time plane had adjusted itself to the Einstein universe in a certain sense but this parallelism was not of long duration. In a few months the two time planes would disentangle themselves and the time differential between them would increase until Druuf time again moved 72,000 times slower than it did, for example, on Earth. Today it only moved half as swiftly. Since the Druufs were big and heavy, this

halftime effect wasn't at all noticeable to them. Ellert had become accustomed to their ponderous appearance and movements so he hadn't been constantly reminded that time for them moved at only half the rate that it did for Terranians.

He sensed the thoughts of an approaching Druuf. A man—that is a physical man—would have been tempted to seek concealment at this point but Ellert was not a man in this sense of the word. He remained where he was and nobody would have been able to discover his presence if he did not want them to.

A Druuf came around a bend in the corridor and Ellert already knew that this was the dungeon keeper who always brought Onot his supper. He thought with satisfaction that this would be a good opportunity to make two tests at the same time. He could observe Onot's actions when he was free of his influence and at the same time he could attempt to take over the guard.

The Druuf first took care of feeding the prisoners on the opposite side of the passage but then he finally arrived at the door of Onot's cell. He opened the little trapdoor and shoved a bowl through onto the shelf that the flap created.

"Here's your supper, Onot," he called, and he waited until the prisoner came to the door to take the bowl. "Well, all set for the night?"

Onot appeared to have been sleeping because it took him almost half a minute to get to the door. "I can't complain," he replied. He took the little pot of food and went back to his bed. At no time had he betrayed any impulse to betray Ellert in his absence.

The keeper closed the trapdoor and shuffled away. Ellert followed him, figuratively speaking, until they arrived at the guardroom. Two other Druufs were stationed there and were getting set for their night duty. At the rear of the room was a barred gate giving access into an adjacent passage. Ellert knew that the passage ended in an admittance control room where every visitor was electronically checked for weapons or tools. Also the main registration desk was there, containing the name of every prisoner in computerized records.

Ellert left the three guards to themselves after ascertaining that they were the only persons in charge during the night shift within the prison proper. There was only one more Druuf who operated the electronic main gate.

Onot was not especially surprised when he sensed Ellert's presence again. "*You made an excursion?*" he asked as he spooned up the last of the indefinable gruel in the bowl. "*I think prison food must be the same everywhere in the universe—all bad. If I weren't hungry...*"

"*You have to keep up your strength,*" Ellert admonished him. "*I've taken a look at the situation on the inside and it seems to me it shouldn't be hard to break out. Don't forget, though—it all has to look natural. And it has to happen tonight because tomorrow it will be too late.*" He did not realize how correct he was in this statement. "*In a few hours when everything's quieted down outside, I'll take over one of the guards and come back here. As soon as he opens the door you have to strike him down. Do you think you can do that?*"

Onot shoved the bowl under the bed. "*I think, perhaps, it has come to that. Basically any kind of physical force is repulsive to me but in my situation I have to put certain principles aside. What do I use for a weapon?*"

"Unfortunately I can't bring you any. That chair over there should do, if you break off one of its legs. Let's do all our preparing now."

Although the chair had appeared to be fragile it proved to be otherwise. Onot had to exert himself strenuously to break off a leg, which turned out to be a formidable-looking club.

"Of course you know I could have the guard furnish you with a raygun but that would add mystery to your escape which is one ingredient you don't need. Everything has to look very ordinary."

Onot stretched himself out on the bed. The chair leg was beside him. *"Well, as far as I am concerned, we're ready. It's ridiculous, though, that there's no other way to convince the Superior Judge."*

"I'll wake you up when it's time," said Ellert, ignoring the other's remark. *"Go to sleep for now."*

Onot's breathing soon revealed that he had in fact fallen asleep. His primary concerns had lessened somewhat under this new plan. The aspect of the future was not quite as depressing as it had been before.

Ellert also rested although with him there could be no such thing as 'sleep'. Sleep is a physical process and even when the body is asleep the mind is capable of work. He did not require sleep.

During the passage of these hours of rest, Ellert's thinking processes were quiescent and this was why Pucky had not been able to trace his thoughts. Any residual impulses that might have been present were too weak to be picked up. And later Pucky was assigned to other duties.

Outside the darker hours of the night had settled upon the city. Ellert had an urge to make another excursion but he was warned by the very fact of his recent recovery. How could he be sure that his weakness would not return? At any rate, his experience of the previous evening had given him new courage.

He looked at Onot's watch. Midnight! The scientist was sleeping soundly. Ellert almost didn't have the heart to wake him up but Onot had to be ready when the guard came.

"It's time, Onot. Wake up!"

At the first thought-impulse, Onot awakened. He sat up and looked around as though to collect himself and remember where he was. Then it all came back to him and he reached for the chair leg. *"Is he here already?"*

"Who, the guard? No, but I'll get him and I'll have him come in here. That's when you knock him down—not hard enough to kill him, though."

"Unfortunately I'm not experienced in such matters," replied Onot, blinking all four of his eyes.

If Ellert could have grinned he would have done so. He departed from Onot's body with a friendly thought-pulse. Seconds later he was gliding through the long corridor and soon he reached the guardroom. One of the Druufs was sleeping on a cot. One of the other two was Onot's cell keeper. The two Druufs were sitting at a table where they were playing some kind of game. Ellert was not familiar with the game but he could see that it was going to have very little effect on his strategy. Any changes in plan were negligible.

Without the slightest difficulty he slipped into the Druuf's brain and took conscious control of it. Actually he turned it off by providing it with an amnesia block. Whatever the guard would think and do from this moment on would not be of his own free will and later he would not be able to remember any of it. When he woke up in Onot's cell he would also not know how he had got there.

Ellert regarded his opponent in the game through the dungeon keeper's eyes.

"It's your turn!" came the other's ultra-sonic challenge.

It was easier said than done. Although the alien game may have been very simple, it was not one of Ellert's specialties. But the big wall clock gave him an out. He knew the prison schedules from the memory of his victim. He pointed to the clock and got to his feet.

"We'll continue later," he said. "I have to make my rounds. It's almost past my time."

"Who keeps exact schedules? Since when have you been so punctual?"

"Since now, maybe," retorted Ellert, and he left the room.

He had sensed the puzzled look of the other Druuf but was no longer concerned about it. Even if the guard's colleague asserted later that he had acted strangely, it wouldn't arouse much suspicion. Besides, his present host would probably defend himself by blaming his lack of punctuality on the clock.

Ellert walked along the corridor in the guard's body, approaching Onot's cell. He took the key out of his pocket. The key was electronically coded. He shoved it into the monitor slot and turned it like a switch.

Onot's cell door opened immediately. Unsuspectingly, the guard stepped inside. Ellert saw Onot standing near his bed, the improvised club clutched in both of his hands. He appeared to be hesitating. Perhaps he wanted to wait until Ellert crossed over to him, which of course was nonsensical because Ellert could not feel pain in the body of his host unless he willed it so.

"Well, strike and get it over with!" he caused the guard to say.

For a second or so he was amused by Onot's stupefied expression and then he figuratively ducked as Onot made a powerful leap toward him and swung the club. The guard's body had actually gone through the motions of ducking so that he caught the blow on the back of his head. Even as the Druuf fell, Ellert left him and penetrated Onot.

"Well done, my friend. He won't come to until early in the morning."

Onot placed the club carefully on the floor. *"Does he have a weapon?"*

Ellert hadn't thought of it but it was not a critical oversight. There were enough weapons in the guardroom. But also in the guardroom there was a Druuf who wanted to finish a game.

"We'll still get ourselves a weapon, Onot. Let's hope you won't have to use one—that would be much better! Let's go now."

Apparently Onot had expended his last spurt of courage when he had struck down the guard. There was not much spirit left in him and now he hesitated. *"What should I do if somebody comes?"*

"Leave that to me, Onot. Come, we have no time to lose!"

The Druuf obeyed. He stepped out into the corridor and began to walk in the right direction. Ellert made a disembodied 'flight' ahead of him and penetrated the other guard, who was still sitting at the table. Giving him an amnesia block, he ordered him to sleep. Two minutes later when Onot arrived on the scene he saw the two remaining guards asleep on their night cots. They were sound asleep and did not move. Ellert knew that even a cannon shot would not have awakened them at present.

"There on the wall you'll find weapons," Ellert told the scientist. "There are also long-range shock-beamers. If I were you, that's what I would take. Later that will help you to prove your peaceful intentions when you stand before the Supreme Magistrate."

"Don't remind me of that!" grumbled Onot and he selected a weapon. As a scientist he of course had an idea of how these electronic devices functioned. He checked the energy charge and then shoved the beamer in his belt. *"So we keep going?"* he inquired, a bit more self-confident now.

