

JANJA WASN'T THE STRANGEST PIECE OF CARGO HE'D CARRIED, BUT SHE WAS THE MOST VALUABLE. Captain Jonuta of the spaceship Coronet stood In the hatchway yelling at his crewman. "It wasn't enough that you fried the male with her, you had to shove her in here with the others. You're lucky they haven't torn her apart, you underbrained sisterslicer. Look other! She's... white!" The chagrined crewman moved forward, toward the small, pale girl He reached out for her-and she pounced. In an Instant her fingers closed around his throat. This Is no scared little prey Jonuta realized. She actually means to kill him. He matched her speed and pried her loose from the limp crewman, bending her arm back and nearly breaking it. He held her In a grip of iron, debating his next move. "If I release you," he said, "what will you do?" "Whatever i can," Janja said. SPACEWAYS #1 OF ALIEN BONDAGE #2 CORUNDUM'S WOMAN #3 ESCAPE FROM MACHO #4 SATANA ENSLAVED #5 MASTER OF MISFIT #6 PURRFECT PLUNDER BERKLEY BOOKS, NEW YORK The poem Scarlet Hills copyright (c) 1982 by Ann Morris; used by permission of the author SPACEWAYS #1 OF ALIEN BONDAGE Copyright (c) 1982 by John Cleve Cover illustration copyright (c) 1982 by PBJ Books, Inc. formerly PEI Books, Inc. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form by an electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording means or otherwise without prior written permission of the publisher Published simultaneously in the United States and Canada by PBJ Books, Inc. formerly PEI Books, inc. Distributed by Berkley Publishing Corporation, 200 Madison Avenue, New York, New York S0016. Printed in the United States of America. ISBN: 0-425-06061-6 First printing May 1982. Second printing September 1982. The name "BERKLEY" and the stylized "B" with design are trademarks . belonging to Berkley Publishing Corporation. A: All planets are not shown. B: Map is not to scale, because of the vast distances between stars. SCARLET HILLS Alas, fair ones, my time has come. I must depart your lovely home- Seek the bounds of this galaxy To find what lies beyond. (chorus) Scarlet hills and amber skies, Gentlebeings with loving eyes; All these I leave to search for a dream That will cure the wand'rer in me. You say it must be glamorous For those who travel out through space. You know not the dark, endless night Nor the solitude we face. (reprise chorus) I know not of my journey's end Nor the time nor toll it will have me spend. But I must see what I've never seen And know what I've never known. Scarlet hills and amber skies, Gentlebeings with loving eyes; All these I leave to search for a dream That will cure the wand'rer in me. -Ann Morris Let us each forsake every other kind of knowledge and seek one thing only . . . to learn and discern between good and evil. Plato, The Republic Somewhere on the Spaceways Captain Jonuta of spaceship Coronet stood at the con, nodding over computer display and scanner readouts. Good, good. The planet that Coronet orbited was on the Protected list. Its inhabitants did not even have iron, much less technology, and non-tech planets were to be left alone. So they were Protected. Except that there wasn't a sign of a law enforcement craft within a million kilometers. Jonuta smiled. Good, good. He was no friend of policers. They didn't like his business and they didn't like his shrewdness and they didn't like him. They did want very much to meet him, but not to discuss his caution or his shrewdness, and not just for a nice visit. If ever he slipped and was caught by any policers anywhere in the worlds-teeming galaxy, he would be in for a long, long visit. If he survived. Captain Jonuta's business was people. Humans, mostly. He sold many, though he bought few. They were available for the taking on non-tech planets, provided one was cautious, and careful. Jonuta was called many things by many people. At least one of those nicknames he had earned: Captain Cautious. He was a thick, tallish man of about 180 centimeters, called sems. His build was powerful and he exercised on shipboard, twice daily. His black eyes were ambushed beneath thick, straight eyebrows at the base of a lofty forehead. (It was growing loftier, as wavy black hair crept back from it.) His nose was broad of nostril and thin at the bridge, and his mouth was full and bow-shaped. He had big harry hands and

excellent legs within grass-green tights of equhyde-which meant simply a simulated leather hardly distinguishable from the real thing. The fabric even breathed. His long-tailed coat 10 with its double row of buttons was scarlet. Those sixteen buttons (of brass, and purely ornamental) were its only adornment, and they were enough. They flashed like purest brass. From his very broad cordovan belt (equhyde) hung a pistol called a stopper. From the end of the holster swung two strips of rawhide-imitating equhyde, because Jonuta understood and enjoyed romantic attire. The big buckle was a fancy coat of arms, though Jonuta did not know of whom or what or from where. The tall black boots were ever-shine equhyde too, or Jonuta could not have borne them. Captain Jonuta of Coronet was no fool. He knew he looked striking and formidable. He looked like a pirate of another era. He was not; he did not attack other spacecraft in quest of booty. Jonuta was a slaver. Now, in Coronet's con-cabin, he spoke into the little grille set just at head level: his, when he stood. It connected him with Coronet's in-gravity spaceboat. "There are two humans or humanoids down there. Pheromonal readings are a bit confused, but they are definitely of different sexes-mostly, at least. You are ready?" "Ready and standing by, Captain." "Boat away." Thump and hiss, and the boat was away. It swooped downward, slicing through this uncivilized planet's ridiculous cloud layer. It made the waiting bulk of Coronet quite invisible. Jonuta did not sit back to wait. He fed two little pieces of information to SIPACUM-ship's computer -and peeled gunbelt and coat. It was nicely lined and under it he wore a sweat-absorbing short-sleeved, collarless shirt of Panishi cotton. While the boat carried his two procurement agents down to the planetary surface, Jonuta calmly began exercising. One: Barbarism God saw that the light was good. God separated the light from the darkness, calling the light Day and the darkness Night. Genesis, 1:4,5 1 It resembled a single white, drooping feather trailing a thousand cloud-white pieces of fringe. It was not; it was a large bird, and it paused on a leper-bark branch to coo its quivering cry into the rain forest. An answering ululation came from the mass of trees and foliage. Only the golden-chested bird could distinguish the call from one of its own sex. It did. It seemed to slide off the branch and swung delightedly in with a flapping of wraithy wings to pick up speed. The fringebird swept in among thickly clustered trees with leaves of chartreuse and turquoise, puce and yellow. Dangling nonchalantly by his three-fingered tail, a vaguely anthropomorphous swinger watched the passage, in beauty, of the fringebird. Then he twisted his yellow-furred head to chuckle at the other swinger, a couple of branches below. Nestled among extravagant scarlet blossoms nearly as big as she was, she simpered and twisted. She bent to show him the heart shape of her vulva. It was a brilliant white badge amid bright yellow fur. The swinger ceased chuckling. He raised the ridges above his eyes and grunted. Then he swung swiftly down to the female. A few trees away, an orange-maned feline lay. Its four-inch claws were retracted and its fangs showed only because it snored. It lay snoozing noisily beside its mate of the moment. It too was weary after the violence of then lovemaking. There would be more. At the edge of the rain forest a heavy-laden phrillia bush bowed. It snapped aside, losing one enormous blue blossom that would have shamed a giant orchid. A pearly gray antelope sprang from the bush to bound in ten-foot leaps across the veldt. Its bluish tail was 13 high; beneath it showed a patch of scarlet. Just behind her, curveting amid the thick blades of the grass, followed a slightly larger member of the species. It was superbly antlered. The two animals fled across the savannah in a series of slow-motion bounces-until the female spotted the two-legs. She veered sharply. So did her pursuing swain, as though attached to her by some invisible pheromonal thread. Both were lost from sight in the flicker of a coquettish eyelash. Afar, thunder rumbled. The only clouds in evidence were big, straggly puffs of white afloat on a sky almost coppery. One of the humans laughed. She did not even glance toward the sound of thunder. "The fringebird . . . the swingers . . . the leapfoots! We are all alike today," she said. Her eyes were pale and gray and her mouth was smiling in delight with the animals,

with herself, with the early summer. Almost spring had been skipped over, this year. The Rites must have been potent indeed! Praise the Tribe-mother and her Mother, the sun! The young man pretended to sulk. Perhaps it was not all pretense, at that. "Fringebird and leapfoot and sillyswingers do not have to go and confer with mother and Tribemother," he complained. He was a magnificent young Apollo, almost heavily muscled and almost unclothed in a very short tunic that bared one side of his chest and that arm. His long hair was a pale yellow against his faint tan. Their planet's sun was not all that bright, and too there was the shimmery cloud layer. Else they'd have been more richly pigmented. A heavy atmosphere with a unique permanent inversion almost at the tropospheric level served to trap warmth and water vapor. It enabled-or forced-them to live in a tropical climate without fear of sunburn, without racial traits to turn sun and release heat. Their genetic heredity instead equipped them to cope with high and constant humidity, and with Aglaya's strong gravitational tug. Short, 14 both of them. Hardly sylphlike. Calf muscles like fists under the skin. Thighs visibly hard under taut skin, with overdeveloped muscle down the front; the pusher-lifter worked hard, on Aglaya. "Formalities, Tarkij," she said. Formal names were seldom used and certainly not between these two: his was Tarkjadar'rahj. She fell back happily, almost chuckling as tall grass enveloped her. Its yellow-green was decorated with little blue shade-flowers like dropped sapphires. "Just formalities," she went on, "no more. You know my mother is delighted with you-and father too. You are the second best mate-son available." He jerked up onto his knees. Light olive, his short tunic fell in ruffled furls on his thighs. Like rocks, those thighs. "Second best! Second best, Janja!" She laughed. With her eyebrows arched in a pretense of cool lack of concern, she tossed her head. The brief pale cap of her hair did not fly. The maidens of their people trimmed their tresses, as the men did not. It was blond as his, her hair; pale as the clouds that drifted overhead like wind-puffed fleece. Clouds and hair were as if faintly gilded here and there-gilded by the soft lips of Sunmother and Her loving spouse. A huge phrillium was caught in the smooth short thatch of Janjaheriohir's hair. Tarkij had plucked it from among many, only a few moments ago. It covered half her head on that side. "Welll . . ." she said, teasing without showing it, "there's Pansij. . ." Tarkij fell to one elbow beside her. He bent over her with strong teeth poised in imitation of feral menace. "Pansij! Huh! He will be fat and jiggly and almost hairless within eight hardrains. Probably seven. Pansij! Hmm . . . I think . . . I think I shall bite this off." Tarkij had no fangs to bare; his canines were barely developed, the same as hers. His threat was to the mounds of her tunic-covered breasts, firm in their muscular youth. That was of short duration, on Aglaya. Heavy gravity soon dragged them 15 down. In natural consequence, long slopes were considered beauty. There was little premium on firmness on Aglaya-except in the legs, where it was necessary. Janja wriggled as if fearful, deliberately making her bilobed bosom quiver beneath her loose tunic of turtle white. She chuckled low hi her throat. Then she closed her eyes while he bent to kiss one nipple. It was only just discernible through the fabric. He nuzzled. His hands moved onto her. Her body's instant response was unconcealable, but she masked the response of her mind. She wriggled, rolled away. She pounced to her feet: a woman-girl girl-woman whose firm musculature barely showed along her 156-centimeter shortness. She was a gentle buff color all over from the warmth of Aglaya's Sunmother. Sunmother hid Her face but was generous with Her heat, and some ultraviolet bled through Aglaya's strange sky to touch the skins of Her people and h'ghtly toast their pinkness. (For two woman-cycles of the year, She sent them less heat and the rain fell both harder and colder. Sunmother, the Tribemother said, was occupied with Her loving mate and could not be bothered with mortals. That was as it should be, they all agreed, for even a god must have love.) Now Her daughter Janja had pounced to her feet and was gazing down at Tarkij. Those pearly eyes could be soft and liquid as the brook that giggled in shade through the forest. They could also be as cold as the droplets that hung from

broad leaves after a downpour. Tarkij knew about the coldness that could harden her eyes, but she had not shown it to him since her body had responded to the call of the nearer moon- the male, at this time of year-and began to follow its rhythmic pattern. Not since Tarkij had changed her, that day in the dark coolth of the forest, from youth to woman. All infants were circumcised on Aglaya. And there were no frigid women among their people. Gazing down at him now, aroused, she remembered that time in the forest. She had enjoyed it. And 16 they had promised, as they were Promised. She was a woman of Aglaya and that had been the time of the mooncall, and Janja was worthy of Aglaya. That afternoon in the forest she had clung to him with all the strength she possessed-which was not inconsiderable. Pain was swiftly forgotten as they loved beneath the trees. Everything of their environment was forgotten, everything but themselves. There was no frigidity among their people, and Janja was worthy of Aglaya. It was golden; it was rain-clear sky, it was white and sunshiny and all the things she thought beautiful. She heard herself cry out and only by hearing knew that she had. Then his eyes had bulged and he was groaning, quaking, and she smiled in delight and in pride. She had become older at that moment. She lay asmile with maternal delight while he shuddered and groaned and weakened, as males must. But she had not thought of him as only a male. She had held him to her then as she might have held a son. Tenderly, solicitously she held him. They lay long in the grass, smiling and sighing. Arms and legs were twined anar-throuslly like weary serpents. They had trailed back home. Now and again they stopped to kiss. The constant looks they exchanged were bright with joy and love. Bypassing her parents, they went to the Tribemother. She pretended horror at their news, for that was her duty. (Although she had received many such visits and admissions in the past. Who could resist the call of the moons?) Yes, Aglii would be disappointed. So would the mother of Pan-kirasij, who had arranged with Janjaheriohir's mother for then- lifemating. (The Tribemother always used all formal names.) But yes, certainly now Janja was Tarkij's and Tarkij was Janja's. They were one. The parents must be told. Eventually Aglii would be as pleased with them as with any couple who loved in Her name on Her world and brought forth children to cavort on Her bosom beneath Sunmother's smiling face, continuing the ancient cycle. The call of the moons took precedence over agree- 17 ments made between mothers. Did not the moons serve the Sunmother, and light the time of Her rest? After that they had met, all of them. The Tribe-mother whose name was unspoken: she was the Tribe-mother; and both of Pansij's parents, who were on the cusp; and the mothers of Janja and of Tarkij. All had pretended shock and some horror-while Janja knew that her parents had behaved identically, some years ago, her mother aggressing. All agreed that they were one. The call of the moons took precedence. Janja and Tarkij were Promised, and then Dedicated. Yet they were punished as well. They must wait until after the next period of hardrain. (They groaned, for that time had so recently ended and was so far away, especially for yearning lovers.) And they must promise to sacrifice their pleasure to Aglii, to dedicate to lonely Her their coupling, until the final ceremonies. They had no choice. They had agreed. And so this day, out on the savannah, Janja sprang up from Tarkij. Already he was breathing more heavily. A strange male, Tarkjadar'rahj. He would be worthy of Aglaya. Janja was sure he was worthy of her! He gazed at her, smiling. His eyes openly admired the tender curves of her just-ripeness, the liquid ripple of smooth muscle beneath taut skin. Her legs were the lithely hard, strong limbs of a god-dancer-or an orange-maned nightprowler. She was young, and aglow with laughing vitality and feminine allure. All over sunlight and gold laid in a thin patina over pink. But there was about her too an aura of strength, firmness of more than body. And Tarkij knew about the aura of firmly curbed sensuality. It simmered beneath the taut surface of her, needing only the touch of flame to boil over. Now it was their own private, joyous war game, about the only conflict their people had to cope with. Tarkij sought to apply the spark while Janja kept her fires banked-until after the Visit, and the Announce- 18 ment, and the Dedication, and the mingling of their blood

in the eyes of the Sunmother and Her lifemate. "It is not easy for me, Tarkij," she said now. "Please -do not make it harder." His smile faded. "We promised together, Janja. I would have stopped. Were you to offer yourself naked, I would turn from you. We promised." She gazed at him a moment. Then she hurled herself forward. She crushed her body against his, molding the tunicked forms at chest and belly and pelvis and thigh. A rumble of thunder, closer, went unnoticed. Her arms were strong and firm about him; her hands were tight at the hard muscle of Ms back. "I love you Tarkij, love you!" "Oh, I love you, Janja." "I am yours Tarkij, yours, yours." Her voice was fierce. It emerged through clenched teeth that wanted to taste Mm, to consume Mm, to welcome him again in the union of their bodies. The words were of the rite they had not yet undergone, and so were his: "I will protect you always, from all things, and come to cusp with you, JanjaherioMr, and clear new fields for our planting, and seek meat in season." For they were planters, seldom hunters, and never warriors. For their Aglaya was a gentle world. "My blood is your blood!" "My blood is your blood." "My loins are yours. I bare fang and claw for you, Tarkjadar'rahj," she said, from the rite, and none knew how old the ritual words were. "I accept the fertile fields of your loins and vow claw and fang for your protection, Janja," he murmured into the pale hood of her hair. It was ritual, only ritual; what on Aglaya might he ever need to protect her from-or she him from? "We will bear each other many-Tarkij! Look!" It was gray and blue arid white-streaked, designed to be invisible against the sky of other worlds. It swept down and down, seemingly diving upon them for some 1.9 reason of its own. Janja thought of the clawbeak that swooped down on the fringebird and the diminutive longtails that inhabited the tall grass of the savannah. "Tarkij-what is it?" "I don't-Janja, run! It must be ... it must be the Sky-demons!" Her little cry became an un-pretty snarl. She was strange, Janja was, and her hand rose to the short flint knife she wore high on her left arm. Her eyes were suddenly feral, dangerous. Tarkij was shocked as he glimpsed in her something he had not known existed. Even then he was turning her. Pushing her. They ran, racing and leaping through the tall chartreuse grass as the leapfoots had run. On their backs a dark shadow grew. It flitted over the grass, pacing them. The tall spears of grass rustled and swished back into place behind them. It quivered as if in fear of the adumbral darkness that swept, rippling, over it. They reached the place where they had emerged from the rain forest. He pushed her so that she sprawled amid convolvulus underbrush and enormous blue orchids. Her own fell from her hair. Its young beauty was crushed forever beneath one flailing arm. There was good reason for the orchid's having been in her hair; there was no reason for its destruction. Yet there was reason for fear. They knew about the Sky-demons. Now and again they came down to pluck and carry away the blossoms-and there were other stories, ugly ones. Certainly the Sky-demons possessed the power of lightning without thunder. And obviously they were more powerful than Aglii-or She tolerated them, for some divine but undividable reason. As Janja fell noisily into the greenery, Tarkij snatched up his bow and quiver. He slung on the quiver and snapped the bowstring into place all in one much-practiced movement. Tarkij preferred hunting to planting and weeding and harvesting, which made him as strange among their people as Janja was, with her love of meat. His body was suddenly dark, all in bluish shadow. 20 The thing above, him was of smooth, full metal, painted to resemble sky, though not this one. There were markings on it: CORONET. The grass prostrated itself beneath its dark majesty, and the thing dropped down with the sound of rushing air. Its rounded carapace quivered and emitted a menacing noise. It rose. A helmeted head appeared. The helmet was transparent and Tarkij gasped. Neither he nor Janja had ever seen dark-skinned faces, or black hair and beards. Obviously this was a demon. Demons were hardly the same as people! His arrow sliced through the air where the strange face had been. The demon's head popped once more into view and a hand appeared. Something flashed in it: the metal Tarkij's people were learning to work from the Long-Daggers of the North. Tarkij's second arrow was nocked. He drew back the string to Ms nose even as

the man said something he did not understand. The demon yelled. The sound was very strange. At Tarkij's feet Janja watched with eyes flaring wide in awe and fear. Demons! In daylight! Come right down to- She heard a faint insect hum. There came a wavering in the air, like the occasional ray of sun that filtered down after a rain. A bright flash. And Tarkij, her TarMj, her intended lifemate Tarkij, became a bright flash in which molecules danced like motes in a sun-ray. And when she opened her dazzled eyes he was gone and there was a strange odor in the air, the pure air of Aglaya. Janja shrieked. She pounced to her feet-and then she behaved strangely for one of gentle Aglaya. She flung herself at the two dark demons that came boiling out of the thing she had no name for. It was a spaceboat, and one of the demons was enormous of eye, as orange of skin as the blossom of the sleet, and intensely dark red of hair. A demon! From its small mouth emerged a weird whistling warbling trilling. "Your damned translator's off again," the other one 21 snarled, the one with the dark skin and black hair on its face. "You idiot sisterslicer," the orange one yelled. "You had the setting on three! You fried him! Jonuta will have your ear!" Janja heard, but she did not understand the words. Nor did these demons understand the females of Aglaya. Just now not even Janja understood Janja. Her dagger had never been used as a weapon before, against a person. "Look out!" The first demon, the darker hair-faced one who had so easily and so swiftly slain the man who would have been Janja's forever, threw up Ms arm just in tune. That arm protected the demon from her dagger, somewhat. Sharpened flashing flint tore heavy fabroprene and scratched a thin red line in the flesh beneath. His other hand, the one holding the stopper that should have been set on shock but was not and had carbonized Tarkij, swung hard. It connected with the side of Janja's head. The sound of impact was ugly. She crumpled with no more than a moan. "Filthy pale-eyed barbarian stash! She tore a damned good suit and-blast her! She cut me!" He squinted upward at the sky before turning to his companion. He wore a mean look. His grin was sly and ugly. "He'll never know, Sweetface. He'll never know. Let's slice out this little barbarian's nest before we take her back. You know she's no virgin-look at the butsy slut! These savages slice their own sisters before they're old enough to bleed." The orange head shook. "Get her in the boat, Srih. You are thinking with your crotch. Bad enough you fried her boyfriend-the captain knows there were two of them." That demon also squinted at the sky, but the spaceship was not visible beyond that unique cloud cover. Grumbling, Srih glanced into the rain forest. An animal made a giggly sound. "Right. Let's get off this 22 stinken planet. Lookat all those phrillias-all that beauty wasted on this barbarian cess-ball!" The orange humanoid helped the dark human load the unconscious woman into the spaceboat. Srih managed to grab a pinch of breast. Hard as a rock. Even in this dam' weight-a-man-down gravity! "Buggerslicing barbarians!" he muttered. 2 The cautious seldom err. Confucius To err is human; to compute divine. Trust your computer-~but not its programmer. Moris Keniston "Captain, that ship matches everything computer has on Jonuta's Coronet." Captain Vratsa looked rather sharply at his aide. He regarded the scanner reports; the other ship was at eight thousand kilometers. It was moving at an easy cruising velocity. Vratsa looked again at Lieutenant Masrur. "Get me a condensed M.O. history on him, Sirah. Display: personal facts and habits of the very wily Captain Jonuta of Qalara." He saw Sirah Masrur swallow, then move to obey. Vratsa swallowed, too. Outwitting Jonuta and bringing him to justice--or just blowing him away, Vratsa thought-had long proven impossible. Too long. Jonuta was known more for caution than ruthlessness, but Vratsa knew a feeling of fear at tangling with him. The damned slaver was practically a legend. He and that pirate rival of his, Captain Corundum. If this was 23 Jonuta, approaching Coronet could be about as safe as playing tag around a Black Hole. Still, here they were and there was that ship, and Vratsa had the duty. Maybe it wasn't Jonuta. He keyed in the other ship's coordinates and velocity, waited a few seconds while Masrur completed making the request of SIPACUM. Then Vratsa updated the coordinates. The two sets of figures would be enough for SIPACUM to read the

ship's direction. Vratsa set up for track-and-intercept. He turned to Masrur, who sat regarding him. The lieutenant looked as nervous as Vratsa felt and hoped he did not look. "Suppose you try calling up what you know about the infamous Jonuta, Lieutenant." "Well." Masrur's eyes took on a recollective expression. "He's called 'Captain Cautious' for good reason. We know he calls his SIPACUM 'Mate' and frequently trades them in, on this world and that. Some of his trade-ins have been found to be better than the equipment on policers in that area. Obviously he keeps up with every new development and pounces on any he sees as improvement or potential, uh, safety enhancement. That way his Coronet's whole inboard systemry is taken over and directed by new computry with a frequency that borders on the ludicrous." "And so he's also called 'Cap'n Chicken,'" Vratsa said, nodding. "Semantics don't matter. He has no need of saying that he has the best First Mate in space. The fact is self-evident! Jonuta doesn't just survive, he flourishes. He has for a long time." "I've ... thought before that we who seek Mm could, ah-learn plenty from Captain Cautious," Masrur said. That was dangerous ground, but her captain had, after all, just said that Jonuta's computer alone was better than Vratsa's computer and Surah Masrur. Vratsa sighed. "Some have learned that by demonstration-always at a distance. His overhead is higher than a lot of others' in his slimy business. On the other hand, he pays a lot less in bribes." Neither of them would go quite so far as to mention it: personnel on government payrolls were seldom capable of admitting they could learn from a private entrepreneur-particularly when he was an outlaw wanted absolutely everywhere. And known to be a flamboyant bastard up to here with pride. Next would have to come the admission that Jonuta's pride was merited. Masrur looked at the screen. Blip. "If that really is Jonuta-" "If that's really Jonuta, Lieutenant Masrur, I hope we're smart enough to outthink him." And if we're not, I hope we live to file our embarrassing report! "Ah." They regarded the big crescent-shaped console; a myriad of bright multicolored buttons, toggles, mini-displays, readout panels, telltales, scan-winkers. Twin displays came alight in eye-eez turquoise. Computer was advising that Jonuta had been in business for at least seventeen years, which was a record among slavers. In seventeen years he had never sustained serious damage to ship, inboard personnel, or "cargo." Nor had he been caught, hurt (to all available knowledge), prosecuted, or even in serious trouble. All his attention to detail, his precautions, his trading in of computers-this he called "overhead" and the price of staying alive. He also called it his hobby. "Hobby," Masrur said thoughtfully. "That means he enjoys it." "Yes," Vratsa said, almost snarling. "He enjoys the game. He doubtless enjoys outwitting and eluding our kind of underpaid and underequipped little local police, Sirah." She looked grim. That was insulting to her blue TSP uniform and to her. She was a serious policer. "Do you think that's his ship, Captain?" Their TSP destrier had come about on a new course to intercept. At the end of a long wedge, their course would intersect that of Coronet. "We're certainly going to find out, Lieutenant. We have to. Let's start recording for headquarters while 25 we study the tricks Jonuta has used to escape others just like us." "Maybe it isn't Jonuta," Lieutenant Masrur said. Sitting at Coronet's con was dull and Kenowa loved it. She was delighted to do it for Jonuta and proud that he entrusted the duty to her. The dullness resulted from lack of necessity. The price of success and freedom from Authority and rivals, Jonuta of Qalara said, was eternal vigilance at the con, along with attention to every detail and some that did not exist. On spaceship Coronet, that meant watching Coronet run Coronet. Presently Coronet's double-P drive hastened it toward Resh in accord with a precomputed preplan that had been prechecked, recomputed, rechecked, and prerecorded. Not only coordinates but the entire course guidance plan was contained in the cassette that directed the computer as well as any person-and better. The computer directed ship functions. Officially it was Ship Inboard Processing and Computing (Modular): SIPACUM; Jonuta called it "Mate." His First Mate. Backup SIPACUM took up valuable space and stood ever ready, in the event of failure of the primary or any

component. There had never been a SIPACUM failure on Jon-uta's ship. "I've had nine First Mates," Captain Jonuta said. "None ever quit or died, and I never fired one. Not one ever back-talked me, either." Each old Mate was wiped before being traded in, on-planet. Each new Mate was fed stale old coordinates and instructed to program a new cassette. After that, both Mate and Jonuta compared that new cassette with the old. They always matched-unless Jonuta had added an update, always minor but based on new information or a new Jonutan thought. The new ones were numbered and slipped in to serve as Coronet's navigator and pilot-along with SIPACUM, automatic systemry, and cybernetics. Jonuta insisted on naming 26 the last two; they differed in that automatics were not capable of functional modification by reprogramming. The old cassettes were wiped. Jonuta saw to it that Kenowa recorded music on them. Jonuta left no loose ends that might aid others or incriminate him. He left not even potential loose ends. Kenowa was delighted to mind the con for Jonuta. Or to do anything else for Jonuta. He had saved her life, and more. He had saved her from her. Rerecord-ing music onto old cassettes for him was fine. She liked music. It was nice background. She could even do that while she sat in the large cabin at the sprawling bright con. With telltales and alarms throughout the ship-including the one at all times on Jonuta's person-as well as parallel/backup Mate and cassettes available for retrieval and recording, spaceship Coronet was perfectly capable of taking itself where its captain wanted it to go. It did. Since it was not afflicted with human pride, it also advised when it needed help. At some tune on every voyage-a time arrived at purely on a whim of Jonuta's-the course guidance cassette was pulled. Jonuta himself activated manual systems, along with defense and protection-aggression systemry. He had them meter-checked at every planet-fall, as well-barring the necessity of an impropri-etously hasty departure. All this produced results in the form of efficiency and safety. It also cost heavily. Overhead, Jonuta shrugged; cost of doing business. And his hobby. High overhead for high income, and he continued free, successful, and safe in a dangerous business. Captain Cautious was Cap'n Chicken and other things to other people, most of them envious. Some even applied the centuries-old buzzword paranoia. Jonuta did not mind. "Semantics can't hurt me," he said. " 'Paranoia' is one of the most misemployed words in all history. It's also a stupid term to apply to intelligent apprehension and caretaking, even fear. No 27 one can accuse Jonuta of not knowing fear! That would be embarrassing." Kenowa did not believe him, but then Kenowa owed him everything; her very self. Too, having known many men, Kenowa appreciated him in bed. He knew women, Jonuta did, and Kenowa's years of EF addiction had not dulled all her senses. Bound to market on nicely cooperative Resh, out past the Tri-System Accord, the cassette reached the point at which it activated the warning impulse. SIPA-CUM sounded the warnings. There were three, spaced so that sufficient time was allowed all onboard personnel to prepare for subspace transition. Cassette and Mate guided them into it, but Jonuta was always in the con-cabin. Time and space compacted while mass tried to. Stars vanished into a streaky mess that turned color spectrum laws into a maniac's dream. Ears popped and stomachs imitated earthworms. Some members of the cargo threw up, as always. (Not the new one; she was strapped into the Learning recliner.) Jonuta saw it through, while impossible distances were traversed in an impossible brevity of time. Cassette advised when return to normal space-time was imminent. With Coronet back in "real" space among suns and planets, its captain troubled to compare the new reality with the cassette. They matched, as always. He was where he expected to be. Returning the cassette to service and restoring all systemry to what he preferred to call "cyberautomatic," he turned the con over to Kenowa. She minded the boredom far less than Sweetface and Arel. Jonuta went immediately to inspect both holds, male and female. They contained twenty-one human beings stolen from nontech and supposedly Protected Worlds. Sweetface double-checked the new one. Kenowa's way was to hitch every telltale and sensor display to a parallel telltale and sendisp, in an exaggeration of Jonutan caution. That done, she

sat/lay back to lose herself in a holodrama. Jonuta did not 28 mind in the least her using a holographic projector to give her immediate area the semblance of a luxurious onplanet apartment. Her favorite viewing matter was the equivalent of what had been called, centuries and centuries before, truconfessions and bodice-rippers. Those who took into consideration the difference between masculine response, which was objectifying, and feminine romantic subjectifying, maintained that such dramas constituted female pornography. Still, no antiromantisex laws had ever been seriously proposed. All that was meaningless to Kenowa. She was being entertained, while performing an important function for Jonuta. All she had to do was make sure Sweetface had no access to her holodramas. Anything that smacked of sexuality brought swift response from Sweetface, and the Jarp didn't much care which human sex was available. Until now Kenowa's non-vigilant vigil had been interrupted only once. This was the second tune. SIPA-CUM broke into her drama. It needed help. Her foot pressed off the projector in the middle of a dungeon scene while her left index buttoned the signal. (On Kenowa's planet of origin few parents had bothered with fetal correction of such nondebilities as left-left-handedness, at the time of her birth.) Her elbow flipped off her holoprojected surroundings while the signal ding-ding-dinged throughout the ship-and vibrated in the bracelet Jonuta never removed. Next she ordered full scanreport at once. Jonuta reached the control cabin in less than a minute. Kenowa sat forward, watching the displays while scanners and sensors triggered search/scan/display. Her blue wig lay beside her, forgotten; she wore the close-fitting sensstimulator helmet he had had calibrated with her holodrama projector. In the excitement of possible emergency, she had forgotten. She hated to be seen with a wig and would be mortified, but Jonuta's eyes were on the displays, not Kenowa. "What are we getting?" The voice was a deep rum-29 ble from his chest; he had cultivated that resonantly deep voice. It definitely went with his eclectic-eccentric attire. Some maintained that Jonuta must have had dramatic training. No records were available. Authorities on Qalara had no idea why their retrieval systems failed to come up with anything on Jonuta at all. She said, "Empty-three destroyer breaching four-thousand kilometer perimeter and closing on intersect course at-" "-seven," he completed for her, standing before the console that, because it was designed for a standing Jonuta, required a height-adjustable chair for Kenowa and Arel. "Destrier class MT-III, right? Oncoming, umm. Looks like deliberate intersect, hmm? Ah. That hump portside means she's no more than three years old. Tri-System Police, I'll bet, with the newest tractor capability. That ship can wiggle about thirteen percent better than we can. Still closing, too." She said, "Sixty-three-bee?" "No, dammit, we have a date on Resh and I want to go in. There's money on Resh, and Reshi will go fobby over the new acquisition. We don't flee, and I certainly don't want to fight." He had removed the gunbelt and was opening his coat. "Suit time, Kenny. Strip." Kenowa knew little of MT-III destriers and nothing of portside humps; hers were ventral and they were big. She wasn't supposed to know about those things and didn't want to. She knew what TSP was: enemy and potential big trouble. She knew Jonuta. She knew what "suit tune" meant, too, and she was good at stripping. Her experience was more than abundant. Both of them moved swiftly. They paid no attention to each other's movements and nudity. This was business, not bed. (Although she knew that once they were out of this his elation would make him a rutting bull. Good!) She was out of her clothing before he was. Discovering her wig, big and blue, she bit her lip, raised a hand to touch her sensstim coif, and left it on. 30 Jonuta kicked the pedal to make the little square compartment pop open to his left. He drew out two of the five silky but rather bulky coveralls there, checked their collar marks, and passed one to Kenowa. The evergreen-colored suits were clingy, with attached hoods anciently called coifs. And a most pervasive inner network of wiring. The aura-projector was made to look like a garish bauble. The fact that it was attached to the suit was not obvious. "Look the other way," she said. Naturally he glanced immediately at her, took in sensstim helmet and the

wig beside her chair, and looked away. Jonuta understood vanity. Jonuta, who exercised twice daily and always stood before the console rather than sat, got into the suit and dropped into the pilot's chair. He was still drawing the dark green suit's extended cowl down over his face. All the way down, over the chin. He could not see through it. His vision was total and clear, however, by means of the telepresences available to the non-implantable blind. TPs could serve as hand-extenders (even across kilometers, electrically), grip-enhancers, special devices once called "waldoes"-and eyes. The suit's TP camera was smaller than his thumb. It moved with his head and he saw what it saw. Feedback was two-way. The viewscreen was inside the coif, self-illuminated, because he could not bear the direct retinal attachment. Jonuta had the adjustable ratio locked at one to one, for sanity's sake. He was not presently interested in being able to turn his head a quarter way around and see behind him, a full half turn. That capability was useful under some circumstances; this was not one of them. Jonuta's vision was more perfect than had the coif-mask been equipped with eyeholes. He was about to interface with the Enemy-in a manner of speaking. He glanced over as Kenowa plopped into the other seat. Enveloped in the suit, she had become a dark green humanoid with no face. She hated the suit, whose necessary tightness suppressed the bemazing ebullience 31 of her bosom. In it, she almost appeared to be a normally constructed woman. Almost. "Suit on." At his words she activated the suit by means of the rather ostentatious "ornament" on its chest, and Kenowa was gone. The dark green almost-human was gone. Through the "eye" of his TP camera, Jonuta was looking at a vice-captain of TransGalactic Watch, silver piping and all. Now the busty, blue-tressed Kenowa was a homely, slightly overweight woman of apparent-age thirty. She had ridiculously short walnut-hued hair under the silvered black comm-coif helmet of TGW. The only diminution of bust came from the tightness of the coverall beneath. Jonuta nodded. He tripped two toggles, tapped a button, and twisted around. Behind him stood another uniformed TransGalactic Watcher. The life-size holographic projection was excellent. She wore engineer's insignia, was young and almost astonishingly attractive, and could be seen breathing. There was a reason her holopic image could be projected only after the performance of three operations: Jonuta wanted no accidental manifestation of a superpolicer in his con-cabin! The projection's purpose was to distract staring, suspicious eyes from Jonuta. He lifted a hand to his chest and triggered his suit's aura projector. "What do you see, Kenny?" "Captain Farz, TGW, I believe." Her lips didn't move as she spoke. "Indeed," Jonuta said, in the voice changed by the tiny and simple tweeter built into his mask. He reminded SIPACUM to stand by for Manual-and-Continue. Then he flipped up the cover on a thumb-size toggle and poked a finger into the hole there. With a half-hearted series of clicks, a panel cover flipped up. The course guidance cassette popped loose to extrude like a brown tongue. "Captain Farz" pulled it. He passed it to Kenowa. The con was his. Already 32 alerted to Manual-and-Continue, his Mate held Coronet unwaveringly on course, "Blip now at two thousand kloms and closing on intersect," the un-Kenowa reported. In less than half a minute Jonuta had transferred eighty percent of monitoring, interpretation, and control to SIPACUM. He sat waiting, thinking. He had never used the aura-suit ploy with a TSP ship. That did not guarantee that it had to work. Tension tried to build and he warned it back, breathing deeply. Jonuta used no drugs in Kenowa's presence and disliked drugs in general. "Blip at thirteen hundred and closing," un-Kenowa told him, unnecessarily. A small pale green panel taletold that Coronet was being scanned with efforts to probe. Jonuta punched on the intraship mike, which would not activate in response to his modified voice. No ship had ever succeeded in monitoring intraship communications on Coronet. "Arel," he said. "Sweetface." "Tdlo-wheet!" Sweetface's whistle meant "Captain!" "Dammit, Sweetface, your translator's off again." "Captain!" Arel's voice. "Sorry, Captain." That was the voice of Sweetface's translator, expressing his/her whistles as words. Both crew would have gone to their stations when Kenowa triggered the alarm. Both would have been waiting for

their captain's voice for what had to seem an hour-standard. "We have an MT-III destrier closing fast at one-oh-oh-nine. It's scanning us. Bet on Tri-System Police; this is their back porch. Our con is now in the hands of Captain Farz, TGW. Ready gunnery and cybertrack. We have every right to track them, but don't bother trying to fire. I've got full control from here, and all gunnery is locked." "Armament ready, in hand, and cybernetic tracking mechanisms operant, Captain Farz, sir," Arel said, and Jonuta could hear the grin in his voice. 33 "Defenses in operation and tracking blip, Captain." That from beside him: the holoprojection of Vice-Captain Choudhury. "Em-tee-three closing at nine hundred-minus. Cutting drive." Jonuta did. "No contact initiated," he finished advising them all. Coronet rushed on, on its own momentum. "Blip's arms systems tracking us," Kenowa reported. The console looked like Friday night in the hotcha district of a spaceport town. "Sure," Jonuta said. "They see ours tracking them and are responding in kind. But they still aren't trying to contact us." He felt humid, although the aura-suit's aircon was functioning. "Jolt coming," he said, and tapped a series of numbers. There was no drag in space, and there were no brakes. The engines were not rockets. Coronet was fitted with two big rockets forward, aimed ahead. SIPACUM responded to Jonuta's tapped-out command by firing both simultaneously. Multiply the recoil from the firing of both barrels of an old-style shotgun by the size differential of shotgun and spacecraft, and-jolt! Damned hard on walking cargo, Jonuta mused, and the thought was in anger. Coronet began slowing drastically. "Suppose they aren't what you think they are?" the un-Kenowa suggested. "Then we're even," he said, and reflected unhappily: No, we're not! If they are not TSP they're one up. Police wouldn't fire without talking first-but plenty of my associates would. He swallowed. He and that bastard, Captain Corundum, had been worse than rivals for years; they were enemies. Each would love to see the other removed from the spaceways, preferably by death. Corundum had not only tried to have Jonuta killed on more than one planet, he had come bursting out from behind a moon where he had no business being, just under a half-year-standard ago. No talk; just attack. Corundum liked to kill, and he'd rather 34 kill Jonuta than anyone. Only Jonuta's genius-and Arel's cleverness-had got them out of that one. "All right," he said. "They either try their best to stop or swerve now, or they're bent on crossing in front of us. That captain knows how dangerous that is, whether he's studied the combat tactics of old sailing ships or not. Now suppose we give him a break, Kenny -we'll challenge them." He told SIPACUM what to do. SIPACUM tracked the oncoming spacecraft, reading its own scans and referents, narrowed probable communication channels to three, and opened them. A new light flashed on, in azure. BeeBeeBee, the board said, BeeBeeBee pause BeeBeeBee: three channels open and ready. Jonuta's foot keyed the microphone and its extensors swung it down to hang before his face. He adjusted it so that it was precisely before his mask's mouth. That, along with the very thin film of petroleum gel on the plastic sheet over his comm sender, would insure that he could be seen without anyone's noticing that the mouth of Captain Farz did not move with his words. He left the screen inactivated, for now. Detectors advised via two red-yellow-red flashers that the other ship had cut engines. Momentum carried it forward at its previous velocity. Without such added forward "braking" capacity as Coronet, it must either swerve or continue on its former course at the same velocity. That would send it broadside across Coronet's bow at a few hundred kilometers. Behind aura and coif-mask, Jonuta smiled. The captains of long-previous ships called brigs and frigates and Ships-of-the-Line had initiated that situation deliberately. It was called Crossing the T. The crossing ship, with gunports all along both sides, became the dreaded destroyer by loosing a broadside: opening up on the other, end-first ship with all guns, one after the other after the next. Spacecraft were not sailing ships and their hulls were not dotted with gunports. In the present situation the advantage was all Coronet's. It might well be hit in an 35 exchange of fire-while its forward guns cut the other ship in two. "Not a word, Kenowa. We're about to make a little error, and let

