

SIGMUND IN SPACE

by Barry N. Malzberg

Freud walks the anterior corridors of the *Whipperly VI*, meditating on the situation. The captain is a manic-depressive. The navigator has a severe oedipal block, which is gradually destroying him; he is unable to attain orgasm, even though the mechanicals are skilled and devoted. The hydroponics expert, a grim woman in her nineties, is manifesting advanced symptoms of dementia praecox, and at least half the crew, by all standards of early-twentieth-century Vienna (which must of necessity be his touchstone), is neurotic to the point of dysfunction: depressive reactions, conversion hysteria, bizarre sexual urges, and the like. Clearly, the administrators must have been desperate to place him on this vessel. Freud hardly knows where to begin. What can he do? What psychotherapeutic techniques (which by definition require patience) can possibly prevail in this emergency? If Freud were not so wondrously confident of his abilities, so protectively despairing, he would be most undone.

The rhythm of his pacing increases. Freud risks greedy little glances at the huge screens, glinting around him, looking at the disorder of a constellation, a smudge of stars. Here in the late twenty-fifth century space exploration is not routine; the *Whipperly VI* is on a dangerous mission to the hitherto-unprobed Vegans. The view of the universe from a distance of so many light-years from Vienna is astonishing. Freud would not have dreamed that such things were possible. Furthermore, he would not have dreamed that as technology advanced, the common neuroses would prevail. Of course, that was foolish. The pain, the schism, the older ironies would prevail.

Freud shrugs. He reaches inside his vest pocket for a cigar and match, lights the cigar with a flourish, watches smoke whisk into the ventilators as he turns in the corridor and then returns to the small cubicle that the administrators have given him as office space. The desk is littered with papers, the wall with diplomas. Freud feels right at home, within their limits the administrators have done everything possible to grant him credibility and a sense of domain. If he is unable to cope he knows they will only blame him more. *Well*, he thinks, *well*, *what they decide will be done. I will be shrunken again and replaced in the dream cube. It will be many centuries before I receive another assignment. But then again I will have no knowledge, and therefore my entrapment will be in their estimation, not mine. The last time I had an assignment was in the early twenty-second century: the madman on Venus who thought he was a vine and threatened to cut off the dome respirators. I didn't handle that too well and got derricked for centuries. But*

here I am again and none the worse for it. Their sanctions exclude me.

This thought impels him toward his next act, which is to use the communicator on his desk to contact the captain and summon him to his office. Of all the technological wonders of this time, the communicator is a simple instrument, reminiscent of the telephone of his era. Freud wonders idly whether they have given him this to make him feel at home or whether the twenty-fifth is simply a century less sophisticated than the slick and dangerous twenty-second, which he remembers so vividly. He also thinks, while waiting for the captain, of his old rivals Adler and Jung.

Doubtless that miserable pair have already been summoned and failed on this case. There is grim satisfaction in knowing this. But he would have hoped to have been reconstructed more often. Two jobs in the twenty-first, three in the twenty-second before that disaster on Venus, and now this. Not good. Not good at all.

Well, there is nothing to be done about that. Here he is, and here the responsibility for the mission reposes. The captain enters his cabin, a slender, ashen-faced man, dressed in fatigues but wearing a full dress cap. His aspect is impatient but restrained. Like all on board, he has been given the strictest orders to comply with Freud's procedures. The administrators cannot control the fate of the mission, but they can abort it, tearing the ship apart at the touch of a light-year-distant incendiary beam. The captain knows this. He sits across from Freud, his hands on his knees, and while staring at him earnestly, his eyes slowly ignite under Freud's gaze. "We're going to take over those Vegans," he says, unprompted. "You know that, of course."

"Of course." Freud says sympathetically.

"They're a green humanoid race, primitive but with the potential for technological advance. They're hostile and barbaric. We're going to wipe them out while we still have time. I have plans," the captain says shakily. "I have enormous plans." ' "

"Of course you do," Freud says. He puffs on the cigar with what he hopes resembles a gesture of serenity. "Why do you feel you must destroy the Vegans?"