"That's the way!" Ellert encouraged him. *"Through that door over there. Beyond is the admittance room and the exit. We have to go through there first."*

In the admittance room the only problem presented was that the computer checked visitors and prisoners out as well as in. Ellert naturally had no control over the electronic brain there, so it would simply have to register the fact that a prisoner had passed through. In the morning when the authorities questioned it about the prisoner's successful escape it would dispassionately testify to the fact that Onot had come through the checkpoint alone.

They reached the exit without hindrance. Of course Ellert had projected himself ahead again and taken over the guard. Without any difficulty, Onot was able to stun the Druuf into insensibility with his shockgun. The victim's state of unconsciousness would last for about 5 hours.

"We're doing excellently," enthused Ellert as he saw the slumped figure of the last guard behind his table. *"Press that button there near the videophone. It operates the main gate."*

Onot's escape operation was becoming more like child's play. Of course one would have to admit that there were extraordinary circumstances. He had a very valuable helper at his side. He would never have risked it alone or had a chance to succeed.

"On the edge of the spaceport is where they park the public air cars. We'll pick one out and fly to the mountains and your laboratory."

"An aircar? They are guarded."

Ellert laughed soundlessly but Onot was clearly aware of it. *"You've already seen how much good the guards can do. They will be no obstacle."*

To this extent Ellert was correct but there was something he didn't know. Each guard was secretly equipped with a positronic monitor device which was similar to a micro-pickup camera. In the monitor room of the court building a technician sat facing a floor to ceiling panel which contained hundreds of small viewscreens. Each screen reproduced the exact scene that was registered by the four eyes of each camera carrier.

On one of the screens the technician had seen the prison cell of one of the Druufs—indicated as that of a prisoner, Onot—and he had observed him as he swung his club.

The technician sounded a general alarm.

5/ PUCKY PROWLs FOR A GHOST

"It's a very desolate region, rocky and almost devoid of vegetation," reported Ras Tschubai.

Pucky confirmed the report in his own inimitable way while grinning and showing his incisor tooth. "We couldn't have found a better hideout. Looks as if we'd landed in the middle of the Alps."

"In the daytime it will be different," observed Rhodan apprehensively. "We have to conceal the Gazelle. An overhanging cliff down in the canyon would be the thing."

"Already located one, sir. If Mundi can trust himself to..."

Lt. Mundi straightened up as though he'd just been appointed leader of the band. "Trust myself? If I had to, I could juggle this cookie into a mouse hole without a scratch!"

Ras grinned at him. "I figured as much. But let's hope you can also do it in the dark!"

"Easy with the infra-red field, buddy. It wouldn't be good to use the headlights. All you have to do is show me that place..."

Rhodan interrupted. "Nobody is doubting your flying capability, Lieutenant. We have to get going and find that hiding place. We don't know whether or not they fly night patrols that are equipped with infrared sensors. OK, Ras—you be the guide."

The manoeuvre actually required almost an hour but finally the Gazelle was parked close to the rising cliff wall. Fifty meters overhead the rocks jutted out far enough to block any view from above.

Rhodan was weary but there was no time to think about it. "Pucky, we're going to pay the city a little visit. Because of the danger of being traced we won't keep in touch over radio. If anything happens here, Pucky will know about it. In case of emergency, Lt. Mundi, take off. The Gazelle must be preserved at all costs. Ellert's body is more important than our getting back on schedule."

"Yes sir," said Mundi but he obviously had misgivings about Rhodan's final inference. Ras nodded silently but it was also evident that he was worried.

Manoli had just entered the control room. "Everything's ready in the clinic. As soon as Ellert's mind comes back into his body the resuscitation process will start immediately. I believe a blood transfusion will be necessary..."

"We'll talk about that later," interrupted Rhodan. He didn't want to lose a second. He gave the men a few more pieces of advice and then took Pucky's right paw in his hand.

The mousebeaver knew his target area but when he jumped he avoided landing directly inside the Tribunal building. When Rhodan's eyes again became aware of 3-dimensional space he couldn't make out much at first. It was dark except for the starlight. To his right, some kind of dark walls loomed upward, blocking out the sky in that direction. To the left there seemed to be nothing obstructing the view clear to the horizon—at least nothing he could make out at the moment.

"Where are we?"

"The city is 20 kilometres in front of us," replied Pucky. He appeared to be listening into the darkness. "Much fewer thought-waves. The Druufs are sleeping. It's just a blurred confusion. I'd like to know what kind of dreams those hippopotamuses are having but I can't figure it out."

Rhodan suppressed a grin. "Still no sign of Ellert?"

"No. You wait here. I'll take a hyjump into the prison and look for the jail cell where he and Onot were supposed to be. Harno's information wasn't all that accurate."

"What do you mean—I'm supposed to just stand here? What if somebody shows up?"

Pucky made a deprecating gesture which Rhodan couldn't see in the dark. "Within a 10 kilometre circle here there's not a sign of life. I'll be back in a few minutes, Besides, I'll keep in telepathic contact so's I can keep track of you."

Rhodan gave his permission with mixed feelings. He realized that it would serve their purpose more effectively if the mousebeaver went ahead first by himself to scout the situation.

"What are those walls—cliffs?"

"Yes, there's a small mountain here. Nobody'll find you as long as it's dark. Why don't you stay close to the rocks and the cliff?"

It was not entirely pitch dark yet Pucky's sudden disappearance was felt more than seen. Rhodan felt the faint suction of the swirling implosion of air as his small companion dematerialised.

The mousebeaver had aligned his jump so that he rematerialised on the outskirts of the city. From this point onward he could make short jumps by direct sighting, which were also less strenuous. At least for the present there was no one around. The streets lay deserted in the dim light of the alien constellations. He only saw bright lights at the main intersections but for the most part it appeared that electric power for lighting was being used sparingly. Pucky was thankful for the Druuf's apparent economy although he didn't quite understand it.

Three more teleport jumps brought him to the broad dome which he recognized from a previous visit. It was the regular meeting place of the Council of 66, the governing body of Druufon. From this point he knew the way to the Tribunal building and the prison.

After another three jumps he found himself at the rear of a massive structure that seemed to reach upward to the stars. Of course this was an optical illusion created by the surrounding darkness. Normally all Druuf houses and buildings were broader than they were high. He was deliberating where he should teleport to next when something happened that disrupted the dark peacefulness of the night.

The streets were suddenly flooded with brilliant illumination. Simultaneously he almost felt rather than heard the nearly ultrasonic alarm sirens, which sounded peculiarly long drawn out and mournful. As though from nowhere, vehicles appeared and proceeded to block 0 intersections and access routes to the prison. Uniformed Druufs rushed into view from all directions and quickly surrounded the building.

Pucky jumped into the protective shadows of the massive wall but seconds later he was bathed in a bright searchlight beam. Several glaring spots of light swept over him and then returned. . .

He didn't have time to determine the cause of the sudden turmoil, and curiosity on that score could only expose him to the danger of discovery. But at least he could try to locate Ellert—meaning Onot the Druuf scientist.

He teleported inside the prison.

At first glance everything seemed to be normal in the lengthy corridor. Pucky did not know whether or not he had landed on the right floor level but there was no guard around anywhere for him to question telepathically. In fact the silence here was almost eerie.

Until suddenly everything happened at once.

Doors opened and armed Druufs dashed into the hall. Which made Pucky realize he was on the wrong floor. This level seemed to be occupied by police and prison guards. The cells were lower down.

He disappeared and rematerialised somewhere below. He ducked into a recess in the corridor as he saw two Druufs standing before a cell door. They seemed to be gesticulating wildly. Although the mousebeaver couldn't hear their high-pitched conversation he could intercept their thoughts. At the same time he saw them bring a third Druuf out of the cell.

"Onot almost killed his cell attendant. . ."

Pucky caught that much and the rest he could put together. Onot had escaped!

This was also why he had not been able to pick up Ellert's thoughts here. By now maybe he could be anywhere on this giant planet and it would be difficult to find him.

The two Druufs suddenly turned around as though they had heard a noise. At first Pucky thought it was because he had been careless but then he saw what had attracted their attention. Druuf policemen were hurrying to the scene. It was high time to get out of here, he thought.

Pucky dematerialised and in so doing made a big mistake. Because Onot wasn't more than 500 meters away. If the mousebeaver had taken the trouble to sort out the inflowing thought streams around him he might have detected the presence of Ellert.

But instead, he returned to Rhodan.

* * * *

Onot pressed the button that Ellert had indicated to him. With a loud humming noise the double gate separated and drew back, leaving the way clear. But when the opening was just 2 meters wide, the gate motion stopped prematurely. For a second or so Ellert was confused and then two things happened at once.