'em 'overhear' us, assuming they're alert. Cassette six-three-bee," he said, and nudged alive the ship-to-ship. "Six-three-bee, vice-Captain," he said sternly, sending on three channels. "Stand by for possible repulsion of aggressor. Record for HQ from this point: mark. Oh damn, it's open." Smiling, he ticked the mike with a finger to make a click on the approaching ship's comm receptor and said, "Who ... are ... you?" Kenowa was taking out the cassette marked simply 63B. She knew it ordered and engineered the swiftest possible entry into subspace. His "possible repulsion" was meaningless; Coronet's shockingly powerful weaponry was already tracking the oncomer, with a human and a SIPACUM box at each station. Nor did she take seriously the instructions of "Captain Farz" to record the coming conversation for TransGalactic Watch headquarters! Two lights flashed blue as the voice came into the cabin, then black, then out. SIPACUM had eliminated two of the three probable frequencies; the reply from the MT-III was coming in on the third. "Who are YOU?" "This is pirate spacecraft Goshawk, bearing false numbers," Jonuta said; he named a ship he was sure was down for repairs on the far side of Terasaki. "Boarded by and in control of TransGalactic Watch. I am R. O. Farz, captain, TransGalactic Watch. We are proceeding to Resh with captive criminals and ship. We read you as aggressor. You are being tracked by automatic weaponry set to fire at formation T. You probably have a minute. Why are you closing? Repeat: who are you?" A brief pause, then: "Tri-System Police, out of Andor. O. T. Vratsa, captain, oncomm. Where is your -urn-own ship, Captain Farz?" 36 "Seven-one-nine-three-plus astern and a port, following with damage." "Sorry, Captain Farz. Glad you were able to board the enemy! Request visual, Captain Farz." Oh so cool, Jonuta thought, and he said, "What the damned hell for?" He did not hear a gulp; he imagined there was one. "Captain Farz, this is our neighborhood and we know your ship is unauthorized. Too, you advise that it is-um-misnumbered. Naturally we defer to TGW but, um-your pardon, Captain; voices can mislead. May we see you?" "Oh! Of course, Captain," Jonuta said. "Sorry. Each of us thought the other was a bandit, hmm?" He buttoned VISUAL. The screen came alive. It blipped, wiggled, imitated a shaken can of oil, and showed him an anxious man of middle age in the blues of the smallish space policing force with jurisdiction over no less than three suns. There was about as much unity among Tri-System's five planets as between Ophiuchi and Okefenokee, but they pretended, and the TSPolice were occasionally useful. "Captain," Jonuta acknowledged, nodding. The other man was staring past him. His eyes swerved to gaze at Jonuta. He squinted. Both Vratsa and Masrur saw a chilly-faced TGW in gray, black, and silver. Clean-shaven, not too handsome, not too young, terribly authoritative looking. Severely whacked-off hair and eyes like brown marbles. Brrr! He was clearly visible, though the pirate craft's screen was a bit murky. - "Captain," Vratsa acknowledged, and nodded to Masrur. (That sideward nod to an unseen aide Jonuta translated: Ifs all right, aide; relax and stand by for break-off.) "Slightly murky reception, Captain, but I see you clear. Pirates are sloppy housekeepers, ha-hmm. Congratulations and, um, our thanks on Goshawk's capture. Sorry we bothered you, Captain. That-um-ship 37 fits our description of Jonuta's, you see." And again, helplessly drawn, Vratsa glanced past the holo-aura of Jonuta to the holopic of that most attractive engineer. "Interesting. Goshawk's 'captain,'" Jonuta/Farz said, putting scorn in his voice at applying that word to a pirate, "claims he killed Jonuta on far side Tera-saki." "That would be welcome news to us all! Should we believe him?" "The TGW believes only what it can see and bite, Captain." "Umm. Yes. Might I ask, um, Captain, what your middle name is? I note we both have the unusual initial O. . . ." "Stands for Orion," Jonuta said sternly, "and I hope you like yours better." He added, "You are approaching our armaments-triggering point, Captain." "Oh!" Jonuta watched Vratsa realize that the frozen-faced TGW watcher had not inactivated his automatics, and he watched the policer swallow it. "With hopes that your captive spoke true of Jonuta, Captain Farz," Vratsa said rather hurriedly-believing he had some nineteen seconds to live-"breaking off." The stern Farz did not acknowledge. He watched

his telltales assure him that the other ship was swinging into a new course with enough haste to discomfit everyone onboard. Jonuta grinned, behind his coif's hood and the holo-aura of a TGW captain who had retired fifteen years ago-from a desk job. His name had not been Farz. The screen blanked and Jonuta killed his mike. He took a last look at the irresistible holopictive distraction behind him, sighed, and eliminated it. What a darling ensign she had been! How fortunate for him to have gained the holo of her just before she embarked on her first voyage-on which she was blown away. "Booda's eyes!" he grunted, though the words emerged ha the voice of Captain Farz. Jonuta was 38 sweat-wet. "What a lot of trouble and hard work this being self-employed is!" "Huh!" Kenowa said. "You love it and we both know it. It's my armpits that are wet-and I'll bet you're as dry as my mouth!" "Well, kill your aura and go on back to unsuit and clean up, Kenny. I'll be along shortly. Arel: con-cabin, please. Fun's over." She gave him the cassette-not 63B-and a kiss as she departed, and Jonuta gave her a most intimate grope. As soon as she'd cleared the cabin and could not see how sweaty he was, Jonuta rose and began getting out of the aura-projecting suit. " 'Bye until next time, Farz, you stern-faced old su-permilitary fart!" And he set the suit aside to be dried by its own aircon. Coronet plunged on past the Tri-System Accord toward Resh, while TSP captain Vratsa, whatever his O stood for, took his ship elsewhere. He had missed only one of the absolute prize plums in the galaxy. Maybe he'd catch a nasty old tobacco smuggler someday. 3 Consider golden words: Love. Freedom. Light. Love/ freedom/light; freedom/love. Love freely; free love. Lovelight. Quicksilver. Delight. Anticipation. Sunshine and moonlight and silvery; silvery moonlight. Leprechaun, and warm, and spring and Spring: a season of light, and a source of bubbling, sparkling water. Aglaya. Mother. Sun. Sunmother and Aglaya. Golden words, all of them, even silver; bright and shining and refulgent; gleaming and happy. Consider dark words, terms of rust and fright: Hate. Slavery, Darkness. Shame. Slavery. Defeat. Spider web. 39 Snake. Submission and subjection and subjugation; frustration and humiliation. Words denoting without: helpless, and fruitless, and hopeless, and lightless. Dark and darkness. Slavery. Fear. Dark words. They chase light from the mind, they crush it beneath dark weights. They bring darkness to shadow over the mind with sickly pales. They creep and they slither in on goblin feet to overwhelm and overpower with shallow spectral breath that makes the nape prickle. Slinking into the mind, to fog it. The fog slithers in on assassins' feet. Slithering like serpents. Crawling and scuttling like spiders, with black bodies and hairy legs. Oozing in like slime bespeckled with the quivering ugly brown of feces. Dark words. They darken the mind and Janja opened her eyes to dimness. For an instant there was light hi her mind-she remembered the swooping fringebirds, white lace in the sun-warmed air; the leap-foots moving in long bounds with impossible slow-motion grace; the tall waving grass of happy yellow-green with its clustering carpet of tiny shade-flowers trying to imitate phrillias. Phrillias: great big blue jewels pending heavy from their branches, pearled with dew. The warming sky and... Tarkij. Tarkij. Dark thoughts slid in. They darkened the mind. They sought to overpower it with excrementitious ugliness. The ugly words that call up all the ancient hates and fears of the race called "human": spiders and light-lessness, shadows and serpents, hatred and slavery, defeat and darkness and death, and darkness and darkness. And death. The light that had come into her mind-dimmed. Dimmed as she remembered. Dimmed until her mind was dark and quavery, spidery and hate-filled, writhing with tendrils of hate and humiliation and hopelessness and, though not yet admitted, fear. And then there was blackness in her brain. It dulled her gray eyes in the deep gray dimness and turned them from bright sparkly pools of spring water to the ice she had never seen, 40 rock hard and wintry cold and icy pale. Sharp at the edges. Her life had been ripped. Her brain had been torn. It began to form a twisty cicatrice. A scar, on the mind. It would be invisible on the brain. It would show in the eyes. She lay on her back, on a surface that was both chill and hard. She tested it with her palms, her heels, the backs of her calves,

her fingertips. She twisted to touch an elbow to unyielding chill hardness. She rose upon the surface. She looked about. How strange her nose and head felt! Her people had no word for lack of humidity, for they had no such experience or concept. She moved her fingertips again and again over her palms. Dry, dry. The hut was huge-no, this was not a hut. The . . . enclosure was huge, although its ceiling was low. Ceiling and floor and walls-slightly curving walls-were of the same uninteresting slate gray. It was steel, she realized, without ever having seen so much of any sort of metal, without knowing how or why she knew. Uni-polymer plasteel. (Words. Just words.) She had seen no metal save in the long thin slivers of knives the North-people had, on Aglaya. They were reddish-yellowish. Janja looked down at herself. She wore her tunic. It was intact, rucked high on her thighs. Strange. The Sky-demons . . . The demons, the dark, hair-faced manlike demons had come from the sky and slain Tarkij! Her throat was thick and something like a great blob of under-cooked dough blocked her swallowing. It did not come from breathing this awful dry air. I attacked them. So she had, insanely and illogically, a vengeful animal with canines hardly distinguishable from grinding teeth. She had not known she possessed such violence. One of them . . . she thought hard, thrusting aside the ugly black tendrils writhing about in her brain, wading into her brain. Yes, she had struck one of them, seen 41 blood. And he had struck her in the head. And I awoke here. Here? Where? In this place. Here, for the mind must apply names to places and things to maintain its balance, to feel secure hi its pretended superiority. To continue the human pretense of being in control, and Janja might as well be called human. Here was here; this place, peopled by Janja . . . and other women. That would do for a time. It would hold back the deep scarlet fog of insanity that strove to creep forward on cat's feet: clawed feet, xanthic eyes glaring, wraithy tail snapping. Here. Janja did not want to be here. She wanted to be there, on Aglaya. With Tarkij. But then . . . since they slew Tarkij and struck me, two demons like men with dark hair on their dark faces, and I am after all an attractive woman, my people's prize and young-why then is my tunic intact? Yes, and my body. For she felt herself with cautious fingers. Tarkij. Strong white teeth, beautiful between the long creasing dimples of his cheeks when he smiled. Gone. Broad of shoulder, more powerful of chest and arm and calf than he had reason to be, among a peaceful people in a peaceful forest. Gone. Clever of hand, quick of mind. Gentle of eye and exciting, too, with those same sky-colored eyes that looked at her and through her tunic and into her body. Gone. Gone, in a flare of light and heat that sent him to join the Sun-mother, to lend new glory to Her light. Janja bit her lower lip. The sun of Aglaya was brighter this day. For the light of Tarkjadar'rahj, son of Tarkaranja, had been added to its dark-dispelling smile. She wished that she could see it, that present but unseen sun of Aglaya. The bright golden form of the Sunmother. Brighter now because Tarkij had gone to join his creator in the fiery sky-palace of gold. Tarkij. They had not yet lifemated, but already she 42 thought first of him, before her long-gone mother and her father and sister and brothers. She had cloven to Tarkij as a lifemate must, even before they were life-mates. And they had waited so long, for so had the Tribemother decided. How the time had dragged while people spoke of Janja and Tarkij and smiled and assumed that they were not really waiting! But we did wait! One time we had it, and then nothing, while we waited! Oh Tarkij! How I wish we had loved, over and over, just as all about us the animals were loving and mounting, joining again and again! "Awake? Are you all right, poor dear?" Janja stared at the big woman with her pillowy, flopping, swinging bosom, and Janja shrank back. She drew up her knees. The woman had left the others, the many others here, in this place. She came to Janja with a kindle of concern and empathy, and yes, motherly solicitude hi her eyes. Her hair was funny. It was dark. All their hair was dark. Now she saw Janja's eyes and she halted. She stared, from dark eyes. The others huddled in little groups. None was remotely blonde. "I am Qila. We are prisoners. We are slaves." "I am Janja, and I am no slave. Where are we?" Qila shook her head. "In a space . . .

..ship," she said, dividing the word, tasting it. For it was in her mind and ready to her tongue as it was in Janja's mind. Janja had not yet questioned that word's presence in her mind, or that she understood Qila. "They brought you alone. There are four with me. My-my daughter and two others. And we are slaves, Shanzha. All of us." "Janja," Janja corrected, without hearing herself. She found that she knew what a spaceship was. And a spaceboat! It had been a spaceboat that had come down and stolen her from gold-and-green Aglaya. And -Aglaya was a planet, one of many! Its sun was a star, and and-her eyes flared and she shivered. "How do I know these things?" Qila gave her a kindly smile. "Call it magic, Zhan- 43 zha, until you know more. Your people are but one of many people on your world, your planet. Your sun is but one of thousand-thousand-thousands. There are many many other planets. Many of them have people on them, people like us. Some have, uh, been there longer than others, and so they know more about things. These things. This place-" She paused to sweep an arm to indicate the huge steel room in which there were more than twoscore more women and girls in varying modes of attire, and a few that were naked. "This place travels among the suns. Among the worlds." Janja shook her head. "Janja," she corrected absently. Her brain felt impossibly full, and swirling. It was as if she had risen too suddenly to her feet and became faint with .dizziness. "I said that we are slaves. Zanza. That is because our captors are slavers. We will be sold. These men raid the worlds such as yours, where the people know nothing of space travel or even air travel. In another chamber of this ship are men and boys, also stolen. It is not legal, what they do. But space is vast, and no one can truly police it. Slaves are legal, on some planets." Janja stared at her. Everything the woman said was unfamiliar, yet she knew these words and these concepts. And how was it that Qila spoke her tongue? She asked. "I am not speaking your language," the big woman said, closer now. She was squatting so that she did not look down upon the confused young woman. "You and I each speak a different tongue from this. While you slept you were given injections. The cellular extracts injected into you contain knowledge of this universe, and this language. They can do anything, these space-people. The language is called 'Erts.' It is the language of all of what they call the 'civilized' worlds, the technological worlds." "What's tech-" Janja began, and she broke off. She knew. Shiny machines and drugs and frighten- 44 ing, impossible weapons and wondrous medicines and unbelievable transportation. Thoughts, concepts, word pictures boiled up in her brain until she squeezed shut her eyes and shook her head. The woman moved nearer. She stretched out a hand. Janja shrank from it. Then she drew a deep breath and accepted the touch. It was in friendship and sympathy; empathy. The hand was warm; the gesture was warmer. "I was of a more advanced world than yours." Qila's eyes went faraway and her face went slack. Her voice was like that of an Aglayan oldster, talking of times past. "My husband gambled, and fell into debt, and we were kidnaped. I don't know where he is. I don't know if I even have a husband, now. We will be sold to repay part of the debt he owed." "Sold? Like-like implements? Like trading food for work, you mean?" (Yes, Janja's mind told her. Yes, that was the concept; that was the meaning of "sold.") "But people? Sell people? I will be sold? How? Where? And-I did nothing. Nor did my father or, more importantly, my mother. There is no gambling on Aglaya." She discovered that she knew what "gam-bung" was only just before she spoke the words. Gambling is evil in the eyes of the god." The woman smiled a slow, sad smile. She looked old, Janja thought. Perhaps thirty-five or more, even. She was amazed later to discover that Qila was fifty-three, that people aged less rapidly on the "more advanced" worlds and lived much longer-usually, on average. Among these people a woman of her years was little more than a child, far from educated and far from lifemating-which was seldom for life. Civilization, progress, technology, she was to learn, brought disadvantages to accompany the advantages. When life was longer, childhood was enforced longer. Indeed, sometimes it was never-ending. Among her people, only the very young and the very old were childlike. In civilization, many never grew up. "I suppose gambling is evil in the eyes of

most 45 gods," Qila was saying. "And there are many gods. Every planet like yours has a god and usually a dozen or a score or even dozens. Usually the main god is the sun, or the god controls it. There are gods here and there among the technoplanets, too. On my world it is the witch-goddess Liya and her husbands. Many of those from the planet they call Homeworld worship Posithink. They direct their prayers inward, for the god resides in that portion of each person called the Subcon. The captain of this spaceship is a Boodist. That is an old Homeworld religion." She shrugged. "There are many gods. But no, Zanza, you did nothing. You were merely onscene when they came. You were separated from your people, weren't you? Off by yourself somewhere?" "Can you not say my name? It is Janja." Qila tried again, coming closer. Janja sighed. "I-I was away from the village, yes. With Tarkij. We were Promised. We were . . . discussing our mating. We mate for life." "Oh, my poor girl! What they've stolen you from- what they've stolen from you! And-your Tarkizh. Did they capture him, or did he escape?" "They-they-" Janja turned her head away. Tears were not womanly, and particularly not in front of nonfamily. Ridiculous, the new things in her mind told her: backward-world superstitions and primitive mores. But they were her mores, her customs and superstitions, nevertheless. At the same time her doctored mind and memory- "encephaloboost," they called it, or just "brainboost" -was supplying her with words. The man-not-demon had turned his weapon-a stopper (or pistol) on Tarkij, with the volume set on FRY rather than on FREEZE (Stop, paralytically). Tarkij's body had immediately been engulfed hi more heat than men had ever engendered on Aglaya. As much heat and electropower as the skyfire-lightning -carried when it preceded a particularly violent rain in the hardrain season. He had been roasted, flesh and 46 blood and bone, and carbonized, and the blackened carbon itself reduced to a sifting of gray ash. Janja might have seen it if she had looked closely at the ground where she stood. This man-hurled lightning did not ground itself. It consumed itself, and its target. (She had no further technicalities. Some few understood what happened. She had never turned a pottery bowl, either.) The man had been a man, not a Skyman or a Sky-demon. It had not even been deliberate, his sending Tarkij to the golden sky-palace of Sunmother. It was accident, coincidence. Her people had always burned their dead. That way they were more acceptable to Sunmother, and better able to live with Her in the heat of Her fiery home. "They-they stopped him," she said. There was no doubt as to the sense of the word as she used it. Qila seized her. One big arm slipped around Janja's shoulders, across her back, and the other across her chest. Qila held her tightly in the embrace of Qila's people. "Oh, my poor girl! Oh, what the monsters have taken from you! I've at least had most of my life-but you! And there's still so much for them to take from you." Janja gazed at her. Still, even held, she controlled her tears. She drew back to look into Qila's eyes. "You said that the commander of this ship is a Boodist," she said. The word called up in her encephaloboosted mind a picture of a very ancient religion, born on Home-world-Erth or Erts, then-before the first spaceship left it The mind-picture included dark-skinned, dark-haired people such as the one who had slain Tarkij and captured her; such as Qila still holding her so motherly; such as most of the other women in this compartment: dark of skin and hair. It had been early apparent on Homeworld that the future was not "white" (their word for such pink-tan people as Janja), but brown or black and coppery. By the time that first ship had set down on the fourth moon of the second planet of Proxima-C, the egregious "white" 47 people made up but ten percent of the planet's population. By the time the first ship had reached the second planet of Ignal, that percentage had been six. By the time of the first Empire there existed no more of the proud pink-tatf people, the Indo-Europeans or Aryans or caucasoids. Those who had not been racist-slain had been amalgamated into the heterogeneous race. It called itself, with ineffable pride, "Galactic." The composite people called Galactics spoke a composite language they called Erts. There were no more Ertsmen. And the universe was brown or black or dark copper, and Janja was unusual indeed. She was unusual on this ship, and

throughout the universe. Thus she was a valuable commodity. A sport, a choice slave. Because of the contrast: that which was unusual was more coveted, and thus in demand, and thus more costly. And thus she was a more profitable acquisition for these demonic men. Too, there was the sort of racial memory. The brown people and the formerly gold or copper seemed unable to forget the inner hate of the pale folk who had once enslaved and walked over them. Paternalism did not generate love, in or out of families. And the god Booda had gone into space, and Allah too (one more among many words meaning "god"). Although they were no longer worshiped and but little remembered on the home planet or among the modified worlds of the home system, Booda and Musla (who had been Allah) were still strong here and there hi the farther reaches. It was a big universe. To everyone its own enclave. And Janja's adjusted memory told her more. She and Qila and all these other slaves were on a ship in the area of space called-from Homeworld, far from galactic center-the "Farther Reaches." Janja asked, "You said that the commander of this ship is a Boodist?" "Yes," Qila said, nodding. (Janja would have to get used to that gesture that was not known on Aglaya 48 other than as a means of pointing direction.) "IBs name is Jonuta. He's a Qalarese." "Jonuta," Janja pronounced carefully, closing her eyes, and she made a silent vow: oj Qalara. Jo-new'tah of Kha-larrah. I shall remember. But she was a slave, and her quest for Qalara was far in her future. Two: Civilization Gray and white color do not belong to the same , thing at the same time; therefore their components are opposed.... It is impossible that contrary attributes should belong at the same time to the same subject. Aristotle, Metaphysics 4 White: achromatic color opposite to black. Achromatic: colorless. Webster's New World Dictionary Captain Jonuta of spaceship Coronet stood in the hatchway and stared at her. She might not be the strangest piece of cargo he had carried, but she was one of the most potentially valuable pieces of merchandise. Nevertheless, anger rode the voice of the tall man in the long scarlet coat with its double row of shining yellow buttons. "It wasn't enough that you fobbers fried the male with her," he rumbled, from deep in his chest. "No, you had to shove her in here with these others. You're lucky they haven't torn her apart or at least injured her, you underbrained sisterslicer. Look at her! She's- white." Hardly. The short-tunicked piece of cargo he indicated with a jerk of one hairy hand was not achromatic. Her short ragged hair nearly was, and her eyes were incredible: pearly gray with only the hint of blue, in a face that was almost golden in its gentle tan. She stared at them, standing back against the far bulkhead of the female compartment. She was not quite alone there. Beside her stood that big old mumsy from Panish, holding the pale girl as if she were her daughter. Jonuta made a mental note. A fine nursemaid there, and he'd bet on it. "Get her out of that, you incompetent clowns, and put her in the cabin behind mine. Alone." It was then that Jonuta received his first great shock about the new one whose name he did not know, and in front of all these others, too. Srih swaggered over to 51 her while Arel stood back by Captain Cautious, with one hand on the butt of his stopper. The pale girl stood still, gazing at Srih from wide pale eyes. She wasn't cowering, but she looked small and fearful and vulnerable, despite those powerful, high-grav legs. So right and so magnificently shaped, those dancer's legs! I'll have to get her out of my system before we get to Resh, Jonuta thought. She looks worthy of me . . . and damn me, once again I am fascinated! Just a scared little plithit though, surely. Srih reached out to grasp the wrist of the scared little plithit. And she pounced. It was as if a holographic still had been animated at the touch of a button. Motion was instantaneous. Arms out and ready, she pounced in past the outstretched hand. One arm swept around Srih's waist while the other leaped up to his throat. Her fingers closed, very pale against his rosewood complexion. His nascent yell was strangled into a gurgling noise. She was not the gentle little bounce-bouncing herbivore Jonuta had considered; not prey. Now she was pure predator. Srih's gurgle was superseded by an even uglier sound when her knee came whipping up between his thighs to slam into his groin. Srih's eyes bulged and he went limp in her

grasp while his eyes closed in a faint of agony. She began to twist the hand that held his throat. Fingers and thumb thrust deep into the skin to gouge into the thick tube beneath. She actually means to kill him, Jonuta realized in incredulity, and swift-shifted his brain into another pathway. He had misread her. She had tricked them into misreading her! "Stop," he snapped. "Let him go and get back away from him." He did not shout. His voice rumbled low and he seemed unexcited. She looked past Srih's sagging body at the captain and his leveled stopper. She knew what it was. Her eyes were like ice. They were scary, deadly as only 52 ocean-borne ice can be. She lifted one shoulder in a little shrug. "Shoot," she said, and her face showed her exertion. He heard it in her voice. She was worse than daring him-she was trying harder to tear out Srih's windpipe and trachea and anything else that would come loose, however bloodily. Jonuta's thumb flicked. His hand tightened. The stopper hummed ever so slightly and he felt its vibration. Both Janja and Srih shuddered and jerked convulsively, for the shock raced through her and into the man she held. She moaned, more in frustration and anger than discomfort. The shock was aggravated discomfort, not pain. She let go Srih because her hands would not remain closed, or still. His elbow and then his head made a belling sound on impact with the deck. Srih lay there twitching. Janja, too, was a twitching, shuffling captive to the invisible beam of Jonuta's pistol. Then it ceased. She sagged back. Qila caught her, and held her. The "big old mumsy from Panish" stared with accusing eyes at the captain of Coronet. Ever alert to business, he noticed no malice in that glare. A good nursemaid, yes. "Search your mind, barbarian," Jonuta said, from the depths of his chest. "Perhaps you failed to get all of it. For instance, the full scan on a stopper. You just experienced it with the setting on Two. The One setting is a milder shock. Three, now . . . Three would drop you like a tree on your poor backward planet." He moved his thumb up, showing her what he was doing. "Now it's on the third setting. I'd as soon give you the experience. It's highly instructive. Will you walk or be carried?" Janja turned her head. "Thank you, Qila. Let me go, now." Qila did, and Janja stepped forward. "I will walk," she said, stepping across the writhing, gasping Srih. Jonuta smiled. His teeth were perfect, white, and beautiful. (Janja had yet to learn that most people's teeth were perfect-those who had teeth, for some 53 races did not but were called "people" anyhow; and there were those who wanted perfect everwhite teeth.) He was a handsome man of an apparent thirty or so years. (Of course he was much older. Janja's viewpoint remained Aglayan.) Smiling he said, "And if I holster this?" "Surely," Janja said, and there was scorn in her voice, "you don't expect any promises from me." She stared. Eyes of ice. Aglaya was gone. Tarkij was dead. In a way, so was Janja. Certainly Janjaheriohir was. Jonuta shook his head once, in a quick sideward jerk. "No, I don't. Not from you. You must have been a warrior. Srih! Get up, you poor bug, and come along. I'll try to protect you from her." Jonuta laughed. Then Arel laughed. After a moment, several of the women giggled. Then most of them were laughing scornfully while Srih rose slowly, with effort. He seemed limp even when he was on his feet. With one hand at his throat, his eyes followed the barbarian. His gaze was on her back. His eyes were ugly. Janja walked between the captain and Arel, through the door, away from the slaves-the other slaves. Away from Qila. Janja never saw the motherly woman again. She walked stiffly erect, holding her buttocks tight- without need. Her back was held almost rigidly straight so that her tunic would riot mold itself to her and attract their eyes. She felt very light, and it was eerie. These people had a standard for what they called "gravity." The standard was One; 1G. Ship's gravity was between .8G and .9G. She had no idea what Aglaya's was, but she thought it must be more than 1G. Perhaps she would know, once she reached . . . somewhere, and experienced 1G. People (the word that took in humans, humanoids, and others) from high-G planets made good spacefarers. They made good spaceship crew. That she would someday be a spacefarer did not occur to this new Janja, slave, who had been Janjaheriohir of Aglaya. 54 She walked stiffly without turning her head to

examine her surroundings. She saw. There was little to examine. Walls were a nice pleasant tan, with the hint of yellow. The doors here and there along the corridor were blue. Not doors: hatches. And the openings were hatchways, not doorways, on a spaceship. The corridors of a spacecraft were called "tunnels." An open walk area was called a "walkway." Her information-loaded mind did not supply the why of this terminology. No one had been interested in making her too smart. (Too smart for what? Too smart for a slave.) Beside her a pipe ran horizontally along, about a meter off the floor. Except that the pipe was a stanchion and the floor was a deck. (Why?) Another stanchion ran parallel to the first, about sixty sems above it. The ceiling-called the "overhead," as stupid a word as underarm, as a noun-was about fifty sems above the higher pipe/stanchion. These two wall-mounted rails ran all along the tunnel and branched to follow the side tunnel they passed. (Its walls were green.) The stanchions were for balance, her implanted memories told her, in the event they were needed for such. Also for hanging onto in freefall conditions. Janja had lain unconscious through both the sub-space entry-exit and when Jonuta had "slammed on the brakes." Freefall was something she could not quite visualize. No gravity or G! A little information about it had been force-fed into her, without supplying understanding. Something called "tork" was simulating G-for-gravity aboard the ship. Whatever tork meant. That was not within her understanding, either. She was not yet aware that most spacepeople were not aware of what things really were or what made them work, either. They just used. They took a side tunnel that was pale blue, with pale yellow hatches. One of them opened and a Something emerged into the cerulean tunnel. Janja stopped so suddenly that 55 Jonuta touched her from behind, having nearly run into her. She stared at that trusted member of Coronet's crew named Sweetface. Where to begin in describing it/her/him? To begin with, the tall slender creature's skin was far from brown or bronze, but it was not tan or beige, either, or coppery. It could not be called "red" as some people were called, or "yellow" either, a word that might be applied to the brass-bronze-skinned Kenowa. Sweetface was orange. Most definitely no exaggeration no mistake about it orange. To begin with, Sweetface's face was sweet. The large dark brown eyes were more round than any; rounder than those of the people Homeworld Asians had used to call "round-eyes." They had no applied color around them, as Kenowa did. Just some hair. It was red. Red, like the hair of Sweetface's head. Not redhead red or Titian; this was a deep dark glowing winelike red. The face was of that kind called "heart-shaped," with a broad forehead and a chin almost pointed. The mouth was small and its semi-everted lips were of a paler orange. The nose was a bit broad of septum and nostrilar flare, but was not slightly down-tipped as were Jonuta's and Srih's and Arel's. The shape of that head and face, the curvature of the lips, and above all, those big lustrous eyes made the creature . . . sweet faced. Broad of shoulder and rather lean through the hips, the creature stared back at Janja, and it stared from a height of about 178 sems to Janja's 163. Only when it raised a long arm to the oddly studded, three-strap openwork "helmet" it-s/he wore did Janja notice the hand. It consisted of four long fingers flanked by two thumbs. Marvelous, useful hands! All that, however, was superficial. There was more. Sweetface wore less clothing than the others, less than Janja except for the orange humanoid's knee-high boots-which were red. Sweetface was from the planet Jarpi. Sweetface was called a Jarp.

Analysis by completely fascinated bio- 56 JC5HN CLEVE scientists led them to apply a new chromosomal tag to Jarps: 46,XXXYYh. The number was normal enough; the same that genetically marked a "normal" human. A normal human female, however, had two sex-controlling chromosomes: the pattern was 46,XX. A "normal" human male had one X chromosome-from his mother-and one that was designated as Y; he was 46,XY. The double-X presence "instructed" the human fetus: between the second and third month in the womb, the single sex organ formed into two ovaries and this would be a female in function and in appearance. The XY configuration instructed the unborn child's one sex organ to differentiate as testes: this would be a functional male-appearing male.

Occasionally a sport appeared: XXY or XYY. Humans had learned to call them male/female, using the word hermaphrodite. It was drawn from the names of a god and a goddess no longer worshiped on any known world. Such a human could differentiate (go) either way, sexually, and was "helped" in one direction or the other, medically. Not on Jarpi. Every Jarp was bisexual in construction, function, and appearance. The chromosomal distribution was XXXYY. An additional chromosomal factor dictated that every offspring would be XXXYY: hermaphrodite. Those bioscientists-Galactics, not Jarps-began to call that the h-factor. Thus, with the usual arrogance of Galactics, they decided that the "standard" Jarp chromosomal pattern would be called "XXXYYh." Most people now assumed that the h stood for hermaphrodite. They were wrong. It had begun as a simple dictanote to abbreviate "heredity factor, chromosomal pattern, Jarpi natives." It didn't matter. Few people cared about the technicalities. Jarps cared not at all. Jarps were Jarps. They were male-female and female-male. They were one sex and they were both. On Jarp, it was somewhat inconvenient but not extremely unusual for both members of a mated couple to be pregnant at the same time. By each other. With a sort of silent show-offy braggadocio, Sweet-face wore only two articles of clothing as often as it-s/he could. On the occasion of Janja's first sight of a really different being, halter and trunks (over skintight hot-pink leggings) were brown. The halter bulged with the unmistakable proof of mammalian femaleness -and Sweetface wore the halters a bit loose, so that movement made the reality of its breasts unmistakable. Tights and trunks were also full, with the obvious attributes of a mammalian male. The female genitals and ovaries, of course, did not show. "Careful about getting a Jarp aroused," the saying went. "You may well get raped, one way or another- no matter which sex you are." In the pale blue tunnel of spaceship Coronet, Sweet-face of Jarpi looked upon Janja and said, through its translating helmet: "Strange!" Then it reentered the cabin and closed the hatch. Blinking, Janja went on along the tunnel. Jonuta followed, grinning while Ke-nowa chuckled. End confrontation. They entered the captain's cabin, which looked comfortable if utilitarian. Swinging leftward, Janja stopped with a gasped exclamation. The cabin had no fourth wall/bulkhead. Instead there was a reddish, gold-dotted plain running out to rearing spiky lavender mountains under a pinkish sky. A warm coppery-gold glow emanated from behind the leftward peaks. Some sort of animals, red-and-tan ruminants, were feeding on the plain. A pallid white cloud was strewn like spilled buttermilk across the sky. "Just walk over there and push the haystack," Jonuta said from behind her. Her heartbeat was more rapid, but she would not refuse or hesitate. She had shown him strength. She must continue. Janja walked over to the plain and the haystack seemed to rush toward her. It was brown. She put out a hand to push it and when it swung away, from right to left and away, it was no longer a haystack 58 but a burnt-orange door. She wasn't on a plain. She was entering another chamber/cabin. A phrase came into her mind, without explanation, though it was explanation for the scene that transformed and disguised the fourth bulkhead of Jonuta's cabin: holographic projection. She accepted that because she had to. She did not want to ask these people anything. She stepped into a sparsely furnished cubicle about 200 sems by 150. A spongy-looking red chair and cot- covered with some wildly printed throw-were secured to the deck, which was carpeted as if in red grass. The cot was attached to the bulkhead as well. Pale bluish light emanated from a small square panel overhead. Janja paused just inside, frowning in the claustrophobic reaction of one accustomed to the outdoors and open-doored houses of wood, roofed with saplings and woven broadleaves. She spun at the sound of the hatch's slamming behind her but she did not try to rush to it and try it She assumed it was not openable. Everything about these spacepeople had a sort of pervasive magic. That hatch opened at a push from the other side-or had. Perhaps now it was secured. On this side, she saw no sign of hole or hook or knob, and would not bother attempting it. In desperation, she might try. But then, even if she succeeded in opening that wall-escape to where? Noting that the cabin had no sign of hatch leading out into the tunnel, she stretched

out on the cot to stare at the ceiling. When she wondered at the little square of illumination, her new memories were forthcoming with a sparse amount of information, if not understanding. It seemed strange that there was not some strange or more complicated word for it! It was called a "light," in their language (which was now hers, if she was to be understood). That was the same word they used for the illumination provided by the sun-a sun!-or any other source. They had light everywhere. 59 She realized that she had not been educated beyond what was necessary. They had provided her with a vocabulary of a few thousand words, some idioms and grammar, and various pieces of information. There were gaps here and there, and no advanced education at all. Information without explanations; acceptance without full understanding. She knew about as much as a ten-year-old, among them-perhaps a little more. Compared to the knowledge of her people, the people of a world either young or settled long, long ago and Reverted (Janja did not know which: both existed and far from all worlds had been visited-or rediscovered), she knew a great deal. About some things, at any rate. In other areas, the people of Aglaya possessed knowledge that even these people did not, or apparently did not. For instance: most of them would have been in a purple heebie or a screaming fobbo by now, having undergone her experience and drastic change of milieu. For instance: most of them would have rushed to any door that closed imprisoningly behind them as this one had done. They'd have been grasping the handle and shaking it and pounding upon it. Fear unto panic would have accompanied discovery that there was no handle or knob. Janja had considered and made the instant decision that such an action would be an utterly useless and indeed ridiculous one. And embarrassing. She was right. For instance: most of them (or certainly many) would have defied the captain further. In consequence, they would have been shocked into unconsciousness by his stopper, and carried or dragged here. That was senseless, Janja knew. She had made that decision instantaneously. A useless, no-sense gesture that could gain her nothing positive and might cost her considerably. To them, she appeared to have given up. For instance: most of the women among them would be weeping right now. Perhaps shrieking and screaming and kicking and pounding as well. That too she assumed would be useless-and knew would be ridicu- 60 lous and face-losing-perhaps even more costly. It was not easy to refrain from what was a reaction, not an action, a natural reaction. Her brain wanted very much to cave in or at least set her to shrieking. Aglayans, she realized then (also realizing that apparently others were not aware of it), could not be depended upon to react "naturally" or "normally." For instance: one of them, these people that called themselves variously Qalarese or Rahmanese or Reshan or Bleakmen or Homeworlders or whatever-and all of whom called themselves "people" and "men" and "civilized" and "Galactics" ... for instance, one of them would not have decided that rest was needed. That a haven was needed, and that the best haven lay in sleep. Even had they realized it intellectually, they most likely would not have done anything about it. Janja, however, put herself to sleep. 5 There is nothing that by universal consent is good or evil, since everyone in a natural state consults only his own profit. Spinoza Janja's awakening dream was an impossible mix from her own and her implanted "memories." It was both ridiculous and unpleasant. She came out of it to discover that she had been wakened by the entrance of a woman. She was not small: heavy-hipped, with more yellow than brown in her skin, more ellipse than circle to her eyes, with more bosom than was necessariy or practical. She also possessed a startling pile of purple hair. It 61 was twisted tortuously up to a height of twenty or more sems above her forehead and in-woven with two bands of something that was very pretty and very scarlet and appeared metallic. Her earrings matched. Her eyes were circled with a pale lavender, the lids darker. Her lips matched. A lace-front purple outer corset rose in a point between the lobes of her overdone bosom and ended in another point below the base of her belly. Under that she wore a shiny blouse that seemed woven of off-white metal. Her pants, snug but very full at the bottoms, swished when she walked. They were black. She wore flat black slippers with a

strap across the instep. The strap of each bore a purple rosette. Jonuta's woman? A big flashy one, Janja mused. She brought food. Janja did not know precisely what it was; this was good and that was not; this was sweet and this was salty and this was bland. The liquid was water that tasted of (the moment she had the thought and started to seek the word it was there) chemicals. Janja ate and drank. "I am to firm if you are a virgin." Janja did not look up. "I am not." She ate another piece of the flaky, waferlike bread. Minimum storage space, maximum nutritional value. That made it unpopular, naturally, on planet. The woman chuckled. "The better for you, the worse for Jonuta. It means a lesser price. But with that hair and skin-! I am afraid I must find out, though." Janja looked at her. "You are Jonuta's woman?" She shook her head. "I am Jonuta's aide. Jonuta has no one woman. He is too much Jonuta. I am Kenowa." "Janja," Janja said. "How can you serve an evil man?" "Evil?" "Evil." Kenowa neither smiled nor frowned. She wore a ring with a very delicate little blue and silver chain that ran up to circle her wrist. A few links dangled there, from a false knot. 62 "I was on eroflore. Jonuta dragged me screaming out of a bar in Sopur, on Terasaki." "Terasaki is a planet? And Eroflore?" "Eroflore is a drug," Kenowa said, and resumed after a few beats. "He locked me up and pumped me full of narcoff for a few days. In those days I lived only for the EF. I earned its price any way I could. By stealing if necessary, but mostly by whoring. I was worthless. If I had died I'd have been better than I was, but I can't seem to help surviving. I'm a survivor, Yanya. Some can break away from EF and some can't. He locked me up and used narcoff and IF-II, and I got off it. For about a year I was his woman. I would still steal or kill or spread for him, of course. Now I'm not his woman, exactly; just usually. He saved me. Saved me from me, and what would have happened. More and more eroflore, and more and more back work, until I'd have been so fraggd and old I couldn't have attracted even an old scum. Then I'd have died. In the gutters of Sopur, most likely." She glanced down while she ran a loving hand over the rather garish finery she wore. "And I'd have been naked when they found me, too, because someone would have stolen whatever I was wearing." She looked up and the gaze of her vaguely oblique eyes met Janja's pale-eyed stare. "I've seen that, Janja." "I hear you. He saved you from horror and he saved your life. He stole my life, murdered my man, and brings me into horror. I hate him. You love him?" "Yes." "Strange. It must be 'civilization.' On Aglaya, where we are not civilized, we always know what is good and what is bad. But among you . . . Jonuta, for instance. Is he good, or is he bad?" "Strange!" Kenowa cried. "You say strange! You sit there and think that way, and you can call us strange? What sort of mind would have such thoughts? Those are thoughts for a philosopher! A teacher, maybe. How judgmental you are, who know so little! I never heard any such from a cake like you before." She paused, 63 seemingly thinking, while Janja stared. Kenowa resumed: "Jonuta is both. He is good, because he saved a person: me. He is bad, because he is a slaver. He is good to me and bad to you." And there, her small-mindedly triumphant tone and finger-flipping gesture said, is an end to that! Janja shook her head. "That is not possible. He is one or the other. All people are, all animals. There is no doubt in Ms case: he is evil. He steals people. His men slew Tarkij. You are blind to that." The other woman flipped her fingers again. The gesture was akin to a shrug. It resembled most closely someone's sign language for "five." The fingers were splayed and straightened quickly, then allowed to relax. It meant "so what" or "I don't care" or "beats me" or "no use talking more about that" and assorted other things. In the same way a raised thumb, turned away from the gesturer, meant the same as "firm," which meant "all right" or "yes" or "I agree" and again, several other things. The fingerflip was a spacefarer's gesture. It came from Qalara, though no one knew why. Perhaps a few people did; those who studied such things, burying themselves in the search for totally useless knowledge. "You worry about it," Kenowa said, less friendly. "As I said, I must ascertain whether you are a virgin." "I told you. I'm not." "I have to check, Yanya. Myself." Gazing at her, Janja considered the courses open to

her. She discarded all of them but one. Rising, she hiked her tunic exaggeratedly, unnecessarily high, and set her feet well apart. She stared, and even Kenowa looked shocked. Uncomfortably, she carried out her mission. Janja stood unmoving. Kenowa withdrew. Janja's eyes showed nothing. She dropped the short skirt of her tunic and drew her legs together. "Very tight, but you are not a virgin." "So I said," Janja agreed, nibbling at the sweet yellow vegetable in one of the partitions of her plate. "So. I am worth less, then. Too bad." 64 "Worth less, on the market," Kenowa said cryptically, and she left. She heard them, later. Their voices came through the hatch from the adjoining chamber: Jonuta's cabin. Janja listened. "-might be able to fake it," Kenowa was saying. "She's very tight." "Others might try," Jonuta's chesty bass said. "Not Jonuta. I have a reputation. Let it be learned that I tried to sell a sliced cake as freshbaked and everyone would know. I'd never be trusted again. No, Kenny. I've built a lot of trust, and I won't betray the people I deal with." An honorable man, Janja could not help thinking, since her conversation with Kenowa. An honorable man who steals and sells people! Then she realized: No, it is not honor he talks of. It's his pride! Jonuta remained evil and Janja's good/evil judgment and Weltanschauung remained untrammled. "Well, she's still mighty tight, as I said," Kenowa was telling him. "That's worth quite a few stellars more. Why not collect it?" "You are trying to keep me from slicing her, Kenny. You think I'm so stupid I don't see that? What, it's been too long since I've been rough with you and you're angling for some? Suppose I tell you this, my darling bust: I'd be willing to pay a few stellars to slice a piece of that, if I saw it onplanet. So-I do. And it costs me the same little price. Biocomputer already firms her as genetically pale as she is and pale-haired as she is, from that snippet we gave it for analysis. Stop downing me, Kenowa. Now-with you, or without you?" "With you, Jone." "Firm. Now's the time." Janja heard a light slap. On the seat of a pair of tight black leggings, perhaps? She flowed noiselessly from the hatch area of the wall. Without a sound as her bare feet whispered on the softly furry carpeting, she planted her shoulder 65 blades against the wall beside what she was sure was the hatch. She stood to its left, remembering that it opened rightward. And she wondered: where off her body had the snippet been taken? And why hadn't she" been "checked" then, while she lay unconscious and was "educated"? This is not wise, she thought. But-what have I to lose? He thinks he has pride! The hatch swung its burnt-orange side into her cabin. Kenowa entered. She walked past Janja, not yet seeing in the gentle azure light that both chair and cot were unoccupied. That, Janja realized, or perhaps the woman's perception and reflexes were as slow as her brain. Jonuta's big hairy hand appeared. Then his booted foot came through the hatchway, and his chin and his chest. He wore a three-quarter-length robe of an evergreen color. Janja's hand, held stiffly across her chest, snapped hard, on the horizontal. Its outer edge slammed into his belly just as he entered. Her hand and arm tingled; this slaver was as hard as Tarkij! He was supposed to double over her arm so he could be thrust forward while she dodged behind him into his cabin and- He was also fast. Before her own paranormally fast reflexes could jerk her arm back, he had her wrist. He pushed it before him as he came on into the cabin. He held it well away from him, his arm tensing against the strength of hers. Probably he was as surprised at her strength as she at his belly's ability to take a truly hard blow. With his other hand he reached back to flip the hatch shut. It did not clang; hatch edges and doorjambs were padded throughout spaceship Coronet. Jonuta turned to her. "You are strong," he said, pushing at her arm. Then he reversed his strength to pull, and Janja was a third of a second too late. Her arm was against Ms chest, forcing her body to twist. She was forced to pivot to keep her arm from breaking. Her back slammed against his chest. She tried bashing his chin 66 - with the back of her head. That didn't work. He held onto her wrist, tugging it high up behind her back. "Also fast," he said in the same calm, perhaps-just-a-little-amused voice. "A barbarian, indeed! You'll find no women to match your strength on any civilized planet, and few men. That will