"Because otherwise in a generation they'll have spaceships and atomic devices and will destroy *us*," the captain says. "Don't worry, I'm completely in control. I'm a highly trained man."

Freud has read the capsule reports prepared by the administrators. Of course there are no Vegans at all; there are three silicon-based planets circling an arid star. In five centuries of space probes, life has never been found on these planets. "I know you're trained," Freud says. "Still, I have a question, if I might ask it."

"Please ask it," the captain says hoarsely. "I am prepared to deal with any questions."

"That's an important quality, to be sure. Now, what if it happened to be," Freud says gently, "that there are *no* Vegans?"

"There *are* Vegans. Several hundred million of them. I'm going to wipe them out."

"Yes, yes, but what if there aren't? Just to speculate--"

"You're just like the rest of them," the captain says, his face mottling. "You damned toy, you *reconstruct*. You're just like the rest. Don't humor me. I'm going to save the universe. Now I have to get back to my bridge. I must prepare for the deadly cancer-causing Vegan probes, which could encircle us at any moment."

"How long have you felt this way?" Freud essays mildly as the captain stalks out. Freud sighs and stubs his cigar on the desk and then stares at his diploma for a while. Then he summons the navigator.

The navigator shows considerably less effect than the captain but, after some gentle probing, discloses that his mother is aboard the ship stowed away in one of the ventilators and whispering thoughts to him of the most disgusting nature. He has always hated and feared his mother, and that is why he enlisted in the service. But she will not leave him alone—he was a fool to think that he could escape. Freud dismisses him and turns to the hydroponics engineer, who tells him bitterly that he, too, is already affected virally with an insidious disease, which the captain has been seeding into the units. Machine or otherwise. Freud is as doomed as the rest, but at least he can try to keep up his strength. She offers him some celery. After she leaves, he gnaws it meditatively and talks to some selected members of the crew. They believe the officers to be quite mad; in self-defense they have turned to bestial practices. Here at last Freud finds some professional respect—they are impressed that the administrators would send another famous psychoanalyst as reconstruct to superintend their voyage. They hope that he does better than Adler and Jung, who worked together and succeeded only in boring them with lectures in the assembly hall on mass consciousness until the

administrators, displeased, dwindled them and said they would send a true practitioner, a medical doctor, in their place.

Freud sends the crew on their way and lights another cigar. The symptoms evinced are extraordinary, yet there is enough consistency in the syndrome for him to infer that the administrators have lied to him: *Everyone* on this ship has gone mad, and this is probably a consequence of the mission itself. Long probes their stress, isolation, boredom, and propinquity-must tend to break down the crews. The administrators have called for him not because of special circumstances but because of *ordinary* circumstances. What they want him to do is to patch over matters in order that the mission may conclude. There has been much difficulty and expense; it would be wasteful and cruel to abort the mission so close to its end.

Freud stands, neatens his desk marginally, and returns to the corridor and his pacing. The welter of constellation now stuns and discommodates. Freud adjusts the angle of the windows so that he can evade them. Space for an early-twentieth-century Viennese, is overwhelming; it must have less of an effect upon the custodians of the twenty-fifth, but several months in this environment would undo anyone, he thinks. The administrators have obviously tried to routinize the missions just as with the reconstructions they have routinized a qualified immortality. But in neither case has it really worked. *Three centuries in a cube*, thinks bitterly. *Three centuries*. They should have allowed his corpse to commingle with the earth undisturbed; they should have left him with the less noted of his time; they should have spared him this difficult and humiliating afterlife. What they need aboard the *Whipperly VI* is not a doctor but a priest. Freud can offer them no solutions; he can, at best, take them further into their unspeaking, resistant hearts, at the core of which outrage has been transformed into insanity. It is not the Vegan cancer probes that the captain fears; it is himself. If he were to be shown that, he would die.