Lights came on everywhere. A high-pitched siren howl was heard. And also the gates began to close again. Ellert realized that something had gone wrong.

"Run, Onot!" he ordered mentally while estimating the distance. Such a body as this was too burdensome, he thought fleetingly. If Onot had not been carrying those important plans... *"It's your last chance!"*

Onot ran. Although his pace was much too slow for Ellert, nevertheless his movement was normal in relation to the movement of the gates. Only a few steps to go—and Onot made it. He pushed through the remaining aperture and reached the brightly-lighted street. Directly before him was a wide avenue that was bathed in the day-bright glare of arc lamps.

"Not that way!" warned Ellert. *"Go to the right toward the spaceport—fast! I can hear cars coming, probably the police. Our escape must have been discovered. I wish I knew how it was possible."*

While Onot ran for his freedom and his life, Ellert pondered over the new situation. Of course he could leave Onot to himself and attempt to divert the Druufs from their task. It would suffice to get hold of their leader and force him to do crazy things. But how would he locate Onot later if he didn't remain in the place where he left him?

The high wall of the prison was left behind them as Onot continued onward and crossed the street. Farther along the avenue a moving light was seen and it was coming in their direction.

"Over there that house entrance!"

Onot made a final burst of speed and pressed into the niche, which was much too small to hide him for long. The approaching car was equipped with a movable searchlight which swept the buildings slowly and searchingly. It was obvious that they expected to find the prisoner in the streets already. Therefore they were aware of his successful escape.

"Stay here no matter what happens!" ordered Ellert as he withdrew from the scientist. He immediately 'saw' the open police car beneath him and could make out the uniforms. Six Druufs sat in the vehicle with fire-ready weapons across their thick knees. Ellert took indirect control of the car by penetrating the driver's brain. He wanted to spare the Druufs' lives where possible but he didn't have much time if he didn't want the sweeping searchlight to discover Onot.

The five Druuf passengers cried out inaudibly when the driver suddenly turned the wheel and raced toward the right side of the street. It was fortunate for them that the manoeuvre slowed them down at least to some extent. The spotlight made one more swing before it went out, followed by the crash.

Ellert witnessed it from Onot's eyes and shuddered to realize the terrible magnitude of power and responsibility his capabilities gave him. Although here he had not endangered human lives, nevertheless they were *lives*. Each life had its own justification and should never be wantonly destroyed. Not even enemy lives if it could be avoided.

But hadn't this been self-defence? Ellert knew he was attempting to justify his deed although no one was forcing him to. To his relief, however, he was able to determine that apparently nobody had lost his life in the accident. The Druufs crawled out of the pile of wreckage and began to complain to the driver. To Ellert the abuse that was heaped upon the fellow was ironical and unfair because the Druuf had slammed on the brakes the moment his own volition had returned to him. Had he not done so, his accusers might have fared much differently.

Onot remained in his niche. Not 200 meters away from him, the police were not forgetting their assignment. After they had convinced themselves that they had come through the mishap without serious injuries, they collected their weapons and continued on their way to their destination, which was the Tribunal building.

Onot breathed a sigh of relief when they had passed him and he was looking at their broad backs.

"Keep going!" urged Ellert, who had grown more confident now. *"The whole town will soon be wide awake. I wouldn't have thought they'd raise such a fuss over the escape of a prisoner."*

"After all, the prisoner happens to be Onot," replied his host. Ellert had the impression of a scornful laugh. *"Of course they're probably afraid that I'll try all sorts of nonsense in order to avenge the great humiliation I've suffered."*

"Let's hope they don't think you're going to throw them into a time-stasis field. That would be all they'd need to double their efforts to catch you."

There were two more occasions where they had to take cover in a narrow alleyway to elude the search patrols but in neither case was the danger great enough to require Ellert's intervention. Then they finally came within sight of the spaceport.

"Over there by the arc lights," said Onot, pointing. *"There's a parking place for air taxis. I don't see any police."*

Ellert ordered the Druuf to remain where he was. He wanted to reconnoitre without fear of being seen. Onot could stay here and in an emergency he could conceal himself in an archway. *"Don't go away from here,"* he repeated. *"I'll be back soon."*

The streets swept past beneath him, Invisible to human or nonhuman eyes, he reached the spaceport and gained altitude in order to have a better view. The many rows of space warships standing ready for takeoff reminded Ellert that Druufon was still in a state of war. At the other end of the spaceport he saw troops pouring out of a large barracks building into cars that had been brought for them. They moved out and began to form a cordon around the entire area. Other foot soldiers were marching in the more obscure outskirts between the spaceport and the city. Ellert estimated that in another half-hour not even a mouse would be able to get through the blockade.

Not to mention a Druuf.

He moved swiftly to the parking place. The aircars were not being guarded. Evidently it hadn't occurred to anyone that anybody might steal one of these. But then Ellert noticed a troop of soldiers that turned into even this area.

Perhaps 5 minutes left...

And what would happen if Onot actually took off in an aircar? Wouldn't that make it easier for him to be caught? Ellert thought of the police car that had slammed into a house front and he laughed mentally to himself. No, it would not be easier to catch him! By no means!

As swiftly as he could he returned to Onot. The Druuf was standing motionlessly in the place where he had left him. He appeared to be terribly afraid of losing Ellert. Perhaps the thought of having to be alone again one day had become unbearable to him.

"You have to run, Onot, as fast as you can! We have to reach the parking place before the soldiers do. How long will it take you? Two minutes?"

The Druuf estimated the distance. *"About 3 minutes but not a second more."*

Naturally they were conversing in terms of Druuf time units but Ellert could convert the relationships into relative Terran values.

"Good, then run! I'll leave you alone for a minute. Before you reach the parking place I'll be back with you."

Onot did not reply. Secretly he was even prepared to escape if necessary without Ellert if his phantom companion did not return in time. But he knew there was little fear of that. He began to run.

Ellert returned to the prison and slipped into the body of a lesser magistrate who was urgently occupied with the task of checking out the electronic admittance controls. A stern-looking Druuf was standing near him, apparently waiting for the results of his efforts.

"Well?"

Ellert's host pushed a switch. "It's true! Onot came through here alone. He had no accomplice—he's done this strictly on his own volition."

"The guard he struck down is still unconscious. It's the same with the gate guard. Nobody can understand how Onot could do this. He seemed to have been completely insane."

"And perhaps he was."

The other Druuf became morose. "It's not our place to make assumptions. Connect me with the Supreme Magistrate. I need his permission to put out a continent-wide dragnet. I want all available troops."

"All that for a scientist who's gone berserk?"

Ellert remained long enough to witness the transaction through the eyes of the official. He saw the face of the Supreme Magistrate on the viewscreen and heard the order come through to capture Onot at all costs—but alive. Aware of having a long night before him, he left the scene and again became a disembodied teleporter, transferring himself back to the spaceport.

He was at a sufficient altitude to be able to see Onot and the soldiers at the same time. The fugitive was still about 100 paces from the nearest aircar and the troops were still 200 meters away from the edge of the parking area.

It was going to be a tight squeeze.

Onot did not conceal his sense of relief when he became aware of Ellert. "We're not going to make it!" he panted and he increased his pace. A side-glance revealed the silhouettes of the marching troops. They were not in any particular hurry because as usual in such cases the participants in a dragnet always assumed the focal point of events to be elsewhere. Which was generally a mistake.

"Take the nearest aircar!"

It was a small craft but certainly not any slower or less manoeuvrable than the others. With a strenuous leap, Onot jumped into the cabin as soon as the door slid softly to one side. His hands found the controls almost involuntarily. The engine hummed to life even while the door was closing again. Then the aircar lifted from the ground and shot upward into the dark night sky with a tremendous acceleration. The city sank away beneath them like a dwindling diadem of sparkling lights. A few raybeams lost themselves in the distance. And then they were surrounded by solitude and darkness.

* * * *

"He's escaped," Pucky reported after locating Rhodan in a nearby hollow between the rocks. "Ellert must have had plenty to do with that but how are we supposed to find him now?"

Rhodan was seated on a large rock and was starting to feel the increasing coldness of the night. He had twice heated up a medium-sized boulder with his small hand beamer and used it as a lightless source of heat but it hadn't proved practical for any length of time. Of course the uncertainties before him were much more disturbing, however, than a cold night on an alien world.

"Take a problem, Pucky," he said. "If you were in Ellert's position, where would you go—that is, considering that you were aware your friends were looking for you and that they had the unusual means at their disposal which you know we have...?"

The mousebeaver squatted on his broad hindquarters, using his beaver tail as a support. He raised his eyes to the sky as though he expected an answer from the stars. "I'd head for some accessible spot that my friends knew about—I can't think of any other possibility."