likely get you punished. Now will you take off that shift or must Kenowa do it for you while I hold you?" The voice rumbled up from his chest; she felt its vibration against her back. Janja considered. He would not break her arm; that came clearly to her. His mind was open and they seemed to have no idea of cherm, which was a fact of life on Aglaya. He was here for violence, but of a different sort. He even relished it. Other than that he harbored no intention of hurting her. She was valuable merchandise. In that case, then, she would not strip for him. "Let Kenowa do it," she said. "She's your assistant, your pet hust, isn't she? Let her earn her keep and wardrobe." His hand tightened. He did not draw her arm higher, but his grip hurt her wrist. "Kenny, you may slap her." The big woman with the pile of purple-dyed hair shook her head. "She doesn't fob me any," she said, approaching Janja. Janja felt a little ashamed. It had been nasty, and not fair. Indeed it felt a bit like betrayal. Nevertheless, she considered a crotch-kick. . . . She decided against it. Kenowa intended her no harm at all. She seemed to feel something close to sympathy, like the woman Qila in the slave compartment. The mother instinct is high among these people, Janja thought, without knowing she had too little evidence for such a sweeping judgment. After all--among them ifs men who most often dominate! Jonuta's hand remained tight-clenched about her wrist. It was a very big hand. Bigger than Tarkij's, and dark. Very hairy. (Janja was becoming accustomed to the fact that all these people were darker than she. The adjective was fading from her mind. It was that 67 she was light, she knew, rather than that they were dark. They were . . . normal. She was a sport.) His other hand was firm on her hip. She made no effort to use her free hand or break away, or to shrink from Kenowa. "Shall I rip it off?" Kenowa's fingers were crooked into the round neck of Janja's shift. "What's the difference?" "It comes off over my head," Janja said, suddenly having doubts about the stance she was taking. "Ah, but that way I'd have to let go your arms," that deep voice rumbled against her back. "This was your idea, remember? Yes, Kenny. Rip it off." The papery cloth of Aglaya tore easily. Kenowa ripped it all the way down the front. She tore it again, and then pulled, and it dropped from the pale-skinned body. Barbarians, Janja thought. Forced to bend a little to relieve the straining pressure on her up-bent arm, she could not help pushing her denuded backside against Jonuta's groin. She felt it pushing at her, through his tights. She stood still, concentrating on stilling her breathing and on damping her mind. "If I release you," he said, "what will you do?" "Whatever I can," Janja said, and he laughed in her ear. The power of his grip was a constant. She had been waiting several minutes for it to lessen.' It did not. She decided that his control was too good. It was not going to relax. She was not going to have the opportunity to break free. "You really aren't afraid, are you?" Jonuta asked. "Yes, I am afraid. Why do you ask? You must know." He chuckled. "I know how you acted," he said. "I have seen little girls put on acts before. Naturally, I wasn't sure-how could I know? Now I really believe you really aren't afraid." Sunmother's Light! The thought came to her in sudden elation without comprehension. She searched the false memories-artificial memories, rather-that they had given her. She found nothing. These people must 68 know only what they saw and heard and felt with their exteriors! He is serious, and apparently truthful-he does not feel the state of my mind! These so-mighty spacepeople, these Galactics-they are cripples! Furthermore they did not even know it. O Aglii, she thought, O Sunmother . . . if only I had drunk Tarkij's lifejuice! But she had not. Neither of them had even considered that. It was a more grievous infraction than their minor one of enjoying each other before they were Promised. The taboo was strong. Had she broken it before the lifemating the result would have been heavy guilt. Too, she probably would have betrayed herself by showing the power if gave her. Both she and Tarkij would have been punished with severity. All females of Aglaya had the mental feeling, the ability to feel and know for certain the strong emotions of another. But chonceling . . . the power was a woman's, though it came to her only from a man. And the law stated that it must be given and received only by

life-mates. Now she realized that it was not the same with them, the Galactics. They were obviously advanced only in the things they could do and make, rather than in themselves. They placed more value on things than on their makers, though thingmakers were proud of their ability. What strange creatures they were, with their spacego-ing craft and their terrible weapons and magic walls that imitated vistas and their lovely metal-looking clothing-and their poor minds of crippled children! How she wished that she knew, could know, more about those minds, their minds. They were not of Aglaya or worthy of Aglaya; they were they. Janja resolved to try. She would learn, as soon as she could, whether it was only Aglayan lifejuice that would Light her-or if the seed of them, these less-than-humans, could Light her, enable her to choncel. "It's too bad," Jonuta said from behind her, "that 69 your nasty little barbar planet was our last stop before Resh. We don't want you marked. You could use a good beating." "The people of civilized worlds beat," she said, staring at Kenowa, "when they have stoppers? How wasteful!" "Are you begging for a stopper session?" She shrugged, then winced. He held her arm behind her, just short of the snapping point, and the shrug added pressure. "No," she said, talking without looking at him because she had to. "That was a-some words, not a dare." "It was an observation," he told her, adding to her vocabulary. "But suppose I just let go and tell you exactly what to do on pain of being stoppered?" "I would be stoppered," she said matter-of-factly. "When you ceased, I still would not do what you said. You came here to enjoy my body. I do not want to enjoy yours. I will not. So I will not aid you." Kenowa was watching her, listening. Her eyes were wide and her purpled mouth formed an O. "Are you . . . immune to persuasion, girl?" Janja gazed coolly at her. Slim and naked and held helpless. "Persuasion is another word for-oh, I see. It is a word for torture. No, I am sure I am not immune. But I will not be forced by what you do to me. I am sure that I can suffer." Jonuta moved her arm down a little, slipped his hand from her hip around onto her buttock, and thrust her suddenly from him. She had felt his preparation and assumed the action to follow. Thus she ran several steps, rather than fell at his feet as he intended. Light; she was so light and movement was so easy in this ship's artificial G! She swung to face him. He had taken a step after her and was completing the second. He halted, staring. "Booda," he said in a low voice, "but you're fast!" She showed him her teeth. The choice was his: maybe it was a derisive smile and maybe it was the baring of fangs he must expect from what he called "barbar- 70 ians." (Though his canines were sharply defined and hers were 'not.) She let her knees bend just a little, standing loose and naked, waiting for his move. "Kenowa," he said, and Janja snapped her eyes toward the woman. Thus Janja learned something, for Jonuta too was fast and Janja's people were not, after all, warriors. Had she been of the northern Long-Daggers she'd have been ready. As it was, he had tricked her. He pounced the moment her gaze shifted to Kenowa. His rush carried Janja back until she banged against the unadorned metal bulkhead. Lights danced behind her eyes. The cabin seemed to dance. Then, with her arms imprisoned by his, she jerked her knee up, hard. Another surprise for her: Ms thighs snapped together to imprison her leg, despite the strength of its upward drive. Now each of them was impressed with the abilites of the other, and Kenowa stared with an expression approaching pain. Jonuta tightened his arms. He crushed Janja's until she winced and her mouth dropped open. Then he turned her and flung her from him. She bounced off the cot. Jonuta was leaping after her. Janja bounced, twisted, bounced again, and was on her feet a meter from the cot. Bouncing still again, she launched herself at him. Jonuta's arms swept up, but not in defense: he stepped aside and gave her nape a hard-edged blow as her momentum carried her helplessly past. Jonuta had just demonstrated that Crossing the T was not confined to sailing ships or spaceships either. Although she managed to remain on her feet, the blow dimmed Janja's lights. She staggered forward, flailing, impelled by his blow to the back of her neck. She banged painfully into the bulkhead. When she rocked back, her body was screaming several separate messages of pain. Her brain was too dulled

and preoccupied with righting itself to take note or sympathize. "Kenny!" he snapped, and this time Kenowa grasped Janja's arms from behind. 71 She held her tightly, thrusting the naked captive against the cold metal of the wall. Janja heard the slight rustle of clothing and was still, grateful for the opportunity to regain her reeling senses. If the women of her people wore hair such as the others she'd seen, long as a man's (of Aglaya), she mused, his blow to her nape would not have gray-minded her so. Hair would have protected it with natural padding. "All right, Kenny," she heard him say, behind them, and she was forced around, and there was Jonuta, not quite naked, his body strong and very attractive except for the coating of hair so alien to her. Janja's muscles had developed on a high-gravity planet. Kenowa could hold her only as long as Janja let her. Kenowa did not know that; she found out when the much summer woman jammed an elbow back and jerked free. Her other arm was already moving. It swung in an arc as she pivoted, and the arc terminated with four very stiff fingers in Kenowa's throat. The large woman's eyes rolled loosely and she slammed back against the bulkhead. Janja was already rushing from her. Nearly naked and exposed, Jonuta stood staring. She watched him while he watched Kenowa. Slowly the woman slid down the bulkhead to sit against it. Her chin lolled forward and a little to one side, on her chest just above its hypertropic swell. Jonuta's gaze swung back to Janja. "Booda," he whispered, and again it was an admiring sound. These people did call their gods' names at strange times. "Did- Have you killed her?" "I don't think so," she said, unwinded. She was crouching, awaiting his charge, small and naked and very vulnerable-and yet looking formidable. As she had proven herself to be. Behind him lay his coat and undershirt, and the belt with bolstered stopper. She did not betray her thought by looking at them. He was over a meter away; with no extra effort she learned that-oddly!-he still meant her no malice, no real physical harm. 72 Because a slave on her way to market should not be marked, Janja thought. And because this handsome but furry man of evil has learned respect for me! "Must this be, Janja? Must you act the animal?" She stared at him. "I? What animal rapes? Animals mate only with those who desire them!" The wonder in her voice, at his words, was not feigned. "I was Promised to my lifemate. We went out for a walk on a lovely day. Lovers; you have heard of love? We had never seen a spaceboat or anyone not of Aglaya. Suddenly they were there, and that animal of yours-not the orange one, but the one that looks just like a human. That monster killed Tarkij. He did not have to. I woke up here, and next I know you want to mate with me-Temporarily, oh, I know. Well, you can probably make me do it, people-stealer, people-peddler! But I do not want to. I do not want you or your repugnant body, except as a corpse. Now: Beat me senseless and thrust into me, or use the stopper. But I will hate it, and hate you, and I doubt you'll have much pleasure of it either-animal." Jonuta stood gazing at her for a long while. It seemed longer than that. The silence in the cabin grew so loud she could hear her breath in this horrid dry air. At last, without taking his eyes off her, Jonuta squatted and reached back for his belt. He buckled on the bolstered stopper as he rose, leaving the long red coat and the undershirt. Janja stood stiffly, waiting for him to draw and use that evil weapon. "Step away from Kenowa and be slow about it. I want to see to her. If she is badly injured . . ." A few lengthy moments of tension passed while they exchanged positions and he checked Kenowa. He rose. Janja was surprised to see him pick the woman up, easily. Kenowa's breathing was normal and so was her pulse. "I am Jonuta. You have pride and so have I. Yours will not serve you well, Janja. Mine does me. I would not dream of forcing myself on you. I have never had to, and will not begin now. We'll get my coat later. 73 That undershirt you will find is more substantial than your ruined shift, if you wish to cover yourself. I see nothing I want." He backed up then and did something to make the hatch open into his cabin-Janja did not see what- and managed to balance Kenowa while he closed it. He is a liar, the much surprised Janja thought, and she was right. Lest she weaken and put on his abhorrent clothing, she squatted over it. If they would not see to her normal physical

needs, she would. His undershirt was nice and soft, too. Hours later, Sweetface came in with food and drink. When Janja saw that the Jarp was not going to leave her, she drank and ate and drank some more. The massive dose of para-aminobenzoic acid the food contained was a kindness to her drying skin; Jonuta knew she was from a humid climate. The Jarp also brought something in a squeeze-tube. First the creature whistled, then paused to turn on its translator, to tell her the purpose of the skin conditioner. The small quantity of Breeder's Friend Jonuta had measured into the food began to take effect after some eleven minutes. Janja became openly flirty with the Jarp. She ignored its bandeau and stared at its crotch. With two minutes more she was importuning and making strong hunching movements in the event the orange creature was too stupid to know what she wanted-no, needed; no-had to have! Within a minute more she was begging. She whined for sex under the impetus of a chemical designed to facilitate animal husbandry. Her eyes glittered with lust and fastened their gaze on the Jarp's trunks. Visible tremors animated the lean femininity of her. She could not think. Her body ruled her brain and the chemical ruled her body. It twitched with an overpowering need to be split open and plumbed until she was beyond this awful itching need. She watched hungrily while Sweetface peeled its 74 trunks. She was all quivery and bright-eyed and her hand could not stay away from her loins. Quickly she dropped to hands and knees. She writhed her backside and wagged her hips with her legs well apart, an animal in heat and begging. Sweetface condescended to use her thus, in animal fashion. Almost at once she was squealing in pleasure and jerking, hard. There was no resisting Breeder's Friend, and there were no frigid women of Aglaya. Janja enjoyed it very very much and was rather sorry when the Jarp climaxed. Arel entered the cabin then, and she looked back to see his bright eyes. His gaze raked hungrily over the more salient parts of her lithe anatomy, kneeling and presented for mounting. She writhed for him. He began to whip off some clothing and she was delighted. Helplessly he succumbed to the lure of her body and replaced Sweetface behind her, on his knees. Spasmlike thrills leaped through both of them as he pushed, and hilted in her in an instant. She gasped and groaned happily under his insistent thrusting. Her mouth was open and her eyes stared at nothing, glazed. The man behind her straddled thighs was pushing savagely and emitting throaty sounds, and all of it was just fine with Janja. Bracing herself, she drove right back at him with strength. The heat of her passion grew and sucked the very breath from her. His pumping strokes jolted her, tried to flatten her buttocks, made her feel wonderful. Her cries were definitely not of protest or of pain. Aglii was kind. Srih did not enter. Srih was being punished. He sat at the con. Janja, Jonuta decided, was not being punished either. He and Kenowa watched the deliriously salacious scene on the big wallscreen opposite her opulently comfortable bed. Fondling each other, they smiled when the Jarp succumbed to more importunities arid mated a second time with the pale-haired woman it had called only "strange." Obviously both Sweetface and Janja loved it. Again. 75 The sprawled Jonuta lowered his head to the sprawled Kenowa's breast. "Turn the screen off, my love. You and I can certainly do better than that." A smiling Kenowa did, and they did. Too bad for the little blonde, the big woman thought. I certainly got the best man! When Janja awoke hours later, headachy and a bit sore here and there, she remembered every bit of it. She remembered, too, how she had made it vehemently clear to both her delighted "lovers" how much she enjoyed their loving. Jonuta had given her pleasure- and etched another scar onto her mind. She also felt a strong call of nature and saw to it that Jonuta's undershirt badly needed a thorough laundering. Arel and Sweetface had taken their captain's piratical coat when they left her. Kenowa was on duty at the telescreen in her cabin. She had to report to Jonuta that the strange blonde did not weep., Coronet entered Resh's system and plunged in toward that planet on which slavery was not only legal but an important part of the economy. Janja was offered no more food. Despite her thirst, she would not drink the water Kenowa brought her. "Tell Jonuta that he had better kill me, Kenowa, for if he does not I will kill him." Kenowa left

the water and shuddered once she'd shut the hatch between her and Janja. Oh, the ice, the diamond hardness, the cold deadness of that poor girl's so-pale eyes! 6 To abolish [slavery] would be extreme cruelty to the African savages, a portion of whom it saves from massacre, of intolerable bondage in their own country, and introduces into a much happier state of life

... Boswell Ignorance, when voluntary, is criminal. Samuel Johnson "You are worthy of the spaceways," Captain Jonuta told the slave Janja several days-standard later, after they had put down on the world called Resh. "If you were not such an iceblock you would be worthy of any man, and will have a much easier time in life." She stared coldly at him. "You are saying that if I responded and played the tolerant and accommodating bust to you as Kenowa does, I might be worthy of you," she said, and her voice was heavily blued with scorn. "I am worthy of Aglaya, Jonuta, and you are not. I have only this thought for you, and this promise: I will kill you, slaver." He gazed at her for nearly a minute in silence and without showing emotion. He had said what he said in the form of advice, for he wished her no ill. Never had he acquired anyone like her, male or female. Now, for nearly a minute he had actually been considering taking her back onto the ship rather than turning her over to the waiting procurer who had credited so much to Jonuta's Reshan account. The procurer had even promised not to sell her to any of the three whose names Jonuta gave him. It was an unusual stipulation. She was an unusual person-that is, slave. She continued to be so, in what she had just said to him! He 77 had sought to keep her out of the hands of several truly cruel people of wealth on this planet. Now she even dared issue challenge and threat, though he would soon be threading his way back through Resh's solar-power satellites, and back into space. She would remain here on warm Resh as someone's slave. After hearing her words and gazing at her in reflection for nearly a minute, Jonuta smiled. He had to smile, for the sake of his manhood. He felt that he had shown her unparalleled kindness. She saw the long hesitation/reflection, and she saw the smile. She was sure that he respected her. Now his smile showed her that he could not take her threat seriously. "You might think that you would like to kill me," he said. "But you will not see me again, Janja of Agla-ya." So coldly stated, it was not a threat, and it was more than a threat. Again their eyes locked. Again he pondered. And again Janja felt it, knew it. For there was no word in their language-or at least in the abbreviated Erts vocabulary they had vouchsafed her, for the way she could know; for what on Aglaya was called cherming. She knew when he again remembered who he was, and what she was. He returned to the swaggering bravado of a highly successful adventurer and businessman. He slapped his tights-clad leg. "Farewell, Janja." And Jonuta turned his back on her and re-entered his ship without haste. (He was rough with Kenowa that night. Kenowa loved it, even while she wondered what had brought it on. They played many different games in bed. Most were at Jonuta's whim. He was the imaginative one.) Janja and the seven others he had sold on Resh were herded down the ramp. The girl with curly brown hair was weeping. She was a daughter of Qila, who was still on Coronet. The others aboard were slated for other worlds; perhaps the busy slavemart of Sopur, on Terasaki. Terasaki was more wide open than far-flung Resh, where most things were legal and those not 78 legal could be enjoyed provided one possessed sufficient power or sufficient buying power. Those were usually synonymous. For the first time, Janja saw houses. She saw soaring buildings of synthesteel in the blue that was popular for buildings on Resh, and the yellow and red stone of the planet, and a bit of synthestone she did not know was not naturally formed. She saw strangely garbed people with painted nails and eyelids, and ocher hair (bleached white, then dyed back to the cupreous yellow that pleased the god Gri), and small craft like spaceboats designed for close-to-ground atmospheric travel, and a few hovercars that whooshed on invisible cushions of air because they were less expensive than the gravity-defying, gravity-bending, gravity-utilizing principle that moved spaceboats and atmosphere craft. Janja was made to ride in a whizzing plastic-walled bubble within an elevated tubeway, and she was able to glance

back and see Coronet lift and move steadily skyward. A great flat-bottomed vessel like an enormous globe cut in half. She watched until Coronet and Jonuta and Kenowa and that monster Srih, along with Arel and Sweetface, vanished into the cumulo-cirrus sky of Resh, and went on beyond the sky. She did not know that the ship would swing into one of Resh's two shipping-receiving stations in synchronous orbit, to take on a bit of cargo, which it would haul exteriorly. Then the tubeway and Janja's plastic bubble plunged into the ground and whizzed even faster, and she closed her eyes. Behind them, she memorized Coronet. Tarkij, she thought. The procurer who had come aboard Coronet to haggle with Captain Jonuta had willingly acceded to the slaver's strange stipulation about the white-haired one. He had promised not to sell it to Savr, or to Sicuan, or to the Temple. He had not vocalized the reservation he made within his own mind: unless one of them offers more than anyone else. 79 He had been correct in that, and correct in his mental prediction. Sicuan did indeed want it the moment he saw it. (The procurer employed only the standard neuter pronoun "it," in much the same way generals and rulers referred to soldiers as "units." That way he thought less about his business and was able to look happily at the face in his mirrors.) Sicuan wanted to purchase Janja for his son more than for himself. Although the procurer had carded a large amount of credit to Jonuta's account, Sicuan parted with even more electronically transferred stells. The procurer left the estate wearing a happy smile of prosperity. He had not really lied to Jonuta. Jonuta understood business, and profits. And Janja was property. They were Sicuan, an old man-very old; he looked perhaps forty to Aglayan eyes, sixty to theirs, and was in truth ninety-one. His son Chulucan had about him the look of dissipated youth. (If youth could be said to begin at fourteen, Chulucan had thus far been dissipating his for forty-three years.) There was the overseer of their mansion-estate. There were servants and other slaves. And the andromorphic, hermaphroditic creature that lived in the house itself and cooked and supervised the several servants. It was a Jarp, and it was called Whistle. The language of Jarpi-a planet developed a couple of centuries beyond Aglaya-consisted of whistles, trills, warbles, and a few odd clicking sounds. Whistle's name was composed of a tloo sound -the I warbled-and a very soft double-l sound, un-warbled, a hummed note that somehow combined n's and m's, and two shortish whistles of different notes. It was quite unpronounceable by Galactics. They called it Whistle, and they called this Jarp a "her" because they were a household of men. Whistle wore a collar and long snug cuffs or bracers of some plastic compound that precisely imitated silver and was lined on its inner surface. Spraboos came way up high on her thighs; they were the same red as her hair and appeared to be leather or equhyde or leather- 80 imitating fabric-except that the spray-on stuff was naturally too skin-hugging for that. A few wrinkles at the knee and above the heels added to the illusion of real boots. The Jarp wore nothing else because that was the mandate of her masters and she hadn't the wits to care that all they had done was ornament her to make her more exotically erotic. Whistle possessed a pair of stiff breasts, shaped rather like the pointed snouts of projectiles, and a vagina with the normal accompanying internal plumbing. The external female genitals consisted of little but a slit just below her penis and directly between the upper lobes of the scrotum. These were oxygen-breathing mammals who nursed the young they carried within them for some seven months-standard, Janja was told, as if she had never seen or heard of a Jarp. Jarps enjoyed interesting mat-ings, she was told. The sex instinct was high in them, though not constant, and either could nurse the offspring. They seemed to hold scant qualities of compassion and empathy and yet were called, almost invariably, by the female pronoun. This was probably because the galactopoietic mammalia were unmistakable and thrusting, while the male sexual equipment was easily concealed by clothing. Men naturally assumed that breasts equaled she/her. "Whistle's was the second genuine hermaphroditic race we humans found among the life-supporting worlds that crowd the galaxy and, indeed, the universe," hairless old Sicuan said, as if he were delivering a sermon. He was

only a wizened face and head and a couple of mummylike hands poking out of a copper-ishly yellow robe that brushed the floor. "The others are jelly-blobs," his son said, "quite intelligent!" "And quite mentally powerful," Sicuan said, staring at Janja as if wondering about her intelligence-or suspecting her secret? "Since those Shirashites possess no limbs or tentacles or even pseudopods, the jelly-blobs 81 of Shirash compensate all too well, with a superb tele-hypnotic ability . . . and a reasonably well-developed telekinetic one as well." (Janja noted that Sicuan paused frequently, sometimes for several beats, although he did not seem to labor for breath. Age, she assumed.) "Spacefarers," he said, "learned to stay off Shirash. Many argued that it should be destroyed, and so I feel Gri wished." He paused to turn and nod to his left, which was eastward, which was the direction of the Temple. "Shirash was not destroyed. A constant guard has been posted in orbit around that Gri-forsaken planet that is an insult before His eyes." (On pronouncing the god's name, Sicuan again bowed Temple-ward.) "It's an automatic monitoring system," Chulucan said, staring at the breasts of their new acquisition; Janja was naked. "A spherical cybercraft spins permanently around that watery planet of abominations." On the other hand, they chattered as they ushered Janja around the mansion proudly showing her her new home and mentioning a few duties in need of performance, the crew off the first ship to land on Jarpi liad Immediately decided they had found paradise. Female crewmembers hung back frowning while the men hurried to take advantage of the acres and acres of tall sexy orange "women" they had found. Under Jarpi's hot swollen sun, the natives wore hooded robes of white and yellow-an abomination before Gri (Temple-nod). Even ungirt, those robes clearly delineated the evidence of the female mammalian construction. Unfortunately they evidenced only those secondary sexual characteristics, while concealing the primary. Even all that whistling and warbling and trilling sounded sweetly feminine to the Spacefarers. They flocked to the seduction on a planet with but a few percentage points difference separating its air from that of Homeworld, which had been Terra, which had been Erth. Few of the Jarps were raped or even sliced. Most of the crew of the explorer ship, proving real 82 novelties to the Jarps, were. Since the poor newcomers possessed no vaginas, they were bugged. Then the Jarps discovered the female crewmembers. They were really pitiful too, poor things. Although they did possess breasts, only one approached the abundance of a Jarp. But not a single one with a penis! The Jarps did their best to make them happy, assuming that they liked lots and lots of sex. At least there could be no issue. At least the Jarps were a scantily endowed race, in the penile department. There was, after all, only so much room and their values were necessarily small. Still, the jokes about the crew of Sunflower were still told 113 years-standard later-119 Reshan years-when Janja came to Resh and saw her second nonhuman. Now those who made it with Jarps were called "Sunflowers" as often as the predictable "Jarp-lovers," although most had no notion why. The Galactics had gotten even. Why they were humans! They could call Jarps people if made to-but the orange slicecakes could never be human! Jarpi was not on the Protected planet list. No one Protected early steel-age Jarpi. Slaves, that's what they were good for. Slaves, and occasional clandestine amusement/use. Jarps were openly owned and openly traded, and no matter what was Right and Law, TAI and TGW and any other sensible law-enforcement force had damned well looked the other way. Sicuan had bought Whistle years ago off a pirate named Strider, now deceased. Whistle had not been too bright to begin with; naturally enough, the Jarp race varied in intelligence and learning ability about as much as Galactics, without the benefit of pre- or post-natal aid. Sicuan also saw to it that Whistle underwent a bit of excholinasteran surgery, so that "she" was less than stupid. She was cook-servant to the wealthy Sicuan, formerly High Priest of Gri for all Resh. (Under his active shepherding, that collection of abominations calling themselves NeoTaoists, over in Hotford, had been . . . removed. Extirpated. Wiped out. There was 83 no Hotford on Resh, now, though even tree-shaded fords were hardly cool except -at night. Sicuan of

course was Honored of Gri, held in high esteem, and very comfortably retired indeed.) Slaves were property, Janja learned. On Resh, their killing was not murder. The slaying of a slave was not punishable-unless it was someone else's slave. Then compensation must be arranged. She also learned that she would be given something to wear-tomorrow. The house was comfortable, was it not, Chulucan said grinning. That was hardly the point, Janja thought, but-yes. Somehow the heat of the sun was power, and that power could be caught by the mansion's own solar plant, and somehow it powered the internal lights and refrigeration and devices, and even cooled the manse. How that was possible Janja certainly did not understand. She soon learned that no one else on the premises understood, either. Whistle was placed in charge of feeding the new slave. The others laughed about Whistle and joked about her, and Janja was told that the halfwit Jarp spent most of her leisure time in fruitless endeavors to unite her-its-own genitals. They called Whistle "hust" and "slut" but never "satyr." Janja, who had been called "barbarian," understood what bigotry was. Unfortunately, the new slave brought with her no skills useful on a civilized techno-world. Chulucan was not dismayed. He soon persuaded his father that a "girl" so different and so fragile-looking should have few duties anyhow. Oh, she could wash up and clean, but some baubles one did not have to use, but merely looked at. She would be useful, he pointed out, just the same. Entertainingly and distractingly useful, as a toy. Sicuan suggested a bit of bosom-enhancing. Chulucan persuaded the old man to leave the blonde's rather hard, high-riding cones alone. Her slim hips were fine too. Different. Every other female on the premises, after all, was big bosomed-even the Jarp. Sicuan acquiesced. 84 Sicuan's aberrant mammaromania was not repeated in his son. The old man's other aberration was, however, definitely a part of his son's makeup, heightening with Chulucan's age. Janja soon learned of it. The two men were bona fide sadists. That word was much misused for people who were merely cruel. Sicuan and Chulucan were not just sadistic; they were sadists. It was a sexual necessity. The pale, slender new cake who put up such resistance to being used was a perfect subject. She provided a fine excuse and opportunity for punishment. The other slaves had long since learned to accept anything. Thus they tried to reduce their mistreatment only to that which was necessary to the master's arousal and orgasm. Of course, a true sadist did not need or await an excuse. The "subject" suffered more deliciously when whimsy ruled. It had been so argued and fictionally shown by Donatien Alphonse Francois de Sade, practically eons ago on Homeworld. Chulucan and Sicuan were very familiar with his writings. They preferred the long novel *Justine*, in which a totally innocent girl devoted to God and goodness suffered unspeakably at the hands of-seemingly-every vicious male on some old planet called "France." The book's subtitle was "The Misfortunes (or Mis-rewards) of Virtue," and *Justine's* vocabulary seemed limited to "Oh sir!" Various artists for thousands of years had illustrated the work; various films had been made and retracked into holomovies; Chulucan and Sicuan seemed to possess them all. One seldom encountered a genuine sadist and Janja had never heard of a creature that needed to inflict cruelty in order to gain sexual arousal and release. Cruelty abounded naturally enough, in both sexes, but -as a necessity for the accomplishment of a natural function? The new slave could hardly understand. Ag-laya was not Resh. There were no Sicuans or Chulucans on Aglaya. Janja knew about cruelty and was learning more. She was no sadist, and not even sadistic. Her climax came by the means normal to women, with or without 85 the presence of men. Aglaya's practice of female circumcision, with the baring of the clitoris, made that consummately easy for her. Sicuan and Chulucan were well aware of the refinements understood by the ancient Homeworlder, Sade. True torture should be mental as well as physical. This bit of lore they put into practice soon after Janja became their property. They left her alone with Whistle, and naked. Everyone in the mansion knew what would happen. It was inevitable. Janja, however, had seen a Jarp, touched a Jarp, and been taken to climax by a Jarp. She did not consider the possibility of rape and saw no reason to hate Whistle. So matters turned out

differently. Janja was kind to Whistle. When Whistle sought to seize her, the blonde eluded without losing grace or dignity. She advised the Jarp that this was not the way to go about it. After that Janja talked Whistle out of it, and each of them felt that she/it had a friend. The masters were hardly pleased. While they pondered giving Janja another lesson, she erred. She let them see her affront at an obscene command, and pulled away from an attempt to force her. The masters were delighted. She must be shown that she must obey, and she must be shown what to expect in the way of use here. Too, she would profit by learning clearly just what sort of behavioral niceties Sicuan and Chulucan exercised toward purchased flesh. She was ensheathed, from waist down, so that she had to spend some five hours in a stiff standing posture. Meanwhile her new owners pondered, discussed, and began to prepare for her further initiation. Among the items of property of Sicuan was a valued prize: a well-educated and pure-blooded native of Saiping, one of the "enclave planets" settled so long ago by members of only one Homeworld race. (Now all those old Erts races were known to be subraces; all were human and members of the Galactic race.) Milotus was, strangely, almost brass yellow in color: 86 the color beloved by Gri. Her eyes were long and slanting and her hair was very black, straight, and intensely glossy. That and its length made it seem a shimmering black cape that fell all down her back and onto her buttocks. The overseer brought her in just as Whistle and Janja entered the big well-lit chamber. They had been summoned. Janja seemed hardly as stiff as she should have been after her ordeal, but it had been only a reminder, after all. The overseer handed Milotus over to Chulucan, bowed, and left. He wore big glossy boots, but they made little noise on the thick carpet of dark but vivid blue, decorated with various floral designs in beige and pale yellow and pale green. Janja stood beside the Jarp. Jonuta had not passed on to the procurer the facts of Janja's strength and speed. He had not mentioned her "barbaric" willingness to fight. (Resh's gravity was 1.2G. Janja might weigh six or seven pounds less here than she had on Aglaya. Such a difference was of no value to johncarter bouncing about.) Whistle stood relaxed and unarmed and Chulucan was staging a demonstration for Janja, without paying her any mind. Indeed, he gave the impression that he deliberately ignored her. That was deliberate. All of that constituted a mistake. Chulucan ordered Milotus to bend over the back of a handsome, exotically shaped chair molded of a single piece of royal blue tetraplas. She did, until her palms were flat on the seat and the chair's back was nudging her midriff into a little bulge. Her hair slid aside in two sheaves to reveal her upturned backside and its bifurcation. "Ah," Chulucan said, "the enchanted valley and the entrance to her rearward sanctum!" He smiled, using terminology from his beloved Sade. Big as a bed, a holobubble of a seated, fierce-eyed Gri stared down upon the scene. He held sword and sheaf of seed-grain, and both were phallic. The pastoral scene that formed the entire west wall of the 87 room was also a holographic projection. It was seasonally changed-though it was said of most of Resh that it had four seasons in its year: a month of spring followed by hot summer, hotter summer, and summer. "How I do love that part of a woman which is most like a man," Chulucan said, again using terminology of the ancient Marquis de Sade. He stepped forward and clapped his hands to Milotus's flaring yellow hips. The slapping sound was loud even in that large room. "This, dear little barbarian, is how I will enjoy your slim and pallid self . . . soon. A woman is so nicely padded here, and so snug in the tiniest channel between these cushions so obviously provided for a man's comfort. And she feels it so much more, here by the darling garden gate, doesn't she, Milotus?" The Saipese groaned and plaintively requested a bit of marge. Chulucan denied her that slippery substance. The yellow-robed Sicuan suggested the same, while his son was molding and kneading the bent Milotus's backside. Chulucan refused. He also refused his father's suggestion of a bit of oil. "Why be so considerate," Chulucan said mockingly, "when one is, after all, ignoring that very chalice of her sacred womanhood?" And he chuckled. Janja saw that the wizened former High Priest of Gri was overindulgent and that the son was headstrong and

disrespectful of all wisdom save his own. And the "wisdom" of Sade, whom he had again mockingly quoted. He forced himself into the brass-hued slave then, and she whimpered and writhed. Only then did Janja, who was not stupid but was without any experience in such matters, realize where and how Chulucan would use Milotus. She saw that he was enjoying himself immensely, but took the Saipese woman's moans and writhing for signs of pain. Janja tried to imagine the agony. Why, this was what the Shirashites had done to the Galactic spacefarers-the males! "Ah, Gri," Chulucan shivered with a sigh of great pleasure, "how wonderful, this tiniest of channels, 88 round and thus obviously the intended home of a round plug!" He was most fond of that ancient argument of D.A.F. Sade. It was most important, Janja's impulsive attack on her first master. She was young, and short on knowledge. Still, even an older and wiser Aglayan could not truthfully say that the brain was always in control of one's actions. (As it turned out, both Chulucan and Milotus were enjoying; the yellow slave was well accustomed to such activity, and was one of those who had learned to prefer it. For Janja's benefit, Milotus had been ordered to simulate pain and outrage.) The pale-haired slave sprang to grasp Chulucan in small strong hands. She hurled him from the whimpering Saipese, who screamed at the abrupt disimpale-ment. The old man started forward. Janja's staring eyes made him stop, staring. She whirled back to Milotus. "This is monstrous, barbaric," she said, raising the Saipese to an erect position. "Flee. We must-" Milotus's wide almond eyes were staring past her. Janja spun, in a ready crouch. Her eyes were steady gray ice. Her fingers bent into claws. Her new friend was a slave of Sicuan and Chulucan, and hardly knew Janja. The shallowness of the Jarp's mind, its weakness, had given Janja no indication of its charge. Such interference with master's pleasure was a mistake for which the new one must pay. Janja's second error was in assuming that no one was a slave by choice and would surely rebel at the first opportunity. Milotus merely stood, wide-eyed. Whistle charged Janja while Sicuan stood glaring from beneath his lids and Chulucan sat dazedly on the floor with his hands planted behind him for support. His erection was gone; violence was for the giving, not the taking. Fierce-eyed Gri stared down, as effective as any god anywhere. Suddenly Sicuan remembered to shout. "No, Whistle!" Janja called. "No, don't! We can-" The Jarp's orange hands leaped out to clutch and Janja's hand shot out to clamp the "silver"-braced 89 wrist. Janja twisted until the Jarp cried out in pain and went to her knees. Janja's other hand whipped out to slap the side of the Jarp's head, edge on. Whistle dropped and dark, intensely red hair strayed over her ever-piquant face. Janja turned back to Milotus and Chulucan brought the edge of an ornamental spaceship replica, old style, down on her head. The silvery statuette had been a present from the spaceport's director. Janja sagged, shaking her head. She was midway between consciousness and the dark. She fought to ex-exert control, to clear her roaring head, to damp out the area that reported pain. Chulucan's viciously placed kick tumbled her forward. At the same time, the door was hurled open and the overseer rushed in, in response to Sicuan's shout. It was a fortuitous interruption. Janja was rolling to face her attacker, her head spinning and her eyes seeing swirling gray. She could just make out Chulucan. He was raising the statuette for another blow. He was not in control of his brain and Janja cherved her death there. The scene was chaotic and yet obvious to overseer Izhan. He drew his slavetube in a smooth motion and leveled it. The beam stiffened Janja into paralysis at the same time as Sicuan yelled at his son. The overseer raised his cylinder to port-arms. The slavetube's beam, which attacked the central nervous system, could have interesting lasting effects if use were prolonged. Janja, shuddering, rolled over onto her belly. She started to rise. Chulucan used an ancient and ever-effective means of chastisement and control. He whipped her. She rolled desperately. That only gained her lashes in different places. At the fourth stroke the thin strip of tubular equhyde snapped itself three times around Janja's throat. Her hands leaped up, and Chulucan yanked. Janja came forcibly up to her knees, trying to keep from

being strangled or dragged. She lurched forward 90 -and fell headlong. Her body slap-thumped the carpet and her forehead banged hard. Chulucan kept pulling. He was smiling. Gray rose up around Janja's mind, swirled, exploded, and became blackness. Milotus resumed her bowed position. 7 Wise and great is His nature who fixed the wide world and the heavens, who raised the great vault of the sky and marshaled the broad army of the stars. Booda Jonuta eluded a bumbling old TAI cruiser out near Lanatia, made a trade there for a couple of interesting pieces of merchandise, undertook to transport a boxcar-size module rilled with seeds, saved a fair damsel in a semi-respectable dive, and very nearly fell into the trap of which she was the bait. Jonuta went through a window to safety-with-bruises; Sweetface quietly strangled the assassin and was then rescued by Arel with stopper ready for anyone who felt that a Jarp should not strangle someone's hired killer. The dive's other patrons lost interest in Sweetface. It was a lot more fun to watch while Kenowa did nasty things to the unfair damsel. When the damsel, who was the dive's singer, failed to show up for work the following night, no one thought to opine that she might be a temporary resident of the cargo hold of spaceship Coronet. Once she realized what that meant, in this nasty place surrounded by strange men off Protected worlds, she began shrieking. She was more than ready to apprise Captain Jonuta just who had hired her and the assassin-a space-station stevedore grounded for drunkenness. Jon- 91 uta and Kenowa recorded her story. Then they gave her to Arel. And then Srih and then Sweetface, for hours. After that Coppertop-or whatever her name had been before the dye job-went into the small cabin adjacent to Jonuta's instead of back to the cargo hold. Coronet was in space when the shuttle returned to Lanatia without Coppertop. Onboard, however, was a copy of the confession tape. It was addressed to a law-enforcement official Jonuta knew. That person listened' to it, personally took it over to play for the owner of the dive, and filed it away. The innkeeper had a new singer within forty hours. "That was a bit close," Kenowa said, as Coronet fled out among the star-crowded parsecs. "It was, indeed," Jonuta grunted, lying on his back. "We've been close a lot of times, haven't we. Isn't it strange how it seems so much closer when it's one man with a small gun a. few meters away! We've been just as close to-getting it, sitting in the con-cabin, and with a lot less chance of surviving. It's just less ... personal, out here." "Hm." She was tracing a pattern around his nipple with her fingertip; a pattern that existed only in her mind. "It's personal, Jone. It's personal. It's Corundum. I think his-his mission in life is killing you. He keeps trying." "A game," Jonuta grunted, staring up glassy-eyed. "Game! That rotten pirate's trying to kill you!" "Shh." He rubbed her shoulder without taking his gaze off his cabin's ceiling. "It's a game. That black-wearing throwback to the era of water sail ships is a gamester, Kenowa. He doesn't want to kill me. Not really. Then what would he do? What would Captain Corundum-dum do if he didn't have me to plot against anymore? I am what adds spice and purpose to his silly little pirate-games life." "All right. But what if he does, mean to or not? Whether he wants you dead or not, he keeps setting 92 traps, paying someone to pay someone to-to kill you." "To try to scare me. They fail, Kenny, dammit. They fail. They just failed again. Next time they'll fail again." "How can you even talk about a next time!" She was quivering. She wanted to shake him. She tried to touch his nipple with her tongue and realized she wanted to bite it, to shake him and beat him, to make him run and hide, live a good comfortable life with the millions he must have. Or to use every resource, all those stells he had stashed on so many planets, to hunt Corundum, hound Corundum, trap Corundum, kill the man Corundum who was trying to kill him, to destroy, annihilate, vaporize, extirpate that damned flakier Corundum. She clutched him. "Tone? Jone-you have backup SIPACUM-" "Parallel," Jonuta corrected quietly, stroking naked flesh. "-and backup cassettes, my dear. Has the idea of a backup Jonuta occurred to you?" Jonuta's eyes flared and stared up at the ceiling as if it had just appeared. Yet he answered calmly: "Oh of course, and so has the idea of immortality. Just nibble that a bit," he said, pressing her

head and moving hurriedly to another subject. "Kenny-are you interested in making a threesome with our dear Copper-top from Lanatia?" She tongue-lapped his nipple while she considered. "Not really. If you want to, of course. But what I'd rather do is watch." "Really? Me with Coppertop?" "Um-hmm. Does that interest you, my dear?" Jonuta's lips moved just a bit in a small smile. "Um-hmm." And Kenowa did enjoy watching it. And Jonuta enjoyed it, as did the two-toned Coppertop. By the time they put her off at Panishport, she did not want to go". Kenowa knew that, and she had a feeling of pride. 93 You want him and you want to stay with him. I have him. So long as I'm not possessive or silly about it, I keep him, too, you silly little adventuress! The tow-module of grain-seed he left at the station circling the planet: Panishport. From there a voucher was faxed down to the planetary surface: the second half of the hauling fee. A weepy Coppertop he put into the shuttle, wearing the Fronter burnoos that Kenowa was tired of. Copper had enough interplanetary credit slips to buy a meal and perhaps rent a room for a day or two. Best she start looking for work-or a patron-without delay. Unsearched, Coronet dropped on down to Panish. He had been sure that the two interesting items of cargo he had traded for on Lanatia would fetch a nice profit on Panish, combined with two others. He was right. The deal was consummated in short order. Five others went to a procurer; Jonuta accepted less credit and erased a favor. Panish was one of several worlds on which Jonuta had two fat backup accounts for emergency or retirement use. Now he had more, invested in a fund based on the economy of the planet itself, and the crew of Coronet went out on the town. The town was named Harmony. For fun Jonuta and Kenowa called each other "General" and "Contessa." The fellow who challenged Arel in a spacefarer's cantina backed down swiftly when he discovered who Arel shipped with. The shapely cause of the quarrel left the place in company with Arel and another friend Arel had made, a Jarp. Next planetary day Kenowa bailed out Sweetface while Jonuta did credit-transferring things with two I.D. cards bearing two names and electronic imprints that proved him to be two people. Arel and Srih meanwhile oversaw the arrangements for the outgoing pay-load. That they picked up at Panish's Station Two, one of the three huge wheels in permanent synchronous orbit. They not only saw to onplanet communication and monitored the solar power systemry, they handled 94 ingoing and outgoing cargo and thus relieved Panish's atmosphere and spaceport of a great deal of traffic. The bulk of mechanica they undertook to haul would have filled four Coronets: a thirty-seven-item load of agricultural equipment for one of the two rival farm co-ops on Terasaki. No piece of equipment was smaller than a telepresence tractor-and-attachments. All of it was permalubed with necessary parts shielded so as to be nonsensitive to atmosphere-or lack of it. Coronet took it all, and looked ridiculous. The ship bumbled off Terasaki-ward hauling the whole load, all tethered exteriorly and most unpack-aged. Santa Claus on his way, with no room left on the sled. Such hauling was sensible and marvelously efficient: a spacecraft trailing thirty-seven tethers, dragging tons massing twice its own weight-except that there was no drag, in space. That was the point. For some items of cargo not even a tow-module was necessary. The item itself formed the module. All that had to be done was tether it to the ship, or one of the space-going "barges" that was little more than a shielded engine with space for a couple of crew. The tether must not be too rigid, not too flexible. And of course one had to avoid anything that even intimidated gravitational pull. No policers of any sort considered overchecking such a massy, multiblip space-borne mess as Coronet comprised on this run. The cassette did not direct them to Terasaki, despite the cargo manifest for thirty-seven pieces of farm equipment worth billions. Jonuta had never had any intention of going to Terasaki. He, Kenowa, and Srih were about as welcome there as vomit in freefall. Nor was it economically feasible-for Jonuta-to stop merely at Tera-saki's orbiting receiving station, leave off the towage, and depart without going onplanet. The backward-streaming load he hauled, however, got him to Jasbir-station without harassment or suspicion. By that time 95 crew and onboard cargo were worse than fed up with the

free-floating freefall of G. While Jonuta obtained readout on the time to Jasbir-station and swiftly keyed in a ten-minute warning, Sweetface stood waiting just behind him, to take the con. Meaning: sit and do nothing while SIPACUM and Coronet took Coronet to Jasbir's orbiting torus of a station. "Your duty now, Sweetface. I need some rest." Sweetface's little mouth smiled. The Jarp knew about that "rest" the captain needed. A Jarp's sense of smell was a couple of hundred times better developed than these humans'. Sweetface had trembled and swallowed hard a few minutes ago, passing Kenowa in the beige tunnel. It had caught a strong pheromonal odor. Kenowa was in heat. Jonuta probably smelled it too, without even realizing it. It was quite pleasant, not having to be human. It wondered if Kenowa played with Jonuta's ittybitsy nipples when they sex-wallowed. (Tloo-whEEetl'ed; the Jarp always thought of love-making or, more properly, genital-uniting, in the Jarp words: tloo-whEEetl'.) "You're on duty as of now, Sweets-and quit pressing your damned titty into your captain's back!" "Treee'tl-l-l wheeet-etll!" "Oh, dammit, Sweetface, turn on your damned translator!" "Sorry, Captain. But you understand my language." "True. But I've told you a million times to leave that damned translator on, and particularly when you're standing right behind me! You can take out an eardrum just 'saying' the word 'sorry,' dammit." "Sorry, Captain. Have I ever told the captain that this translator is calibrated to my left rear molars and sets them on edge?" "You have," Jonuta said dryly. He was impatient. He had a strong yen for Kenowa and wasn't sure why, but was certainly ready to do something about it. "I have also responded, I have so far bought you three of 96 those overpriced helmets on three different planets, and had that one remodeled twice." "The captain understands Jarp, though, and when we are alone together-" "Don't remind me. Every time you whistle it sets up a vibration in my right rear molar. Have I ever told you that?" The human sense of humor was a couple of hundred tunes better developed than Jarps'. Sweetface cleared its throat. "Sorry, Captain. I did not know that, Captain. Taking con, Captain. Rest well, Captain." The long orange body folded itself into the high seat beside the captain's chair, eyes three sems in diameter staring at the busy panels. Jonuta departed the con for his own cabin, while the Jarp sat and entertained interesting fantasies as to what Kenowa and the captain did together. The captain's rule was that he and Kenowa had nothing sexual to do with Sweetface, on the grounds that it was a rotten way to run a spaceship. Like it or not, the Jarp agreed-almost. But, it thought, gazing unblinking at the steady-as-she-goes panels and lighted displays, what does she put into him when they tloo-whEEetl'? Jonuta meanwhile entered his cabin to find Kenowa waiting, and more. Kenowa wore: earrings, extremely thin gold wire, formed into rings of huge diameter. Unusually heavy makeup on her eyelids, deep blue shading out to azure. The latter matched her short-tressed wig. A large bracelet on her left wrist, silver with a setting of that pale blue-green stone the Jarp had given her; Jonuta could not think of its name. A satin scarf, medium green and shining, was wound around her hips so low that it just covered her vulva. It was knotted on her right hip so that the loose end trailed down her leg. Both legs were encased in blue Rinkl-Fre tights, crotch-less. Around her left ankle, a slim armlet of blue plas-teel. She wore nothing else, unless the makeup counted. Her nipples were an unusually deep pink and the 97 aureoles had been touched up with fluorescent mascara, in pale blue. She held a Qalaratini, which she extended. (Touch of lemon, six drops olive juice, half-ounce of driest vermouth, half-ounce of carbonated water, two ounces Qalara Passion Dry Gin.) He took the stemmed plass and sipped in silence. He nodded that it was good. "What else does my master wish?" Oh, he mused. We play Gor. All right. It was a nice game they both enjoyed, however unrealistic. Sex fantasies were hardly supposed to be mirrors of reality, after all. "You are my slave?" She nodded, looking at the general area of his huge belt buckle. She had not looked into his face. "My old friend Captain Cabot sent you to me?" An instant's hesitation; she nodded. "Yes, master. He-he said he owed you a small favor." "A small favor." "Yes, master." "A small slave for a small favor."