This line of thinking, however, gives Freud an idea. He returns once more to his cubicle and uses the communicator to summon all officers and crew to an emergency meeting in the lounge in ten minutes. Then he uses the special device he has been shown and speaks to the administrators. "I want to tell you," he says, "that your twenty-fifth century is finished. Your deep-space probes are finished, and your Vegan mission is done."

"Why is that?" one administrator says flatly. "Aren't you being a little florid?"

"I am telling you the truth."

“Why is that the truth? On what basis are you saying this outrageous thing?”

“Because you have pushed limits, you have isolated circumstances, you have misunderstood the human spirit itself, you have lied your way through the circumference of the planet, but you cannot do it among the stars.” Freud says, and so on and so forth and on and on. He permits himself a raving monologue of two minutes in which he accuses the administrators of all the technological barbarities he can call to mind and then says that he has found a one-time, stopgap solution to the problem that can never be used again but that he will invoke for the sake of all those on board who cannot discern their right hand from their left and also much cattle.

“What is that?” the same administrator says weakly. “We have no cattle on board. I don’t understand. Explain yourself before you’re dwindled on the spot.”

“You won’t dwindle me,” Freud says. “You don’t dare do it; I’m your last hope. If you shut me down, you know the mission is finished, and you can’t deal with that. So you’re going to let me go ahead. And afterwards I don’t care what you do. You are monstrous yet unconvinced of your monstrosity. That is the centrality of your evil.” It is a good statement, a clean, high ventilation. Feeling as triumphant as the captain preparing his crew for dangerous probes, Freud shuts down the communicator, leaves his cubicle, and descends to the brightly, decorated lounge, where forty members of the *Whipperly VI* crew sit uneasily staring at him, waiting for him to speak. Freud stands on the Plexiglas stage, swaying unevenly in the wafting, odorous breezes of the ventilators.

“All of you should know who I am. I am Sigmund Freud, a famous Viennese medical doctor and student of the human mind who has been reconstructed to help you with your difficulties on this Vegan probe. I have come to give you the solution to your problems.”

They stare at him. The hydroponics engineer puts down her gun, folds her hands in her lap, and looks at him luminously. The captain giggles, then subsides. “Ah, then.” Freud says, “you must repel the Vegans. Caution will not do it. Circumspection will not do it. Only your own courage and integrity will accomplish this.”

Chairs shift. The captain applauds fervently. “Understand me,” Freud says, nodding at him, “the administrators have lied to you. They have always lied to you. Spaceflight is not the routine transference of human cargo. Space itself is not

the ocean, and a star probe is not a nineteenth-century battleship. Vega is not the Azores! Conditions are new and terrible. Monsters lurk through the curtains of space. Everything is changed.”

“Yes,” the captain says gratefully, “everything is changed. I tried to tell them-”

“It’s too late to tell them,” Freud says sharply. “You must act. You will land on Vega and advance upon the Vegans’ cities and kill every single one of them. Until then you will remain quiet and you will plan. I will see each of you individually to tell you what role you will play in the conquest. For the moment, thank you and bless you all.”

He bows. The applause begins. It swerves toward him in thick, deepening waves. Freud is humbled. Tears come. It has not been this way for a long time, since the Academy as a matter of fact, and then there were the jeers and abuse of some rivalrous colleagues. He basks in the applause. Even a reconstruct can be permitted vanity. Finally, he bows and stumbles from the stage, then moves up the ramp into the darkened corridors above.

Pacing, he adjusts the viewscreens so that he can stare again at the dark constellations-which he no longer fears. Freud thinks that in this maddened circumstance, almost six full centuries from Vienna, he has found some qualified answer to his problems. It is possible to say that his final moments are happy or at least as happy as a scientist of the mind may make them. But they come, as do the emotions of all the others, to a startling termination.

The mission is aborted.

Not by the administrators. For Freud, these men of steel and power now have only the greatest respect.

But by the Vegan space probes, which do not bring cancer (the captain, like many insane, was intellectually damaged), but the fire.