"Aha—and what place would be known to Onot and Ellert as well as ourselves?"

Pucky suddenly dispensed with his stargazing. "His former secret laboratory, 700 kilometres to the east of the capital!" He got up abruptly and waddled over to Rhodan. "If we're able to hit the nail on the head like that, what are we waiting for?"

Rhodan took hold of both of Pucky's front paws and swung him up into his lap. "Because I'm still trying to figure out the purpose of Ellert's escape. If he's still capable of influencing Onot to this extent, then he should also have had enough strength to come looking for us on his own, in disembodied form. He certainly must know that we're trying to reach him now. I'm wondering why he's exposing Onot to this unnecessary danger—as well as himself—because it's delaying him."

"That's right. Some of this is hazy to me too," admitted Pucky. "But I'll bet my head against Bell's big

toe that Ellert has a good reason for bringing Onot along."

Rhodan nodded almost imperceptibly. He had already thought of this. "Ellert can't carry any material object so he'd have to use Onot to do that for him—if that's what he has in mind. So I have to assume that's what he's doing. He's trying to bring us something that only Onot can carry with him. OK then, it won't do any harm for us to have a look in that direction. I think I could find that laboratory again."

Pucky listened into the night without moving from Rhodan's lap. "At least one thing is sure: Ellert isn't at the laboratory yet! I don't pick up anything from him there, so he's still somewhere between those mountains and the city. Let's hope he isn't expecting Onot to hoof it all that distance on the ground. At that rate we'd really be waiting around a long time for the old hippopotamus!"

"Let's go to the laboratory area," replied Rhodan. "Or do you have a better suggestion?"

Pucky's incisor tooth gleamed in the starlight. "Not at the moment..."

A few seconds later the boulder in the small hollow lay deserted as before. Only a dwindling warmth on its hard surface would have betrayed the fact that someone had been sitting there.

But there was no one in the vicinity who might have detected this.

* * * *

Their solitude aloft was very short-lived.

"They're after us!" announced Onot while checking his night-vision tracker. "A whole squadron of interceptors—and they're faster than we are!"

"Just take it easy," said Ellert, attempting to calm the scientist. "They are forced to take you alive so that they'll be able to find out what they want from you in court. You are of no use to them dead, so they're not going to start off by shooting us down."

The soundless words were registered effectively in Onot's brain. He became calmer and more deliberately objective. Even though the pursuitships were swiftly closing the distance between them he made no attempt to get more speed out of the aircar.

Within 400 kilometres of the laboratory area, the interceptors overtook the small craft and fell in ahead of it. Several brilliant-warning shots sliced past him but Onot took no heed of them. He was acting of his own volition; Ellert remained completely neutral.

"Are you familiar with those interceptors?" he asked, finally. "I mean, with the function of their engines especially. Is there anything on the control panel that shuts off the propulsion? Like an ignition key, for example?"

Onot thought a moment and remembered. *"They have a very ordinary electronic shutoff device that is activated by a socket type key plug. Without the insert plug you can't start the engines."*

Ellert took in the situation through Onot's eyes. In front of them were about 10 such ships—probably police units. On either side of them several more similar craft raced along, carefully keeping pace with them. It was obviously their purpose to prevent any lateral escape attempt on the part of the fugitive. At least 10 more ships followed closely behind them. Altogether then, maybe 30 interceptors.

It didn't look like an easy chore to accomplish but nevertheless under the circumstances it was possible. Far below them was the desert.

"Onot—just hold your course for the laboratory and don't be surprised at what you may see happening."

Onot thought fleetingly of the fate of the police car back in the city. He nodded. It was a gesture of agreement that Ellert had anticipated.

"You can depend on me," Ellert told him as he withdrew from him.

A second later he was hovering near the aircar in emptiness. He was not quite sure how he was going to accomplish his task, yet he felt confident. Perhaps this was the first major test of his newly developed faculties. Traversing the stream of time was something else; it was something he was no longer capable of. But in the place of that capability a new field of application had opened to him.

He sought out his first victim among the ships in the lateral escort. He penetrated the interceptor's cockpit and slipped into the brain of the pilot, who was flying solo. He dispensed with the more laborious process of creating an amnesia block, which wouldn't have served much of a purpose anyway. He simply took over the Druuf's conscious mind and gave him his orders.

These consisted of two simple commands.

First, the pilot let go of his controls and opened a small ventilator window next to him. Then he quickly jerked loose the socket plug from the ignition and threw it out the window.

The engine became silent immediately. The interceptor dropped a short distance but levelled out again as Ellert left the pilot to his own resources. He waited until he saw that the aircraft was making a steep, gliding approach to a landing in the desert. The pilot had no other choice since now there was no way of starting the engine again. His was the first ship to drop away from the formation.

Ellert was satisfied with the success of his strategy. The whole process had not taken more than 20 seconds at the most. Of course the pilot was going to wonder what happened to his key plug and later he wouldn't have any explanation for having thrown it out the window. But that didn't matter anymore. Let the Druufs rack their brains over it. One thing for sure: there would be no logical explanation they could come up with.

With new determination, Ellert prepared to force the next pilot into an emergency landing.

Onot, who firmly maintained his course and continued to disregard the further warning shots of the police ships around him, was aware of Ellert's actions. In his night-vision screen he saw one pursuer after another drop back and peel off toward the desert below. Soon there were no more pursuers other than the 10 ships ahead that were trying to block him.

But they, too, soon began to drop away in the same mysterious manner as their predecessors. One of them even plunged helplessly into the depths, only straightening out within 100 meters of the surface.

Since there were no bursts of flame or any explosions, Onot assumed that all interceptors had landed safely in the desert. All they had to do was wait there to be picked up, without damage or injury.

When he sensed that Ellert had returned to him he pointed back into the night. *"If the Supreme Magistrate had seen that action, maybe he'd be only too glad to believe the statements I made yesterday. Well, he'll find out what happened from the pilots."*

"That won't do him much good because not a single pilot knows that he threw his key plug overboard. If they're lucky they may find a few of the keys in the desert but nobody will know how they got there or how they were removed from the control panels. I would have preferred avoiding this kind of spooky action but there wasn't any other way. Sooner or later they would have forced you into a landing, otherwise. How much farther do we have to go?"

Onot looked at his instruments. "Another 200 kilometres. In 10 minutes we'll be there. Let's hope another squadron doesn't overtake us in the meantime."

Luck was with them. The night sky behind them revealed no further pursuers. Onot dropped the aircar toward the ground finally and made a fairly hard landing close to the cliff wall where the laboratory entrance was still standing open. He gave a sigh of relief. Here they had first taken him prisoner and it was unlikely they'd assume very quickly that he would return here. Even if they did make such an assumption... He would be waiting for them.

Ellert made the mistake of sharing Onot's new confidence. Consequently he neglected to probe the surroundings and the laboratory. So he was taken entirely by surprise when Onot got out of the aircraft, only to stare into the muzzles of more than two dozen energy weapons.

6/ PLANET ALERT!

It was precisely at this moment when Dr. Eric Manoli made his discovery.

Prior to this he had slept a half hour and also conversed a short while with Ras Tschubai. Lt. Mundi was still sleeping in his seat before the flight controls.

Ras had asked him: "Do you think that we'll find him?"

Manoli shrugged his shoulders. He felt weary and beaten. "We can only hope so. Otherwise I don't know where we'll get a body for Ellert. From an ethical standpoint it would be a crime to suppress another intelligence so that Ellert could find a place to stay."

The Afroterranian gazed thoughtfully at the ceiling. "An interesting problem—if there were any time to go into it. Just as an example, what would happen if Ellert took over the body of an insane person? Would that also be a crime? Or wouldn't it be more likely that a sick person would be cured that way?"

"Perhaps I have too many scruples," replied Manoli somewhat uncertainly. "Of course I guess it wouldn't be such a hard decision to make if there were no other alternative. But it's all so theoretical... I don't know."

Ras waved a hand as though to dismiss the ethics of the problem, "Well, that's something we don't have to decide at the moment. Ellert isn't dead yet—I mean his body is still more or less intact. We'll soon be able to stop worrying about him."

This remark reminded Manoli that he hadn't been taking care of his own task for almost an hour. He got to his feet hurriedly. "I have to get back to the sick bay. If he's gotten any worse I may have to make a transfusion. Can you help me with that, Ras?"

"Sure thing—let's go!"

They left Mundi to his gentle snoring and exited the control room. The ship's clinic was not far away and within a minute following their conversation they were in the immaculately white sickbay chamber. Manoli closed the door behind him and went to the bed where Ellert lay. When he lifted up the sheet he was startled at the sight of a pale, motionless face in which there was no longer a trace of the bluish colouration.