Keeps the ones with big warheads for himself, does he? You have a name?" "No, master. I am only a slavegirl, master." "Of Gor." "Yes, master." "I see. I shall not bother with a name, then. Perhaps I shall call you Azure." "As my master says. I live to please." " 'I,' is it? Not too well trained a fiat-chested little slave, at that." "This slave is so sorry, master!" She hit both knees and clasped his legs-.pressing her forehead against his crotch. He sipped the drink again, stretched to set it down. "Undress me, Azure." She undressed him. She made a very sensuous affair of it and now and again had a little difficulty. When he stood naked, he was visibly aroused. It was a very sensuous experience, being undressed by an interestingly painted, loving, not-quite-naked slave-who was 98 more submissive and lovingly sensuous than any slave would be! "Master's body is beautiful." He almost said thank you, but that would not fit. The trouble was that Jonuta was not an arrogant churl with heavy emotional needs not just to dominate but to crush women. Jonuta loved women. One did not,-however, thank a slave. This one in particular would not like that. He picked up the Qalaratini, drank. "We will hear a warning in about a half hour, slave Azure. You have just under a half-hour to flash me. Otherwise-out the airlock." She knelt again and pressed a soft, tender kiss to his sex. She kissed it all the way down one side, holding it gently with thumb and one finger, and then kissed its pendants, and kissed back up the other side. Ducking her head, she put out her tongue, hesitated a moment to be sure he saw it, and then drew it slowly up the undersurface of his erection. It hardened more and more. When her mouth was back at the tip again, she kissed it. Her hand rose, cupping, with the fingers pushed through between his thighs to fondle the very lowest curves of his buttocks. She kissed. Her tongue twitched. Warmth flowed down to his belly with the drink and warmth flowed up into his belly from his groin. She held the kiss, and increased the pressure. Her lips began to spread out, to splay. She held the the kiss. Her lips spread still more, soft and warm, slowly gliding down. He tensed at the feel of her teeth. Then that pressure was gone. The head of his slicer disappeared. She was no longer kissing but easing him into her mouth with more sensuous, exciting slowness than she ever had before. Than anyone had, since Kenowa was the best. The sensation, the sight of it, were intensely arousing. His pulse was thumping in his temples and he felt that it should be audible throughout the ship. A little jolt of extra warmth ran through him when he felt the quiver of a hot-pink nipple against his thigh. 99 His breathing was becoming erratic. Her hand slithered over his buttocks, fingered between; there was no longer room on his shaft for both her hands, and barely space left for one. All his senses were concentrated on feeling. Feeling, sensation. It coiled like liquid warmth in his loins, in his stomach, up his back. He began to quiver all over. Soft and yielding lips glided slowly, warmly. "Draw a deep breath," he said quietly, "and take it all, all of it, until you gag. I'll tell you when to lift your head again." She took a deep breath and pushed her mouth straight down, all the way. She held that pose, feeling him swelling and pulsing in her very throat, while he silently counted off twenty seconds. "Enough," he said. She held it another couple of seconds before lifting her head, gasping and gulping. He squatted and slid his hands onto her breasts while her eyes gazed into his. "When I say enough, it is enough. A slave does not wish to impress by throating her master an extra two seconds. Any slut can do that. A slave obeys. I shall have to deny your mouth and plug you right up the middle." "Oh, master-this slave is a virgin!" "Good. Then I will be gentle." To their mutual delight, he was not. At Jاسبirstation, while the shipment was checked and monitored for possible damage en route, Jonuta arranged to lease a schooner for transport down onplanet. That, rather than his merely paying shuttle fare, Impressed station personnel. Sweetface spotted the customs spotter and watched the watcher. For over an hour Coronet's crew moved back and forth between the ship and the smaller schooner. After that the bored spotter directed his attention elsewhere. One by one the fourteen items of walking cargo were transferred onto the smaller craft. All had simply received a hypnotic

injection-tetrazombase-and crossed under 100 their own power, in the clothing of the crew. Since sixty-three-point-forget-it percent of tetrazombase went straight through the system and could be returned to ninety-five percent potency, an enterprising onplanet buyer would receive a bonus-provided he "milked" his new property, that is, collected their urine for reprocessing. Arel stayed on Coronet, with Sweetface; its behavior on Panish had earned detention. Two men and a woman in two bars were, after all, unconscionable even to the Panishi Enforcement Bureau. Sweetface's bail fee, fine, and bribe on Panish had not amounted to plithit-feed. Sweetface was charmingly guilty, those huge eyes resembling those of a chastised beagle with myopia. With Kenowa and Srih, Jonuta went down. And around, low and then lower and half around again, on the dark side. Ground transport was swiftly arranged. Refreshments were provided for the three crew and a collection bucket for the fourteen cargo. Jonuta, Srih, and Kenowa urinated elsewhere. Six hours later Jonuta was possessor of a mini-holo-projector for his holster; a crate of Bedakeacorp calculators, the best; various medical stores and a few illegal substances massing two kilos; a case of better than good just-add-distilled-water brandy; a very willing slave who wanted the romance of being interplanetary traveled; first call on two favors with minimal stipulations; three names that could prove valuable; and another I.D. card. In addition he gained Jasbir-invested credit sufficient to finance four months of high living based on the current economy-or a good escape and hiding out. He was minus the fourteen items of cargo. They were now property on Jasbir. The trio also accepted the procurer's hospitality and the three night-partners he provided. Jonuta's was well trained, and he didn't have to teach her much. A nice diversion, if one liked them sixteen with breasts hard as tensed thighs. The willing slave was checked right through to Coronet as a paying passenger. His former owner had 101 provided the I.D. The medicals went right through because they were sealed and frozen, labeled, in the manufacturer's original cartons. The calculators were a proud Jasbiri export, and Captain Jonuta was beamed at. The two kilograms of illegals, meanwhile, were illegally taken offplanet by an agent of the procurer and rather daringly flung at Coronet from the skiff's airlock. The magnetized container crossed a couple of meters of space and smacked onto Coronet, where it clung. Jonuta went up, grappled it off and carried it onboard, and returned to the surface. Now for the transport of the machinery on out to Terasaki. He anticipated no major problem. Less than an hour of checking around by phone from a hotel room turned up what he wanted: a good ship's master in trouble. Merchant Captain Darr had been locked up for inability to pay his ship's entry fee. The poor devil had hauled in cargo for which he found a very soft market. Jonuta knew Jasbir. First the authorities would let poor Captain Darr sit around gaining weight and losing nerve and confidence in durance vile for a couple of months Jasbiri. Then they would attach his ship and call that payment until such time as Darr found a way to earn it, on Jasbir. Plus the fine. Plus interest. Plus a daily charge for the ship's continuance in dock. It might take almost a year, but Darr would lose his ship to the usual legal thieves of all tunes and all places: the government. Captain Darr was much surprised to receive a visit from his old buddy Praque of Ghanj. Except that the man who came to his cell was not Praque, but one Srih. He outlined a bargain and obtained quick and grateful agreement. The credit transfer was arranged. Two hours later Darr was released (by jovial guards; the unhappy ones were behind desks somewhere, realizing that this time the scam hadn't worked). Darr left with "Praque." After some probably unnecessary evasive tail-shaking, he gained a disguising robe and a complete shave, and entered Jonuta's hotel room in 102 the Taj Jasbirum Karavansery. It was the first time he had ever entered the city's finest hotel. "Sorry about the loss of your facial hair, Captain," Jonuta said; while Darr tried not to look at Kenowa; she was playing Space Maiden in thigh-high silver boots and gloves to the armpits, simulated metal breastplates, and an apparently metal crotchpiece that would have been monstrously uncomfortable had it not been both malleable and well padded.

"Perhaps you'd care to regrow it en route to Terasaki. Do come out of that ugly robe and let Barbarella here pour you a jolt." Darr tore his gaze from "Barbarella's" garb and lack of it, glanced back at that mop of orange hair, and looked around the spacious suite. "You do know how to live, Captain Jonuta." "I'm afraid I learned early-the hard way, believe it-about the cornholing practices of various governments and initiated certain antibuggery practices of my own. It pays. So does cornholing the cornholers." Darr chuckled, then sobered with a sidelong glance at the other man. "Meanwhile though, you have paid . . . my entry fee, a month's worth of docking fee, my fine-" "And some interest," Jonuta said, lifting a glass of pale amber liquid to the merchant captain. "Unfortunately, my way of doing business and circumventing the cornholers makes me unpopular in a few places. Terasaki is one of them. I have a little over a couple of billion dollars' worth of farm machinery with a Terasaki destination, and a couple of people most anxious to get there, too, I have half the towing fee in advance. The other half is waiting on Terasaki. Do not leave the station of that hole until you see it faxed through with your name on it! That will put you very much in business; it's yours. As to the two people-" Jonuta shrugged. "I will give you a name whose owner will be waiting for them." Darr tried not to frown. "These . . . people . . ." Jonuta turned his head in the direction of the doorway leading into the suite's other room. "Zeleek!"

103 The smiling man of apparently-thirty came in with some obsequy, and bowed to both captains. Darr stared. "Zeleek, this is Captain Darr. What is your profession?" "The best manslave on any planet, Captain Jonuta!" "I didn't ask for an advert," Jonuta said, curbing a smile. "Do you want to go to Terasaki?" "Oh, yes, Captain Jonuta!" "Are you in trouble on Jasbir?" "Oh no, Captain Jonuta! My master died and his son and I do not get along, Captain Jonuta. I am a professional! He is happy to let me leave him and go where I will be appreciated, Captain! He knows that for years I have dreamed of traveling all the way across space to another whole world. Terasaki has a better year-round climate than Jasbir and a slightly lower gravity, which will be nice, and I will have no trouble finding a master grateful for a real professional on such a planet, Captains!" "Be damned," Darr muttered. "And if Captain Darr transports you there-what will you do for him, Zeleek?" , "Anything, Captains!" Jonuta flipped his fingers and Zeleek, with another bow, departed to the adjoining room. Jonuta looked at Darr, who was shaking his head. "I got to admit that's unique in my experience, Captain. A slave who calls himself a professional slave!" He shook his head, looking both amused and uncomprehending. "Oh-and the other person for Terasaki, Captain?" "Not Barbarella." Jonuta grinned, for Darr had glanced again at Kenowa. "Oh, Captain Jonuta, I assure you-" "Quite all right, Darr," Jonuta said, dropping the "captain" politeness and flipping his fingers. "If she didn't love being looked at she wouldn't go around this way with most of her ass and warheads hanging out." 104 "Uh-" "The other person is Zeleek's wife. Or maybe it's his sister. I forget." Jonuta looked directly into Darr's eyes. "Does it matter?" "I suppose it doesn't, Captain. I'll be in your debt for life." "Well, I'll tell you this, Darr," Jonuta said, smiling, "I'll never try to steal your ship as payment of debt, legally or otherwise! Look, I said I'd get that shipment to Terasaki and I keep my word. The favor, you see, is mutual." Oh sure, Darr's nod and look said. Jonuta was only saving his ship and his livelihood and his life. Their conversation culminated hi agreement and action. Darr took Zeleek and saw to the tethering of the multipartite load to his Ladybug. An item of cargo was transferred from Jonuta's hold to Darr's. She was no kin to Zeleek, unknown to Zeleek, and would be swiftly bought by the same party on Terasaki who would handle Zeleek. That transaction would be effected by a triple credittransfer on Terasaki and its withdrawal; a packet of Terasaki's Crescent Emeralds would eventually find its way to Panish, there to await Jonuta's pickup. The item of cargo went aboard Ladybug as a passenger, beside Zeleek. Within the aura-suit she was drugged and gagged, with her wrists bound behind. Unfortunate, but there it was. A while later Zeleek hustled the suit over to Coronet and hustled back to

Ladybug. He had already told Darr that he and his "wife" were having trouble. Darr would not interfere. He was still seeing to his exterior loading when Coronet departed. All this resulted in Jonuta's doing favors for four people and making a good profit as well. It also resulted in Darr's being Jonuta's on demand. He would discover the fact that he was illegally transporting a kidnaped freeperson as a slave. His only way out would be murder in space. Instead, Darr would take 105 her to Terasaki, where he would soon be a most happy merchant captain. Four more items of cargo were offloaded on Jasbir's second moon, Ruby. There, for the next six days, Jonuta made a fool of himself over a short, slim bust with white-bleached hair. No way around it: she reminded him of Janja. She was not, and she was not worthy of Aglaya or the spaceways or Qalara or any hell of any faith. Coronet departed Ruby under command of a man angry with himself for a weakness: inability to forget a pallid barbarian from some dot in space called Aglaya. He was practically mooning, and he had just earned enough to retire wealthy! Besides, he reminded himself, Ruby is just another word for Corundum! 8 // a man is a slave, his own will is responsible for his slavery. Hegel (Restated, A.D. 1980s: If a person is a slave, their own will is responsible for their slavery.) (Restated pursuant to Linguistic Rescue Act: If a person is a slave, its own will is responsible for its slavery.) "Many brilliant methods of punishment are available to us," Chulucan told her, his disembodied face hovering amid swirling indigo clouds that were stealing her breath until her chest felt as if it must burst like a dehiscent seedpod swollen with its regenerative need. "But they are cold and impersonal, like modern space 106 combat. Some of us deplore the depersonalization of such intimate personal pleasures as war and torture. A force field can be applied to crush until the body bursts and spews. To crush the internal organs until they are a jelly within a living person. To rearrange your face by smashing the nose and convoluting the lips and thrusting the eyes backward toward the brain until they pop like grapes. Still, a force field is not something one holds in one's hands and administers personally." (Yet he had no hand; he was only a floating head and a voice and flat eyes that stared and pierced through into Janja's brain.) "A stopper of course does not give its wielder such a feeling of power and elation as a simple whip. A slavetube merely induces artificial catatonia. Where is the fun hi a stiff victim whose neurotransmitters are as if frozen? The firepaint from Franji applied, say, to your breasts and armpits and certain other areas turns you into a shrieking, dancing creature that experiences itself as burning alive. Still, that is wholly a spectator sport. It is not personal, once the paint is applied hi interesting designs to interesting areas." (Smiling, he materialized huge clawed hands with fingers like cables that curled around her breasts and brought fiery, bansheeshrieking pain to her body as it shifted, and angry humiliation to her mind her mind her mind-this is not real not real fight it fight it-her mind that at the same time felt his horrid calm, his utter delight and passionless malice. It faded slowly as agony misted her brain and damped out her cherming ability. This is not real, fight, fight, she told herself, and he squeezed, and twisted, and pulled, and the dehiscent seedpods popped and he tore them from her body and she stood there helpless, somehow bound, and she looked down to watch the crimson lines flow down from her chest and flow and flow and slowly, slowly she grew very tired in a creeping bloodless ennui that at last limpened her and Janja slid, quietly and slowly, into the last sleep that was death.) 107 And then she was falling. She fell for ten minutes, on and on, shrieking and twisting while her wide windstung eyes reported the kaleidoscopic agony of sky-ground-horizon-ground-sky-rain forest-skyground ground GROUND her guts floating and her mouth streaming vomit that splashed her as she fell and fell, screaming with the sky blasting her eyes but fading, fading, moving ever farther away while terror mounted screaming screaming onto the wind like a wake of sound behind her (above her) and the ground ground ground rushing up and rushing up closer and closer to meet her pinwheeling breathless vomiting body and its floating organs until with the impact it would explode and send

blood and internal organs and bones and muscles tearing, snapping, ripping, exploding squishing out through the flesh and it went on and on for ten minutes with the ground rushing up and getting closer and closer until she was going to IMP A- Jonuta thrust her into the airlock and slammed the door behind her. She whirled, but would not try it. It was locked, she knew, and she would not waste time and energy on a huge locked door of metal. She stood on metal. Above her head was a metal ceiling and on either side of her were metal walls-bulkheads, bulkheads-and the fourth wall was another metal door. The door behind her opened back into the ship, into Coronet. The door-hatch, ha-no no, port, it was a port; all these silly names these people had for things! The port before her led outside, into space. There was no air in space and she was completely naked. She was not sure what was going to happen to her, but she knew that she would die (this is not real! fight it, fight it, fightit fightit) in some horrible but swift manner and then the port opened, slowly, and all the air in the airlock rushed out into space and it tried to take Janja with it so that she had two broken limbs even before she died. Not real, not real, not real. Can't be because I 108 couldn't die more than once and how many times is this HOW DO THEY DO THIS TO MEEEE (Easily. It was but the work of a moment. Pain, and torture, and torment. The exertion-free work of a moment: the pressure of a thumb on the plunger of an exodermic syringe. The result was agony undreamed of by Xerxes or Darius or Dante or Sade or holy Torquemada or the well-fed proprietors of Belsen. But without physical harm to the victim. . . .) She was being turned into a human pincushion, millions of pins and each with a tiny sting all its own that grew and grew- The stings of wasps caused pain to their victims out of all proportion to the wasps' size and the potency of their venom. The sting was rather inconsequential. Without realizing it, without vindictiveness, Hyme-noptera vespidae polistes injected two chemicals along with his sting. He was totally unaware of their existence or their effect. The chemicals were histamine and 5-hydroxytryptamine. Their effect was to sensitize the victim's nerves to pain. In consequence, wasps gained a bad reputation. So did their cousins, the hornets. Yet they did nothing more than defend their tenuous paper homes against facied or real attacks by fearful and vindictive two-legged beasts who were many, many times their size. Those vastly larger creatures, bent on the total genocidal destruction of the home-and-family-loving wasp (a remover of agriculturally harmful or ruinous insects), were experimenting with its chemicals, along with others. There were analgesics first: drugs to reduce algesia-pain. There followed soporific drugs to induce sleep, either locally or to the entire organism. There came ataractic drugs to calm and analeptic drugs to excite. Humans invented antialgesics, then, and antihista-mines, and eventually an anti-5-ht. At the same time, humans were isolating the chemical agents in the neurons and neuroglia of their own 109 brains: cerebroside and sphingomyelin and ganglio-sides. They discovered that neurohumors calmed or stimulated this or that brain area. Humankind began to control, and then to cure the mental illnesses that plagued its nervous kind. Humans employed huphena-zine enanthate against schizophrenia, for example, and trimethadione and diphenylhydantoin against epilepsy. And azacyclonol, to lay the horrors induced by another chemical, LSD-25. Humans learned that an overabundance of uric acid could result in compulsive aggression and mental retardation; learned that overabundance in males often resulted from an enzyme. Humans named it, using forty-two letters and three hyphens. For a human was a Name-corner, as well as a Thingmaker. The invention and application of names, Janja saw, made humans feel that they understood what they named. In that lay security. Sometimes the names were meaningless. The peptide enkephalin, for instance, a brain chemical formed of a short chain of amino acids. Enkephalin was the body's "natural morphine." After years and years of using manufactured morphine-often dooming the relieved patient to the further pain of a burning addiction- humans found that the analog or agonist of morphine was manufactured naturally within the body! The Thingmaker looked inside last, ever last. Within itself the Thingmaker discovered neurotensin. This peptide

neurotransmitter was an even more powerful natural analgesic than enkephalin. Sometimes the names were childishly simple, as in interferon, made even simpler by being called "IF." IF proved to be the body's own defense against invading enemies. The chemical was manufactured within the body. Farewell to morphine. One of the tranquilizers was meprobamate. In addition to relaxing the user-not necessarily a patient-it raised the response threshold of its flesh. Ah; the Thingmaker saw interesting possibilities in that. . . . The vindictive murderer of billions of wasps and as 110 many of its own kind learned-through chemicals- first to give pain, then to lessen pain, then to deaden it, then to control it, finally to end it completely. Meanwhile it had learned to remove diseased or injured organs. After awhile it learned to replace them with mechanical contrivances, then organic ones. At last, with the creature's prodigiously growing knowledge (of things), it learned to coax the organism to defend itself; even to regrow some of its own lost or removed parts. The patient felt little or nothing, for its kind had learned to control pain chemically, then to nullify it, and then to coax or trick the organism into massive self-defense or self-regeneration. (Aglayans had learned to do these things with their minds. They controlled the mind; the mind controlled the body; the body feedback to the mind.) Thingmaker's next step was obvious. A savage and vindictive beast, it took that step. "Substance P"~for-Powder proved a primary transmitter of pain perception. In a different way, so were histamine and 5-ht. And hundreds of years passed. The wasps were long since exterminated, first on Homeworld and then from other worlds as Thingmaker expanded its sway. Eventually more intelligent humans bioengineered a strain of wasp that controlled ravagers of crop fields-and would not attack humans. And ever was humankind in need of more crops, as it was driven by an imagined need of more space, more Lebensraum. The mad intensity with which it engaged in the gratuitous slaying of its own kind was matched by its seeming mania for reproducing itself. Meanwhile, staying alive grew easier and easier. As ever, humans, Galactics, grew old as a race and as individuals-without growing up. Even in the homes of retired priests of Gri on the Farther Reaches world called Resh there were chemicals in quantity, and exodermic syringes. A scant two cc's of fluid was injected into the slave Janja. Beta IXP-hytreg+lysphimt-dv3 in HI: Beta-nine-substance P-hystatryptamine gammalase+lysergic 111 sphingomeprobase-dejavusane(Mark)3 in hydroxyl solution. A nerve-sensitizer, a pain-sensitizer, a skin-sensitizer, a hallucinogen, a muscle relaxant (so that she would not break her limbs in her agonies of the mind), and a deja vu inducer. If the hallucinogen was not enough, the dv3 was guaranteed to make its horrors abundantly real. She fell. She experienced the pressure of the force field along with the illusion of Chulucan's personal presence and manipulation. She felt the tearing away of her breasts. She fell again, longer. She was sucked out of an aMock into the airlessness between the stars. She was multiply stabbed with pins, each worse than the sting of a wasp. . . . Black tentacles writhed out of murky red, twisting, alive, shot with occasional streamers of orange-yellow-like garish serpents slithering susurrantly through the crimson swirls while the tentacles crept out, anar-thrously writhing, reaching, stretching out toward her; there were ten, no, twelve of them, all black and furry like the shivery arms of spiders all clutching, clutching, reaching for her. One slid around her waist and it was cold and furry and prickly with setaceous hair while another went around her neck as others pinned her arms and another slipped between her thighs and another caressed her face so that she groaned and shivered and shrieked in scarlet pain and terror that made her writhe and groan in futile anguish and horror and disgust. The furry, ropelike arms caressed and squeezed while one probed into her, probed to sink farther and farther into her until she was gasping, unable to scream, aware of her own internal rupturing and hemmorrhaging that sent her blood bubbling forth until her eyes saw only gray, gray, gray and there was a roaring hi her eyes no her ears as she grew weak, weaker, dying, helplessly dying while the tentacles held her in their obscene clutch and there came a final thrust with a final squeeze and she- So many

brilliant methods of punishment available to us Chulucan said 112 No no I can fight this I am of Aglaya and They don't know . . . The slavemaster Izhan was beating her. Beating her with a long curling whip. Even as she winced and writhed and groveled on the floor she knew that he was only an animal, a servant; it was Chulucan and his holy priestly father she had to fear. She knew it from both their minds. Izhan was no more than a minor member of what they called Homo sapiens. Anxious to please. A dog pleasing his masters. He whipped and whipped, the long lash whistling and slashing to wrap and curl and cut in fire and thunder and torment. Homo he was. Sapiens he would never be for he was merely contemptible. Homo caninis perhaps. The others were hateful and to be feared. Izhan was merely an employee; he merely obeyed his masters. He merely carried out orders, and so she did not fear or hate him but felt only contempt as with his whip he flayed her alive and continued, until he had whipped her to death. I am gaining on it; I can seize control, I am breaking through and when I have succeeded I will be stronger than their pain-stronger than they (are)! But it had begun again, she was to die again: this time on a tabletop, facedown, beneath a forcebeam in the chandelier with Chulucan demonstrating the power of the terribly narrow beam by turning a rheostat across the room. It was not a great hand that seemed to press on her back. It was a fingertip—a fingertip backed by fantastic strength. It pressed just at the base of her back, just at the coccyx. She tried moving. She was helplessly pinned and must lie there helplessly while Chulucan twisted the knob to add a bit, just a bit, more resistless power to that invisible superfinger. The pressure on her back increased, an ineffably powerful fingertip attempting to thrust into her back. She stiffened, trying to find a niche in the tabletop into which she might press her body in escape. She must gasp for each hard-fought, bad-tasting breath. She drew in her hands, bending her arms outward at the elbows. . . . 113 (The Saipese Milotus half-lay, half-sat beside the chair over which they had bent her. She watched the brave little girl who had tried to stop them. The strange blonde lay in the middle of the floor, writhing and moaning with dilated eyes, sweating in some monstrous terror and agony that was solely within her mind. She lay unable to resist, in enforced submission to them and their pain, slender and packed with muscle, her hair shorter than any woman's should be, paler than anyone's should be. She had resisted with honor-foolishly, for the subject of her attempted rescue was too much a slave to join a rebellion, and knew too much of psychoanalgesics. Milotus was broken. Janja was being broken. They had won, as they must win.) Placing her palms flat, she strove to raise herself against the beam, the finger. She strove—and she might as well have stood atop Jonuta's spaceship in an attempt to prevent its liftoff into space. The force-beam at her back was more constant than any dozen or ten dozen hands could be. All pressing down on her the spiked heel of a shoe or an elephant's foot or anything else of material construction, Thingmade. She gasped and lay flat again, to lie flat and take it. There was no alternative. She allowed a little groan of exhausted, conquered acceptance to shudder from her open mouth as it pressed the life from her and she died again. (It was still awful. It was dying. Now, though, she knew, and while the pain was terrible, the knowledge was not; she had died before and so knew that she would again but would not really; it was some sort of illusion. She sought control of it. White corpuscles were not the answer and she had called off their flocking to this and that source of agony. Now she sent enkephalin though she had no name for it. Now she ordered up more and more neurotensin within her, though she had no name for it, for she was not of them, she was of Aglaya, and worthy of Aglaya.) But now it came. Was this not reality? She lay on her back, staring upside-down at Chulu- 114 can. He stood at the head of the altar and her head hung over. He held an enormous golden knife, obviously phallic. And he wore the yellow, sexless robes of Gri. "Seven centuries ago the worship of Gri became the faith of the world," he told her. "Unbelievers were punished most severely, for Gri is a jealous god. Once human sacrifices were offered Him. Most gods, we know now, on most planets have proven the excuse for murder.

Behold the golden knife of Gri! Behold His life-giving phallus, that also takes life away. Gri is no soft god asking the impossible, that everyone be nice to everyone. The planetary deity of Jahpur—a false, mistaken god, of course—is one of those, mainly because he is the god of a people who spent most of their time being conquered and held captive. Once Gri came into His own and His dominion had been established throughout the world, those who clung to their false gods were punished. One of those punishments was to initiate them into the Way of Gri in the ancient manner." Chulucan paused to smile and regard the knife he held. It was a triangle, pointed at the tip and very sharp along each of the three edges. (These are intruders. They seek to rule my mind. Thrust them out. They are but chemicals, injected by the Thingmakers to torment me without marking me, to let me taste death without dying. She ceded all control of the body to Janja2, and Janja2 set about regaining the kidnaped brain.) "My father," Chulucan was saying, dragging it out for he had read Sade and understood the agony of waiting in apprehension (but the yellow draperies behind him were fading) "has amassed a great deal of wealth. Gri is good to His own. Our family has been priests for over two hundred years. Thus I have been out among the stars and the planets. I have seen old Homeworld with its tiered archaeomuseums that show the scores of civilizations and gods that have risen and fallen there. I know the legends of Osiris and Maho- 115 met/Muhammad and Mithras—Jesus and Ashu and Theba and Booda—and scores of others. There are great similarities from land to land, people to people, planet to planet." (He was nearly transparent now, though still he talked. . . .) "So I have been content to break with tradition and be not a priest but a wastrel, and my father is content to see me thus. He has retired from the priesthood. He believed in it no more when he wore the yellow robes than he does now! So we come down to you. It is with happiness that my father and Gri look down: Chulucan of the house of priests, the family IsGrican, at last acting as a priest, and as an ancient priest of the tradition as well!" Chulucan raised his yellow-robed arms and the golden knife glittered aloft. "O Gri—" And he vanished. She had won. Her mind was stronger than their chemicals. Gri was as nothing to Aglii and Sunmother. Janja had made the stupid mistake of warning them early of her speed and pluck and strength. She must now convince them that she was what they wanted, to bolster their egos: one more soft little slave, limp and malleable and soft and servile. Another object of helpless submission. She had learned. They had taught her respect, by subjecting her to more horror than she had ever dreamed in her nightmares aboard Coronet. They had indeed conquered her; it was just that they had not broken her. Janja was defeated, but she was not conquered. Not in her mind. Her brain flowed smoothly into a higher gear and began to function at that accelerated level. They must be made to believe that all resistance and even pretense of resistance had left her. That she had accepted slavery through fear. That she admitted to no choice but to submit and be openly accessible to 116 them, as Miletus was. Inside, she scorned them and waited. Them: the technosocietals who created thousands and thousands of things and raised them from the fertile gardens of their minds. But Janja knew that those minds remained essentially as they had when their race began its climb from seeking shelter to building it, to seeking new worlds. Without the power of mind, they resorted to Things and chemicals. Yet the strength of her Aglayan mind overwhelmed their chemicals. Her body lay on the floor before their delighted gazes. The sweat and urine that ran copiously from it were also carrying off their defeated chemicals. (Quite impossible, according to all texts.) Chemicals, shame, humiliation, pain, terror—all these she thrust from her. "It is time," Sicuan told his son. Chulucan went to stand over her. He smiled. "Yes . . . by now she has felt the bloody love-making of the Knife of Gri," he said. "Girl. Slave. Janja: you can hear me. In our kindness we have resurrected you from the dead. We have replaced all the damaged portions of your body, so that you will bear not even a scar. We have punished you, as you deserved, and we have rescued and preserved you, for we are kind. We are your masters." He waited. Janja realized that she was expected to respond; to

acknowledge, probably. She shook off the terrible feeling of aloneness that had arisen in her. Now she knew why Milotus was quiescent and un-rebellious. Now she could almost understand why the Jarp had defended them. Janja was alone, for she alone was not their slave. "You are my masters," she said dully. They were, of course, but not as they were masters of the others! She was then: slave not by their choice, but by hers, and by her conscious choice. She alone of all the slaves on Resh had decided. 9 It takes a hundred times more skill to make love than to command an army. Anne de Lanclos They vacationed on Franji. There Jonuta was clean, wealthy, and some sort of heir to some sort of fortune. -He spent a few pleasant days and nights in a few clubs. At a party on an estate of wealth he met a woman calling herself Countess Reesapantarii. After the party and for the next several planetary days-and most especially nights-he came to know her intimately. Jonuta called her "Ree." She called him "my darling." Kenowa meanwhile gave most of her clothing to the delighted girls and "girls" at a medium-range House called String of Pearls, and shopspreed on an (almost) unlimited budget. Jonuta set up a fat new account at the Franji State Bank & Transfer, using the new I.D. card he had gained on Jasbir. He used his own retina print. Who was going to order an hours-long and expensive com-putercheck to see if Eri Haddad of Jasbir was really someone else? (He had checked the I.D. through; Eri Haddad was clean, and dead.) Franji could be a nice place to retire, someday-or live in deep cover with wealth. Now he had two identities here, along with one fortune and another chunk of near-wealth sitting safely at interest. He also had a home on Franji, far from the capital. Meanwhile, he went back to the hotel and Ree's marvelous mouth and talented inner muscles. She was decorative, reasonably bright, and knew how to behave. Her lovemaking was unimaginative. Those 118 vaginal muscles, however, were sufficient compensation. For a while. Only after his leavetaking of the tearful "Countess Squeezer" and Coronet's return into space did Jonuta advise Kenowa that she owned a piece of an apt-complex on Franji, and an interest-earning credaccount. He told her where "her" Franjese I.D. card could be found, if necessity arose. "You-this-for me?" Jonuta showed her that tiny smile. "Of course for you, Kenny. Some people just can't seem to like me. If one of them succeeds in taking me out, I want you retired more than comfortably. It's my pride, of course." "Oh, my dear. Do just be still while I wrap my mouth around your pride." They fell happily into bed with the ease and expertise of long-time lovers who "vacationed" with others -and viewed the secret movies taken automatically of Jonuta and Countess Reesapantarii when he had brought her up to the ship. The closely snuggling Kenowa noticed that Reesapantarii was shortish, lithe, unusually well developed of leg, and unusually fair of complexion. Otherwise she really wasn't all that attractive. Kenowa sighed, but said nothing. She wished he had sliced that damned Janja-cake and gotten her out of his system. Jonuta thought the sigh was elicited by the activity of his fingers, and pushed. They forgot the movie and curled to get hands and mouths on each other. The cabin went steamy. They vacationed on Qalara, too. There Jonuta seemed to know everyone. There Jonuta could not be touched. He was also a backer of numerous upstanding Qalaran endeavors and activities, and beloved. He was also the target of an assassin, who proved just good enough to blow Axel's head completely off in an unequivocally messy manner. The supposedly safetyplac of the window had not stopped tinkling on the floor when Jonuta took out the murderer and 119 half the room of the adjoining hotel from which the shot had been fired. What was left of the corpse proved female and unidentifiable. Policers began checking, goosed by more than one irate citizen who owed this and that to Kislar Jonuta. No one bothered asking him who might want him dead. Copperhead had named her employer as Captain Corundum. Could that Rahmani bastard get to him even on Qalara? Surely not. But could it be; was it possible? Corundum. All too often someone somewhere just had to mention the man to Jonuta, not realizing that the two were most definitely not friends. Both were austere yet sometimes flamboyant outlaws of transcendent competence. Both were more than bright, with a flare for the dramatic. Both

were successful; both were respected by many and probably by each other; feared by many and perhaps by each other, although that could not, of course, be admitted. The contacts of Captains Jonuta and Corundum were broad, competent, and nearly always loyal. Both kept up with technology and with the opposition, and kept up their ships and equipment, both hard- and software. Jonuta was known to be a Qalaran. Corundum was thought to be of Rahman. No one was really sure. No one could really be sure who Corundum was. Was he a Hindi named Kurun, from Rahman? Might his real name be some form of ruby or sapphire, the corundum gemstones? Captain Jonuta had been asked, "What is Corundum?" "An aluminum oxide found in crystals and big rhombohedral stones in various rocks on many planets." On hearing this, Corundum was reputed to have said, "Ah! He forgot to add that it is a most brilliant and valuable gemstone indeed!" Captain Jonuta had been asked, "Who is Corundum?" 120 "A very dense piece of rock," he had said, and was overheard by seven or eight grinning patrons of a bar in Cold Spring, on Shankar. It has been said that Captain Corundum was: a.. a retired TransGalactic Order (TGO: "The Gray Organization") agent who was 1) caught on the take, or 2) too ruthless even for TGO (hardly likely); b. a scuttled former space captain of TGO's uniformed branch, TGWatch, who realized that there was much more for a truly competent spacefarer on the other side of the law; c. a victim of an onplanet duel with Jonuta, regenerated and no longer recognizable as whoever he had been; d. the victim of an explosion in space (accidental? Jonuta-caused?), after which repeat (c); e. a deep-cover agent for TGW, or TAI, or TGO proper (surely a ridiculous postulate, in any of the three cases); f.. the fabulously wealthy son of some Homeworlder, bored, unchallenged and intelligence-enhanced by computerfeed, seeking thrills; g. a smart, lucky son of a nondescript peasant of Rahman. If Jonuta knew who Captain Corundum was or had been, he was not saying. That they had once spent three days-standard stalking each other in space, each always on the other's screen while both ingeniously maneuvered for a blow-away position-that was true. Both men confirmed. Weapons were fired only twice during that incredible seventy-hour "duel" in space. Corundum said it ended when Jonuta, realizing he was outmaneuvered and about to die, went Forty Percent City and lucked out: he survived instant subspace entry. Jonuta did not confirm. Jonuta said that he had never ram-jammed Coronet into subspace. His story was that they had broken off because in seventy hours word had gotten around, and various craft of various policer organizations were converging on Coronet and Firedancer. 121 It had been said that Jonuta had once destroyed a spaceboat off Captain Corundum's Firedancer, incidentally relieving Corundum of a valued crewman (Mate, some said) and three valuable items of cargo. Precisely the same story was told the other way around, which did not aid credibility. Corundum was supposed to have vaporized a Coronet spaceboat off Bleak (or maybe it was Jarpi or an unknown planet only Captains Corundum and Jonuta knew about). It was definitely true that Jonuta had once looked up from a card game in a bar lounge on Shankar to see a Fire-dancer crewman staring at him, and drawing his stopper. The game ended noisily. Jonuta had hit the floor backward even while he drew, and sent that Reshi to Gri before the man had leveled his gun. (That Jonuta had then coolly finished the card game was a later embellishment.) It was also true that Corundum had once laid a trap at Jasbir's onplanet shuttleport. He had embarrassingly tricked Jonuta out of two walking items of cargo and very nearly killed Jonuta into the bargain. "Very nearly killed" meant that Jonuta had been forced to run. It was after that that Captain Corundum became worse than unwelcome at either of Qalara's two stations, much less onplanet. It was relatively certain that the colonyship Samarkand had been saved by Jonuta, although neither he nor Corundum would admit that Coronet was the ship that suddenly appeared to chase off the pirate craft-definitely Firedancer. No one had offered Jonuta a medal or commendation 'or amnesty. Some claimed that Kenowa had been Captain Corundum's woman. That was not true. Some said that Srih had once worked for Corundum. Denied; unconfirmed either way. Other stories were too wild and provably ridiculous to bear repetition. The rivalry was old. The hatred- and

grudging respect-were mutual. Corundum could have been called Captain Cautious and was not; Jon- 122 uta had more than once earned the sobriquet "daring" but was stuck with the other label. Now and again the story arose anew that one had sold the other out to TAI or TGO/TGW, or had made a deal with one of those or some other policers against the other captain. That recurrent canard was not credited by sensible people, or even semi-sensible ones who knew much about Jonuta and Corundum. There were lengths to which neither would go. Some things just were not honorable. The dramatically black-clad Corundum laughed at such tales. "There is no deal which either Corundum or Captain what-is-it?-Jonuta--could offer that any policers would accept. Even if we were low enough to deal with such incompetent hired help-which, be assured, not even Jonuta is!" Jonuta's version was simpler: "Even Corundum is more trustworthy than The Gray Organization. You wouldn't find either of us trying to deal with them. As to that other thing you mentioned-what was it? TAI? What's that?" And on another occasion: "TAI? That means The Anile Incompetents, doesn't it?" Corundum had been asked if there were any truth' in the rumor that he and Jonuta were planning an alliance to rule the galaxy. Corundum's reply was, "Corundum and-whom?" "I've never met him," someone had said to Jonuta in public, so that the story was remembered and told by several people, "but I understand that when Captain Corundum talks you can hear the commas and semicolons. Is that so?" Jonuta had flipped his fingers. "Who could know? Who would listen to Captain Ruby-Sapphire?" Once Corundum had been advised that a TGW ship had blown Jonuta into dust and spacedrift out off Shirash. "Unbelievable!" Corundum had said. "If it is true, however, Firedancer will send that TGW craft to join him." "You mean you would avenge Jonuta, Captain?" "No," Corundum replied, unsmiling, "but Corun- 123 dum would certainly go after the TGWatchdoggers who cheated me of removing Jonuta from the space-ways." Jonuta had been asked, "Is it true that Captain Corundum's friends call him Ruby?" (Or Gem, or Sapphire, in variant accounts.) Captain Jonuta's reply was swift: "Oh-Corundum has a friend?" And now Corundum had hired at least two people on Lanatia to blow Jonuta away, and-another here, even on Qalara? It was terribly hard for Jonuta to believe. Nevertheless, the attempt had been made, and Captain Cautious was shaken by it. Corundum or no, someone had tried to murder him in the capital city of his own home planet, where he was far from disliked! Jonuta did not brood long. He went several times to Qalara's Hakimit Medical Center, into which he had put quite a bit of money over the years. Rumor was that he was injured; he was not. He would not say why he went there. Kenowa asked, once. He did not reply. He did withdraw his financial backing from two investments and another purely Qalaran endeavor. That led to the withdrawal of other investors, and hurt all three. Newspeople were not able to get close enough to ask Captain Jonuta why. Instead, he made a public statement that was dutifully reported and reported. It was difficult, he said, for a man to give such heavy financial support to institutions or organizations on a world that "I have always called home, and loved, yet where a hired killer's employer cannot be found." That guaranteed a renewed exertion of pressure on onplanet police and other investigators. They trebled their efforts. To no result. That naturally led to some speculation. Who was so competent as to make such an attempt and resist all efforts at being uncovered? Well . . . TransGalactic Order: TGO, The Gray Organization. A shaken Captain Jonuta took to space. 124 This time he carried mercury and enarpan and crates of Qalaran holomovies, certified legal. He also towed two Hummingbirds, crated. The small ground-cars were a popular and profitable Qalaran export, along with mercury. Arel's place onboard was filled temporarily by two one-trippers, brothers, who had been checked very carefully before being allowed to work their passage to Panish. The holds contained only legal cargo. Accordingly, Jonuta happily allowed himself to be stopped and deep-scanned by a swift, ugly black TAI cruiser, shark class. Jonuta always assumed that Kenowa's connection with him and her continuing presence on Coronet were known, and that her description and likeness were immediately available for retrieval display on every policer

craft. Merely as a test of his facilities and to keep them guessing when they pooled their information, Captain Cautious saw to it that Kenowa's presence went undetected by the TAI. She sat quietly under a scanner-defeating thermoretentive shield. It was also a table on which rested a freefall food kit. Eventually the TAI prefect reluctantly assured himself that there was no contraband on Coronet, and no female. Obviously this was a purely legal operation. And didn't Prefect Raint wish he could find some reason to seize the cargo and get one of those lovely and superb Hummingbirds bumped to himself! Prefect Raint could not. Too bad. Captain Jonuta had either taken a scare and gone straight, or happened to be clean this time. No use trying to take him in without evidence in hand. The TAI shark broke off. Coronet went on its way: back to Panish. There Jonuta lucked into selling one of the ground-cars himself. The other he traded to a dealer, rejecting the offer of a human as part of the payment. He also saw to the development of the lengthy, motive holoprojection he had directed and made aboard Coronet. No questions were asked, but the seemingly babbly big client—a Chank, according to the I.D. card Jonuta used this time—let the developer know 125 that he had a-uh, er-yen for Jarps. That certainly firmed with this nowhere holomovie! After a couple of laughing recountings of his dealings with the Chank weirdo, the developer forgot him and the job. Jonuta took the projection back to Coronet. After viewing it, he set off with it to a suitmaker on the far side of the planet. Kenowa was meanwhile making a few little observations and checking a few things for them. She also bought a blatantly sexy outfit, all in real leather and simulated brass-prass. She strutted in for her arranged dinner date with Jonuta, in the rooftop dining room at the south pole resort hotel. Everyone there, regardless of sex, stared at her or at least watched—all except Jonuta. He was staring moodily and rather moon-ily at a sum, short dancer in a wig the color of a giant orange sun. Lean hi the hip and extra-round of thigh, Kenowa managed not to weep. Janja, she mused. How I wish I had slipped ground microfiche in that pallid creature's food! No-better and more satisfactory to have slit her triple-damned throat! Kenowa knew she would be leaving this place alone, and she was right. She had assumed that Jonuta would meet the dancer and arrange a tryst, and she was right. Kenowa was not even interested in the two males and three females—or maybe two and a crosser—who tried to pick her up in her magnificently erotic new clothing. She packed the leathers away for at least two months. It would be interesting then to see if he recognized them. It was possible that he had not noticed. An assassin could have walked up and strangled him, Kenowa thought, worried and leaking tears. She curled up with herself and a vibrator. Dam' little cake of a dancer! She wished Aglaya's sun had gone nova—long ago. She was not displeased, less than three hours later, when Jonuta came to her. She read the signs. The cake had been a down. Jonuta was feeling silly/embarassed 126 /self-castigatory/apologetic and, insofar as he was capable, guilty. Kenowa was sorry for him but neither overly solicitous nor standoffish; under such circumstances he was a fabulous lover. Kenowa was one of those few sensible people who understood when they had something good, and to whom fidelity was a term for something aside from the natural call of the flesh toward . . . fresh flesh. It was she who got the best part of this man, who was one in millions. So he was capable of error, when he thought with his emotions or his crotch. "Got something in my breast," she said, handling and flaunting one. He turned, frowning. "Not a lump? What do you mean, something." "I don't know." She tugged its (darkly cell-dyed) tip. "Whole lot of pressure inside. Feels like it's stuffed and all swollen." He had seen the vibrator. "Maybe it was your toy." "Maybe. I think this needs a lot of sucking." "I'll send out for someone," he said, smiling and undressing, and he came to her in the hotel's big airbed. "S-strange," she murmured a couple of minutes later. "The-pressure seems to be . . . increasing rather than . . . going down." "Better switch to the other one," he muttered, nuzzling, and he did. "Uh!" And a couple of minutes later: "I think I need a daktari." "Doctor Jonuta's deep protein injection?" "Uh-huh!" He nibbled. "Where do you think you want it,

ma'am?" "Uh! Umm ... I think ... I think I'd like it orally, daktari," she said, and she grabbed the injector. Kenowa, too, was capable of error. She was aware of Jonuta's inability to clear his mind of that damned little barbarian-worlder, Janja. That hurt Kenowa a bit 127 But it had no effect on her love for Jonuta or her desire that he be happy and as at rest his mind as his profession would allow. In a small, semilegal shop in Dogrun, across Panish, she overpaid for the finest, softest available wig of human hair. She gave her instructions for its preparation, and visited the honeymoon shop of another store. When she returned, the wig had been bleached to a family yellowish white. Brushing aside offers of help, she went into a dressing room to don it in private. The shopowner was shocked and chagrined at the order to clip the fine soft wig very short. All that wasted hair -paid for! Again in private, Kenowa changed back into the ringleted brown wig she wore that day, and departed with her wrapped purchase. (Credittransfer to the shop's account had been effected and confirmed before the proprietor would make all those obscene changes to her purpose. All that lovely hair-on his floor! All the doltish overrich woman had now was a cap of ridiculously pale hair, like a-like a Rahmani turban!) Kenowa turbotubed back to Jetspring, Panish's capital. She had no trouble smuggling the wig onto Coronet, along with a lot of square meters of some flouncy sheer rustly stuff from the honeymoon shop. It was lovely. Dogrun couldn't help having grown out of the town that had grown out of a mining camp idiotically named two centuries ago! Jonuta paid no attention to her return. Jonuta was busy. He was working at talking Sweetface out of bringing onboard two "friends." They were twins, nineteen years old-a boy and a girl native to Panish. Both were dazzled, almost flashing. They were more than enthusiastic about the Jarp with which they had spent the night. Sweetface-or any Jarp-could be all things to all sexes (or nearly all; both usual sexes and other Jarps, anyhow). Jonuta talked hard and well. He wanted no one to find reason or excuse to make a search of spaceship Coronet. It was not that there was any contraband 128 onboard. Jonuta was not interested in allowing anyone to examine or even see his specialized equipment. These two Panishi were young and reasonably attractive. They surely had relatives. Jonuta's business was known. The relatives might be shocked or assume the worst about the twins' relationship with a Jarp, or their presence aboard the ship of Captain Jonuta of Qalara. A lot of people were more than willing to assume the worst about Captain Jonuta of Coronet! That the girl was a chromosomally deviant 46,XXY was of interest only to her brother and to Sweetface, not to Coronet's captain. So she had both breasts and a penis of sorts. So what? (Idiot sloppy parents!) Jonuta persuaded the trio to take a suite at the best hotel in Jetspring-imaginatively named the Royal Jet-spring Homeaway. They were hardly out of sight before Jonuta began making arrangements to get off Panish by next Panish-day noon. Duty was duty. One of the twins took Jonuta's call, passed it to Sweetface without Visual. Sweetface warbled and trilled, and nodded. Aye, Captain. Sweetface reached Coronet in plenty of time, late next morning. It did seem a bit fragged and draggy. Very well; Jonuta elected to hold to Panish time for awhile. Coronet departed the planet and "night" was only a few hours away. Wearing the wig and fetching new frillery, Kenowa slipped into the captain's cabin. Jonuta was not pleased. For the first time, he denuded her head to its hairless state-incidentally removing a tiny morsel of skin with the Janja-imitating wig. Kenowa wept and groveled. Jonuta railed and- and as always when he looked down on her bare and barren skull, he was not disgusted. Instead he was moved to a feeling of tenderness, or protectiveness. Not being the jealous type did not mean that he was not territorial, and protective. He did not like that obviously instinctual drive, but there it was. Some things genetic could not be changed. This aspect of him was part of the reason he had tug-hustled her out of 129 that Sopurese dump in the first place. The seductive Kenowa, reduced and unsexy, unwittingly triggered the fatherly strong-male-protector instinct in Captain Cautious. As for that double-damned downing water-eyed white-headed pallid little Aglayan barbarian, she triggered

in him- Never mind. He would not think about that. This night he played the game Kenowa liked. He darkened the room completely, so that she need not be conscious of her head. Roughly he pulled her up. His hands clamped and pawed and groped. With complete disregard for the expense, he shredded her frilly, honeymoony new clothing and went at her as a homing rapist. He roughed her. Strong fingers fired her nerve endings while they grasped callously, groped roughly, sank into the resilient masses of her breasts. She groaned aloud at the lecherous and lascivious manipulations that, just for a while, turned her into the object of a callous bastard in rut. It was fun and it was erotic. Like the men in so many of the holodramas she loved, a strong irresistible man was amusing herself with her body. She whined and whimpered. Her eyes were closed despite the blackness in the cabin. Possessive fingers pressed and entered and tugged and ravished her until she was making kitten-whimpering sounds and her hips were pumping without her knowledge. Roughly, the unseen ruffian who had captured her dumped her onto the soft-sheeted, hard-bolstered surface of his bed. And then he became a tender and loving lover. Few would have believed it of Jonuta. He was no one's prepossession or cliché or even set of clichés. He was Jonuta. Her legs, her lips, the muscles of her stomach, all were flexing in arrhythmic spasms. Her entire organism seemed athrob and pulsing. Her breath puffed out in small quick gasps that muffled into mewling sounds of passion. She seemed to lift from the bed as 130 she went into welcome convulsions, and seconds later she was full of Jonuta. Her round brown eyes had gone glassy. They stared up at absolutely nothing. Had the cabin been brightly lit she would still have seen nothing. She held his fluidly moving body to her with strength. Now she was only molten flesh; now she was Woman; now she was only a single clasping organ. He climaxed as such a man might be expected to: massively, loudly, volcanically. Delighted with her and with him. Loving them both. And always far too excited and delighted to flop over and go to sleep. He held on, and she held on. When gasping had returned to breathing and that had slowed, along with their heartbeats, he slid from her and twisted onto his side. He kissed one nipple, soft and quiescent now, and then the other. "Stay right here," he said, throatily and low. He left her. When the hatch opened, she saw him for a moment. He wore the short robe of midnight velvet that in another era would have been reserved for a sultan enthroned. The hatch closed behind him and once again all light was gone. After a minute Kenowa rose. She found the discarded wig by feel and found a deck-mounted chair with her shin. The chair's leg was rounded and padded and she felt it and grunted just the same. Then she was at the bulkhead. She patted it until she found the little round door. She opened it, feeling the suction. In went the wig. It was organic; it would be converted and become useful in some other form. Kenowa went swiftly back to bed, crawling up from its foot so as to avoid that accursed chair. She lay still in his cabin, darker than space, and thought about him, about them. Anyone who really knew them would have realized that Jonuta of Qalara was indeed a sentimental man; that in his eyes it was difficult for her to do wrong-any real wrong, that is; any permanent wrong. In hers, he could do no wrong, without qualifications or reservations. Each of them 131 understood, as each understood the other. An outlaw's woman, she was full of love and without guile. An outlaw, he was as near to being her man as such a man could be. Only an idiot could have expected such as Jonuta to be a one-woman man; only an idiotic woman would have tried to hold him to such. No one knew all that because no one really did know them. No one really knew Jonuta. Kenowa was sure that she came closest. She was quite certain that she would rather die than reveal anything at all about him. Jonuta was worthy of the spaceways; Jonuta was the essence of humankind and of the spaceways humankind had made its property. Worthy of Aglaya? Aglaya?! Meaningless! When he returned, she saw what he carried, and tears came into her eyes. She lay still as he came around to her side. It was his cabin and he moved unerringly in it. He lowered himself gently beside her, with care not to bounce her or make her feel as if she might roll off. He found her hand, the other. Into them he pressed what felt like a furry little animal. "I am going for a walk,"

he told her, as if there were anywhere to go on a smallish spacecraft; as if it were not midmorning, Panish time. And he left her. Surely everyone in the universe is happy this night, she thought, and wished happiness even on that damned white-head cake he could not forget. Then Kenowa rose, twisted on just enough light, and began to put on the long black wig he had brought from her cabin. Tears slid down her cheeks, glistening and twinkling like distant stars. 10 . . . among barbarians no distinction is made between women and slaves. . . . No free man, if he can escape from it, will endure [tyranny]! Aristotle (Later repronounced pursuant to LRA) Surely no slave had ever taken to her station with such stoicism. No one among the servants of Chulucan and Sicuan was so chastened and meek. The slave Janja did precisely as she was told, everything she was told, and often more. Her eyes had appeared to Tarkij of Aglaya as soft gray-blue pools of mountain water; to Jonuta as cold as a morning in January on far-off Homeworld; to Sicuan as ice and fire, if such could be mixed and buried deeply in a slender, almost elfin face. Now those deep-set eyes fitted none of those poetic comparisons. Now they were cinerous holes in her face. The face itself became thinner, and older. It was worn set in unsmiling stolidity. She talked little. Whenever she could, she listened to the yellow-fleshed Sai-pese. Milotus's well-educated mind transferred much into the eager sponge that was Janja's. Janja's education was heightened and broadened in transilient surges. She began to learn to understand Whistle, and expanded that understanding. Jarps could not form words other than a few, ludicrously; humans could reproduce few sounds of the Jarp language. Janja merely listened, deduced, reflected, and began to understand. Ordered to lick a boot or a sandal, she licked. Ordered to strip, she stripped as if her only desire 133 was to be naked for the master, and that as quickly as possible. A minor rebellion in her second month of slavery brought her swift punishment. She was bound facedown under a heatlamp. Every part of her was shielded except her buttocks. They left her. The burns were bad, and there was no possibility of her walking without some pain, much less sitting down, for many days. Then of course her buttocks peeled and itched abominably. She remembered. She learned. They had the power. Ordered to bend over for the entry Chulucan preferred, she moved quickly to grip her ankles. Already her mind was at work on her rearward relaxation. That way by the time he grasped her cheeks and plunged into her-he always entered to hurt-she was ready. It was not hard to enjoy it, and soon that took no effort. She learned to simulate pain. That masked her pleasure and heightened his. Otherwise he would merely give her pain in another way, in aid of his twisted sexuality. He had no idea he was giving her pleasure, not pain. Janja became the pet and the showpiece. Chulucan hospitably turned her over to more than one visitor. The enormous-bellied High Priest who required so much effort to arouse; he never knew that he failed to achieve penetration! He would have failed completely had she not possessed such strong muscles in her thighs. It was he who bought Milotus, after a month of trying to hint Sicuan and Chulucan into donating her. Her yellow skin was obviously intended for Gri. Milotus, Janja later learned, went to Gri one night hi a small ceremony involving the ancient knife that had hung as ornament in the temple, for centuries. No records were filed by Sicuan or the High Priest. Sicuan later filed to indicate her death by accident. His home computer link faxed that to the capital, to be stored in the uncaring banks of the vast computer system. He received a 'gram of condolence from the Minister of 134

Religion, who had seen and admired the Saipese a couple of years previous. Janja missed Milotus. But that was in the seventh month of Janja's enslavement. She had no idea that she was to remain here only eleven more days. Milotus was soon replaced by a girl stolen off the streets of Grim, Resh's largest city. Janja pumped her for knowledge of that spaceport city. The Jarp had exacted her vengeance a month after Janja had sprained its wrist that first night. By then Janja was astounding them all-she was an exemplary slave. She was coming in for more and more trust, though she was not yet considered fully domesticated. Sicuan journeyed to the capital on business

having to do with his memoirs as High Priest. Chulucan, taking the infinitely dependable overseer, Izhan, went into Grim for an evening on the town. Janja was left on her bunk with a two-meter length of chain connecting her collar to the wall. It was little bother. She was happy to have the opportunity for a long session of braining. Whistle entered the room and stood staring at her. Janja gazed back, seeking to charm. She read menace -and fear of the masters. Whistle intended vengeance, but would not kill or mark. Her vengeance was simple. She had brought food, which Janja thought was safe to eat. She was wrong. In a few minutes she was sagging, and when she awoke Whistle had used her. The Jarp had also moved the cot and shortened the chain. It was fixed to a wall-plate higher than Janja's head, and drawn taut. She had to stand on tiptoe to relieve the strangling pressure of the collar. The drug's effect was of short duration, since the Jarp wanted no evidences of it when the masters returned. Janja was fully conscious and able to suffer, maintaining her tiptoe stance with her back jammed against the wall. It lasted for hours. First her legs and arms seemed to catch fire. They quivered with the strain she did not dare relieve. Now and again she 135 would take a deep breath and relax a little. She must rise again onto her toes when she could no longer hold the air in her lungs. Whistle had obviously maintained a careful watch. When house-scanner firmed the incoming of Chulu-can's aircar, the Jarp hurried in to Janja. It returned chain and cot to their former positions. "You know I not dare touch you, White-hair!" the Jarp whistled. "They would hurt Whistle! But now you is punished for hurt Whistle's wrist." The Jarp showed astonishment when Janja nodded and replied to the series of birdlike sounds. She spoke in Erts, which Whistle could understand; Jarps merely could not form the words and the masters had never seen fit to provide their orange slave with a translator. "It is even between us, Whistle. I apologize, too. I should not have hurt poor Whistle." "You-you understood Whistle!" "Yes," Janja said. "Badly. Will you teach me more?" Yes! Whistle did. Its mentality was a shade beyond the longtailed swingers of Aglaya. Whistle could think, though not in anything approaching the abstract. Whistle could carry out commands and remember that which pain-and-reward had reinforced in its mind. It was delighted with friendship. And Janja discovered it had always wanted to be called "he." (To Whistle, male equaled master; she-her equaled slave.) Janja called Whistle he, since she hoped for an ally. She wanted to learn the language-and she wanted to make an experiment. She had need of doing so. Within a few days, she succeeded. Both she and Whistle had needs that were hardly met by the masters' brutal use of them. Janja enjoyed the Jarp's puckered little lips on her nipples and the supple orange fingers on her and in her. There was no great enjoyment in giving her mouth to the Jarp's underdeveloped male organ, but it was not unpleasant. (Later Whistle was disappointed that her new friend 136 was not overly interested in repeating the act. Janja did, in friendship.) Though Janja was careful to swallow every drop, there was no change in her. She still did not know if the lifejuice of someone other than an Aglayan would have the same dramatic effect. Nor could she ask anyone. She had to find out. More than once Chulucan forced her to lend him vigor with her mouth. Once she made it good enough that she took him to his peak. There was no change in her-but she was punished. She would find out. The time would come, she knew, just as other tunes would come. The time came. The opportunity was irresistible. She had been a slave on Resh for just over seven months. She had never been branded, although she did bear a few marks of their cruelty. The combination of circumstances began with the desire of Sicuan to return to a place nearer the Temple, to work on his memoirs with the aid of the very private Temple computer, as well as respectful human aid. He put the estate up for sale and began selling slaves. He and Chulucan had a frightful argument over that, and for once Sicuan prevailed. Janja was retained because she was Chulucan's. Whistle Sicuan would keep with him, a trusted servant of several years' duration-mentally and physically harmless. After a few days, Chulucan and the overseer came one night to Janja. She knew before they entered the room. She frowned, being very

still to absorb it from the emanations of their emotions. Chulucan was planning an altogether fresh start, in Grim, across the planet from his father. He did not intend to take her with him. He intends to kill me. She was sure of it. They had hurt her and used and used her; now they would murder her. The intent was there, and Izhan was privy to Chulucan's intent. (The 137 overseer was not a sadist; that is, he had no sexual need for cruelty. He merely enjoyed it.) "Come along to the table, Janja," Chulucan said. He had come to know that she would obey any command or even suggestion, even when she was sure it would mean pain to her. He walked past her toward the table he so often used, and she realized then that he bore a surgical laser. It was for her. She got the feeling strongly as he passed: tonight she died . . . leisurely . . . It had to be now. Janja saw opportunity to put into practice the small bit of lore imparted to her by the "new girl" brought in off Grim's streets. (The girl had never been missed, which told a great deal about the crammed spaceport city.) Janja had questioned her closely. She had practiced and experimented a little. Once she had redded herself out. She could not be sure of the maneuver's efficacy, never having put it to the practical test. As Izhan passed her she held her hand just so and her fingers just so and set her mind just so, and she thrust hard, just there. Without a sound, the overseer began to fold up. Already moving before he struck the floor, she came up from her swift crouch with the slavetube in her hand. Chulucan was in the act of jumping her with the laser when she squeezed the tube's corrugated grip. He froze and stayed frozen while she walked-slowly- toward him, keeping the tube squeezed and leveled. Izhan had already collapsed in a lump that seemed smaller than he was. Circling Chulucan, she kept him in the slavetube's paralysis while she bared his back with quick, savage jerks. She kept the thing activated while she gave him a dose of his beloved buggery. She kept the imbedded tube's power on while she hand-struck him in the back of the neck just as Jonuta had once struck her. It was the ancient and effective blow called the "Rabbit-punch," wherever Rabbit might be. 138 Chulucan fell and lay silent. The slavetube hummed away in his anus. "How do you like it in your 'postern gate,' animal?" she muttered. She withdrew the tube only because she had to have it. Quickly she replaced it with the hollow cylinder he had brought for her torment. She considered boiling water, but decided not to take the time. She did squat and, almost carefully, break his nose with the slave-tube. Then she hurried from the room and to the stairs. Janja thumbed them into movement but continued her downward rush even as they conveyed her to the ground floor. On her way to the kitchen she saw neither Sicuan nor Whistle. She rushed back upstairs with the knife, and used it. Chulucan's blood pumped to spatter and run thickly. She checked the overseer: it worked! Izhan was dead. She performed the same operation on him, and remained on her knees beside him to dedicate both sets of severed genitalia to the Sunmother. This tune she rode the steps down motionlessly, thinking. She found Whistle just entering the kitchen. For a moment they stared at each other. Then the Jarp's lemur-huge round eyes dropped to the dark tube in the blonde's hand. There was blood on the slave-tube. Whistle's lips pursed to whistle. "No, Whistle! We are free! Come with me!" Whistle could not, Janja saw with sadness. Again friendship died; she cherned the Jarp halfwit's horror at leaving this place. It started to shrill a warning and Janja sadly used the slavetube. The Jarp froze and she held it so while she approached. She had to tiptoe to use the Rabbitpunch, and another, before she relaxed her sweaty grasp on the tube. The Jarp collapsed. It was no enemy, only a poor creature who had been her fellow slave and her lover. Janja wrestled open the door to the main cyberhouse controls, wrestled Whistle into the niche, and closed and secured the metal door. Then she went in search of Sicuan. 139 He was in bed, watching a favorite tape on the holo-bubble suspended opposite his pillow; the extravagant movie depicted the early "history" of Resh and showed the highly redacted beginnings of Gri's worship. His eyes blazed at the intruder. The seamed gash of his mouth dropped open. She spoke very quietly. "The gods are to be respected, and worshiped. Or abandoned. The gods are not

to be mocked, not even Gri, the eater of people." She was moving toward him, her eyes dead and cold, gray ash. "And the highest creation of the gods are not to be sold and bought and used." The soft yellow fabric of his sleeve whispered as long yellowish fingers reached for one of the buttons on the portable master control beside him. She froze him long enough to kick the panel away. With the point of the bloodstained kitchen knife at his throat, she released Mm from the bondage of the slavetube. His eyes returned to life. His throat worked, its scrawny turkey-folds moving against the knife's edge. "Whistle lives. Izhan is dead. Chulucan was a bad, bad son who was cruel to everyone, including you. He is dead. You who spoiled him may not wish to outlive him. Is that true?" "I-would-live," the old man said, in a strained voice. His adam's apple was moving against the edge of an eversharp, neverstain knife. "I am stronger and faster than you. Here." She gave him the mastercon panel. "I know that the blue button activates the tapes you keep for your glorious memoirs. Push it. Any other button and I open your throat." "You will be freed. I will give you a card with much credit to get you offplanet." He was trembling. Janja would of course regret saying, "The blue button is all I want of you." He depressed it. She pressed his hand, clicking it off again. "You will dictate that you have ever been disappointed in your son and that as everyone knows he 140 was angry about your giving up this place. You will say that this night he went too far even for you: after slicing up the slave Janja and incinerating the pieces, he turned even on your trusted Izhan. You feared for your life. You killed him and did to him what he did to Izhan." He was trembling. "What-did he do to Izhan- what did you,do?" "It is not important. Depress the blue button and say it." She saw the crafty look come into his eyes. Of course! All he had to do was obey, and erase once she had left! The stupid murdering slave would pay and pay-though he and the world were well rid of Chulucan! He said what she had bidden, and he said it well, though with much tremor in his voice. Good, she thought. He was understandably excited, after killing Izhan and his own son, and knowing he would now kill himself! Again, her hand on his inactivated the mastercon, the dictation, and elsewhere in the house tapes ceased turning. She backed a pace and showed him the unwavering snout of the slavetube. "Come." He accompanied her, preceding her from the room in a rustle of long copper-yellow robes. At the stairway she said, "Down," and he pressed that button. He was three steps down when she buttoned STOP, then UP. He was old, and scared, and the robe was long and voluminous. He fell all the way down. Janja watched him bounce and slide, saw how still he was as the steps brought him back up to her. She dragged him up enough to tumble him to the bottom again, and shut off the mechanism. She ran down, buttoned the stairs ON and UP, and fled Into the warm night of Resh. 11 Experience consists in experiencing what one does not care to experience. Lichtenberg (quoted by Freud) Coronet was sick and so was Srih. Jonuta was with him when Kenowa called him to the con: urgently. Coronet was just out of subspace, reeling, only about a hundred thousand kilometers from Bleak. Not a lot could be said about the world called Bleak that was superlative, but they needed to be there. Badly. The other ship was practically on top of them. It-was a new model RT-Quad Janissary. Jonuta was painfully sure that it was TransGalactic Watch. It was closing. He also knew that: he had cargo aboard, five units; he had to get to Bleak for medcare for Srih and repairs to Coronet; he was definitely not interested hi trying to blow away a TGW ship; he didn't care to tangle with a Janissary-class Quad; he was not about to begin to make a start at trying to outrun any ship, with Coronet in present condition; he was in trouble. The RT-Quad Janissary was mightily capable of turning Coronet and all hands into something resembling space-borne pollen. "Sweetface to the con, fast! Sakyo: see to Srih and prepare cargo and yourself for a fast jump. Kenowa: six-three-see inslotted but inactive. Good. Now listen, here's what we'll do. Remember the holos of Sweetface I had processed on Panish? Right. . . . The Jarp reached the con-cabin in a half-minute. Even so, the captain was most of the way into a new 142 aura-suit of Prussian blue. He was more than ready for the orange

creature's presence. Kenowa had gone to be sure that Srih was secure-and to prepare herself for her role. If and until she heard the words "Status Two," she was to strap in and hold her breath against the necessity of 63C. Guidance cassette 63B prepared the ship for sub-space transition and took her in to defeat infinity with only a single ping as twenty seconds' warning. Sixty-three-see seized everything and rammed the ship into transition phase with no warning, within ten seconds after its activation. Kenowa had isolated cassette 63 C. The pressure of a foot from the mate's chair would activate it. Then one merely waited to see whether one continued to exist. The probability was just above seventy percent for survival with (undefined) damage; 59.7731-to-infinity percent for survival intact. That left 40.2269 percent probability of ... utter destruction, presumably. Maybe there was another universe. If those ships that had jam-crammed into subspace had survived in it, no one knew, for none of them came out. Spacefarers had a name for that desperation action, aside from jam-cram. They called it Forty Percent City. A few months ago pirate captain Tomo had forty-percented. Tomo had departed the spacewys with ship and all hands. There was no cassette 63D on Coronet. Jonuta had even skipped over 64, with hope and a sense 'of drama -and crossed ringers. Sweetface hurried in and tootled. A sour-faced Jonuta reminded that its translator was off-and then bade the Jarp remove it. Sweetface was delighted to do so-and to sit in the captain's chair. Sweetface was also delighted to see the captain become . . . Sweetface! Ensheathed in that semblance holopro-jected by his suit, Jonuta sank into the other chair. The suit's aircon was turned up. He also activated the small fan in the console, and to hell with all that bare orange skin Sweetface was showing-the real Sweet- 143 face. The aura included the translator Sweetface had worn while the holosimulation was made. "We are TransGalactic Watch Q-1006, S. L. Treen, Major, TGW, commanding. Identify yourselves vocally and visually and stand by for tractor lock- now." Coronet shuddered as TGW-1006's tractor beam clamped. The craft of the galactic supercops was now a magnet and Coronet was an iron nail. Forget 63C, Jonuta mused, and started to reach for the cassette. He stopped. No. // you decide to tow us or come onboard, Treen my friend, it's off to Forty Percent City we all go, together.' Scanners advised that Treen's ship was "under" them-that is, just off Coronet's ventral surface and locked on. "Open comm with Visual," Jonuta said, "and tell 'em you're Hoo-hee Hootl'ee of Jarpi, piloting out of Franji for your employer. And ask why TGW is taking this unwarranted aggressive action against a private craft." The Jarp did that, in whistles. Some were pretty and some were not. Jonuta understood enough Jarp by now to know that he was being obeyed. He had not expected otherwise. "We have no Jarps aboard and do not firm you," Major Treen said. Do you have a translator?" "I have a translator," the delighted Jonuta said, knowing that his aura was soundlessly whistling from time to time-behind the extended microphone. He did not need a translator to speak Erts. "Captain Hoo-hee Hootl'ee will not wear such. I translate for Captain Hoo-hee Hootl'ee. My captain advises that he is Hoo-hee Hootl'ee of Jarpi, piloting out of Franji for our employer. He asks why TGW is taking this unwarranted aggressive action." "Who is your employer?" Jonuta's foot touched Sweetface's leg; their bodies were out of sight below the pectoral area. Sweetface immediately pursed its sweet lips and whipped off a 144 stream of curses and insults at least half of which should have curled Captain Treen's hair. The other half he would not have understood as insults, even in translation. "My captain says our employer is the Lady Emtery of Ghanj. She has been visiting a friend of some wealth and renown, Hee-wheetl-1-1-Oot' of our wonderful world of Jarpeee. She too would ask why TGW is taking this unwarranted . . . aggressive . . . action." "If apologies are in order to the Lady Emtery, they will forthcome," Captain Treen said, and Jonuta's foot thumped Sweetface's booted shin, and the Jarp "captain" whipped off another trilly-doodle line about Treen's lifemate's probable activity even at this moment. Treen glanced at Sweetface, frowned, and looked at what he saw as another wine-haired, orange thingo. All Jarps looked alike, even to a TGW major. "What did the captain say, uh,

Lieutenant?" "My captain points out that apologies will be in order to itself, too. And I add for the major's information that I am not a lieutenant but Hoo-hee Hootl'ee's mate, both in and out of the con-cabin. I am Hoo-tweetl'eet!, Major Treen." Jonuta trilled Treen's r. "Oh. Um. Your captain does then understand Erts," Major Treen said. "Of course, Major. Jarps are not stupid, we just look stupid-to you." And Jonuta nudged the RECORD button with his right foot while his left thumped Sweetface. Sweetface responded with some comments on the probable weather on Tula. Jarps loved to mention that planet; it came out in a lovely trill. Jonuta nudged the REWIND button with his right foot and kept his left to himself. " , " Treen muttered, and Jonuta read "Dam'!" in those tight lips. "What did the captain say, uh, First Mate?" "My captain chastised me for rudeness," Jonuta said quietly. "My captain says our position is such that we must let you be rude but not return it."

145 Major Treen's onscreen image looked directly at Sweetface, and inclined its head. The Jarp puckered a kiss to Major Treen and inclined its head. Treen twitched but otherwise showed no reaction. "We have stopped you because your ship displays much like someone else's," Treen said. "A-fugitive. I have never seen two of our esteemed friends from Jarpi at a ship's con before. How has this come about?" Thump:

Twill-whistle-warblewhistle-tremolo-SHRILL-tootle-trill. "The Lady Emtery of Ghanj likes us Jarps," Jonuta said. "She is a Sunflower, right? Do I have the proper phrase, Major Treen?" "Uh-" "How else may we serve the TransGalactic Watch, Major Treen?" Jonuta's foot thumped Sweetface. The Jarp advised that it was a little hard. Even tighter of lip, Treen asked what Sweetface had said. Jonuta advised that he had better leave it untranslated. Treen looked sternly at the Jarp, whereupon Sweetface puckered and bowed. "I gather that your lady employer is onboard. I should like to interface with her, if you will be so kind. Why are you in this area?" This time Treen wisely spoke directly to the onscreen image of Sweetface. Jonuta toed on the mini-corder, at the same time turning to Sweetface. Thus the brief recording of the Jarp's remarks on (probable) Tulan climatic conditions appeared to come from Jonuta's Jarp aura. Dam', but I'm the clever one, he thought, sweating. Sweetface, looking surprised, tootled back. Jonuta faced forward and appeared to open the intraship comm-which was already open. "Lady Emtery's presence is requested in con-cabin, Status Two, ma'am," he told the mike. To the TGW officer he said, "We were heading for Ghanj, Cap- Majorrr Trrreen." "Ah yes," Treen said, at least a bit charmed by the 146 trill-but back on the scent. "You are nowhere near any heading for Ghanj, Captain. May I ask-" "No," Jonuta said, and Sweetface picked up fast; it gave its "mate" a strong look for having intercepted the TGW officer, and told Jonuta he was rude. Jonuta bowed to the Jarp. Sweetface faced forward and stared huge-eyed at Captain Treen. It whistled again. "No," Jonuta repeated. "Pirates sought to take us. They also thought we were someone else! We just managed to escape-does my noble lady's ship Light of Ghanjit resemble that of some-outlaw? A pirate, perhaps?" "Yes, it does. And we are sorry to--" Treen broke off to stare between the two Jarps he thought he saw. Behind them stood a woman, a large woman whose Jarp-red hair had to be dyed, or a wig. She wore a multicolored Ghanji caftan under which, Jonuta knew, she would have strapped down her abundance. She had also removed her upper plate and installed the specially made spare. The incisors were unusually large. And her left leg, encased in a black spidermesh stocking, was visible almost to the hip. She said, "What is this, Captain? Some sort of morals arrest in free space? Harassment? We were recently accosted by a pirate craft. Why are you bothering us while those scum are back there threatening to turn ships into composte, whatever that means?" Jonuta's foot pressed Sweetface's. The Jarp dutifully trilled a bit of Jarp, while Jonuta touched REWIND and STOP with his foot. Then he "translated," half turning: "My lady: that is a TransGalactic Watch ship. Its commander is a major, which is bigger than a captain. Major Treen is merely doing his job." "My ass!" Lady Emtery unladylikely said. "If he was doing his job and catching pi-rates, we wouldn't even be here! We would not have had to

interrupt our nice vacation games and strain ourselves and our sub-space capali-capab-capawhatchacallit to get away from those evil rude creatures! How far are we from Ghanj now, anyhow? It must be kilometers, or parsecs 147 or something. TransGalactic 'Watch' indeed! I have a bruise from that jump into subspace and this ship positively rattled! Who is TransGalactically Watchdog-ging that?" Oh, Treen would like to, Kenny, right now, Jonuta thought in delight-sloshing in sweat. Believe that, my dear clever Lady! He said nothing; his "captain" had raised a double-thumbed orange hand and was, blasting a series of shrill whistles at the onscreen image of the harried Major Treen. Treen's eyes swerved Jonuta-ward. "Should I-ah-ask what your captain said-ah- First Mate?" "No!" Kenowa snapped, while Jonuta said, "I think not, Major. He is not happy that our beloved employer has been disturbed. My captain would love to make contact with TGW-HQ at this instant." To which Kenowa added, "So would I!" and Sweetface trill-warbled. Major Treen's image stared at them. Then he glanced aside. "Free tractor beam," he ordered. When he returned his gaze to the screen, he managed to look directly at Kenowa. "Lady Emtery: I should in duty advise that your present and perhaps previous difficulty -with the shark encounter, I mean--stems from the fact that Light of Ghanjit bears an arrestingly close resemblance to that of one Jonuta, who is suspected of . . . various misdealings. This is not merely by visual resemblance, my lady will understand." "Oh my lady will, will she?" Kenowa said, in no understanding manner. "Pirates try to kill us in our ship, and you tell me it is because they are outlaws and thought we were? Major!" Major Treen sighed. "My lady; Captain, uh . . . mumble, you have the apology of Sven L. Treen and of TransGalactic Watch. We are breaking off and wishing you a lovely vacation." Sven!" Kenowa exploded, and both Jonuta's recorder and Sweetface trilled, and the last thing Treen 148 saw as he blanked off his screen was her great big bucktoothed grin at his strange name. So careful was TGW-1006 that Coronet was not even rocked by its departure. Jonuta sagged. "I'd say . . . that Major Treen is . . . wishing for a nice big drink, about now." "A wonderful idea!" the Jarp whistled, and Kenowa concurred. Jonuta remembered to remove guidance cassette 63C. 12 black: the darkest color. Webster's New World Dictionary Grim is Resh's spaceport, but not the planetary capital. The ancient Temple-city, Menre, reigns on as the headquarters of the spiritual and secular power of Resh. It is a twisty, overgrown old town, swarming with yellow-robed priests and acolytes hi orange, along with government officials. They wear mostly black for state power, despite the sun, and yellow in honor of Gri-and as a reminder to all that their power comes from Him. Grim is a newer city, a teeming young jungle of steel and syntheses and plastics that first rose around the spaceport and then sprawled back from it on three sides. There are administrative offices in abundance and overabundance. Civil "servants" swarm among the representatives of private enterprise from two dozen and more worlds. Resh is Gri's; there are temples, large and small, of native stone and synthematerials, and smaller, rather clandestine places devoted to other gods from other worlds under other warming suns. Grim, like all spaceports, is metropolitan; interplane-149 tary; galactapolitan. It does not belong to Resh, but to the spaceways. It does contribute much to Resh and Gri in the form of rents and duties, taxes and fees, slaves, and other valuables. The streets are ever alive, throughout the day and night. Strangers swarm them in many styles of attire. They tend to walk rapidly without paying much attention to each other, these Galactics of the spaceways. They are spacefarers. They wear the clothing of many planets and districts. There a crewman wears the shoulder-length bleached-and-red-dyed hairstyle of his home planet and walks with the strange freefall gait that resembles that of the ancient spike-footed players of baseball. They are still remembered and spoken of in places where Homeworld is only a word and a concept. Computers rescued the game from the whimsy and ego of human umpires; computers destroyed it. Perhaps this spacefarer is propositioned by a Reshi pimp piously wearing his yellow Gri-sash. Perhaps he is not a pimp but a bust himself. Perhaps the approach comes from a Reshi "girl" who thinks she is not