It took him a moment or so to grasp the actuality of the change. "But... that's not possible!" he stammered, finally dropping the edge of the sheet. It fell back against the body but left the face in view. "The process of biological deterioration can't just reverse itself! This body was slowly becoming a corpse—but now it seems to be alive again!" On a sudden impulse he bent down and placed his ear against Ellert's chest. Then he straightened up again and shook his head. "No, not actually alive. Ellert hasn't returned to his body yet. But why... I mean, what the devil! If I don't find an explanation for this I'll lose my mind!"

Ras Tschubai was surprisingly calm. "I'm no medical man and can't presume to make a judgment. You say the process has reversed itself. Maybe it'd be a good idea to also reverse our thinking process."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Manoli absently.

"Quite simple. You were saying previously that the blue colouration was due to the fact that Ellert's mind had become too weak to put out the necessary energy that made it possible for his body to receive certain vital impulses through time and space. But now if the deterioration process has stopped and even a little recovery is noticeable it would seem logical to assume that Ellert's disembodied essence has begun to broadcast some excess energy—maybe without even realizing it."

Manoli came out of his momentary lethargy and nodded in agreement while still staring at Ellert's face. "That's what it must be, Ras. Of course that doesn't solve the whole problem but at least it gains us extra time. The main thing now is to let Rhodan know about the new situation. If Pucky happens to be listening in on us, he'll be able to give him this information."

Ras grinned briefly. "It's quite probable that the mousebeaver is picking up our thoughts and conversation—if he has time. If for no other reason, he'll be keeping contact with us out of his inborn snoopiness and curiosity. "

Manoli agreed with him, feeling somewhat reassured.

What he and Ras Tschubai did not suspect however, was that Pucky was in no mood for monitoring distant thoughts at the moment.

* * * *

At first Onot had raised his unwieldy arms in the face of the threatening weapons but he soon dropped them loosely to his sides and regarded the police troops quietly. His self-confidence had become strengthened, even though it was actually bolstered by Ellert's capabilities.

"Well, this is where you took me the first time," he said with a touch of sarcasm. "They say history repeats itself."

Ellert could make out the colourful insignia on the red uniform jacket of the officer in charge. The latter did not appear to be in any mood for sophistries. He replaced his hand weapon in his belt and made a sign to his men.

"Whatever he may say, don't listen to him. You know the orders of the Supreme Magistrate, to bring the prisoner back to the city alive. You know the nasty tricks he can play on other men's minds—so if I should give you orders to the contrary and tell you to let him go, do not listen to me. Take him into the laboratory and hold him there until he is picked up."

Without any show of resistance, Onot followed the soldiers and police officers as directed.

But Ellert realized that this time it wasn't going to be so easy to outsmart the Druufs. He would only be able to take over one of them at a time and then would have to leave him again to go into another. It was not possible for him to effect a mass control simultaneously overall of them. The Druufs had been warned.

"*Go with them,*" he told Onot silently. "*Meanwhile I'll see what can be done.*" Having sensed the scientist's confirming response, he left his host's body.

His movements and mobility were less difficult for him now. Just the mere wish of emerging from Onot had been enough to accomplish it. Onot's former resistance had really consumed most of his strength but now he was definitely on his way to recovery. At least in the same time plane he would again be able to move about without hindrance.

Outside in the vicinity of the laboratory, Ellert counted 30 Druufs. They must have been here for some time already, apparently lying in wait for Onot's arrival. He was mystified as to how the police troops had been able to get here so fast. Or had the Superior Judge stationed his forces here even prior to Onot's escape—in order to take any possible friends of Onot by surprise when they approached the secret laboratory?

In the lab was every evidence of a thorough search operation, or more to the point—a raid. Bundles of papers and documents together with sketches and drawings were neatly stacked in a corner. Apparently they were to be picked up and turned over to other scientists as data for them to use in their own researches. Chests and boxes had been broken open. Their contents were strewn all over the floor as though no one had found any interest in them so far. A number of machines had been loosened from their anchorage and had been made ready for being transported away.

Onot was taken into a small adjacent room and locked in. Ellert knew he was safe there and that for the time being he could leave him to himself.

He was about to take over the officer when all of a sudden he was already seeing through the Druuf's eyes. It happened without the slightest transition or effort. He had merely thought of it and it was already realized.

The officer had gone to a vehicle that was carefully concealed behind some outcroppings of rock. There he operated a transmitter so that he could report to the police chief in the city that Onot had been captured. He was promised that an air vehicle would be there as soon as possible to pick up the criminal. It was estimated that this would require about a half-hour.

Ellert concentrated on the face that appeared on the viewscreen in the car and then he thought of the capital city and the Tribunal building. In the same second he found himself in a very familiar corridor. In two more probing attempts he was inside the brain of the police chief.

The officers present were somewhat pleasantly astonished to see their superior dance suddenly from one leg to the other. Yet they were puzzled when he quickly desisted in this and looked at all of them with a wide-eyed expression of surprise.

"Do you have a pain?" asked one of his friends in some concern,

"No... it was just a passing impulse. I simply felt an urge to move my legs and... well, haven't you also felt that way at times? Often a man will be overcome by a certain exuberance and will want to dance. Don't worry about it. I think maybe it was because I'm so pleased we've caught Onot again."

He did not know that he was personifying Ellert's own secret joy, which had to find an outer expression of some kind. Everything seemed to be back in order again. He could cover greater distances and reach a specific goal. So he was not foredoomed to stay forever in Onot's body.

"If you're so happy about Onot's capture, then you'd better send a ship out there so that the traitor can be brought here."

Now Ellert took over the chief completely. "You take care of that. I'm going to advise the Supreme Magistrate of our success. It was a lucky thing I posted guards at the laboratory."

The Druuf who had been so addressed proceeded to leave the room. Ellert bothered no further with the police chief but instead followed his friend, who hurried through the corridors and emerged into the street, which was once more under reduced lighting. Here he commandeered a car which brought him to the spaceport.

When the Druuf sought out the officer in charge of the troops there, Ellert relaxed and did not interfere. Everything was going as he had figured it would.

"Orders from the police chief," said the Druuf. "Send a ship at once to the Brasi Mountains. Onot's lab. North of the computer station. You know the coördinates. We were able to capture the escaped prisoner again and he is to be picked up there."

The C.O. appeared to be happy to comply. "I'll fly there myself," he replied. "I know that region. I'll take three of the troops with me."

The emissary of the police chief saluted and returned to the court building. He must have assumed that everything had been well taken care of because he had personally brought the order to the C.O.

Ellert let him go and nestled down inside the brain of the troop commander. By Earthly standards the Druuf would have been a lieutenant. His name was Rambos.

Rambos alerted his subordinates and called for a pilot and two sergeants who were to accompany him. Five minutes later the swift machine rose upward into the night sky and then raced with amazing speed toward the East.

Shortly before the landing, Ellert tried a second experiment. Remaining with Rambos, he sent out a fractional portion of his intellect to Onot. By this means he was now located in the brains of two entities at the same time.

"They're coming to pick you up, Onot. Go with them. We'll be airborne again but this time much better prepared. They are going to find out that you are not to be trifled with and that you will deal with them only on the basis of your own free will. Are you receiving me alright?"

"As ever," returned Onot soundlessly. *"What's going to happen?"*

"We're going to have a nice aircraft placed at our disposal," replied Ellert enthusiastically, after which he returned completely to Rambos.

The ship landed and Rambos got out to greet the officer who had recaptured Onot. Onot was brought outside and remanded into the custody of Rambos, who had him placed in the ship's cabin between the two heavily armed sergeants. The pilot turned to his controls.

Rambos gave the arresting officer one last nod and then closed the entrance hatch. The motor began to hum. The craft climbed into the sky and shot away in a westerly direction.

But it never arrived in the capital city.

* * * *

The stars were in the same position as before when the slightly tugging pains of rematerialisation wore off. The only change seemed to be that the dark shadow of the cliffs beside them had disappeared. Pucky had calculated his jump so that they did not come directly to the area of the laboratory. Instead, they arrived several hundred meters away from it.

"Careful!" whispered the mousebeaver, remaining motionlessly where he was. "There's a whole bunch of Druufs close by. Police. They're guarding Onot's laboratory!"

Rhodan comprehended the situation at once and also remained motionless. They were surrounded by the darkness. Farther ahead in a northerly direction the horizon appeared to be elevated; there must be the mountains. At the foot of a mountain slope Rhodan perceived a faint light that was moving about. Apparently it was being carried by a Druuf who was checking the sentinels stationed there.

Pucky confirmed Rhodan's assumption. "They've surrounded the lab and are hoping to be able to catch any friends of Onot. Of course they have no idea whether he has any friends or not. They're waiting just

in case."

"Which means they have a good nose for probabilities," Rhodan whispered back. "It's a lucky thing we were cautious. We could just as easily have popped up in the midst of them."

"And we would have disappeared just as quickly and they'd still be scratching their heads over it."

"And not without good reason!" retorted Rhodan gravely. "Remember that our action is aimed at convincing the Druufs that Onot is working alone. Our mysterious appearance would only have strengthened their suspicion that he has accomplices. And accomplices with very unusual capabilities at that! That would again bring Terra into the game. No, Pucky, we have to remain in the background

They waited awhile in silence while Pucky sampled the stream of thoughts that came his way. Since the troops stationed by the lab still had no idea that Onot would come directly into their hands, they didn't think about such a possibility—nor were their thoughts even centred on the fact of his successful escape.

After about 10 minutes of concentrated 'eavesdropping', Pucky turned to Rhodan. "There's no particular pay dirt in what I'm listening to. We're waiting around for nothing. Who knows how long it's going to take Onot to get here. First he'd have to steal an aircar, which seems improbable. Anyway he or Ellert won't be stupid enough to jump right into their hands here. Ellert will reconnoitre and discover the police troops—which means he'll fly somewhere else."

"Sounds logical," admitted Rhodan. "What should we do?"

"You're asking *me*?" Pucky acted surprised. "You think we should wait here?" He shook his head. "I have a suggestion to make. Let me take you back to the Gazelle and then I'll go alone and have another look around in the city. Maybe I'll pick up a clue."

After some deliberation, Rhodan agreed.

When they materialized inside the Control Central of the Gazelle, only Lt. Mundi was to be seen. He lay back in the pilot's seat with his mouth wide open, snoring away as though he were determined to saw down an entire forest of trees.

The temptation was too great. Pucky let go of Rhodan and made a quick jump into Mundi's lap, where he turned to him and held his nose shut. The effect was startling, to say the least.

The somewhat portly Mundi stopped snoring abruptly. Then he gasped for air like a fish unexpectedly jerked from a pond. Only then did he open his eyes in consternation to see a grinning mousebeaver in his lap.

His expression of relief was mixed with a certain amount of justifiable anger over this rough manner of being awakened. "No sooner does the little monster get back home than we lose all semblance of peace and quiet," he complained with a snort of indignation. He straightened up so abruptly that Pucky had to grab his jacket to keep from falling out of his lap. "We ought to lock him up!"

"Just try to lock up a teleporter," said Rhodan, smiling resignedly. He looked around searchingly. "Where are Tschubai and Manoli?"

Mundi also looked around the control room. He was at a loss. "I don't have any idea. They must have left the Control Central while I was here on watch."

"While you were here sleeping!" Pucky corrected him, and finally slipped off his lap. "I think I know where they are—in sickbay. They were going to have a look at Ellert. See you later!" He disappeared in a small whirlwind before Rhodan could say anything.

Mundi stared at the empty spot where he had been. "Teleporters are a weird bunch," he mumbled sleepily. "By the way—did you have any success?"

"Unfortunately not. Pucky has just gone back to the city to see if he can pick up any clues, because meanwhile Onot has escaped." He smiled. "Continue your watch. I'm going to find Manoli."

"Well, besides, it was Tschubai's turn for the watch; that nap was legitimate. But now I'm so worked up I won't be able to sleep anymore."

"Don't get mixed up with Pucky," said Rhodan, giving him a friendly warning. "You'd come out on the short end of it."

He met Manoli and Tschubai in the passageway. They had heard voices and correctly assumed that Mundi was not merely talking in his sleep. And so Rhodan was informed of the great piece of news about Ellert's physical condition.

Unfortunately it came a few seconds too late because Pucky was already under way.

* * * *

The police ship raced toward the East.

Ellert had barely taken control of Rambos again when he had him order the pilot to make a 180° turn. Of course the pilot had looked up in surprise as he heard the command but he had then obeyed without questioning. The two sergeants had no knowledge of navigation and were solely concerned with their prisoner.

So far, so good. But what now?

Ellert knew that he wouldn't be able to fly around forever in the stolen aircraft over Druufon. It wouldn't be long before this new escape was discovered, which would bring more pursuers. If he didn't want to lose Onot's technical notes, something was going to have to happen in a hurry.

Had Rhodan sent out anybody yet to find him? In fact, had they ever received his distress calls in the first place?

Ellert thought of his new capabilities. Granted, they had their limitations. He was not actually a hypnotist and he couldn't give anybody a posthypnotic command. If he were to withdraw from Rambos, the Druuf lieutenant would carry on again according to his own evaluations. He only remained under control as long as Ellert dominated his brain and conscious mind.

Still, he was now able to take over two brains at once. Perhaps even three? Or perhaps more?

As he weighed this possibility in his mind, the ramifications of it struck him like a bolt from the blue. If he were capable of this, then it would be possible to bring all four Druufs in the plane under his control, in addition to Onot.

His very first attempt convinced him that it was possible, even though for short duration and with great effort. Of course this new knowledge didn't mean too much at the moment but it opened up unexpected perspectives for the future.

It seemed to him that he could see the first glimmerings of dawn in the East. The airship was racing toward the morning light. It wouldn't be long before the new day broke upon them, that is if they continued eastward. Yet there seemed to be no reason for changing the course.

Meanwhile, Pucky had teleported back to the city. Several shorter jumps brought him inside the court building, where he found a good hiding place in the office of the police chief. The Druufs were large and so was their furniture. By contrast, Pucky was very small. Nobody noticed him behind the huge filing cabinet.

He learned that Onot's second escape had succeeded, yet by the same token he realized that he and Rhodan had missed them only by seconds. The officer in charge of the guard detail at the laboratory reported by radio that by some inexplicable means Onot had forced Lt. Rambos to turn the aircraft away from the city. The ship had disappeared without a trace.

The police chief sent out a new alarm but this time it went to the Planetary Air Patrol itself. Everywhere on Druufon, automatic-tracking networks went into operation. Entire squadrons of fast pursuitships took off in many locations and began to make a systematic search of the whole planet. Nothing would be able to escape their unified surveillance, not even a landed airship.

Nor even the Gazelle!

Pucky immediately saw the magnitude of this new threat and besides that he had heard enough. Ellert was present on that escaping airship and he didn't know that assistance was so close to him.

The mousebeaver teleported back to the Gazelle. He found Lt. Mundi on watch and this time he was fully awake.

"You must have been living it up in the night spots," grumbled Mundi wearily. "What took you so long? Here at least a few things have been going on and..."

"There'll be a heck of a lot more than that going on—real quick—if you keep babbling," said Pucky swiftly. "Hit the alarm and wake up the others!"

It was then that the apparently easy-going Austrian revealed another side to his nature. Without even asking why, he reached over and pressed the clearly marked button on the com panel.

In shocked dismay, Pucky clapped his paws to his very sensitive ears as he was smitten by a tornado of sound. In every cabin and corridor of the scoutship the same shrilling bedlam was heard as in the Control Central.

"Man—did you have to do*that*? !" he complained impatiently.

"Why mess around?" retorted the lieutenant dryly. "You said wake everybody up, didn't you? Well, that ought to do it. So now may I ask—why?"

Dressed only in his pyjamas, Ras Tschubai was the first to appear in the control room. "What's the matter?" he panted and then he saw Pucky. "Oh, it's you!"

"Do I look like anybody else around here?" inquired Pucky, somewhat piqued.

Rhodan and Manoli appeared simultaneously as though by a mutual signal.

"Ah—Pucky! What's happened?"

"Now that you're all together I can tell you," replied the mousebeaver. "I wanted to avoid having to repeat myself. Ellert—or Onot—has gotten away again and this time he's in an aircraft with four Druufs. Where he's going nobody knows. The whole planet's on air alert and a full-scale air search is building up fast. They'll probably discover us here."

Rhodan glanced briefly at Manoli. "Ellert's physical body appears to be recovering again," he said, then explained to Pucky in a few words what had happened in the ship's clinic. "Apparently Ellert's disembodied essence has developed enough superfluous energy to supply his body without his knowing it. Perhaps he may find us."

"I should be finding *him!*" exclaimed Pucky dejectedly and he looked at the ceiling as though expecting help from that direction. "But if he doesn't try to make contact with me I'll never find him. Why in the world doesn't he leave Onot and come looking for us?"

"We've been over that question before," Rhodan reminded him. "He must have his reasons. And besides... Pucky—what's the matter?"

Everybody stared at Pucky. The mousebeaver was still staring at the ceiling. Or rather, his face was in that direction but now his eyes were closed as though he were straining to hear something. Finally he squeaked excitedly. "I'll never touch another carrot in my life if that isn't Ellert—not 3 kilometres right overhead but going like a bat toward the East!"