a slave but will never be free; perhaps she is a woman of Murph or Front or Ghanj or even Saiping. Perhaps she wears a scarlet wig and the dimple-scar etched into her chin at childbirth; in that case she is from Thebanis and holds promise of expertise in ... certain esoteric forms of recreation. Their clothing fills the rainbow and covers the spectrum, although there is usually very little of it. On this night Janja of Aglaya came to Grim, afoot and without I.D. She saw and heard swishing robes on the streets of Grim, and not all of them yellow; swishy rogues wearing too-short tunics in many colors and even patterns; skintight metallic-flashing suits and half-suits or tunics over tights or long-tailed coats over tights-in imitation, although she did not know it, of a man called Jonuta. Or these things and others were worn over leggings, or loose straight pants, or baggy trousers, or over nothing at all. She saw an occasional chin-high, 150 knee-length "coat" from one of the inward planets, and skirts that scraped the ground or caressed only the very upper surfaces of thighs or brushed painted knees or slithered just at ankles or insteps. Once Janja saw a mere girl whose shift was very high of collar, loose and full of sleeve, in swirls of nine or twelve colors. As she walked, that rainbow writhed about her like a pit of painted snakes. It covered her body completely, demurely, nunnishly past her wrists, to her chin, to her little red shoes. And it was cut out in a neat heart so as to expose her buttocks. That might be unnoticeable to some; those long ovals were painted so as to blend, approximately, with the multimulticolored skirt. Behind her ambled a man all in skintight black. His hair was in chocolate ringlets and his lips and eyelids were blue. His companion wore yellow metallic thighboots and a halter and a capelet of deep ultramarine. Her hair was dyed to match the kneeboots and her shorn pubis to match halter and little cape. She was sneered at by an overly meaty woman in transparent bandeau and kneeskirt, who walked between two obvious spacefarers off a Bleaker ship. They wore chest-daggers and each an armored left glove. They made nasty noises at a couple consisting of an obvious transvestite and a Jarp that must have stood two meters tall. The transvestite-in pink and white and cerise-stuck out his tongue. The Jarp-in red shirt, tight blue pants, and a broad-brimmed white hat called a Wayne-smiled and winked. An acolyte of Gri stood outside a place featuring slithery entertainers, mostly female, wearing only tall spraboots with seventeen-sem heels. The poor fellow continued to exhort those who went inside, carefully nudging him as they passed. A man in a torn shirt staggered out of an alley, bleeding from a head wound. The acolyte ignored him. So did everyone else. In such a collection of humanity and near-humanity -there were the Jarps, and doubt continued about the natives of Croz-Janja should have been invisible. 151 She wore nondescripts: a sand-hued tunic and the long cloak of dark blue she had taken from beside the door as she left the manse of Sicuan. Unfortunately, the cloak contrasted arrestingly with her hair. She was not nondescript and she was not invisible. She could not help her staring, her rubbernecking'. She was more the farmgirl come to town than could have been imagined by the farmers of twentieth century Homeworld, regardless of nationality. And she was pale of skin, and her hair was longer, but still the color of a type GO sun. She could not go unnoticed in Grim, or anywhere else along the spaceways. Too, there was her walk: a smoothly gliding gait, as if she had never worn shoes or leggings with that weight to lift and set down-which she had not. Even her tight slenderness was unusual, in a time when most had had their bodies rendered perfect or near-perfect in one or more of the several ways available. To many, perfection of body had been insured while they were still in utero-or in vitro. She represented something that had been hated once, and feared as well, since it was from fear that hate so often stemmed, a red mask to cover a face of dark green. She saw no other blondes. On Resh, hair was bleached only to be dyed some color other than the endless brown or black. She saw no others whose skin was as pale as hers, which in seven Reshi months of slavery had lost the outer pigmentation added by the ultraviolet rays of Aglaya's bashful sun. Janja had been a pale golden-tan when the spacefarers of Coronet stole her. Almost eight months later Janja

walked the streets of Grim, and she was pale, and people stared. Yet her greatest difference did not show. It was in her mind. The residential areas are well out, generally miles away, from the enormous sprawl of the spaceport and 152 its accompanying buildings and equipment. A little closer are the high-security main offices of those corporate and government and TAI organizations that are represented at the port and/or the orbiting station by an agent or two and a cybersecretary or three. The closer one moves in from the outer perimeter to the port, the older and uglier and more boisterous Grim becomes. Bars and pleasurehouses thrive under hundreds of names and scores of descriptions, most blaring their brag-invitations to passersby. Among these are busts and their pimps, who pay no attention to the recordings. About them rise-or squat-the older, cheaper, less fawning and less dazzling hotels frequented by spacefaring crews and their less affluent passengers. Deeper in still, and darker, are the tenements and alleys where the scum live. Those close-packed thousands make Grim a crowded and grim place indeed. Here no man walks unarmed, and seldom alone. Here no woman walks unarmed, and never alone. Here walked Janja. She was unarmed either with money or with knowledge. She had discarded the kitchen knife, smeared with fingerprints. The slavetube was thrust within her wrap-across dress so that it nudged her midriff. A little pouch swung at the cord that girt the short tunic. It held no money and no I.D. card. Seeking and gaining revenge and freedom, Janja had not thought of stealing even enough to buy food, lodging, and passage. Stealing was something she had never considered. It was not in her. She was not a thief, and not accompanied, and she was not of Grim. She was much out of place and looked it. They began to call to her. A hand plucked at her skirt, which was finger-length: just above midpoint on those tight, strong thighs. Faces leered at her. They opened to mouthe suggestions and threats and fervent wishes for her. Once a hand closed on her arm. It contrasted darkly 153 with her flesh but she could not appreciate the aesthetics. The hand pulled. Janja jerked her head to see huge eyes surrounded by little white and a large mouth filled with perfect white teeth. "I want me a little slice of this cake," the mouth said. The eyes rose to stare at her hair. "Didja dye the hair on your stash too, huh?" She wriggled, twisting, and her stiffened right hand shot out in a blur, palm up. Three fingers sank into his body just below the sternum. They jabbed and jerked upward. He gasped. With a helpless sound of pain he released her and staggered back. Janja ran. Fleetly, blind and deaf to all around her, she ran two blocks up Sweet Temple Flower Way before glancing back. Naturally he was not pursuing. "Hey, Jacko," a speaker blared from her left, "pop right in and get a glim of the hottest tail since rocket engines!" Janja went on. She realized now how alone and out of place she was. She passed a bar called Fat Jak's Fatass Fair. From somewhere someone had got the idea of leaving the place open to the sidewalk. Its inviting sounds and perhaps sights were plain to all who passed, on either side of Sweet Temple Flower. From somewhere that someone-Fat Jak, presumably-had got the idea to make the entry extra wide and to half-close it with a pair of swinging half-doors about the height of a man's shoulders. Janja swerved to the outer edge of the sidewalk and moved a little more rapidly. She was seen, just the same. A voice yelled, then another voice, and someone shouted: "Hoy, looka that -a gal for ole Whitey!" Janja fled. At the corner she glanced back to see the abbreviated double doors swing open. Fat Jak's disgorged two men. Spacefarers. Full-cut pants bloused over adjustable-soled boots and wide thick belts held bolstered pistols. They wore brown tool-singlets over tight shirts with snug sleeves and cuffs. One pointed at Janja. 154 The other bawled out something, but just then a many-year-old hovertaxi swung around the corner. Janja heard only the sound of his voice, without words. They started after her. She had been headed for the port, but assumed they knew that way far better than she. She swerved around the corner, away from the port. On naked feet she ran down the narrow immobile sidewalk that flanked Illustrious Gri Way, a dark and unillustrious street. Her legs flashed and stretched in annual suppleness and the skirt was just short enough to slide easily up and down as

if anxious not to interfere. She thrust a hand into her dress to grasp the slavetube. That felt good, although she did not want to use it. Would it brand her a runaway slave who had stolen it from her master or overseer? She had no idea whether others used the devices. She ran. Her bare feet pattered and began to hurt. Unyielding pavement was not designed for barefoot walking, much less running. The sidewalks in the better areas of Grim were not only mobile, but were designed for the shod feet of people accustomed to carpeted homes. Janja was far from the better sections of Grim. She was a frightened rabbit in a jungle of predators. She passed a ramp leading to one of the overstreet walkways. She had decided not to take it. Up there were fewer walkers, and she would more easily be seen and followed, limned against the deep slate night sky of three-mooned Resh. A backward glance showed her that the idiot pair of spacefarers was still following her! They ran, lumbering in their awkward gravityless gait. Both were waving their hands and shouting. Janja's breath came fast. Her heart pounded hard and adrenaline coursed through her. The frightened rabbit raced on. She ran into a fat oldish woman wearing a skirt as short as Janja's and a laced outer corset, pink. The creature screamed at her, cursing, and as Janja dodged aside and ran on she saw the glint of a knife. Curses 155 followed her, mushily. Janja had had a fleeting impression of a fat-lipped mouth hi which teeth were sparse. The mouth was painted fluorescent pink. She ran on. Little slivers of ice seemed riding inside her calves. A towering black man hi a fluorescent yellow shirt and shorts stepped out before her. The contrast was stark, beautiful, and so were the teeth hi his big face when he grinned at her. His arm came out, one hand curling toward her left breast- And she dodged, kicking hard at his shin with the side of her foot. Ducking low, she had to slap the pave with one palm to keep from falling. At that she bounced her shoulder painfully off the store beside him-USED SPACECLOTHES: GUARANTEED WORN BY REAL SPACEFARERS! He bellowed, and then Janja was past him and sprinting on. At the corner she glanced back again. He was not following. He stood awaiting the spacefarers who pursued her, and she knew he was ready to vent his anger on them. Good! He was big enough to stop twice their number and probably hold them as well. With a little smile she ducked into the alley marked DRINGLE PIE BLVD. She did not see the other sign, this frightened rabbit: DANGER! KEEP OUT! She could think only that when the pair of crewmen got away from yellow-shirt they'd have no idea which way she had gone. Certainly not into this dark, misnamed alley. . . . It was like stepping into a polluted river at midnight. There was no light at all. She had only an awareness of walls rising close on either side; of several odors, none pleasant. Garbage, sharp and multiform. And excrement, human, and the nostril-burning, eye-squintingly ammoniac sting of old urine. She moved through it, having to slow in the blackness while she worked to regain her breath and to control fear of the dark and the unknown. She kept her gaze on the light far ahead, like the opening at the far end of a tunnel. And then she heard sounds. Movements. She smelled something else; something 156 pungent and herbal. Her foot touched something that yielded. It groaned, and the sound came from a human throat. She felt menace, a desire to do terrible, bloody things to someone . . . anyone . . . to the owner of the offending foot . . . to the world and the galaxy and universe at large. Janja danced quickly away. She was afraid to run, in this noisomely stenchy tunnel of blackness within the very midst of a galacta-politan city that flared and blinded with light and was overly alive with people and their voices. Here, there was only the stink, the blackness, the strange new odor, the softness she had accidentally kicked, the groan. The terrible mind that seemed to claw at hers with its need for violence. And the hand that closed on her ankle. It was totally unexpected. She was moving and could not yet fix precise mind-locations. She could not prevent her taking another step, and so she fell. As she sprawled she tried to reach into her dress for the slavetube. She should have had it out and ready; now she realized that. Her elbow struck imperfect paving with a sharp-pain. At the same time her knee radiated another pain-message to her brain. She managed to keep her head from hitting the

pavement only at cost of a minor whiplash. There was a sudden icy feel in her right thigh. Then -was that blood? "Got 'im! Got 'im!" The hand hung onto her ankle. She winced as she twisted it in turning onto her side to get at the slave-tube. Her eyes were warming up to the alley's darkness. She could make out the darker figure against the wall. Then there were other shapes, moving shapes, and she had the slavetube out and pointed. She squeezed. And learned something: of what value is a weapon that constricts the victim's muscles, if that victim is tightly clutching one's ankle? She drew up her leg, then relaxed her grip on the slavetube and kicked out as hard as she could. Instantly she jerked the leg back again. It came free. 157 He was groaning. She backed away on her bottom on the filthy, stenchy alley and planted her palms. She must lever herself to her feet and run, darkness or not. A foot kicked her left arm from under her. Sharply electric pain jolted into her wrist to flare up her arm. Janja sagged leftward. A fist hit her and she sprawled. A foot came down on her right wrist and turned a little. "uh." Her fingers let the freeze-cylinder roll away. The foot lifted. The hand was back at her ankle. She kicked. Fingernails dug into her. Breathing approached her face and it stank. She swung an arm at it, desperately. The blow was blocked by a hand's edge. It met her wrist and left her right hand as useless as the still-tingling left one. They can see in the dark! They can see me-see what I'm doing! The clutching hand was moving up her ankle, up her shin. She jerked the leg and he squeezed. Hard, strong, raggedy-sharp nails dug into her calf. Another hand came up her thigh. "Barefoot," a voice grunted from that direction. "A cake!" a voice said close to Janja's ear, and she jerked her head toward it. His breath was warm, and strange smelling; the hot, acridly thick herb odor she had noticed before. It had increased as she progressed into this trap. He nuzzled her hair and she twisted her head away, reaching for him. A hand clamped on her wrist. "Silky haired." "Thin," the other voice said, and she gasped when a hand came onto her breast, through the cloth of the brief dress. "Little warheads, but hard! Oh, they're hard, dolls!" Almost blind, just able to make out the occasional flash of eyes and teeth and light clothing, Janja went wild. She jerked her body in every direction, kicking, yanking, and shoving her arms in her attempt to free them, wallowing on filth-smearred pavement, her mouth 158 open and ready to bite. The pave abraded. Something sharp raked one ramming leg; perhaps the same something that had cut her thigh. Her elbow struck something that padded it from the paving. The something was squishy and slid beneath her. She fell back and her head banged. Bright lights cavorted before her eyes. The man who had first grabbed her ankle now sat on her, riding her jerking, bucking thighs. Her skirt had hiked up in her floundering and his hand was up under it. He pulled and pushed and pinched. "Lord Gri! It's furry!" He sounded both surprised and disgusted. Janja was aware that nearly everyone was depilated now, of at least pubic and armpit hair. Some women and men had hairless legs and arms as well. Some had chosen that; others had been bioengineered to be hair-free below the head. Some men even depilated their chests and a few, their heads. The race called "human" had come a long way. It was far beyond the animal it had once been, on the few planets of its birth. Its members were not tolerant of the persistent hairiness that reminded them of their origins. Hair below the head was deemed atavistic, animal, barbaric. Not civilized. Janja was of course in the hands of civilized men of a civilized city. The man at her head had his fingers tangled in her hair. Her forehead felt stretched and her eyes were wide as he pulled hair and skin. His knee on her left forearm effectively pinned it to the pavement that abraded it. The man at her middle was pulling open the front of her dress, which wrapped from left to right. Beneath it she was bare. The third man-her first attacker-jammed a thumb into her. She grunted and tried to kick. Useless; he still rode her legs as if he'd had years of practice. Maybe he had. A bit of light from the middle moon showed her that they wore big goggles, all three of them. They could see in the dark-where they lurked, awaiting just such fools as she! 159 It was unreal, surreal, chimerical, this wallowing in filth

and stench with three nameless goggled faceless-nesses; the produce of someone's insane imagination or drugdream. There were no names and no faces, even in the pallid moon-glim. Only hands, hands that gripped her hair to tug and stroke it, that fondled and squeezed and pushed and pulled at her. Hands that stroked her thighs and poked frantically, bestially into her. And voices. Voices that came and went with loud breathing; voices that cursed and commented obscenely on the discoveries of bodiless hands and their activity. Fingers clutched and gouged and twisted soft flesh into whimsical shapes of straining flesh. Smooth, hot skin pressed her and three fingers were probing. She trembled away from the rigid shaft of flesh that pulsed against her cheek. She was raised, turned onto her side, and a hand stroked and clenched and dug at her buttocks. She was unreal, not a person; she was a thing they had and now they were going to use it. A sneery voice said so and she threw herself into a riotous new fury of jerking and twisting. Though their hands had been rough, she had not been struck. Now she was. The man sitting on her legs brought his palm and splayed fingers down hard on her belly. She was flat there, and muscular, but she had been unprepared. She had to suck hard for the air of life and the slap on her naked stomach stung sharply. It also catalyzed emulation. She was slapped across the breasts so that they danced and seemed to flame. A big hand slapped one tight cheek of her backside, and slapped it again. Fingers came to her chin. A thumb dug into her cheek just at the corner of her mouth, and fingers were tight in the flesh of her jaw on the right. The hand twisted her face toward the man who knelt at her head with a knee across her arm. She tried to turn her head to get her teeth into the hand. He held her too tightly. Then he had her face in position, where he wanted it. He slapped her 160 with his other hand. Back and forth and back and forth, back and forth and back and forth and back, relaxing his clutching hand so that her head jerked and swung with each blow, back and forth again and backhand and forehand and palm and knuckles, back and forth. Her head roared. Her cheeks were wet with tears knocked out of her eyes. The moistness increased the sting of his slaps. "You gonna knock 'er out, Boots?" The voice came from the direction of her feet, of her flattened thighs, of her thumb-infested loins. "It wasn't any good the last time you did that, jacko-remember that guy from Jasbir? I mean pluggen into a dead ass is nothen, Boots, nothen." "Just . . . quieting . . . her . . . down ... a lit-tie," Boots panted, slapping her between words so that each word exploded between the exploding sounds of the blows. He had released her chin and her head swung with the slaps. Her elbow ground on the pavement in agony. Her eyes were unable to see even dimly, now. Futile little groans of exhaustion and pain and helpless subjection crept tremulously from her throat. "Well, get it over with, Boots, dammit! I want my hand out and my slicer in. I got her all wet now- it'll be like knifen a fat man in the guts!" "Twist 'er warheads, Fraggy!" That was Boots- slapping. Fraggy did that until she mumbled in pain and Boots released her shoulder. Her elbow slid sideways, scraping on the paving, and she fell back. Again lights danced. This time they were dim. She lay on her back completely limp, the fight knocked out of her body and brain. Naked and subjugated, re-enslaved, waiting helplessly to be used brutally; to be sliced into insensibility and then dumped or carved or sold or whatever these alley-lurkers did with their victims. Her face flamed from Boots's blows. Her buttocks slid in something soft and slippery. Feces, garbage, perhaps part of a previous victim; she could not care. Someone was jamming into her. Boots was commenting that she'd 161 been rearwardly used, plenty, and she had a fleeting almost-thought that she had been better off with that user: Sicuan. Fraggy was griping about the pavement hurting his knees while he rooted in- Footsteps! Loud, snarling voices! A blow, and another, strong and meaty-and not on Janja's bruised flesh, this time. A scream. Curses and more shouting. Swirling sounds in the darkness and more blows. Fraggy was torn out of her and off her. She heard a shriek and thought it was Fraggy. She heard a grunt and Boots was pulled from her. More sounds of blows and grunts and slap-slap, meatily; a body striking pavement. It touched

her thigh but she could not identify the anatomical part. She lay twitching, still and exhausted and dizzy from the many blows to the face. Boots started to yell and there was a sudden flash and his voice became a cry that stopped abruptly. "You shoulda had it on Fry, Whitey, steada Freeze." "You're right. We leave this human shit and it will just smear itself on someone else." "Whitey! Oh payday, jacko, what've you done!" "Not what I did," the other new voice said. "It's what I'm do-ing! Daughter of Aglaya! Are you conscious?" Then he repeated it, in a language that made Janja frown. She knew it. Being forcefed the language called Erts so long on Coronet had not driven from her mind the language this voice spoke: her own tongue. The language of Aglaya! And in it he spoke, asking if she were all right. She told him weakly that she was. She was uncertain whether she spoke in Erts or Aglayis. "I have just sent two of them to Sunmother," he said, "though what she will want with two drug-dreamers I do not know. Will you slay the third?" She shook her head, trying to get herself into a sitting position. "No ... no, I-I can't see-" 162 "Grabbles, Whitey, you stabbed them! How could you-and stop talking in that funny language, will you? No, here, you can't-oh, shit, we've got to get outta. here! You killed all three of these dreamers!" "Yes," the voice that had spoken her tongue said, quietly. "All are dead, daughter of Aglaya. Here; on your feet now. Worse things have happened. Why did you flee us? Of course I killed them, Achmy," he said to his partner. "You come with me because I can be depended on in a fight, isn't that it? And these-who will care? Who will miss them? The city might give us a commendation." "Not too dam' likely. A fight's one thing, but this-" Voices. Just voices in the dark. Knights in shine-less armor and baggy pants and tool-singlets. Her pursuers; her rescuers! Whitey drew her to her feet. His arm was hard and strong across her back. "Your- dress is ruined. Hold your cloak together from inside. This is a woman of my .world, Achmy. Those are three dreamers, narcobums. They grabbed her and two of them were trying to slice her at once. Aglii is pleased that I have sent them to Sunmother; she will put them to work stoking the fires of Her palace." "Uh, firm, Whitey. Sure. Now what do we do with ah her?" "He fears you," Janja whispered in Aglayis; that emotion was strong in the man called Achmy. "We are friends," Whitey said. "Please don't fear me, Achmy. Had I known you objected to exterminating scum, I'd have sent you off before I did it. I don't care for your Ghanj eating habits, either, but one makes allowances. We do nothing with her. We leave this alley, out the other way, so anyone who saw us enter will not see us. as we emerge. You go on back to Fat Jak's or to the ship." "Uh-firm, Whitey," Achmy agreed. He still sounded nervous-scared. They began walking down the alley, toward the light 163 Janja had been making for when the unreal-all too real attack began. Already it was fading from her, becoming swirling chimera. She had seen none of the trio. They were not people. They no longer existed. They were husks, now. They had been little more than that before-but alive they had been dangerous. Had they even been real? Perhaps they were only a vocal part of the alley's accumulated cess. Except that her face hurt and her elbow stung abominably. At the mouth of that awful tunnel called Dringle Pie Boulevard, Achmy looked at the man beside Janja, then at her. His face softened "Ooooh, they beat her." He glanced again at Whitey. He raised a hand. "See you, Whitey." "Three Reshdays," Whitey said, "if not sooner. I'll be there for liftoff." Achmet nodded, moved his gaze from one to the other of them, nodded again, and, after backing several awkward paces, again threw up his hand. Then he turned and started away. "Achmy." He turned back at her voice. "I am Janja. Thank you, Achmy. They had already said they would kill me when . . . when they were through with me. They would have cut me apart. Thank you." Achmy nodded, raised a hand, glanced at Whitey, nodded again, backing a pace. Then he turned and walked away. "Did they say that, Janja?" Whitey's voice was low. She looked up at him. "No. But it makes him feel better. He needs reassurance. Soon he will believe what he should believe: that they should not be alive and that both of you are blessed for being their executioners." She spoke in

Aglayis. Whitey nodded. "You are Aglayan," he said, and he stepped back. "Open the cloak and turn, Janja." Janja did. "You are bleeding in three places that show," he 164 said, returning to her. "Or have bled. Aside from your face and mouth, I mean. You will be darkly bruised. And your dress is both ruined and smeared with filth. Where do you live, Janja?" She made a gesture; shook her head. He sighed. His big hand took hers. "Come, then. We will get what we can for you." They walked in silence, Aglayans together in a city of them. Aliens, all of them. Janja's hand was in his and she was very aware of his being an Aglayan and a spacefarer, not a slave. A spacefarer with a friend from Ghanj and shipmates in Fat Jak's Fatass Fair and a ship somewhere. His skin was a bit darker than hers--she had not been outside the mansion for seven months Reshi--and his eyes were as pale. Yet his hair was not blond. It occurred to her that he must dye it. She felt stupid at having wondered about it. She also felt angered and ashamed that he disguised his Aglayan-ness. Did he now fancy himself one with them? "What is your name?" she asked, after they had walked four blocks and were starting down a fifth street. Now and then people brushed them. Only a very few stared or said anything. He walked on Janja's right. His holster swung on his right thigh. He was a spacefarer. "Whitey," he told her. "No--I mean your Aglayan name." "It does not matter. I am not on Aglaya. My name is Whitey, Janja." "But--" She clamped her lips. She did not like it, but perhaps he was right. She said, "Cool winds . . . Whitey." "Cool winds blow on thee, Janja--of Resh." 13 It is impossible for anyone to believe the same thing to be and not to be. Aristotle "Who's this you've brought me, Flash?" the skinny little woman asked, after she had greeted Whitey and led him into the brightly lit room. It was eerily alive with laser-generated synthemorphs in lazy loops and swirls and more colors than Janja could name. Even more, she marveled at Whitey's having more than one friend-name. "Janja," he said, and to Janja, "This is Kitsko." Kitsko regarded her with pursed lips and raised eyebrows. Kitsko was about five feet tall, with blue-black hair wound and piled like that of the woman Kenowa on Coronet. Her eyes were chocolate, her skin bronze, her lips and nails painted green. Her cheekbones were very prominent and her mouth was not. Her "dress" was a live thing, alive and wriggling smoothly, somehow erotically, in blue and green and gold and turquoise and a bit of--black. It was not a garment at all, Janja realized, but the product of some sort of holoprojector Kitsko wore. The woman --was past fifty, surely. (Eighty-one, Whitey told Janja later.) "Somebody's beaten the ergosphere out of her! She won't look decent for weeks, you naughty barbarian. LINSHIN!" She returned her gaze fondly to Whitey after that sideward yell. "What's this you've brought me?" she repeated. "I do not bring her to you, Kits," Whitey-Flash said. "She is of my home world. Her name is Janja and she had the bad judgment to turn down Dringle 166 boulevard. Dreamers were waiting for her, wearing UV goggles." Kitsko was frowning. "Anybody who'd go down any alley in Grim! Where do you live, Janja?" "I--I do not live here." Kitsko made a face, pushing her mouth down and her brows up. They were very thin, her glossy black brows. "Grabbles! Flash, this cake's an escaped slave, sure as I stand here." Whitey looked at Janja. Slowly he nodded. "Of course. I had not thought-- Of course you are! Are they looking for you?" Janja looked from one of them to the other. Neither radiated anything other than sympathy/empathy. It was safe to tell them. "I escaped only tonight. I think no one will know." "Until tomorrow," Kitsko said, and she and Whitey gazed expectantly at her. Janja said nothing else. At last Kitsko nodded in a slow bob of her head, mindful of her high and complicated coiffure. She flipped her fingers and looked expectantly at Whitey. "Three of them had her," he said. "They are dead. I had help," he added, with a little smile at the sparkle in Kitsko's eyes, where she had covered up her crow's feet. (Sad, Janja thought, how so many of these people disguised their marks of character.) "I need clothes for her and attention for her scratches." "Hmm. LINSH--oh, here's the wiggly eel now." A girl or very young woman entered the room. She was small as Kitsko and yellowish of skin, blue of hair and mouth and nails, with bare nipples.

Six-pointed stars radiated from them, in a darker blue. She wore something pale green and hip-slung. It was opaque when it swirled and diaphanous when it touched her body. She stared, but Janja was not offended because of the sympathy in Linshin's face and mind. She seemed very tall, but that was because of her heels, which were laserbeam thin. "Janja," Kitsko introduced. "She needs bathing, fixing up, and some clothes. Janja: Linshin."

167 Linshin took Janja's arm and grinned at Whitey. "Hello, Flashdoll!" And she led Janja back through the house to a room in which Linshin helped her strip off the revoltingly smeared wrapdress. Linshin pushed her into the shower. Janja stood trembling while the incomprehensible-sound that she could not hear- somehow removed the dirt and grime and garbage and excrement and blood from her body. When she emerged, the yellowish woman pushed her into another little stall. "Ever see one of these? It's just like a shower, except it's water! Don't jump, now-there. Nice?" Linshin talked very rapidly. Oh yes. Warm and soothing water splashed on her chest and belly to run in rivulets down her torso and thighs. Janja stepped forward into the spray and rubbed her hair vigorously before turning. While the water sprayed her back and dribbled down, she wiped her palms along the top of her head from back to front, pressing very hard. "Your hair too? You do like it! I hate getting my hair wet," Linshin said. "I have to admit I never saw anybody with white hair before. I mean, almost white. Cleverrrr. Do it your-it's natural!" she cried, for just then Janja had turned, and she was not depilated. She nodded while Linshin stared. "I know! You're from the same place Whitey's from, aren't you? He's got white pubic hair too. Well, it's a little darker than yours, actually. Hmrrn! Hold still now, Jan, while I-" The spew of words trailed off while she turned some dials. The water stopped and Janja jumped at the advent of a warm breeze from . . . somewhere. "You have to turn around, Jan. There you go. It's old and the left side's broken. There you are-dry. Now-" Another dial and a button, and Janja was misted with cologne. It was a little too heavy, she thought; like lying amid a huge growth of phrillia vines during-she thrust that thought from her. Meeting another Aglayan was surely an impossibility. Thinking of Aglaya was torture. At Linshin's beckoning she 168 stepped from the little stall and stood while the other woman sprayed something else on her scratches, abrasions, and contusions. It stung-and then was very cold. Almost at once the sprayed areas were numb and tingly, as if she had been in one position too long and various unlikely parts of her body had gone to sleep. "That gets it-except for your face, I mean." Linshin pursed her lips. "Flash do this?" "No! There's a place on the back of my head." While Linshin sprayed there, Janja said, "It was not Whitey, no. He saved me. Three, uh-dreamers." Linshjn shuddered. "Ugh. Was it terrible? Of course it was. They beat you up good. And there was guck all over your dress. I poofed it. Did they slice you? I didn't really think it was Flash, by the way." "They had, uh-just started." Linshin chuckled. "Poor monsters. Flash arrived and scared 'em off!" She clapped her hands. "I wish I'd been there to see that!" "I wish I'd been here," Janja assured her. She decided not to tell Linshin that Flash-Whitey had slain all three of her attackers. "Is my face very bad?" Linshin regarded her with her pert doll's head cocked on one side. "Don't smile or joc around much, do you? Well-yes. Your lip is split and the skin's broken on both cheeks. I guess you're lucky not to have a busted nose. I know; you don't feel lucky. You'll be all yellow and black tomorrow. Here, Jan, sit down and I'll grease it for you. But first, close your eyes." "What is that spray?" Janja asked, eyes closed; the cold spray stung on her face, then tingled. The hurt slipped away. "Medicine. I don't know. Antiseptic, analgesic, tran-qer, two-three other things. I don't know. Medicine. The salve will keep your face from scabbing, and help keep the swelling down too." "There will be little swelling," Janja said quietly, 169 her eyes closed while Linshin rubbed something cool and greasy on her face. "And no ugly bruises." Linshin's moving fingers hesitated; went ahead. "Janja sorry, honey, but there will be swelling and bruises both." There will not, Janja told herself. The medicines she is putting on me are magic potions of these

people, better than ettam. There will be no black and yellow and blue bruises and the swelling will go down before it starts to rise. By tomorrow night. She divorced herself from whatever the other woman was chattering and thought hard. She saw to it that Janja² Believed. "What is this place?" She sat still in the soft chair that flowed to hold her sensuously-and was not the stiff thronelike thing the holoprojection made it appear -while Linshin opened a magnificent big painting. It was a closet, disguised by another holo-aura, and sh" was in quest of clothing. Linshin glanced around. "Don't you know?" Janja did not answer. Obviously she didn't know; she had asked. At last Linshin muttered, "Just like Flash: no more talk than necessary! Always way back inside himself. Things must be mighty quiet on your planet." She turned back into the closet. "This is a whorehouse, Jan." Her dried hair combed a la victime, her bruised body loosely garbed in a hoopelände sans under-sleeves, Janja returned with Linshin to Whitey and Kitsko. They sat in a little room, three of whose walls were red and the other displayed a huge multicolored dragon. They were drinking something pale green, in yellow goblets with little green and red rosettes around the bases. Both of them looked up; both of them smiled. "Nice," Kitsko said. "You're a beautifully shaped girl, Janja. But don't you ever smile?" "No." "Oh, Flash, look at her eyes! Like dead things, all 170 gray and burnt out. Were you stolen off-your planet, Janja?" Kitsko asked, her little pause indicating she could not remember the name of Aglaya. "Yes." Kitsko nodded. "Linshin, thank you-and Tigger and Ravi are waiting for you." Linshin sighed. "Mister Front and Mister Back," she murmured, and the professional hust left them. Janja sat at Kitsko's invitation; shook her head when asked if she drank alcoholics; looked up sharply when Whitey said this was most definitely the time to begin. The green drink was slightly bitter, with a touch of sweet hi it too. It was very cold and refreshing. She drank. "How long ago?" Kitsko asked. "Were you stolen, I mean?" "Less than-almost a year," Janja said. To Whitey: "Do you know Captain Jonuta?" "Know him? No. Why." "Captain Jonuta of Coronet," she said, staring between them at the holovisual dragon. "From Qalara." She wasn't seeing the dragon. "Qalara. That's a long way," Kitsko said rather nervously, and Janja realized that her face had become frightening. She immediately set about softening it, "Whose slave are-were you?" Kitsko asked. Janja stared at her. Gray eyes. Dead. Flat. Frightening. Like staring into a furnace the day after the fire had gone out. Kitsko looked away. "Sorry. I'll not ask again." "We will go now," Whitey said, finishing his drink. "Kits, I am in your debt. Oh-the dress-" Kitsko waved her hand. "Next time you're in Grim," she said, "try to bring the whole crew over. Tell your snobby captain the hotels on the other side of town don't have a thing more to offer than Kit-Cat's-they just charge more. We're inspected weekly." Whitey smiled. He had a quiet smile, Janja thought; his teeth did not show. She was accustomed to these people, and the smiles of Aglaya were not so broad 171 as theirs but quieter. Perhaps it was the eyes, she mused, studying Whitey's face. (The scar at the corner of his mouth was nice, although it would not be when he was old.) Gray and gray-blue and blue eyes did not sparkle as much as the dark eyes of these people. Perhaps Aglayan smiles only seemed less sparkling than theirs. She had denied herself smiles. She would smile at Srih and Jonuta, some day, when they died at her feet. "I don't believe the captain will listen," Whitey said. He spoke quietly, too, in a soft medium baritone, rather formally. The younger language of Aglaya was more formal than Erts, and of course its vocabulary was considerably smaller. He rose. "Thank you, Kits. Now we must-" Kitsko shook her head without rising. "No. Spend the night here. If they are looking for her, you might never get to a hotel. Probably not. And there's no reason for you to go out again. There's room here. Tomorrow we will see what the news says and think about how we can disguise her." As he started to speak she raised her hand. "Think, Flash. And if you're so obtuse, consider this: I dp not want a fugitive slave seen leaving Kit-Cat's." Whitey smiled and bowed his head in acquiescence. "Show us where then, Kits, and I will buy another drink." "You will sleep together?" Janja looked at Whitey. "No, but certainly

we can share a room. We are Aglayans, and we have just met. We will talk, Kits." Kitsko looked surprised, but she nodded. "Of course." She rose quickly. A small woman, she had formed a short person's habit of moving rapidly to keep up. She moved with short, quick steps, the inch-high heels of her gold sandals tap-tapping in the hall, then fading again to silence in the carpeted lift. She let them into a room that was done mostly in yellow and pale brown, with a big bed, a dresser with 172 a mirror, and two comfortable-looking chairs, both orange. "Here you are, my dears." She leaned outside to do something to the door. "There, Flash, I've deactivated the lock from the outside. You lock it from in here." She smiled, regarding them alertly. "Oh-Janja. His crewmates call him Whitey, although he wears that wig in port-won't get a proper dye job. We started calling him Flash because of the effect his lovemaking skills have on the girls here. You know, he gives 'em a flash!" She nodded, backing out. "Two Aglayans I know," she was muttering to herself as she closed the door, "and I've never had a phrillia in my life!" Alone, the two Aglayans looked at each other. "Cool winds, Whitey. I would call you by your own name." "Cool winds, Janja," he said, and ignored the rest. "Who was your owner?" She told him. She told him all of it, though with brevity, while she watched his eyes widen and his mouth drift open, and then she opened the pouch she had kept throughout the horror of the alley. An Aglayan opened it to show an Aglayan the severed genitals. Whitey nodded and moved his lips in the proper prayer. He studied her face. "In the alley, when you would not kill that last dreamer, I felt no respect for you. Now I see that you were speaking true." He indicated the little pouch with Ms eyes. "You are worthy of Aglaya, Janja." She bowed her head to accept with the ritual phrase: "Janja thanks thee." But she had no Aglayan name by which to call him, "Now I understand your face," he said, "and the deadness in your eyes. You asked if I knew Jonuta of Qalara-" "I live only for him. I live only to get to Qalara. I died on Aglaya, with Tarkij. I must kill Srih and Jonuta." "Oh Janja! That is not-" "I have sworn." 173 "Oh." That ended it, and he could but nodr "You are worthy of Aglaya, Janja." She bowed her head and responded, then asked, "And how did you come to leave Aglaya, and become a spacefarer they named Whitey, and in a bar in Grim?" He flipped Ms fingers. "The story is similar, but not so ugly. I was crossing the savannah, trailing a wounded leapfoot. The spaceboat came down. No, not off Coronet. I woke as you did, in a metal pen on a ship, with much Erts and some information hi my head. I was sold on Jahpur. A farmer bought me, a good and intensely religious man. For two years I worked there, tending grapes and learning more and more about that machinery. Then he was caught in his cyberplow, and I extricated him. I nursed him and brought the physician. I had saved his life. He took me into the capital and freed me. A few days later I was hi the gutter." Whitey paused, shaking his head. "A slaveowner thinks the greatest gift he can give is freedom. But a slave cannot just be freed. He is worse off than before, if he is merely cut loose. He has no food and no home and no funds. A man who buys a slave assumes a responsibility. Truly, he teaches the slave to be dependent. Then-well, responsibility extends beyond the day of manumission. Some planets enforce that and some do not. Some places have 'welfare' and some do not. It tends to ruin governments." She sighed and nodded. A slave who escaped, she had learned, also had no food and no home and no funds-or friends. Six people are dead this night, because of me. Were their lives worth continuing? Is mine worth theirs-is it worth continuing? Again Whitey made the little hand-shrugging gesture. "I decided to go back to the farm. It was a good decision, I am sure. Instead, I was shanghaied aboard a spaceship, a tramper. Two years later, on Bleak, I walked away. By then I was an able-bodied spacefarer, good with machines, able to get along with anyone, and had two years' experience. I found a man 174 who asked few questions and did not mind my hair and eyes and skin. I have been crew on his ship for over a year-standard now. That is just over a year on Aglaya, and almost fourteen months Reshi. The ship-my ship-is Rambler." He saw her expression and answered her question before it was asked: "I have seen no other free Aglayans, I have

seen two or three Aglayan slaves." "You did nothing?" Whitey spread his hands. "There is nothing to do, Janja." She turned away to run her hand over a yellow wall. It was covered with something soft and fuzzy. "I will do something. The man who slew Tarkij was nothing -an employee. He will die for Tarkij. But Jonuta- Jonuta is a slaver. It is his profession. He raids several planets regularly, including Aglaya." She swung back to him amid napping of the long, slashed sleeves of the hoopelande. "You see? He steals Aglayans! He kills, as he killed Tarkij. Worse, he kills minds. You were stolen. That does not make us slaves. We are free Aglayans. He must be stopped, Whitey. He must die. Aglii has given us the opportunity! She has placed us together, a woman and a man of Her world. We-" "Free? You will be sought, Janja. Tomorrow you may not be free." "I made him dictate that confession, I made it appear that he fell down the steps-" "And discarded the knife somewhere else? They will look for it and not finding it, know. And there is the very oldest of policer techniques, Janja-ancient! Did you wipe off all your fingerprints?" She looked from him to her uplifted hands. "Fingerprints?" "They will know you did it all. They may know already, and be looking. Tomorrow you may not be free. Neither will I, if we are found together. We cannot be certain we are free. No, this: we will never be free. We do not belong. Aglayans are different. You 175 have the knowing, the cherming?" For there was no word in Erts; in the language of them. She nodded. "All of it?" "No. We can achieve that together." He drank off the rest of his green liquid and paced the room. "No. We will not, Janja. Nor will I walk your path. I have employment and position and friends among these people. I belong among them. I am-a Galactic. There can be no going back to Aglaya for either of us." She stared at him without bothering to disguise her horror, "You have just said that you do not belong among them, Whitey. None of us ever will. It isn't just our hair and skin and eyes-it's what we are within. They call themselves advanced, and us barbarians. But they have no idea who they are, what they are. They are Thingmakers, and it is things they call 'civilization'!" "Janja." Whitey sighed. "Aglaya cannot remain as it is. It will be ... incorporated. It is the only way. These people used to have wars: wars and slavery based on different colors-they call it 'race.' Skin color determined race, and superiority or inferiority. This was true on several of the planets where 'humans' grew. The problem was solved by incorporation -now there is a race. Some are black, but most are several shades of brown. Some few are more yellow, like Linshin. Most hair is black, but some is brown and twice I have seen red hair-real red hair, I mean. Look at us! We are too different. Aglaya must either be incorporated or ... be ever the universal prime source of slaves. People like me-I can teach them, just by being among them, as one of them. That the differences are nothing, that-" "That is false," Janja interrupted. "They do not have the power to control themselves. They do not have power over their own bodies, but stimulate them from without, with chemicals. They do not have the cherming, much less our chonceling. And-what are 176 you proving by going about wearing that dark brown wig?" He looked at the floor, then tore off the crinkly walnut-hued wig and tossed it from him. His hair, close-cropped and visibly silky and sun-colored, was so beautiful that Janja gasped. At last she was able to force her gaze. from it. Among them, men are supreme-and so he cuts his hair short, as Aglayan women do. But she knew that was not fair; he cut it short so that he could wear the wig. She went to open a door and peer into a little closet. Inside hung two robes. Both were dark blue. One was longer. She closed the door and went to the bed, sniffing. She smelled no semen. It had lingered in her quarters at Sicuan's, and she had expected it to pervade the air of a bust-house. Obviously Kitsko had some means of dispelling the odor. Some Thing that they made. Janja sat on the bed. It was too soft. "Will you help me get off Resh? Help me get to Qalara?" "Do you have funds? I.D.? Coupons? Anything that can be sold?" "Of course not!" He swung to her, a handsome Aglayan male in his twenties, with short blond hair and eyes blue as the phrillia. And angry of face: " 'Of course not!' Of course not? You slew three and escaped a wealthy master! Why did you not carry away something

valuable, something worth credit? Did you bring away only the trophy for the god?" He jerked a hand at the pouch with its gory burden. "Yes," she said. "Only that, and a slavetube I lost in the alley-" He thrust his hand into his baggy pants and drew forth the tube, showing it to her with a disgusted look that said, See, you hadn't sense enough to look for it, but I brought it away with us. She went on: "-and the clothes I almost wore. No, I did not think of stealing anything from the mansion. If I had 177 thought of it I still might not have taken anything of theirs." "Why? Because stealing is a crime? What of three murders and two dismemberments and your plans for two more: Srih and Jonuta?" Her eyes were puzzled. "Those are different, Whitey. Those deaths are like those in the alley-good in the sight of the gods. I think Aglii might not have been pleased if I stole from Sicuan's house. It is not the same. Surely She is pleased that they are dead." His laugh was short and ugly. "Oh, what sureness, what righteous smugness! Resbi Peacekeeping Force will consider you a murderer-and worse, a murdering slave. And worse: your victim was the Most Honored High Priest of Gri, retired. I consider you worthy of Aglaya, yes, and the god-if She exists- oh, don't look at me that way; wait until you've traveled the spaceways and seen how many gods there are and learn that all peoples always start by making a god of their sun and a planetary spirit! What does Aglii think? That you are worthy of Aglaya, surely. And so you will be tortured-yes, slave!-and put to death, if you are caught. Yes, death! Who would bother rehabilitating or brainchanging a slave? What then that you did not bring away something to buy passage off Resh? You would have served Aglii and Sunmother better if you had, and Janja and all those slaves you want to save, too! Because then you could be independent and surely escape. By not stealing you jeopardize yourself and me and your plans for Jonuta and thus the other Aglayans he will steal if you do not stop him. "Not," he added quietly, "that you could hope to succeed, anyhow." For a moment she remembered a conversation from long ago. About good and evil; about Jonuta. She thrust that and Kenowa from her mind. She would return to pluck at it another time. Could he be right? Was black not black and white not white? Was not gray merely white with black in it-good tainted by 178 evil, and overwhelmed? And she-stolen. Her Promised murdered before her eyes. Sold and mistreated and used. She, with her righteous mission, sworn to the god-how could I possibly be gray? All that I do and will do is toward stopping Jonuta. How could there be wrong involved? The motive is pure! "I have nothing," she said. "I stole nothing. I must get to Qalara and I will. Tell me how." He strode about the room. "You might stay on here at Kitsko's," he said, "selling your body as a bust. It is better here than walking the streets. You might save up passage to Qalara ... in about ten years. Maybe nine, if you are popular, and frugal, and are careful with your clothes. Kitsko is fair, and kind." Janja said nothing. She did not dare. He was not serious. He was a man, an angry man making noises. But he was of Aglaya and she was of Aglaya. There was a way. He knew. She could think of one already, and she knew so little. "Perhaps you could-" "Whitey, where does your ship go three days from now?" He swung back to her. The four-way stretch shirt spaceship crew wore was tight, for safety reasons; tight on his fine biceps, tight across his well-shaped chest. She wondered if there was a fine down of white there. Linshin had mentioned his pubic hair, around bis slicer of cakes. Men slice cakes with their slicers, she thought. Women are cakes. We . . . get sliced. "You are indeed an idiot," he told her. "Indeed an Aglayan-indeed a barbarian! You should have stolen from the dogs you slew! My ship goes to Franji, with a stop at Jasbir, and then back." "Is Franji closer to Qalara than Resh is?" Her expression had not changed. Her voice remained calm, single-mindedly seeking information. Qalara. Qalara. He made an exaggerated gesture. "Yes!" He thrust his hands into the pockets that were inside the waistband of spacefarers' pants, and came forth with a few Gri-stells. Most transactions were handled electroni- 179 cally, via I.D. cards. "Pocket money" could be had in the form of coupons. Some few planets used some few coins. Whitey tossed the Reshi coins onto the spread beside Janja. He bent to lean past her, with one palm planted on the