"The stolen plane!" exclaimed Rhodan.

"Yes, the one he escaped in! I'll go to him."

Before Rhodan or anybody else could say anything to him, he had disappeared. In the same second he appeared in the cabin of the fleeing airship, just as Ellert was performing his experiment on Onot and the other Druufs.

Thus Ellert saw Pucky simultaneously through 20 alien eyes but only one—or none—would have sufficed. Five separate thought-streams flooded in upon the mousebeaver, yet with a single mental cry: "*Pucky!*"

"Ellert—which of these hippos is *you*? Which one is Onot?"

Again came the telepathic answer in fivefold duplication: "*Between the guards there—that one in the middle is Onot! I have to spread myself among them and I can't go into him alone. The Druufs would recognize you. This way they won't know you're here. Where is the ship?*"

"You mean our ship? It's waiting down below in the mountains but the Druufs have put out a maximum air alert. We have to get out of here before it's too late. Can you come with me?"

"I can't leave Onot... Wait a minute—I can! Pucky, reach into Onot's right-hand pocket. You'll find a sheet of foil... yes, that's it! Take that and guard it well. It contains the construction details for the translight linear space drive.—What did you say? A major alert?"

"That's right—it's planet-wide. Nobody will see the daylight without being monitored—not to mention a spaceship the Druufs haven't registered before. I'm jumping back on board now. Rhodan has come here personally to pick you up. Come on along!"

"Wait a few seconds, Pucky. I'll go with you—in fact in you. But I just want to erase Onot's memory of certain things. I promised him that much."

Meanwhile, Pucky took a look around. The pilot headed persistently eastward toward the approaching dawn. Rambos sat beside him and stared expressionlessly at the controls. A portion of Ellert was holding him in that state. The two sergeants remained motionless, as did Onot. In fact, the scientist's eyes were closed. When he came to his senses again he would no longer know anything about his remarkable friend Ellert.

Soundlessly, Ellert spoke to Pucky. "As soon as Onot opens his eyes you must make your jump! That will be the moment in which I'll be pulling out of all Druufs at once. Don't hesitate, because Lt. Rambos is very quick. He'd shoot you down immediately."

Pucky concentrated. He did not take his eyes from Onot's face. However hard he tried, however, he could not detect Ellert's mental presence. The time teleporter must be holding himself neutral.

Then Onot opened his eyes and saw him.

Pucky 'jumped'.

7/ HADES' END—A NEW BEGINNING

The giant double sun of the Siamed System was just topping the horizon when Lt. Mundi activated his controls. With howling engines the Gazelle hurtled upward into the colouring sky...

But not swiftly enough.

That is, in a certain sense of timing. The Druufs' air and space tracking controls functioned excellently, yet by their own time ratio they were only half fast enough to be able to destroy the Gazelle with their automatic weaponry.

"We've gotten through!" muttered Rhodan.

He had been able to make out the flitting shapes of the fast-moving interceptors on the viewscreen but

they were fast moving by virtue of the Gazelle's superior velocity, which was leaving them behind. The Gazelle's speed capabilities were far superior to those of the airships and it was now shooting into outer space. But in that realm lurked the greater danger: the spacefleet of the Druufs.

"Transition—as soon as the first space units appear!" he ordered.

Mundi nodded, his lips tight-pressed in concentration. The moment had come to show his chief that he was capable of a thing or two.

But in the ship's clinic Dr. Manoli was oblivious to the dangers of the reckless flight. The name of his problem at the moment was Ellert who lay before him on the bed in the form of a human cadaver that was not yet a cadaver. An hour before when Pucky had returned to the Control Central, everyone had thought his mission had failed. But then Ellert himself had made his presence known. Seventy years before his disembodied entity had been catapulted into Eternity—and now he had returned via Pucky's body. After which he had finally slipped into his own.

Manoli checked the pulse. It was still very slow but it was regular. The blood transfusion had brought a more lifelike colour to the face. Ellert had begun to live again in physical form.

"Can you understand me, Ellert?" It was strange to Manoli to be thus addressing this physical body which had become such a familiar inanimate object to him over the years. "I mean, through your ears," he hastened to add.

Ellert's lips trembled. It was obvious that he was struggling to actually articulate an answer. "Yes."

It was barely a whisper that reached Manoli's ears. It was the first time in exactly 73 years that Ellert had spoken through his own mouth.

* * * *

Meanwhile, Rhodan and Mundi were facing a serious problem. A Druuf battlefleet was blocking their way into deep space. The ship's velocity was still not great enough for a normal transition. They'd have to 'slip' through semispace. In spite of their anti-tracking screens the first energy beams from the enemy were already zipping past the Gazelle's defence-field envelope.

"Transition!" ordered Rhodan.

Mundi did not hesitate to throw in the switch.

The enemy ships seemed to blur and grow hazy, falling back and away. But Rhodan soon detected that they still pursued them. A short transition within the system was not enough to shake off the Druufs.

Ahead the disc of Hades emerged out of the sea of stars.

"Make a landing!" said Rhodan and then added: "Beam out the code signal—put them on top alert!"

The Gazelle raced toward the twilight world but quickly went into maximum deceleration, after which it

dove into the gaping hangar lock. The stars blacked out behind them as the outer hatch closed. Just as they were settling to the hangar floor the sound of alarm shrilled through the stronghold.

Capt. Rous burst into the hangar just as Rhodan came down through the exit hatch of the *Gazelle*.

"Abandon the base!" shouted Rhodan to the commander, who could hardly believe his ears. "If the Druufs can add 2 & 2 they'll be on top of us in half an hour and they'll make Hades earn its name! We have to leave all material and equipment behind. Everybody into the transmitters! Advise the *Drusus* ! On the double—not a second to lose!"

Nor did they lose a second.

Manoli was occupied with Ellert, whose legs were still too stiff for him to be able to move without help. There was no time to fool with the stretcher table, so Ras and Pucky teleported doctor and patient into the nearest transmitter, which had already been activated. A hypercom dispatch from Hades Com Central had alerted the *Drusus*, whose matter transmitters had been switched immediately into a receiver mode.

"Strong Druuf formation on approach flight," announced a com officer just before he closed the timer on the prepared demolition charge. It was perhaps a superfluous security measure but no one could be sure whether the Druufs would destroy Hades or try to land here and inspect the base.

The base crewmembers hurried into the grid cages of the transmitters, taking only their most indispensable personal belongings. They disappeared in rapid succession, to rematerialise almost a light-year away on board the *Drusus* .

Rhodan and Marcel Rous remained to the last. They waited until the *Gazelles* took off, which they did not choose to surrender to the enemy's destruction. The scoutships only carried two-man crews so as to reduce the risk of casualties. They were to attempt to get through the discharge rift to the relay ship that was stationed just beyond it, after which the relay ship was to escape in a sheer blind transition.

The viewscreens in the Control Central were still functioning. In the rear of the room the demolition timer was ticking.

"We still have 30 minutes," said Rous a bit rigidly due to the strain he was under.

"The Druufs will be here before that," replied Rhodan.

Nearby the door stood open which led to the matter transmitters. If the situation called for it, the two men could get to safety in just a few steps. In the screens the dark sky of Hades was covered with thousands of stars. Suddenly it seemed as if many new stars had appeared out of the void but Rhodan could tell by their swift movement that these were glowing exhaust flares from the engines of spaceships. The fleeing *Gazelles* had enabled them to get an angle on where they were.

"You know if we don't show them any resistance..." Rous began to say.

Rhodan had already guessed his thoughts. "Let's fool them. Hades can't fall into their hands—it has to be destroyed. Activate the automatic defences, Captain. Let them think we're sitting here in the trap."

It happened fast. The Druuf ships had hardly come close to a certain security distance from the stronghold before the energy cannons opened fire, hurling their deadly lightning toward the fleet in outer

space. In the viewscreen, Rhodan could detect the collapse of defence screens on two of the Druuf ships. The other units pulled back almost immediately but they regrouped into a typical 'bombing run' formation, which clearly revealed their intention to destroy the planet. It was exactly the reaction Rhodan had wanted from them.

"That's it!" he muttered, finally taking his eyes from the screen. "In a few minutes their bombs and torpedoes will be converting the crust of Hades into molten lava—which should make it pretty hot down here!"

Rous remained unmoved by the prospect. With a few quick adjustments of the controls he set the automatic firing range for a greater distance. Lightning bolts of energy shot from hidden gun positions and penetrated the Druuf formation but this time without creating any additional damage. Still, it served to advise the enemy that the secret base was being manned by someone. As a result, they launched an all-out attack.

The first bombs fell far from the target but caused incredible devastation. A second wave of torpedoes struck nearby cliffs, turning them into bizarre molten shapes of lava which almost instantly hardened again. But then the first nuclear bombs fell. They unleashed an atomic fire that would remain unquenchable. Hades was lost forever.

"At least now we know that nobody's ever going to make use of this base," said Capt. Rous with a slight note of regret in his voice. He looked searchingly about him. "Sure going to lose a heap of valuable stuff. Just the 12 transmitters alone..."

"Stuff!" retorted Rhodan and he beckoned to Rous as he went to the transmitter room. "You said it, Rous—it's a swap, really. We're swapping all this stuff in exchange for human lives. That shouldn't be a difficult choice."

Without further words they both stepped into the waiting transmitter cage and Rhodan threw in the switch. Within the same second he was standing with Rous in the hold of the *Drusus*.

The first thing they saw was Bell's worried face, which suddenly brightened in relief. "That was cutting it real thin, gentlemen! In another minute I'd have come to Hades to get you two!"

"You would have gotten your fingers burned," retorted Rhodan curtly. "All set to leave?—Where's Ellert?"

"Manoli took him to the ship's hospital. Gen. Deringhouse is waiting for your instructions, Perry."

"You take care of that. Immediate transition. We have to get back to Earth as soon as possible. Be careful to make several transitions and in different directions."

"You're not coming into the Control Central?"

"Later. I have to see about Ellert."

Bell nodded and disappeared. Marcel Rous had his hands full meanwhile, collecting his men and assigning them to new quarters.

Rhodan left the cargo loading holds where the transmitters were installed and made his way to the ship's clinic. Marshal Freyt had been back in Terrania for some time now where he would have made all the

preparations. It was going to be a surprise for Ellert.

Ellert...?

Rhodan sensed a warmth of affection. After all, he had found his old friend after he had virtually died 70 years ago. He had actually survived the whole time although it was in another place, in another dimension of time and in another body.

The lift brought him to the deck he wanted and he quickly located the clinic, where he paused a moment before entering, still trying to get used to the idea that Ernst Ellert had come back to himself. True, he had lost his faculty of being able to project his mind at will into the future but maybe that was just as well. Just the thought of time travel was confusing, blurring the mind with complexities that one couldn't cope with. While Rhodan still held his hand on the doorknob of the clinic entrance he asked himself what might happen if he could see into the future? Wouldn't the knowledge of future events rob him of his power to cope with the present?

When he entered he looked into the faces of Haggard and Jamison. Behind them was Manoli, who was leaning over Ellert's outstretched form.

"Didn't you two go back with Freyt?" he asked wonderingly—and then a hot wave of fright gripped him. "Doc, what's wrong? I mean... Ellert?"

Manoli straightened up. "Everything's alright, sir. He's resting. And that includes his mind. His body is showing signs of making rapid strides toward recovery. We believe that within a few weeks he'll really have it made."

Rhodan was deeply relieved. He hardly heard the explanations from Haggard and Jamison in which they assured him they had only remained behind with the intention of helping Manoli. He walked over to the bed and looked down at Ellert. The face that had formerly been so pale and deathly in its appearance was now alive. Beneath the skin was the life pulse of blood. The eyelids fluttered and then Ellert was suddenly looking at him. It was a strange sensation to see this body in a living state again after it had been 'dead' for so many decades.

"Ernst Ellert... how do you feel?"

The mouth moved but his words could hardly be understood. "It's great to have mind and body united again," was what Rhodan could just barely make out. Then, somewhat more coherently, Ellert continued: "So many people would like to be somebody else but they don't have any idea how stupid they are. One can only be truly at peace in his own body. Can you understand that, Perry?"

"Yes, I follow you," replied Rhodan, placing a hand on Ellert's forehead. "Now you will be able to be Ernst Ellert again."

Ellert smiled weakly. "I'll be happy with even one arm."

Rhodan glanced at the doctors around him and then he also smiled. "You will soon have two arms again, Ernst. Professor Haggard has been doing a lot of thinking and when we found out what wonderful faculties you would be bringing back with you from your wanderings in Eternity we came up with an idea. Actually we can thank Onot for it. Is it too much of a strain on you if I talk?"

"No, just keep on going."

"It became difficult for you to influence Onot because of his resistance. You lost a lot of energy and became weak—almost dangerously so. So you're not only going to have yourself a new arm, at the same time you're going to get a hypno-technical type of weapon. It's an improvement we've made over the old hypnotic raygun. With your new arm you'll be able to bring people under your control with purely technological means. Of course we've already been able to do that but the effect of the control ceases when the hypnobeamer is shut off. It will work differently in your case. While you are beaming your opponent you'll be able to take over his paralysed intellect without any personal effort. There'll be no one who'll be able to resist such a takeover."

Ellert smiled faintly. "I guess you've thought of everything. And—will I also be able to work and eat with the new arm...?"

"It will be like a regular arm. On the inside it is made of semi-fibrous plastic containing semi-biotic nerve fibres and elastoplasma muscles and tendons. Outwardly it has living culture tissue produced with the help of your own genetic code. No one will be able to see that it's any different from your left arm. Its secret is hidden on the inside."

Manoli intervened. "He must rest, sir. It's too much of a strain on him."

But Ellert didn't agree. "No strain, Manoli. On the contrary! You ought to know that good news or good fortune is never hard to take. In the course of my wanderings I've visited many planets and seen many types of intelligences. I've lived with them and come to know them but I've never found a race like humans. It would have been a shame that time 70 years ago if they had succeeded in destroying themselves. I am fortunate to be able to be a human being once more."

Rhodan nodded to him. "Even good fortune can wear you down, friend. So now I'm going to give you the first order you've ever received from me as Administrator of the Solar Empire. Don't speak another word and I want you to go to sleep. No back-talk! Back on Earth we'll have plenty of time for chitchat. Get well, Ellert, because the future of that humanity you're talking about is going to need you—all fresh and ready for action. I trust you understand that, don't you...?"

Ellert nodded feebly. "Yes, I understand. But one day maybe... I'm going to visit an old friend. Onot. Just now I wouldn't want to be in his skin—in the full sense of the word! But he'll get through it all. They'll end up by setting him free."

Rhodan nodded to him once more and then the four men left the clinic.

Out in the corridor, Haggard raised a question: "About the Druufs—will they know who built the base on Hades? Do you think they'll connect it with us?"

"We've wiped out all traces, at least any that could lead to us. No, I don't think we'll run into trouble on that account. They also have enemies in their own universe, you know. Why shouldn't some of them have found a foothold inside that double-sun system?"

"What do you think will happen to this Onot entity?" Jamison wanted to know.

"Ellert took away the incriminating portions of his memory," Rhodan explained. "Before the court he will claim that he is not a traitor. The lie detectors will prove that he is speaking the truth. They'll have to let him go."

"And then what about..." He was interrupted as Pucky materialized before them in the passageway.

"You keep talking and talking and in two minutes we'll be going into the first transition," he said. He adjusted the belt of his special uniform which had been custom-tailored for his small stature. "How about retreating into a cabin?"

"Mine is right here," interjected Manoli and he opened the door. "If you please..."

Once they were seated, his interrupted question came back to him. "What about that translight space drive of the Druufs? Ellert didn't mention it."

"I almost forgot!" Pucky blurted out. He slipped off the couch in order to rummage through his pockets. In the last one, fortunately, he found what he was looking for. He handed the crumpled foil to Rhodan. "I took that from Onot. Those are the plans for the super spacedrive."

Rhodan took the foil and unfolded it. Naturally he couldn't understand any of the details but he saw by the rough sketches that the data had to do with a stellar spacedrive such as the Druufs were using. "Thanks, little one," he said, "You have just handed over Ellert's greatest gift to us. An even trade, I suppose, since he's gotten his life back in exchange."

"Plus a hypno-shocker as a bonus," promised Haggard.

Perry Rhodan still held Onot's priceless notes in his hand as the first pulling pains of the transition began. He realized that what was on that piece of foil would make all such pains of transition superfluous. In the future the race of humans would be able to hurtle through the star seas with their eyes open, at a thousand times—yes, even a million times—faster than light. No more would they be blind as they took such giant strides through the void.

The far light of galactic suns would beckon them and guide them on their way as did the old lighthouse beacons for the ships of Earthly seas.

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ERNST ELLERT RETURNS!

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And a sample happening:

"Careful, my friend," said Dr. Lewellyn. "What frightens you and your people so much about the desert? Do you fear the terrible storms or do you believe that demons and evil gods live there?"

The bird-creature nodded. "The wasteland is evil embodied, Doctor. Many Greens have disappeared there or they have returned insane. Strange things happen that are uncanny to us."

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