bed. "Resh," he said, planting a blue disk. He laid another down, about the length of her thumb away; about five sems from the first. "Jasbir." And another, five sems beyond that: "Franji." And another, some twenty sems from Resh: "Qalara." She nodded, gazing at the little electroplas disks glittering dully on the bedspread. "And Aglaya?" He tossed down a coin, out to the left and about equidistant from Resh and Qalara. "Terasaki." And well off beside it, "Aglaya." Janja studied the configuration, one eyebrow up. "And ... the old planet? Homeworld-Erf?" He swung and tossed a coin across the room. It clacked off the wall, dropped to the carpet, and hesitated on its edge. Then it flopped over. "Homeworld. And Hawking would be right beside it—a planet of Centauri." That meant nothing. She said, "I will go to Franji on your ship." On his way to retrieve the Homeworld coin, Whitey paused to look back at her. "It is a freightship. A trumper, and not one of the best or even newest. Even so, passage to Franji would come to about two thousand stells. Fat Jak may make that in a month—and his is a very popular place. Linshin, who lives quite comfortably, might make that in ten months—Resh, but of course she could not save all of it, even living here without rent. Sicuan was probably worth five millions. I have an account on Jasbir; a few hunstells. I will not use it to buy you passage, even if it were enough." "Whitey, this is needless. I know how I can go to Franji with you, and you know. I will go as your woman." "Janja! You were Promised! He—" "Is dead." 180 He stared at her. "You would do that? You want to get to Qalara so badly?" She shrugged. "You are of Aglaya, Whitey, and you know you are good-looking. Leave me here and I die. We will disguise me and I will go aboard Rambler as your woman. I know that is legal. You are taking me to Franji, to wait for you there. The god will not condemn. She understands my reasons. After that you can forget me. I will set about getting myself to Qalara." "How?" "That is not important now." Whitey bent to pick up the coin. He held it between thumb and finger and studied it for a long while, as if he were a collector and it a rare piece. He slid it back into his pocket. He looked across the room at her, perched on the yellow bedspread at bed's edge in her long-sleeved, long-skirted, high-collared robe of metallic blue. "All right. We leave in three days. By that time we will have made you unrecognizable. Kitsko will help." She sat looking at him, waiting. Qalara. Qalara. "Go to sleep," he said. "I am going for another drink." Janja sighed. "Might I have one? Or let me go for them—oh. You are also perhaps going to Linshin or . . . someone?" With his hand on the door he turned back to look at her. "That—that is not your business, Janja." "Sunmother would forgive," she said, in the ritual of their people. "No, it is not my business, and I am not questioning what you do. I asked because this is a whorehouse and Linshin is a hust. She will charge you. I will not." For a long time they were silent, their eyes locked. His studied. Hers merely . . . were. At last she spoke again. "I am to go aboard your ship and travel to Franji as your woman. Do you intend that we lie about it?" "Oh," he said, sarcasm dripping yellow from his words. "Lying is a crime, and we killers of Aglaya 181 must not lie!" He shrugged. "Strip and get into the bed. It is very pleasant, this bed of a whorehouse of civilization. I will return with two drinks." He swung his hand over the seam beside the door and the light dimmed to the sensual glow Kitsko had devised for the rooms of her House. He moved his hand back to the door. It opened and Whitey went out. Janja rose and began to strip. It occurred to her that Linshin would cost him stells—whereas Janja might cost him far more. And Linshin could charge because she was a professional, presumably a trained expert at her trade. At my new trade, Janja thought, almost without bitterness. / must concentrate then, and make it good. Certainly he is good-looking, and O Aglii, he is of Aglaya! They cull him Flash. I will make him flash as he flashes them! 14 Good is "that which we certainly know is useful to us." Spinoza Coronet was well and so was Srih. Since Sakyo had proven he could be trusted, Jonuta made him Arel's permanent replacement. Sakyo, Srih, Kenowa, and Sweetface shared in the mystery: While Coronet and Srih were being repaired, Jonuta leased a sleek little ship and departed the big planet called Bleak. He was gone six

days-Bleak, and he did not say where he had been. None of them asked more than once. The day after his return, Coronet lifted from Bleak. Jonuta worked out a course for which he had no cassette. With Coronet empty, all were curious. "Where are we going?" Kenowa asked. 182 Jonuta's eyes were hooded and he hardly glanced at her. "Resh," he said. "Empty?" He did not look away from SIPACUM, and Ke-nowa compressed her lips. She asked nothing else. She knew why they were going to Resh. Damn, oh damn that pale-headed little cake! Whitey did not return to the room. After a long while, Janja slept. In the morning she woke to discover that complications had begun and were mounting. All captains would please cooperate. All outgoing ships would be checked for the murderer of Sicuan and his son. Citizens were urged to come forth to do their duty. Too, they might well qualify to collect the reward being offered by the Temple. This they learned at breakfast. "You were better off to have put her on your ship last night," Kitsko told Whitey. "Then they would have known exactly where to find me," Janja said quietly. She and Whitey acted as if nothing had happened. Something had; he had said he would come back, and he had not. She was disappointed and assumed cheerlessly that he was not. "Will they come here?" "Who knows? They won't search every house in Grim. But everyone knows about this, Jan. They'll all be anxious to get some of that Temple reward. The Temple's agents and RPF will be everywhere, snooping." Kitsko shook her head. "I don't know what we will do. They described you well." "The Jarp," Janja said. "We must make me look some other way." "Oh, Gri take you, you silly girl! Why did you have to do it so bloodily? Why did it have to be the former High Priest?" , "A slave," Janja told her, "has no choice as to her master." "Well, my knowledgeless barbarian-of course we 183 must 'make you look some other way! But how? We can change the color of your hair and your skin, even your eyes, with subcutane. But all dyes are government controlled. They can detect them instantly with the simplest of scanning devices." "From what I have seen of Grim," Janja said, "I should think they would suspect someone with no dye much faster than otherwise." "Flash, if she spews one more of those asinine pronouncements, would you please knock her through the wall?" Kitsko sighed. "Every woman who even acts like she wants to set foot on the port will be checked. She won't even know it. If she shows hair or skin dye, they will put a scan on her to determine the original color. And that will be all-for all of us. Dam' you, Hash!" Janja stood. "Whitey did nothing. I will go out and let them take me if they can." "Oh sit down before I knock you down," Kitsko snapped. "We're going to get you offplanet, girl! All we have to do is think of a way to do it." Janja looked from Kitsko to Whitey and back to the woman. Suddenly she said, "We are not thinking as Aglayans think! On Aglaya, Kitsko, we do not have the means to inject something beneath the skin to cause a change in pigmentation. Whitey-the girl in the rain ceremony! Her hair must be red-so it is soaked in water and sourberry!" Whitey looked at her. "Yes!" Janja sat down. "Kitsko! Subcutanes are government licensed, and they put something in them that shows up on a dermascan. What about the dye used for fabrics? Or some fruit juice?" She was right, but it is human to place other obstacles in the way of someone who presents answers, and so Kitsko said, "And what about your eyes? Even old-fashioned comeal lenses can be detected." Janja finger-flipped. "We will worry about that. First-my hair. And my skin." It was not difficult. Ink did not exist, but printout 184 ribbon, boiled hi cola-pop, yielded a murky black. Janja's hair became jet. Linshin played her role with relish. Sauntering into an artist's supply store in the newer section, she bought several tubes of Saf-T paint, as well as a roll of canvas. Kitsko railed at her for wasting money on the canvas; Linshin pointed out logically that she had not wanted to arouse suspicion. The raw siena took. They applied it to Janja, rubbing it up into her newly dark hair but leaving her soles and her belly. Those would be dyed at the last minute. Kitsko feared that even guaranteed Saf-T paint might be dangerous to skin. It would have to be got off on the ship-and Janja could stay covered up (religiously, Linshin suggested, rolling her eyes). And the eyes? "Who will notice?" Janja

demanded. "Someone," Kitsko said. "Bet on it." And Whitey nodded. Quietly Janja told them she had the solution. She would not tell them what it was, just yet. They had all been astounded at her face, though Linshin remembered Janja's prediction and announced it with gusto. The bruises did indeed fade and her face was not badly swollen. By the end of the second day her face bore scratches and some few bruises. She had effectively blotted most of them away by applying what her people called the "inner" Janja: Janja2, her sub-but not un-conscious mind. Now she was sorry she had done so. Black and blue and swollen nearly shut, her eyes would not show their grayness. On her knees, Janja looked up the length of his body. "Let me have it, Whitey. Please." He swung from her. "No. That is for lifemates, so that a woman may know her mate's thoughts and make perfect their mating! I cannot do it." "Oh, Whitey!" She moved after him, on her knees. Her hands rose to touch the backs of his strong thighs, 185 his buttocks. "Think what it will mean to me! I will be unstoppable among these people! Please, Whitey-" "No!" Her hands continued toying with him from behind, fondling and caressing. He jerked away to spin around. "No! It is forbidden by Aglii Herself!" "So is rule by men, and a man's denying a woman her wish!" "I say the reserving of the deepkiss for lifemates is a higher mandate, Janja-but I will not discuss dogma with you. Or allow the deepkiss." "You want me to remain a cripple as they are!" "As I am! I do not want you to be a superwoman among them. That would be wrong." "Wrong!" Janja bounded to her feet. "Wrong! Whitey! What is 'wrong'? That we are different? That I must wear this dye to escape punishment for killing my tormentors? That we are enslaved by them? Wrong! What is wrong?" Again he turned away. "No, Janja. I have not forgotten the god and Her demands, just because I am not on Aglaya. I will never forget. What you want is wrong, and it is not possible for me." She desisted, but did gain his promise to stay with her this night. Whitey did, and she strove and concentrated and led and followed; she bent for the mounting and lay beneath him and sat astride as well, pumping wildly and twisting, sweating and making him sweat, exhausting him. Oh, she flashed Flash! At last he fell asleep, and so did she-telling herself when she would awake. She did, in the night, and she set about a gentle, furtive arousal of the man beside her in the whorehouse bed. She did not know if she could accomplish it without waking him. She knew that she must try. Moving carefully, she leaned over him. Her tongue lapped and slithered, and when it had grown, her lips clasped gently about it, slid down it. Slowly, gently, she began to deepkiss him while he slept. It stiffened and grew in 186 her mouth. She was desperate to strip it before he might wake, and yet she could not rush or be forceful. Her cheeks' sank far inward until the bones pressed the skin in shiny tightness. Civilization was forgotten. She was Aglayan woman, voraciously seeking her strength via the deepkiss of their people. Even in his sleep, the supine man's hips began to move, to match the rhythm of her head. He grew restless and she slacked off until his Body found a new rest and his steady breathing resumed. Janja started anew. She was apprehensive of his awaking, of her failing to achieve her goal. It had been in her mind ever since she had realized she was among an inferior people. With one drink of the life-giving nectar of a man, she would ascend to a plateau as far above them as their technology was beyond Aglaya. Her deepkissing Whistle and Chulucan, her swallowing their seed, had no effect. It had to be a man of her people, and she realized that Aglayans represented a different race indeed! She sucked strongly, trying to quell the sounds she made. They were louder in the darkness of the room. Just a little more . . . And Whitey awoke. He jerked, he cried out, he yanked himself away and yelped when her teeth scraped him. He sat quickly erect in the bed and shot forth his hands. One grabbed her. The other slapped her offending mouth. Even hi her sobbing frustration she remembered to lean into the blow, and her lip was split against her teeth. She set her brain to it: kill the pain. Deaden it. She ducked her head as he struck again and he struck her cheek. Her mind seized control of the substantia gelatinosa in her spine, commanded the auto-ataralgic cells there. She ducked her head and moaned as his knuckles

struck her right eye and her head seemed to explode. She passed out. Janja awoke with her right eye swollen shut-and A headache. Whitey was asleep beside her, wearing 187 snug briefs. Immediately she began to berate and curse him in two languages, slapping and gouging. It was a horrible way to be wakened. He came roaring up out of sleep and with one blow tumbled her from the bed. She rose to pounce at him. He twisted her arm and slapped one tight breast. She bent her head toward his, baring her teeth and grabbing at his crotch. She twisted her head to take another blow just under her left eye. Tears squirted but she hardly felt it; the analgesic chemicals of the Thingmakers could not match Ag-layan mind-over-body control. She let herself go limp, then, and he hit her twice before he realized she was not resisting. He left off. Whimpering, she clung and burrowed her head in toward the sheltering warmth of his armpit. "Thank you, thank you, Whitey. You have completed my disguise." He went stiff at realization of what she meant, at realization of her purpose and her incredible bravery. He held her close and they lay together while she sobbed some of it out. Insane, she told herself, I am insane! Her psychocellular efforts were directed only toward damping pain. Skin damage, cell damage- these she encouraged. Within an hour she could barely see. Both eyes were swollen nearly closed. The right was the worse. There were several bruises. Three almost merged into a fascinating sismoidal pattern on her left cheek and jaw. Her lip was swollen and puckered. They hurried to Kitsko and announced her plan. Kitsko made the call. The uniformed RPF men came. Kitsko screamed about the noise and the damage to her room and her furniture and most of all this chit of a girl she had taken in two months ago and treated nicely. Look at her, she loves that scummy spacefarer and he beat her this way and still she hangs onto the beast as if he were beloved of Gri! She's no good to me-who'd look at her? You, officer, would you ask for this mess if you happened to come back 188 tonight because it will be free for you tonight? (A smiling headshake.) Of course not! And you? (A grin; a headshake with sparkling eyes.) No, I'll not make any charges-just get them out of here. Out of here! Make sure the nasty little bust goes with this bastard wherever he's going! Oh-oh, what will I do-she's got the biggest warheads hi the House and she's been so popular with those crewmen from the Accord planets! After all that the two policers were anxious to escape the screaming woman and spend the rest of the day thinking about their return here tonight for a free ride or two. They hustled out the pale-skinned space-farer and his fat-busted little hust. She was all over bruises and one couldn't even see that she had eyes! What a brute! But look at the way she clung to him. She liked it! A man must really have a flash with a pieca cake like that. Thus Whitey and Janja had a police escort to his ship. Onboard Rambler she removed the outsized brassiere Linshin had found for her. She hurled it from her along with its stuffings-the dark purple tunic and pale blue leotard Whitey had bought her. Collapsing on his bunk, she began to concentrate on her bruises. The eyes first. Hours later the ship departed Reshport and began the journey out to Franji. Four women had already been taken into custody on suspicion of being the escaped murderer-slave. At least thirty had been politely invited into Port Authority for a further examination of their follicularly dyed hair or subcutaneously dyed skin or eyes. 15 The ultimate sanction of all morality [is] a subjective feeling in our minds. J.S.Mill Rambler was the personal property of her captain and an onplanet partner. Captain Tachi, who had no idea his name had once meant "sword" in one of the old languages of Homeworld, hauled anything at nearly any rates he could get. Rambler was a freighter, a tramper, with plenty of cargo space, the strength to pull more, and little else. The crew of four contrived a semblance of privacy and someone usually slept in the hold, for privacy. Tachi slept in the con-cabin, even when the mate was on watch there. Rambler was not equipped for subspace and did not approach light-speed. Whitey and Janja-now called Linshin-had weeks together. Despite the lack of privacy, they mated as often as possible-considering the tired did ship's constant need of attention and Whitey's accompanying weariness. They found each other's ways and bodies to

their liking. Each was able to delight the other to a degree neither had known before. After awhile she left off trying for the deepkiss, and at last promised Whitey she would not seek it anymore. She did not. Weeks later they reached chill, gray-skied Jasbir. Rambler stopped only long enough to take on cargo and a few supplies, and they resumed the journey to Franji. The lightness aboard ship in zero-G was a delight to Janja/Linshin. It was a novelty in lovemaking, but they had to be careful. After awhile the novelty wore off. In one area they were not careful, and during the 190 third week out from Jasbir they terminated the fetus. Whitey was amazed. As soon as they reached Franji, where Rambler would remain for three days-Franji and perhaps four, they would get her inoculated. Then she need not worry about conceiving unless and until she decided she wanted the countershot. To his knowledge, Aglayans were not cross-fertile with them. "Then we are aliens-another race," she said. One of the doubts about the people-looking inhabitants of Croz stemmed from the fact that Crozers were apparently cross-fertile with none others. Neither Tachi nor his crew gave them any trouble. One of the crew was a Jarp, who kept them all happy. Captain Tachi seemed sexless. Achmy, who surely knew who "Linshin" was, said nothing. He was distant with Whitey now, although they still worked well together. A few days from Franji, Whitey asked her to stay with him. Janja countered by asking him to accompany her. Whitey turned away. He had a place among these people. And Janja had a mission, a vow made. They did not mention it again. They were transitory "lovers," and Janja felt that Tarkij must have been the beginning and the end of her real loving. She thought about Jonuta, but not as a lover. Franjiport was similar to Reshport, as it was similar to many others. It was also different, as all others were. Franji's peculiar arched and circular ideas of architecture were everywhere apparent, administration buildings included. The port was younger than Resh's and the city was smaller than Grim. It was called Velynda and had a "native" population of perhaps fifteen thousand with a daily workforce exceeding twenty thousand. Most bureaucrats and enterprise agents lived elsewhere. The bright green shafts of Franji's elevated tubeway system-government owned, as nearly everything was, here-was fast and usually efficient. (It was also showing a rising annual deficit and falling efficiency, and many on Franji were agitating to have the entire system leased out to private entrepreneurs for administration.) In some areas the 191 tubeway formed an almost eerie green arabesque against the hot yellow-orange sky. Janja received her inoculation. Posing as Whitey's wife, she had her "lost" I.D. replaced. Whitey bought her a cheap wig-a blue Terasaki coil-and a one-piece sleeveless shortsuit. It was bright yellow, with a closure that ran from the high round neck to the crotch, and under. That was convenient; he had her keep it on two of the several times they wallowed in the overly soft bed of their cheap hotel. She was childishly, barbarically happy with it, loving the brightness of its color and more than pleased that he had chosen to buy it for her, unurged. She wore it and went to sleep in it the night he did not return. Next day they saw each other briefly before he boarded the shuttle to return to the laden ship for Resh and beyond. "Thank you, Whitey. You are worthy of Aglaya," she said. She was suddenly unable to think of anything to say other than the ritual words of their own planet. Their former planet. He smiled. "You are worthy of Aglaya, Janja. Aglii and Sunmother go with you; keep Them by you." He began to look even more uncomfortable. "Uh-" "Cool winds, Whitey." "Cool winds, Janja." "Whitey-" He leaned toward her, waiting to hear her words. His blue eyes were bright. Janja sighed. "Go, Whitey." Impulsively he said, "My name was Fidnij, Janja." "Cool winds, Fidnij of Aglaya." He boarded the shuttle to go up to Rambler and space, leaving her with an anticonceptive shot and a coiled blue wig and a cheap yellow jumpsuit and the very handsome purple tunic and blue tights. She also had another night in the Royal Franjis and coupons worth nineteen stells. She was registered as Linshin, of Grim, on Resh, divorced wife of Tachi of Terasaki. In the morning, after vanitizing away the circles 192 under her eyes-as best she could-she and her blue wig and tunic-over-tights went to Port

Authority: Employment. She walked with ease. Franji's gravity was .73 and she was glad to ease into weight, after freefall on the ship. She would do anything, she told the woman and then the man with the folds running around and around his neck, which bulged over his stiff collar both fore and aft. Anything? He gave her a look. He had already established that she was without useful skills. In seven days a ship would arrive; three days later it would depart for Qalara. A freighter, Lion of Islam, one of the ships of Portage L'llillah. A good ship. Unusually, it would swing out of Iceworld for a passenger, who obviously had money! It was all he could promise. Lion would need a ship's girl. Did she know what that meant? She nodded. "Crew hust," she said levelly. She watched astonishment spread over his face and squeeze it, pushing his eyebrows up and his fat lower lip down toward his chins. "Such purpose," he said quietly. "Such insouciance." He spoke as if he admired and respected her. Janja knew better. After looking at her for several long seconds he picked up a memomike. He told it that Tachi-Linshin 810244204TR, of Grim on Resh, had this day signed on as crewgirl of P.L.S. Lion of Islam out of Ghanj for Qalara via Iceworld. He asked her age again, her height and weight, and true colors of hair and eyes. She answered "brown" to both, knowing he assumed the flat, unattractive, yet fascinating gray of her eyes was the result of subcutane and that this just-divorced woman so anxious to reach Qalara was hard up-or perhaps a disguised agent for some person or organization. That did not matter. He was shocked that she did not know her citotype. "You realize that could mean your death, or loss of some vital organ? If anything happens to you they will 193 have to ascertain your celltype before they can even begin to regen!" She shrugged, and he stared, and finally looked away while he asked more questions. Then, "What will you do until the ship arrives?" His eyes examined the little ridge of cloth that connected her breasts and the folds that fell from their points. He watched all of that move with her shrug. "Might I suggest... I could use some help for the next few days. You could live in, just until the ship comes of course and, ah-food and lodging, you see." His tongue appeared to wet his lips. "How nice. Must I sign something?" Surprised, he nodded and passed her two documents that had to be thumbprinted. She did that and he fed them into the machine which registered the information, gave him a record in the retrieval system, and issued her a little permaplast card. "Is that all? Am I now ship's slut for Lion? It is all done?" He nodded. With his smile his fat lips writhed like a pair of overfed worms. "All recorded and official, though that's hardly the term!" "I'll bet the truth is you were worried you might not be able to produce a ship's girl for Lion of Islam, weren't you?" "Ah, you must be familiar with Franji's kindly welfare system-uh, Linshin. But about my offer of immediate-ah-employment-" Janja stood. In a voice as flat as her wintry eyes she suggested that he lose weight so that he could go and bugger himself. The civserv's eyes bulged. His face began to take on the hue of Franji's famous firepaint. Planting his fat hands on the desktop, he started to stand. Then his eyes went just a little wider. It was no submissive hardshipper he faced, ready to do anything and accept anything because she was stranded here. This woman's teeth were showing without smiling. They seemed bared ferally, despite the lack of point to her canines. 194 She had bent her knees a little and looked as if she knew how to handle herself. He sank back into his chair. Janja departed, ignoring the words he spat after her just as the door whispered shut. She knew that people will always spit out words at something or someone they fear, once they feel secure again. "Feisty barbarian hust!" An hour after Kenowa, Srih, and Sweetface checked into the Imperial Hotel, they received a call. The Jarp took it, whistled, and was urgently requested to turn on its translator. It did, unnecessarily: the caller asked for Jonuta, and Sweetface contacted Kenowa. The contact was expected. It was Talicuan the procurer, who had his sources. He kept tabs on all incoming ships. Coronet had docked up at Resh's Eagle-Station six hours ago. Talicuan would have been waiting. He was surprised to be told that Jonuta was not onplanet. Anything wrong? Yes, he would be delighted to meet Kenowa in the

Babylon Lounge. He was at the bar when Kenowa arrived. Oddly, she was un-flamboyantly attired in a long gray skirt- straight but not tight-and a long-sleeved black shirt. True, the two strips of white lace edging the "neckline" seemed enemies to each other and did not come together for a long time. She did wear her purple Terasaki coil and striking black eardrops the size of thumbs. She walked past him to a table under the place's jungle of overhead netting and hanging plants -all of which were plastic or fabric. The lighting had little effect on her black-shirted back. Talicuan ambled back to join her casually. He was a tallish man, stockily dashing in appearance, with a small, perfectly trimmed mustache and dimpled chin. His apparent age was thirty; he was about fifty. He wore a blousy white shirt of frills and darts under a tight black vest-suit. It seemed to absorb the ever-shifting light of the Babylon Lounge. That illumination came from two slowly revolving spectrum lamps at opposite ends of the room. The lamps were deliberately out of chromatic sync with each other. Everything and everyone was fitfully lit in constantly changing colors-all suitably muted for atmosphere. Talicuan sat across the small table from the big woman in the big wig. Drinks in hand, they paid for privacy. Kenowa even rose to step a pace away as a test of the table's scrambler field. Yes. Suddenly the procurer seemed to be speaking gibberish. It became Erts again once she was seated opposite him, within the field. "He is up at the station," she told the tall and rather handsome man opposite her. "He doesn't dare come onplanet." "Damn!" Talicuan was experienced and cool, though. She had not pronounced Jonuta's name and had emphasized the pronoun. He used it, too. "He is in trouble on Resh?" "No. He doesn't care to be pulled in and questioned about Srih. Srih is in trouble on Resh." "Ummm. Anything I might be able to help with?" Jonuta had more clout on Resh than Talicuan, and both he and Kenowa knew it. Still, Talicuan was Talicuan. She fingerflipped. He watched the hand. It was hard for him to look at her face. She was displaying about three-fifths of her bosom, which was more than most women possessed. "Oh, you know him. He hates publicity and he does hate to bribe. That would do it, of course. He'll probably wind up paying off someone. Meanwhile, he's stuck up there. Along with Srih, of course." He shook his head as if in sympathy and tried to wait a decent interval before asking what he wanted to know; all that was important. "And cargo?" She nodded. "Something . . . interesting?" "Very. And nothing warm, much less hot. Six items." "Six." She nodded. "One's from . . ." Despite the scrambler, 196 she glanced around and leaned a little closer. "Home-world," she murmured. That revelation made it a lot easier for him not to stare into the mighty canyon she was showing him, in her blouse. He only just refrained from echoing the word. Marucan of Temple City/Menre loved Home-world slaves, of either sex. It made him feel even more powerful. He had only two and had let Talicuan know he wanted more-and Talicuan was sure Marucan had told other procurers, too. Only recently Lady Maplade had also expressed a bright-eyed desire for a Home-worlder, male. It was one of the few experiences she had not had in her busy bed. "Interesting," Talicuan said coolly, but Kenowa had already seen the flare of his eyes. "Uh-sex? Age? How can such an item not be hot?" "Male about twenty-five," Kenowa told him. "And he's not hot because he has no I.D. card and no memory. He's supposedly dead, you see. Lots of re-gen-" "Ah." An unidentified, unidentifiable Homeworlder, a young male, newly regenerated but without reimplantation of the memories they would have stolen to edit out the horror of-whatever had happened to him. That would be fine with Marucan. And exactly what Maplade wanted, unless the fellow was just hideous. Talicuan doubted that. He envisioned some nice competitive bidding and an unusually fat profit followed by a little trip and the partnership Corundum had offered him. Oh, Jonuta would fare all right, of course. Talicuan paid fair prices and Jonuta knew he had a good item, as he'd had last time he visited Resh. It was just that this time Jonuta needed him! "Sounds interesting," he said, and both of them knew he was covering excitement. "Perhaps I should go up and see him. And the others, of course." Kenowa said, "That possibility occurred to us. I'm sure we'd all rather that no one knew

you visited Coronet. You will be totally incognito. I came down 197 with Sweetface and the new man, Sakyo. Come up to our room and I'll show you something very, very interesting." "Should I trust myself in your room, Kenowa?" That easy, flashy, wow-the-gals smile. "What're you afraid of," she said, "rape?" He chuckled. "Nah," he said, lifting his head and squaring his shoulders. "Aren't you?" Kenowa could take just so much of this strutting rooster. She smiled, then laughed. Coronet crewpersons Sakyo and Sweetface flashed I.D. and passed through the scan aisle on Eagle-Station. Sakyo's obviously drunken state was sufficiently distracting that the clerk on duty failed to watch Ms screen while the Jarp passed through. It was routine, anyhow. Yet the attendant might have noticed that this Jarp's skeleton was displayed with normal hips and completely human, one-thumbed hands. The two went down a few steps and boarded a rail-car that ran them halfway around the station's wheel to berth 37. They passed through the airtight port, waited while it closed and the other one opened into the sealed cupola. They passed through it into Coronet's airlock. There the Jarp raised its double-thumbed orange hands to its chest, seemed to perform an occult set of signs or turn something invisible, and was no longer a Jarp. It-that is, he-became Talicuan the procurer. "Brilliant!" he enthused. "No one has any idea I'm up here! This is brilliant!" In the dark blue aura-suit with the jewel-imitating control at his breast, he grinned at Sakyo. Sakyo, the color of excellent bronze, smiled. He made a sweeping gesture and Talicuan preceded him into the ship. For fun, presumably, Jonuta had activated a projector that turned this area of Coronet into a vast stone-walled chamber. Jonuta stood waiting. In his usual piratic garb, he lounged against a stone wall-that is, bulkhead. 198 "Are you sure, Tal? No one knows we're having this meeting?" "Absolutely no-" Talicuan blinked. "Oh, well, Kenowa and the real Jarp, of course. And Sakyo here. That drunk act of his kept the scanner attendant so busy he hardly glanced at me, much less the bonescan. How are you, Jonuta? What's this business about Srih?" "I am fine. Srih's problem can wait. Do get out of that suit and come along. I've got something to show you." "So Kenowa said! Uh. This thing is brilliant, just brilliant. But it's-ah, thanks, Sakyo." With Sakyo's help Talicuan writhed the suit off his arms and started getting it down his legs. He wore a green leotard. "Come to think, it seems silly to take it off now. I'll just have to put it back on before I go back, won't I?" "You won't be going back, Tal." Jonuta's stopper sent the procurer into a spastic little quiver-dance. "Do you have any idea where Janja is?" "J-Ja-Ja-?" "The pale short female with the white hair and powerful-looking legs you took off my hands eight months ago. You know. The one who killed Sicuan, Chulucan, and their slavemaster, that animal Izhan. Remember?" Talicuan, in the quivering rigidity of the freeze beam, could not reply. Jonuta kept the stopper on him, and activated. "I was unofficially on Resh this morning. Srih is in no trouble, Tal. I merely wanted you up here without anyone's knowing it. In less than an hour onplanet I learned about those murders, by an escaped slave. Everyone in Grim seems to know her descrip. I couldn't believe you'd have done that, so I checked the civil records. They show that Sicuan bought her from you. You treacherous slimy bastard, your kind exists because some of us in my business don't care to hang around onplanet, dickering about cargo. So we use 199 you middle-men for a swift transfer of cargo. We make few requests and know you creatures get rich off us with about point-oh-one percent the risk we take. I made a request about that slave, Tal. You absolutely promised not to sell her to any of three individuals I specifically named. One of them was Sicuan because he was an evil rotten slimebug all his life, and that son of his was worse. Sadists. For a few extra stells you might have got from someone else anyhow, Tal, you lied to Jonuta! That is cheating, in business. Everybody knows I don't cheat and won't be cheated, Tal. Everybody knows about my big ego. I can't bear being cheated." "Jo-J-Jo-nu-u-u-u-" "Oh stop. Sakyo-now." Sakyo had drawn the exodermic syringe out of the dragon-embossed yellow tunic he loved to wear. The palm-size syringe hissed and 20 cc's of illegal tetra-zombase plunged into Talicuan's neck, where it would hurt. It

would also reach his brain a lot faster. Jonuta stood grimly staring at the procurer, keeping him in the clutch of the stopper. Its effect on this setting was to confuse his central nervous system. "You're not out of a ninja family are you, Sakyo?" Sakyo chuckled and shook his head. "Just a well-to-do one that put me into medical school, Captain, as you no doubt know better than anyone back on Tera-saki!" The wiry and yet chesty man had made a solemn vow that had taken aback even Jonuta: "Your orders are my wishes, Capain Jonuta, and your enemies are my enemies." Jonuta had to believe it. And now Jonuta watched Talicuan's eyes change. They looked as if Talicuan wasn't at home anymore. In a way, he wasn't. He was far more in thrall than Trilby had ever been to Svengali, or however that legend went. The ancient word was zombi. Jonuta moved his thumb and holstered the stopper, while Sakyo aided Talicuan in staying on his feet. He regained control of his muscles quickly enough. It was 200 his brain that would not work for Mm; his will. He had of course wet his pants. "Do you have any idea where Janja is, Talicuan? Answer." "I have no idea where Janja is. RPF hasn't any idea where Janja is either. Some think she is still on Resh, because she could not have got off. Some think she must have left, somehow. Jo-" "No no, Tal, let's don't have any shit now, Tal. Just keep answering and skip any attempt at conversation. Do you have any information on that slave? Any opinion? Guesses?" "I think she must have got oflplanet. I don't know how. Really. Listen, I-" "Stop talking." Jonuta knew the TZ would insure Talicuan's obedience. "Come along now. You've lied to me and cheated me and caused me trouble. Kenowa is not happy about this. Now come along. You did want to see the cargo hold." Jonuta turned away to move back into the ship. "Mouth shut, Tal." Talicuan went along. He had to. He couldn't do anything else. Jonuta's expressed wishes were commands to him, so long as the tetrazombase kept him will-less, and it had a long time to run. In silence he wanted to break, but could not, he accompanied Jonuta to the main cargo hatch. Jonuta opened it. Across a small "hall" were two other hatches, wheel-locked. Jonuta opened the leftward one. Behind it sprawled a big empty chamber. Jonuta opened the rightward hatch. Behind it, an identical big metal room had no other hatch, no porthole, no furnishings, and no cargo. It was empty. Jonuta had no cargo at all. Talicuan could think: O Gri of Might! He came back here only to see about her-and get me! Jonuta looked past him. "Sak, tomorrow I want you to get a list of all ships that left within the week following the murders. Next, narrow those down to the ones that lifted off with anyone not on board when they arrived. Male or female, understand. Next, try to confirm the identity of any of those people. Mark 201 those, but keep that list. Finally, add to the lists all their destinations, ultimate and intermediate. All that should be readily available to public retrieval without bothering anybody." "Right, Captain. And if she did not leave-" "I'd say she did. Sweetface and Srih will do some checking, though. There are some people on Grim who tend to know things, and most of them don't tend to care to tell policers what they know. We are different. Sweetface and Srih will have cash; ready coupons. So will you, just in case. Get stupid and try to bribe the wrong person, though, and you're on your own." "I understand, Captain. Kenowa?" "You're out of bounds, Sakyo." Sakyo showed Jonuta the top of his head. "Right, Captain. Sorry, Captain." She's mad and doesn't want to help and he won't make her. Kenowa is Captain Cautious's weak spot. "Talicuan." Jonuta gestured. "Step inside." No, no, no, Talicuan tried to say, while he obeyed. In the absence of a further command, he turned once he was within the cargo hold-the one for females. He turned just in time to catch Jonuta's hard-swung stopper right in the face. Talicuan was practically thrown backward, with blood bubbling from his nose and lip. He sprawled. Unconscious, he did not hear the slamming of the door to the cargo hold. It locked automatically. A little while later an obviously agitated Captain Jonuta approached the bored-looking scanner attendant. "You passed in two of my crew awhile ago?" "Yessir, Captain. At ... 1803 hours. Anything wrong?" "Can you describe them?" "Ah . . . Captain ... a lot of people come through. One was a Jarp and the other wasn't." The man tried to look helpless and made a helpless

gesture. "Very good. You hate to tell ole Captain Cautious his crewman was drunk, don't you?" "Well, uh-" 202 "All right. Look, the thing is that dam' Jarp didn't come onboard. Seen it?" "No sir." The man looked around. Jonuta knew that was to please him, not in any hope of spotting the supposed and supposedly missing Sweetface. "Could we check the station?" The check let Jonuta know that no one had noticed Sakyo and the disguised Talicuan boarding Coronet. Maybe that missing Jarp had taken the shuttle right back down after he'd got his buddy back onship? No one remembered. Fine. Jonuta took the shuttle down, and he smiled. He had just established that the Jarp had arrived with a drunken man who would not remember, and was not on station or on Coronet, and so must be below. That took care of the people on EagleStation. Those on-planet would have no way of connecting Talicuan with Sakyo or the station or Coronet-once the procurer was missed. When they all returned from their various missions and shuttled back up to Coronet, no one on Eagle-Station dreamed that Sweetface had come up only once. That way only five people in the galaxy knew where Talicuan 8102423 3 6R was, and they were all on Coronet. With Talicuan. 16 ... aggression is always a consequence of frustration. Freud Janja had seven days until Lion of Islam came to Franji and three days more until it would depart, bearing her toward Qalara. Her heart did not speed 203 with anticipation. Her mind worked with a chill fury, and what it came up with was impossibility, desperation, and frustration. She could not survive ten days without funding. Among those people she had no skills; if only she had gained what she wanted from Whitey! Then she could be employed by anyone to whom she deigned to rent that ability. But she had not succeeded. And she did possess one attribute, one skill, valuable among all peoples. On Resh she had found sanctuary in a whorehouse. She had got herself here by being Whitey's woman. She would get to Qalara the same way, except that she would be the woman of more than one man. She had not thought to ask what the crew complement of Lion was. She probably would not have bothered to ask if it had occurred to her. It was a way to get to Qalara. The oily employmaster had offered her food and housing for the next ten days, obviously in return for the use of her body. She nodded as she walked. She ignored the pair of spacefarers who turned to study her tight rump below the unusual near-white hair and the body so slim it had to be natural-one of the few natural bodies remaining in the galaxy. Then she put together her thoughts with the passing spacefarers. Janja turned to glance back at them. One waved. The other grinned and nodded. His gaze was on the tight thrust of her breasts within the purple tunic. Warheads. No, she decided. No, she would not. She did not think she could. There was a difference between being Whitey's woman--however temporary-or even taking employment as ship's girl, and this. This business of picking up men on the street and going with them to wherever they would take her so that they could take her... that was different. Giving them a fleeting smile, she turned and walked on. She rode up the ramp over an open-air restaurant and descended the other side. A sign blared GIANT 204 BUBBLE HOLO and posters advertised two (2) features: something called a Western and the thirteenth in the Akirma Mars series, starring Setsuyo Puma (BIGGEST PAIR IN THE UNIVERSE!) as the indomitable and audience-delightingly masochistic secret agent, Akima Mars. Janja wondered without more than passing curiosity: what was a "secret agent?" And how could a woman be such? As Franji's hot red-orange sun sagged behind the distant lacework of tubeways, Janja decided. She entered the cusped archway into a dark place called Hari's New York Bar. Light seemed to leap up from the floor, which was of multifaceted crystal or quartz-probably plastic. Even so the room was dun, swirling and musty-sweet with the smoke of nobac slicks and D-Lite and an occasional sykedeli stick. At its opposite end was the bar. Behind it was a vast number of spigots and purely decorative copies of ancient "bottles," lined up with their colored contents reflected from a mirror-wall. This side of the bar was lined with backs. Behind it worked, sweatily, two men whose hair was parted in the center. They wore armbands and white aprons and could discuss anything from TAI politics to deepspace to psychology to Setsuyo Puma,

possessor of The Biggest Pair hi the Universe. (Unless someone else, somewhere, had undergone even more- drastic hormone engineering and difficulty and was willing to put up with the several problems of supporting a pair of 134-Es on a frame that included 100-sem hips and a 64-sem waist. At a height of 175 sems. Booths done in red and black equhyde lined the walls. They could be privatized at the twisting of a button that raised opaque shields. Most of the floor-space was occupied by tables with trilegged chairs that resisted only strong pressure, otherwise accommodating themselves to the sitter. Hari's was an expensive place. She could not dream of affording to be here. She had chosen it for that reason. She saw no bumpkins and few spacefarers. The 205 patrons were of obviously better means, and about seventy percent male. On a dais two meters and more high, without steps, sat a golden-fleshed woman lazily plucking a kotolux as background lightmusic to talking and drinking. Three of the five accompanied females present were together. Several booths were opaqued. A sign warned that there had been no rights in Hari's for nine years and attempts would be met with stoppers. Heads came up at her entrance. Eyes studied her. An unaccompanied woman was reason enough, but the skin of this one in the Terasaki coil was subcutaned to an unusual paleness. She looked around, blinking. A spacefarer came to her, swaggering in tight green blouse and loose yellow trousers tucked into adjusta-boots. He was obviously orbiting. Perhaps on drink, perhaps on sticks, perhaps a combination. Drinks were oftener made with chemicals than with real alcoholics and hangovers were centuries hi the past. Pill-popping just wasn't as social as drinking. With a sweeping bow the very brown man offered her his arm. By now many eyes watched and the bow and grin were for the larger audience more than for Janja. Janja gave him a little smile and shook her head. "Come along, little girl, we'll buy you a fizzler," he said, ignoring her refusal. He leaned closer: "Got some redjoy sticks, too!" Janja shook her head again, still looking. She wanted no aphrodiszy smokes and no spacefarers. Yes; that was a vacant booth, just over there. She started for it. He grasped her arm. She swung on him with the same crouch and feral face that had shaken the employmaster. The spacefarer stared. Slowly his hands relaxed. Amid hoots and shouted remarks and commentaries on his ability, he rejoined the single local female with him and his two shipmates. She wore the traditional Franjese gown, high-necked, loose-sleeved, floor-length, and slit up both sides to the waist. 206 She edged away from the unsuccessful crewman, giving Janja a sardonic smile. With golden lips, Janja made her way to the empty booth, ignoring a remark or two. As she passed a booth, its lone blue-haired occupant touched her elbow. Janja paused to look down into a diamond-shaped face with blue lips, eyelids, and brows. One breast was bare and resting on the air just above the tabletop; its aureole had been subcutaned blue. "Join me. That same downer has been over here twice, and he'll try us both again in a few minutes. Safety in numbers." She smiled and Janja saw with some shock that her teeth were a pale green. It flowed beautifully into the deep blue of her lips. "He will not come near me again," Janja told her. "Relax, sweetcake. Our being together won't turn away the ones us smartcakes want." Janja studied her. The green-toothed smile broadened as their eyes met. Yes, this woman was here for the same purpose as she: to attract a moneyed patron of Hari's. She recognized Janja as a beginner and seemed to radiate a warmth that approached motherli-ness. Janja had now met several women whose minds radiated rather maternal feelings toward her. Perhaps it had something to do with the pop-control legislation on most planets. And little Franji was seventy-eight percent ocean, Janja slipped into the booth. Her tights-clad knees brushed the other woman's bare ones. She wore a black micromin that passed over her right shoulder and swept under her left breast to her left hip. When she stood, her pubis would be covered. When she walked, a careful watcher could probably catch an occasional glimpse. Seated, it clearly displayed its hairless blue lips. On her wrist the woman wore a broad blue bracelet seemingly dusted with tiny multifaceted diamond look-alikes. That was the extent of her jewelry. "Fin Caramyl," she said. "From Bleak . . . long ago." 207 "Linshin." Janja introduced herself in the

same laconic fashion popular among most of the Farther Reaches worlds. "Qalara." It had occurred to her that if she claimed to be from Qalara, someone might be more willing to help her get home. Caramyl's eyes swung to the little grille hi the wall beside the booth; its green light was on and winking. As Janja turned to gaze uncomprehendingly at it, it began to blink orange. "Better order, Linshin. You have one minute before the light turns red. Then you either order or lift off. Hari's has a high overhead." Janja had no notion as to what to do. Not only was she unaware of how the thing worked, she knew nothing about alcoholics. Oh yes! The spacefarer a few minutes ago had mentioned buying her a fizzler. A little LED panel just beneath the speaker flashed, "CODE: HEY HARI." She remembered that some speakers were activated by a keying word. Perhaps . . . She bent toward the grille. "Hey, Hari," she enunciated carefully. The orange light went out and a male voice responded with "Yeh?" It was somehow both surly and encouraging. "A fizzler," Janja said. The light winked green, once. "You got it." "A fizzler!" Caramyl was staring at her. "Poof, little cake, you'll be out before you tag!" "Oh," Janja said, and she tried to cover: "You're right. What are you drinking?" Caramyl lifted her plass, a handsomely stemmed one containing a liquid about the color of Kitsko. "Bose," she said, and amplified; "Franjese wine." Wine! Janja had tasted no wine since she had been stolen off Aglaya! Quickly she bent to the speaking grille. "Hey, Hari! Can that fizzler order be changed?" This time the voice was not questioning: "Yeh." The green light winked once. Janja realized that everything here was automated, including the voice. Behind the human-attended display bar she could see, there must be another, completely automated-no, cybernated, since orders could be changed. She supposed; 208 she would know when her order arrived. She asked for a Bose instead of the fizzler. When she leaned away from the grille, she found Caramyl studying her. "Ever tasted a fizzler, Linshin?" Janja shook her head. Green teeth flashed in a smile. " 'swhat I thought. Potent, very potent. No back-kick. Spacefarers go for them, with a woman. They're always in a hurry to go grope. Smart gals nurse Bose or mar-tyny. Ever had a martyny?" The second syllable rhymed with "tiny," not "teeny." Janja shook her head. "Hoy, Lin, you ever talk? Never mind--a martyny's a ginless martini. Tastes the same, but you can stow them in all night. The chemical's nonintoxicating, the very mildest of microeuphoriant. Hm-bet you don't know what a martini is either. You ever played tag before?" Janja gathered that "before you tag" and "play tag" meant what she was doing: sitting in a bar for the purpose of more-than-meeting a man. She felt that the admission could not harm her. It might help. Caramyl might succumb to the normal desire to show off under the guise of altruistic advice. Janja shook her head. "Ah, 'swhat I thought. You picked a good place. Most beginners go to spaceholes--you know, dives the spacefarers like. That's a lot simpler. You don't get through the door without four-five offers. But spacefarers only want to stow a couple of fizzlers in you so you'll be as drunk as they are, then go slice a pieca cake and sleep it off. In two years I tagged exactly one hundred spacefarers, including two captains. A hundred was the stopping point I set up. Exactly six had sense or decency to flash me. Exactly twenty-one gave me anything. I wised and started helping myself, with the last thirty or so. I always left a little money in their clothes. That way they thought they'd spent more than they remembered. They usually don't remember you in the morning, and want another free slice. I didn't get caught. The hundredth caught me-- he wasn't as drunk as I thought. Used a knife on me. My left cheek is regrown, and this"--she slapped her 209 clothed breast, which trembled slightly without bouncing--"still gets sore when it's going to rain. Seriously! The scar doesn't down me, though. He carved my initial in it, and I had it blued. Now the jackos think it's a decoration. It fascinates 'em." Overwhelmed with so much information so casually given, Janja could only think to say, "Why do you cover that one, then?" Caramyl laughed. "A gal should keep something back," she said. "Never fire all your charges at once! Now in your c-ah, here's your drink. Can you pay for it?" Janja shook her head. Caramyl leaned to the grille. "Hey, Hari.

She's with me." After a moment the light winked green and the claw holding Janja's Bose released it and retreated into the wall. The decorative door closed. "Hari's," Caramyl told her, "always charges the real stuff for the first drink. Wants to make sure you're not a downer-Hari's wants only high-class husts for its high-class jackos!" She laughed. The Bose reminded Janja vaguely of nuts. It was very dry, and resembled Aglayan wine no more than she resembled Caramyl. She made a little moue and tried it again. The second taste was a little better. She held the tulip plass, noticing that Bose was a clear liquid. It was the plass that was yellow. "Now you, as I was saying-you mind advice, Lin-shin?" Janja shook her head. Caramyl shook hers. "Listen, you're a strangey. All you do is sit there and shake your head-once each time. Try it twice or three times now and then, huh? Try mixing up the number of times. Try saying 'neg' or 'nah' or something. Open your mouth now and then. You ever smile?" Janja overkilled; she shook her head three times and said, "Neg." 210 "Grabbles. Never? You are a weirdo. Want to tell me why?" Janja shook her head. Remembering recent advice, she swung it back; that made two shakes. With a little frown, Caramyl put her head on one side and asked if Linshin was her real name. Janja shook her head three times. "You look like a roborg. Either do it loosely or just go back to one shake. Some men like the superquiet type. Poof-oh, I'm trying to stop saying 'Grabbles;' it's so typically spaceman. Maybe I'd better stop asking ques-no, one more. Why'd you hit on a Terasaki coil?" Janja touched the high-coiled, -twisted wig. "Why did you choose that long blue one?" she asked Caramyl. "Because blue hair is mighty pop right now, as you very well know! Anyhow, that coil looks cheap. Still, it would be prettier if you hadn't made yourself so pale. A deep pink might contrast nicely-or even white. Or just your normal hair color. Sorry, Lin, but you're a beginner and I know men and this town. That ' outfit's not bad, but I'd recommend a hole or two in it. You know-like just above the breast, to tease, or at the tummy-you obviously don't have one-or on each hip or something. Or a slashed front. And you know what would look great with that purple and blue? Black bucket boots! Also maybe if you-" "Are you ladies waiting for someone?" They looked up at him: medium height, slender to the point of being skinny, white turban wound above a very dark, bearded face. He wore a black redingote over white tights tucked into black kneeboots. "Pos," Caramyl smiled. "You." "Waiting for me? How nice!" Caramyl slid over to make room, incidentally letting him see the tremor of that naked breast. He sat-slid in next to Janja and kept smiling at the other woman so that she couldn't be sure why he sat across from her rather than beside; to look at her, maybe. "Hemendranath Banerjee," he said. "Would one of 211 you order a Terasaki rain and a package of Heaven High?" "I'm Caramyl," she said, and ordered for him while Janja realized that he had given his name, without a planet. Was he a native? "Linshin," she said, and for some reason, this time she added, "Panish." "Really! I have never been to Panish! You must tell me about it." Among them, Janja thought, men do not care to listen to women. Men wish to be listened to. "You are Franjese?" He shook his head. "Home. I am agent here for Heaven High." "And you pay for 'em?!" That from Caramyl, with an incredulous grin. He shrugged. "One more sale. You smoke?" He looked at Janja, who shook her head. "Certainly if you did you would prefer our brand! Heaven Highs are filtered, and the mildest-tasting marijane available. But without one jot less cannabis! We merely have some secrets to control the flavor and bite, without weakening the potency." Concentrating, wondering what he was talking about, Janja jumped when the wall opened and a tall, thin goblet extruded, along with an unfamiliar cassette-sized container. It was decorated with a white-and-blue planet surrounded by a winged creature with some sort of stringed instrument resembling a biwa. He was amazed that Janja did not recognize Home. He explained that the figure was an "angel," a being that figured in several of the Homeworld's religions. Banerjee squeezed the package open and offered them each a stick. They were slimmer than Janja's little finger, with gold tips. Janja shook her head; Caramyl took one, as did Banerjee. Janja watched them put the gold ends between their lips and flick

the ends so that they flashed and glowed. Each sucked in a deep breath, through the mouth, intensifying the glow. She smelled something rather sweet. "Smoking," 212 she knew. Marijane was some sort of drugplant that grew on Homeworld, Terasaki, Franji, Jahpur, and several other worlds. It was mild, compared to the chemical intoxicants or the eroflor that came from Croz, or the dangerous lascivicant, redjoy. And TZ was illegal everywhere. Janja sipped her Bose. Abruptly Banerjee crowded her with a "Please Excuse" as he pressed past her to the grille. "Hey, Hari! Open for a card." He waited, turning his head to smile at Janja from a distance of about four centimeters. He touched her only with his body, though, and she continued to look pleasant. The little wall-panel opened and the metal hand emerged-whether cybernautomatic or a telepresence, Janja had no ncj-tion. Banerjee gave it his I.D. card. "Record that and add further orders from this booth. Cancel this booth's debt. Two more Boses. Maximum cash." Caramyl nodded, smiling when he mentioned the Bose. Janja only blinked. Her heartbeat had speeded. Banerjee's body pressure and the marijane-sweetness of his breath were not all she was aware of. Their two or three tokes had visibly relaxed both him and Caramyl. That resulted hi a lowering of the "mental shields" people did not even know they possessed. For Janja, the effect was to heighten her chermmg ability. She felt their mental set/emotions to an unusual depth and precision. What she chermmed was more than a feeling; the booth was full of menace-to her! "You are warm, Linshin!" Hemendranath Banerjee said, very close, with a big smile. "It sure is fun to crowd you!" There was noplace for her to go; he gave her a quick kiss. She got it even more strongly, then. This man intended to enslave her, to profit! Heart pounding, Janja smiled and slid her hand onto his thigh. The opening of the wall-panel startled her. 213 This time the "hand" proffered a small rectangle, about a sem thick, with his card. Leaning against Janja, Banerjee slipped the card into a receptacle in the little cassette and the hand carried them back into the wall. Banerjee gave Janja another peck on the lips. She forced a little response, and squeezed his thigh. Janja sat with her heart pounding, trying to think of something to do. She was on the booth's inside, next to the wall. Banerjee blocked her in. Caramyl sat across from her. She was looking at them, and suddenly Janja realized: Caramyl showed no sign of un-happiness or jealousy at the man's attentions to Janja. Why? Did she know? What are we waiting for now? What can I say? What can I think of-I can't even think of anything to say. Say anything, she told herself, then made it an order. "What does 'maximum cash' mean?" she blurted. "Oh-don't you know about money on cards? With a Class A I.D. you can get cash-you know, real in-hand stell coupons-at a lot of places." Banerjee still sat close, turned toward the grille-and her. "I didn't realize. What's maximum?" "A hundred stells." "Oh." Keep talking. Think, think! Think, Janja, think! "But if you can order anything with the card and just have it deducted from your account electronically, why do you want cash?" He was rubbing her thigh with his. Caramyl was watching, bright-eyed, poised. Waiting! "Oh, I think it's nice to have cash on hand, don't you, Linshin?" "Oh-uh-I-I guess." The panel opened. The "hand" came out. It delivered the card and five twenty-stell coupons. They were the size of I.D. cards, paper with perforated edges, colored yellow and blue with black print. The hand returned to the wall. "I think I'd rather have a fizzler this time," Janja said inanely, and ordered one, feeling idiotic. What to do? Think Janja, think! 214 While she leaned toward the grille, he was nuzzling the back of her neck. His hand came around to toy with her breast. Janja tried not to stiffen. "Well," Caramyl said, "since we're going to be such friends, let's have some privacy." She twisted that little button. The booth shielded itself without a single squeak. The booth became a small walled chamber. Janja was very very alone with them, cut off from everyone else in Hari's; everyone else on Franji and in the universe. She felt it. She also smelled the marijane smoke and felt the menace-and Caramyl's growing excitement. It was Janja who was receiving Banerjee's attention, and yet Caramyl had said that about friends, and privatized the booth. They must be a team! Janja thought, feeling prickly and hot. And now no one can see us. She

comes in and stays alone until she spots a dummy like me. A new one. She gets them to join her. Like me, they're just delighted to have company and advice. Then Banerjee comes along. So! Now what are they going to do? She measured the table's width with her eyes. "Oh, how pret-tee these lu-uvely coupons arrrrre," Caramyl cooed, scooping them up. As she did, Banerjee leaned away from Janja at last. Smiling, Caramyl put down her Heaven High stick. She slipped the five twenty-stell coupons into her half-dress and that hand came out with a little gunlike thing. Janja sat up very, very straight and braced one foot. "Why what," Banerjee asked, "could that be?" Caramyl looked at it. "Called a needier, or a trunk-er," she said amiably. "A simple CO2 cartridge, a grip and tiny chamber, and a trigger. It puffs out itsy-bitsy darts full of tranquilizer. They dissolve hi the body." "Do tell," Banerjee said. "I thought they were illegal outside of zoos and police crowd-control squads." "Oh, they arrre," Caramyl said sweetly, and pointed the nasty little thing at Janja. Janja had just picked up her plass. She looked over it at Caramyl's smiling face. It was a mocking smile. 215 "Nighty-night, Linshin," Caramyl said, and at that moment the panel opened and the hand extruded Jan-ja's fizzler. Caramyl glanced at it; Janja flung her Bose, plass and all, into the woman's face. At the same time her foot jerked up to kick Caramyl right in her bare, blue-lipped crotch and her hand swept across to hit Cara-myl's wrist. Caramyl squeezed the trigger reflexively. Hiss-thunk!-and the tiny needle whipped into and through the breast of Banerjee's coat. He grunted and Janja banged her elbow into his side so hard that he banged against the privacy shield. Caramyl was showing her agony and was blinded besides. Half-standing, Janja twisted her arm and took the needier from her. Janja had no notion whether it would shoot more than one needle, but she pointed it at Caramyl's cheek and tried. It did. Caramyl jerked her head up, rocking back with her eyes wide, and Janja filled them with her fizzler. Banerjee grabbed at her and she kicked backward to get his thigh. Again he banged against the shield. The other patrons must think the trio in booth 9 were having themselves a real orgy! Twisting around, Janja squeezed twice. One of the needles hit the hand Banerjee threw up and the other vanished into his cheek. She took a blow and tried to kick him, and then he collapsed. After the desperate and swift flurry of activity, the booth was silent. Janja was in the company of two unconscious drinking companions. She was panting and her heartbeat felt as if it was approaching escape velocity. Somehow, she kept thinking. She had come close to panicking and had coped with it and bested both her would-be enslavers. It would be stupid to succumb to panic or the desire to flee, now. She didn't. First things first. She squirmed herself onto the table and thrust a hand into Caramyl's dress. She found a firm, clammy breast with a little pouch adhering to it. She pulled and it came off with a faint tearing sound. 216 The coupons were in it, along with Caramyl's I.D. and an empty compartment. Janja thrust in Banerjee's I.D. card and dragged aside her clothing to discover that the pouch adhered very nicely to her skin, too. Next she pulled Caramyl into an upright sitting position and made sure she stayed that way. Making a half-circle on the tabletop, she tried to get Banerjee into the corner where he could be propped. She couldn't; he was unconscious and a dead weight, and she had no leverage in this position in the little booth. She backed down into the seat beside Caramyl, and dragged Banerjee down until he was under the table. Somehow she got him turned so that the soles of his feet were aimed at the barrier between the booth and the rest of Hari's. She killed the privatizer and slid out of the booth. "Perverts!" she snapped, and stamped out of the place amid a lot of laughter from other patrons. She turned left, crossed the street among four others, and stayed with them until they reached the corner. Janja turned it, at last felt safe enough to slip the needier into the little pouch-and ran. She didn't run all the way back to the hotel. Instead, she stopped into two bars, ordered a drink and cash, and obtained more cash at a street booth outside a financial house of some sort. In her dumpy little hotel room, she locked the door and strewed the bedspread with paper: twenty 20-stell coupons. Next she called Hari's New York Bar and

advised that the couple in Booth Nine were slavers, using the place to trick and steal first-timer, would-be hustlers. Then she buttoned off, stripped, and masturbated herself to sleep. 17 Gray: a color made by mixing black and white pigments. Webster's New World Dictionary The following day Janja bought a black wig that fell in blue-gleaming waves nearly to her waist. She had her lips and eyes subcutaneous blue and her fingernails painted to match. The attendant suggested subcutaneous her pubic lips and nipples. Janja declined, paid with real cash, and departed that store. In another, she delightedly indulged in very feminine clothing. She wore the boots and Bleaker jellabah back to the hotel, in a swirl of soft pastels. There she changed into the neck-to-wrists-to-ankles leotard of silver, added the deep red overbra and short skirt, and ate lunch in the hotel restaurant. It was fun, being stared at, knowing she was being fantasized about, and being anonymous. When she returned to her room, she packed the purple tunic and tights she had worn at Hari's, and dropped the package into a public disposal on her way to the library. Good-bye, Whitey. Without scars. To the library she wore a dark blue sari, a garment favored by older Franjese women. She had to have help with working the retrieval-and-display system, but she was a quick learner and soon handled it herself. She spent the next three days studying, until her eyes burned and she felt dizzy with new knowledge. She found nothing in the news about Caramyl and Hemen-dranath Banerjee. The universography edutapes led her to history. That led her in and out of religion and psychology, and on into simplified physics and worse. Aglii did not benefit by those studies. Deifying the sun, Janja 218 soon learned, was silly, childish. Any sun. Every culture seemed to start that way, though most gave their sun the male pronoun. On Homeworld, some had worshiped the Sun on Sun-day, for centuries. Janja laughed aloud. Civilization! The first day, the entry on Aglaya shocked her into quitting. Hurting, she wandered about for hours: AGLAYA (N175-2Gsl3 a,u,p). PROTECTED/UNDVLPD. XANTHOCHROID (CAUCASOID?) INHABS:LT. IRON AGE. TOP.F. 2/3 LAND. SPARSELY POP: HVY RAIN FORESTS. UNIRELIGIOUS: SUN + PLANETARY EPONYM. THOT TO BE FORM OF GYNECOCRACY. ONLY KNOWN VALUE: Phrillia (Q.V.) And that was all. Why was slavery not mentioned, she thought, while she wandered among these highly civilized others (all humanoid and none xanthochroid-which she had looked up to find "pale-skinned (archaic).") Phrillias were lovely and desired. Since they stubbornly refused to grow anywhere else in the galaxy, they were expensive luxuries. Presumably their value far transcended that of the xanthochroid humanoid autochthon slaves from the same Undeveloped and "Protected" planet. Or did the referencers merely look away from such ugliness as civilized humankind's predilection for swooping down on such "barbarians" (undeveloped, inhabitants in late iron age)? Was it too naughty, too reprehensible, too shamefacedly uncivilized to matter? ("Only known value: Phrillia.") Protected? She returned to the library, wearing the draped yellow mini-sari and black bucket boots. (Caramyl was right; they became her marvelously well. Janja was sensitive about her short and overdeveloped legs.) She punched for "Slavery," was given a choice of refs and tapes, and ordered it all. She spent the rest of the day on that. She found Jarpi/Jarps, but no mention of 219 Aglaya, or anyone named Jonuta. Both were too small to matter. It was a big galaxy; an infinite universe. (She came across the sentences: "In an infinite universe, possibility is infinite. Therefore Impossibility is impossible." And she was directed to Philosophy. Jan-ja passed.) She learned that the universe was vast, vaster than vast. Earth/Terra/Homeworld had long ago lost control. TAI's control was only partial and at that tenuous. (Only the initials were used. Once they had meant Terra Alta Imperata: "Earth High Command" in some pre-Erts language.) Contrary to previous expectations and centuries of fiction there had never been a true interplanetary war. Only the harnessing of gravity coupled with an ability to nullify it had enabled humankind to move inward to the stars, dragging its ships from sun to sun in "conquest" of the vasty reaches between planets and suns and systems. She learned that there were many galaxies and that this one contained over 300 million stars and over 600 million inhabitable planets.

With so many, humankind -now Galactics-took only the best. (There were also billions of Black Holes, which were collapsed suns, whatever that could mean.) Feeling tiny, she read the (probable) population of the galaxy, and Janja became sick to her stomach. She came across "Socialism" and looked it up to learn that it was a practical and impracticable theory of social and political existence that had been necessary to get humankind out among the stars. (Which meant in among the stars, really; technically Home-world was at the Farther Reaches, while just now Janja sat in a public library of a world turning around a star deep in toward the galaxy's center, where stars were far more numerous.) Once "out" among the stars, once on other planets some of which were colonized and some of which were already provided with local populations, people had swiftly returned to free enterprise. Only governments had possessed the money 220 (by stealing it from the citizenry) to "conquer" space and colonize, but only people could colonize and develop. Such governments did not develop, but deteriorated/devolved. Within a few months to a year, socialism on each colonized world had been sagging as initiative leaped forward and demanded recompense. "Conquered." She learned that no one knew just how much space there was, or how many galaxies, each with sun-systems and planets. No one could prove there was but one universe (and how big was "infinite"?). One scientist on Hawking (the new Hub, although it was far out along the galactic rim) opined that people had conquered no part of space, statistically speaking. She maintained that humankind might have wandered about and left tracks in about as much space as one person might leave in an hour's wandering on the Sahara Desert. Janja looked up "Desert, Sahara," and discovered that the scientist way back on Hawking was a bit provincial; the far more sprawling desert on Sekhar would have made a more dramatic example. She learned a lot of other things, all of which made her feel rather small-and yet superior. What the brief articles referred to as "psi phenomena" was still denied by many! It was still experienced-perhaps; it remained resistant to proof-by a few. Man/human-kind/Galactics/people/the Thingmaker had progressed in chemistry and in biology and hi physics-the outside sciences. And the phrillia was Aglaya's only known value. No one knew that every person on Aglaya could cherm (know, feel, sense) the basic mental attitude or disposal of another, within a radius of one or two meters; that group-thinking or group emotion-such as that of an attacking force-could be chermmed up to within 1.5 or so kilometers. Depending upon the number of members in the group and the unity and intensity of their feelings. No one knew that the women of Aglaya, once they 221 had drunk male seed (within a lifemating, bound by taboo and ritual), were able to know, feel, sense, "read" a great deal more than basic underlying attitude or intent. That was the ability to chancel. Chonceling existed, apparently, only on Aglaya, and only among its lifemated women. Why? Obviously Aglayans could not be called part of humankind. They were people and they could be Gal-actics. They were of a different race, however. Janja was not displeased to discover that she was not human. And the phrillia was Aglaya's only known value. Janja paused to rest her eyes and roll her neck, while her mind went on working. How had they developed so far without having opened then" locked minds? Was it because they were Thingmakers? Could there have been a sort of unknown choice, long and long ago, and the people of Earth and other worlds had gone one way while Aglayans went another? Was Thingmaking a dead end? (First one makes Things, she niused, and then one uses them and grows dependent, addicted until they become more important than yourself, and then one serves them; the Things?) Or was it because Aglaya was a planet of nonhumans, like the Jarps, a definitely different race? Crozers, after all, were humanoids who were cross-fertile with no other beings, and very often not with each other. Perhaps that ability which Aglayans accepted from birth, like the ability to make noises, was limited to them? Why? (Was that a sensible question? Why was water? Why did it boil? Trees and stars existed. Why?) Janja searched. She found that people in many places and many times had asked Why. Usually they had taken shelter in some supernatural explanation, then turned that into the womblike warmth and security of a religion, which they then

turned rather quickly into a system of rites and forms. 222 She learned that the seek-within-yourself attitude of S0! many on Homeworld was the harnessing of the subconscious mind. That was very similar to Aglayan mind-over-body; Janja2 was her own subconscious. Among them only a few were adept, and a regular industry had developed. Janja felt sure that on her world there was no person above the age of six that could not put herself to sleep within a couple of minutes (Galactic Standard Measurement) and cure a headache either through neck rolls, head-emptying, or five minutes of concentration. Now she could put that in their words: psychocellular control. On Homeworld, humankind worshiped a new god called "psychoso-matism": rudimentary bodily autocontrol. How interested they would be to know that I have practiced psychocytological control all my life! She wondered if she and other Aglayans might become teachers, gurus, to end their dependency on drugs and chemicals-from-outside. She learned that had been tried many times already. Homeworld preferred the security of drugs, even when they were administered only to coax the body to combat invaders and debilities, just as others preferred the womb of religion. These people had spent centuries looking for solutions to themselves outside themselves; blaming institutions for their failures and thanking someone or something or SomeOne outside themselves for their achievements. Humankind stubbornly refused to admit that it was the most powerful force in the universe- that it was god. God: Janja learned that the concepts of god and religion were primitive, connected with ghosts and desire for afterlife/deathfear and people's inability or refusal to accept their own power. They knew it, but intellect and emotion warred only briefly before emotion triumphed. That made her firm her lip and sit back, then stand to relax-and think about Aglii and Sunmother. Forty minutes later, still flunking, she sat again . . . and 223 when she awoke the custodian was shaking her to expel her until tomorrow. Talicuan proved nicely useful. "Of more value than he's ever been in his life," Jonuta said. Jonuta was making use of the captured procurer, in the pursuit of what he called his "hobby." Pumped full of tetrazombase and told what to do, Talicuan was the subject of lots and lots of holographic images, stills and movies. Meanwhile Talicuan was beginning to prove that it did not take much TZ to amount to too much. He was also beginning to prove the contention that too much led to a lingering, perhaps permanent dulling of the human will-and other mental faculties as well. Kenowa did not like the reason- for Talicuan's capture and this not-so-slow destruction of him, but she had only positive feelings about the fact of it. Talicuan was scum. This way, he was helping Jonuta, and thus her and the others of Coronet. That damned Janja was of some value, after all! Jonuta viewed and reviewed his Talicuan holes, mostly from his bed or Kenowa's. There was nothing sexy in watching the procurer put through his paces while wearing the various sets of clothing Jonuta chose, all to a purpose that was beyond hobby. It was just that once Kenowa and Jonuta made up, they spent a lot of time together in bed. Both had a lot to prove, to each other and to themselves. There was plenty of time for the holovisual preparations, and for bed. Having picked up a load of eleven huge crates-machinery parts, mostly-before leaving EagleStation, they moved almost leisurely through space. Coronet bumbled along like a tramp freighter, towing ten of the eleven crates exteriorly. They formed a tasteless and amorphous girdle of mismatched pendants around and behind the ship. Because of the ex- 224 treme environmentally sensitive nature of eight of those crates, Jonuta had accepted a bonus and agreed to travel only in normal space. The last time a spacecraft had taken the "Tachyon Trail" into subspace while hauling a GriReshCo 237CV3 Spacehound, both the 237CV3 and the ship had been worse than damaged. They were popular items to use, but not to transport. This time Jonuta didn't mind taking the "Tramper Trail" from Resh to Franji, with four 237CV3s and four components in tow. He was paid extra. He did like to go strictly legal now and then. On such occasions he always hoped to be challenged, inspace or upon approaching a planetary station. Never mind that this time he had onboard a certain kidnaped individual doped on strictly

illegal tetrazombase. Various contacts on Resh had felt that the slayer of the IsGricans and their slavemaster had got herself offplanet. One thought she might be the "long-lost cousin" supposedly "discovered" by First Mate Gat-shanhongo of spaceship Tanzanee. Another thought maybe she was the cake chased one night by Whitey and ole Achmy, off Rambler. Neither had come back to the bar, or been around anymore while they were onplanet. Also, a short, slight man with big calves had signed on as crew on the Tritonian Ring. Jonuta felt that might well have been a disguised woman someone was smuggling onto Ring. Srih returned from the House of Scheherazade with word that Mama Cree knew nothing about Gatshan-hongo's cousin. So far as she knew the little cake really was his cousin. What color? What did it matter? -The color of an eggplant, or space out at galaxy's edge. Sweetface came back from the Kit-Cat House with a weary look and an air of soaring happiness. The Jarp also had a sore penis-from use-and a swollen nipple -also from use, two Come Back Anytime passes to the House, a lovebite mark from someone named Linshin who Sweetface claimed was sliced out and 225 sprawled, dream-eyed-and no information about Jan-ja. Sure, Whitey had been there, the last time he had been onplanet. A few weeks ago. Of course, he hadn't brought a female friend; what the hell kind of whorehouse did the dam' orange superflasher think this was, anyhow? It also had. a standing employment offer from "that littlebitty yellow woman with Kenowa hair up to my tits," as Sweetface described her. Sweetface had also taken off the translator "helmet" shortly after its arrival at the Kit-Cat. "How the slicin' grabbles did they understand you, then?" Kenowa wanted to know. The Jarp flipped its fingers on both hands, an interesting gesture with all four thumbs in play. "We didn't do much talking," Sweetface said, and asked if it was all right for it to retire now. (Four hours later Sweet-face was off again, "looking for a little action, tootl'-wheet!") Jonuta used his brain and SIPACUM, and conferred with his crew. His decision was that he'd put his stells on Tritonian Ring or Rambler. Since both Rambler and Tanzanee had departed for Jasbir and Franji, however, while Ring was headed for Terasaki nonstop, he elected to accept cargo for Franji and head that way. Once Coronet was well out in space, he considerably reduced his funds on Jasbir in an expensive and lengthy exchange of tachyon messages. No one off Rambler had even shuttled down onto Jasbir, when it stopped there, briefly. Four blacks and an orange left Tanzanee at Jaskstation and shuttled down; the same four men and the Jarp had come back up. The reply from Terasaki was succinct and a stinger: "DO COME RIGHT IN AND ASK IN PERSONCOMMA CAPTAIN FRYBAITPERIOD WE WOULD LOVE TO HAVE YOU FOR A LONG RPT LONG STAY CAPTAIN SLIMEBAG ENDCOM." Sweetface was standing beside Jonuta when that one 226 came in. While Jonuta continued to stare at the displayed words, Sweetface commented. "Tleedl'ewheetl'-ootl-'eet!" Jonuta rumbled, "Turn on your damned translator and get your damned hand off your captain's ass." "Sorry, Captain. Have I ever told you that this translator sets up some sort of vibration in my right rear molars and makes them feel all on edge?" "You have. Seems to me it was the left rear ones last time, Sweets." "Umm," the Jarp said, which emerged through those puckered little lips as "ooow" with the hint of an m sound in it. "My captain does understand the language of Jarpi, though, to his great credit." "Stop trying to fob me and keep your horny hip to yourself. I failed to catch everything you 'said' that time, Sweetface." "Oh. Sorry, Captain. What I said was that people on Terasaki seem to continue to fail to appreciate my captain." "You noticed that too, hmm?" Jonuta straightened and sighed, then glanced at the Jarp. "All right, stop jittering. You jawed me into bringing a fellow Jarp onboard, and I still think I erred. Go back and make her happy before I decide she's better off going out the airlock." "It, Captain. It. Tweedle-dee is an it. We Jarps do not have him and hers. Tweedle-dee is an it, as I am." Tweedle-dee is also a half-wit, Jonuta reflected, or less. And if she/it hadn't been a fellow slave of Ionia's and miserable, dear old pumpkin-skin, your Sunflower captain never would have let you bring her along. I mean, it along. "Well, go on back to it anyhow. What was all that noise last sleep-period when the rest of us were trying to rest?" Sweetface smiled, which

was less pretty than the Jarp's normal pucker. "Ah. Tweedle-dee and me. I mean, I. Hundred and thirty-eight." 227 Jonuta shut down the subspace messenger and looked at the Jarp. "What?" "Tweedle-dee and I played the delightful game of a hundred and thirty-eight, Captain. You know. Think about it, my captain. Jarps? Sixty-nine? Both of us are both sexes. We do it double." Sweetface finger-flipped. "Hundred and thirty-eight." "Booda," Jonuta muttered, looking down and wagging his head. "Sweetface: get out out of here. And keep your damned translator turned off." As Coronet came in to Franji, Kenowa asked, "You -ah-are going to let me stay out of this . . . search, aren't you?" "Of course, Kenny. Srih can use the public computer facilities at the library for his part of the- search." He couldn't think of a better word, although he didn't care to have to say it aloud: that he was searching for that damned pale-headed slave. "I'll do some wandering and snooping, in a bit of a disguise. Sakyo will work alone, too. He's unknown in the places he will be checking." "Jonuta, have you decided why you're so interested in her? You've never behaved this way. It isn't like you at all." "It must be, Kenny: I'm doing it." He could not let that stand. It sounded too harsh. "No, I haven't decided. Anyone who did for Sicuan and his slimy son and that viper Izhan, though, has my respect and regards. And I did order that bastard Talicuan not to let them have her. She had too much spirit for that. I'm not-" He broke off and firmed his lips. "-not nearly the hard-nosed hardcase everyone thinks," she finished for him. "Sometimes I wish you were, Jone." He stared at the con. Kenowa gazed at him awhile in silence, before she rose and left the room. Damn! She was almost ready to break his absolute mandate against intra-crew sex. Getting it from every direction and up 228 the middle with those two Jarps would certainly take her mind off this fixation of Jonuta's. She certainly wished Janja had starved on Resh somewhere-or had already been sold off Tritonian Ring, and cooked up and eaten with some nice seaweed on Terasaki, maybe! 18 "Good sense" means enlightened self-interest, the ability to learn, and acting on both. Kislar Jonuta Janja sought to understand the concept called "government." She learned that there was no such animal. She learned that the nearest to a perfect government was an unacceptable one: one person's whim, stemming from the holding of total power by that individual. Many such individual rulers had accounted for uncountable advances and accomplishments-and usually had to be killed. The highest state of humankind seemed to be in war, a formalized game of killing other humans, with ruses and various reasons. In order to drain off that natural urge, first Homeworld and then planet after planet-as their populations grew and jostling reduced the value of each individual life- had reinstated a sub-ancient pastime. Games: The Games. It was a spectator sport in which a few well-trained humans attempted to kill each other, while many untrained humans watched. All of this was effected by holograms. People could not be trusted to congregate in such large masses, when they could be so excited. Combat and the flow of blood excited. New problems arose. First, were the 229 killings they saw on holovision real? And second, some people just had to go out of their homes and imitate what they had seen. All in all, however, it was found that watching violence did not initiate it. Janja made a note to look up something called "sublimation" and "substitution therapy." Naturally public punishment and execution had also been reinstated. That too tended to drain humankind's natural instincts and loves. Humans were enabled and allowed to shift their own urges to kill and torment onto the shoulders of others: the executioners, and the condemned criminals. . Thus, generally speaking, wars had been eliminated. (They were also too expensive, and the consequences too ghastly because of the incredible power of weaponry. Energy was used not to propel missiles, but to destroy.) Janja paused with her teeth in her lower lip. She had never been aware of it on Qalara, but now she knew: she had a love for the excitement of danger and conflict and violence. She had killed. The thrill was enormous. They have made me one of them, she mused, and returned to her self-education. What better place than the public library? An interplanetary "police" or "order-keeping" force had been formed. It did not

cancel others; it did supersede all other policing forces. It was called Trans-Galactic Order (not TGW: TransGalactic Watch; see separate entries). TGO was still considered necessary, just to be certain. No one sought to conquer the galaxy or even a system. There would be no return of a single ruler-"dictator"-or an empire. TGW was one facet of TGO. It was the outwardly manifested policing force, the uniformed branch, with authority throughout the galaxy. Every planet in the galaxy-every peopled planet in the known galaxy-contributed to the upkeep of TGO. It answered to no one. TGW did, in a way; local systems policers and on-planet protectors/order-keepers took precedence. Laws 230 covered jurisdiction, and limited TGW's powers within sun-systems and on planetary surfaces. Not quite paradoxically, no such laws covered the parent organization. TGO answered to no one. TGO took precedence over all. TGO's head was unknown. TGO's strength, in terms of materiel, soft and hard (number of persons, ships, armaments): unknown. TGO's recruiting procedures: little known. TGO promoted only from within (it is believed). She considered the sinister line: NO ONE LEAVES TGO. Aside from a few religions, TGO was the only institution known to have existed beyond three hundred years, with no apparent decay or decline. No government had ever been so stable. TGO, obviously, was the Secret Master of the galaxy. "Or perhaps," one encyclopedic lecturer suggested, looking from the screen at her from beneath eyebrows like threllberry corpses after a tremendous rain, "perhaps there is no TGO at all. Perhaps it is a shadow-force: only a name and a shadow, with no further substance or substantiality." But no, Janja reasoned. Wasn't whoever headed TGO a sort of dictator, a sort of emperor? True, TGO did not rule. It was solely in charge of enforcement and what constituted "order," though. It answered to no other authority. TGO did what it deemed best to maintain order or "order." It affected every world and thus, indirectly at least, every person in the galaxy. Janja reflected on that: Is it not then concerned with such as Jonuta, or Sicuan? Are they no menace to this thing called "order"-and the addicts in Resh's alleys? Is TGO concerned only with overall order-and not with evil, no matter how obvious? Was it a force or was it a named shadow without substance or substantiality (or perhaps without teeth)? And-who dared find out? 231 DIP ALT THAKUR: rose to the supreme power on Khan. Dipali Thakur set about preparing Khan to conquer- the galaxy? Probably; his pattern was obvious, as his type was well known. Then he was slain. The killer was never found, although the usual hapless suspect, a Goat for Azazel, was found and duly executed. Had TGO assassinated Thakur? Everyone seemed to assume as much. ARTISUNE MUZUNI: established the first interplanetary pirate fleet. Artisune Muzuni & Co. challenged the power of Homeworld, of Hawking, of the combined Outworlds, and he won. He was paid ransom by those able to afford it. They paid him for "protection." Those who did not frequently lost their ships: people, cargo and all. Then Muzuni appeared off Bleak, from which his menacing fleet extracted ransom. So far as was known, they never spent it. Artisune Muzuni and his reputed nineteen ships simply vanished. How? To where? Naturally the assumption was that TGO got him. (TGO must possess a fleet of warcraft whose size and power were extraordinary, if not preposterous.) FOD RAKIR: achieved "rule" as First Councillor of Jahpur, took up travel. On Panish, on Shankar, on Resh and smaller worlds, he talked with officials about TGO. Was it not a form of rule from Homeworld? Did they not all make large annual "contributions to galactic order"? Should they not consider keeping that ' money at home and setting up a policing force of their own that would be answerable and accountable? That was dangerous talk, and several leaders refused to talk with him. Fod Rakir vanished. Furthermore, he vanished off a spaceship in flight! Further, the Chank who had vociferously supported him ran up against an Un-defeatable opponent at the next election. She had never been wealthy, but her election funds were seemingly unlimited. She won, and became a strong advocate of "order"-and its maintenance by TGO. What had happened to Fod Rakir? Who managed his disappearance? (Since the "how" was impossible, 232 that aspect was soon dropped from-quiet-discussions.) Who backed the new Shanki senator? Surely the answer

lay in shadows-in TGO. There were other interplanetary pirates, but none ever succeeded in replacing Muzuni. If any aspired to that accomplishment, they curbed themselves. Piracy was a dangerous, backbreakingly difficult enterprise that was inclined to be unprofitable. It was harder than such honest work as hauling or even slaving, which was accepted in some places. Piracy generally ended in early demise, rather than wealthy retirement. There were other examples, and cross-references aplenty to the persons and groups that had been mysteriously . . . stopped. None of them were any more enriching. None yielded any more real information about TGO. Now it was usually called The Grey Organization, the shadow-force. No TGO acts could be proven, although the "contributions" went someplace. Messages were everywhere received from those "shadow-men." None remained extant. The final sentence always advised that the message would selfwipe. The message always did. It even refused to be recorded. If TGO existed, it was composed of the secret masters. And it is not interested in Jonuta-nor cares what he does, how many he harms and wrongs, even kills. Janja went on to look up something else. She spent three intense, joyous days-Franji at her studies. Most of the third day she spent studying Qalara, for her only raison d'etre 'was still to reach Qalara and slay Jonuta of Coronet. She left the library late as usual--and recognized the man who stood near the door, watching everyone. Instantly her body temperature rose and she went momentarily light-headed. She walked past him, down three steps, and turned. "Srih!" she called. "Srih of Coronet! Are you by chance looking for gray eyes and hair like-this?" She thrust back her long black wig just as he turned 233 to look down the steps at her. He might have missed the lightness of her eyes; he could not miss or mistake the pale hair she showed him. She saw his face register recognition, and saw his sudden movement toward her. Janja turned and ran. He was not tall, the man standing in a clear area among the tables of the Parallax Lounge, and he seemed thin. That and his clothing of unrelieved black made him appear taller. At second glance, he was an unusually compact man, the kind who weighs more than he appears to. The black clothing was snug without being tight; the thighboots were flamboyant eccentricity. His stopper was bolstered on the left, grip turned forward; another eccentricity. The belt was black and without a buckle. He was very dark with black hair. The nose was large, falcate. The eyes were so dark they appeared without irises: big black pupils in off-white sclera. They were staring at another man who stood by a booth against the wall. "You did not intend to say that," the man in black said, "nor do you wish to question my actions. Persuade someone to apprise you of my name, and note that the bartender's cannon is aimed at you." He spoke in a measured way, his voice in the medium range. The man by the booth risked a leftward glance at the bar. The bartender and the cyberservo were staring at him, but he saw no weapons. The little blur that caught his peripheral vision was the swift across-the (flat)-belly draw of the black-clad man's stopper. It was leveled. "Buzz," he said. "You're dead. Now sit down. You are not ready for me." Slowly the other man, a burly local in a nice Franjese suit, sank into the booth. Someone leaned over and muttered something to him. He stared up at the man he had been so foolish as to challenge. "You're right, captain. I'm not ready for you and didn't know who you are. Buy you a drink?" 234 The man in black knew that his erstwhile challenger had just been informed of his identity. "No, thank you," he said, and returned his black-butted stopper to its dull black holster. At that moment a young woman burst through the invisible flow-field that acted as a door to protect patrons of the Parallax Lounge from outside dirt and noise. Long, long blue-black hair swirled about her and she held up the skirt of her dark blue sari to reveal silver-clad legs with truly outstanding calves. She charged straight in. The man in black was in her path. He did not move. He took in the legs and had a glimpse of a pretty face with blue lips before she slammed against him. He had already braced himself by setting back one foot. "Help me! Help me please!" She threw her arms around him. The black-clad man continued to watch the doorway. She was fleeing. She begged help. Therefore she was being chased. His hand was at her waist-small

and tight within the sari-ready to hold or shove her where he wanted her. Twisting, she looked back over her shoulder just as a man stepped through the flow-field. His open mouth and the movements of his chest showed that he had been running. "Help me!" she cried, clinging. "Don't let him get me!" Her pursurer erred; he did not try to explain or deny. "I need to talk with that girl," he demanded. "It seems telemetrically apparent that she is not desirous of speaking with you," the man in black said. "Best you depart. Parallax is a nice, quiet, peaceful place." Someone snickered; otherwise the Parallax was very quiet. The cyberservo, which acted as peacekeeper and bouncer when the occasion rose, came around the bar. Srih noted that. He noted, too, to whom Janja clung. But he had a job to do, and he compounded his error. 235 "Why don't you just step away and let her and me talk a bit," he said, and started forward. Janja stood with her back to Srih, her arms around the black-clad man. She felt his hand tighten at her waist and knew Srih was coming. She pushed back a little. Her hands glided easily on this spacefarer's back, along his waist. That way it was more than easy for her to draw his bolstered stopper with her right hand. That she accomplished swiftly and just as quickly she put back her right foot and pivoted on its toe. Srih's gaze was on the black-clad man's eyes. Srih had no reason even to consider Janja's making such a move. Thus he was totally unready when Janja spun and fried the man who had fried Tarkij. Absolute silence cloaked the Parallax Lounge. Even the tubular cyberservo had halted. Its "eyes" stared just as did those of every patron. There came a faint hum. Automatic sucking fans, triggered by the odor of Srih's dying, efficiently began to swallow the smell. The human silence was broken by the quiet, measured words of the man whose pistol Janja held. "Very nicely done, my dear. It would seem that not all is as it superficially appears. You were aware of that man's identity?" She turned, stepping away a pace. The stopper was up and ready. "Yes. I assure you I have nothing against you. But do be peaceful and walk me out of here, or I may be shaky enough to use your own stopper on you." "That would be unbearably ironic. Escorting you from here is my pleasure. Anyone who so facilely destroys the left arm of a swine named Jonuta is certainly no enemy of mine." He glanced around at the other patrons of the Parallax. "Let that be known." And to Janja, "I am Captain Corundum of Firedancer." He was walking past her, toward the doorway. "Please do tell Corundum your name." "Janja," she said, before she thought. Everything had happened so fast! Still was! She also realized that Corundum could have grabbed her or his stopper or 236 both while her back was to him. Staring at Srih-that is, where Srih had been. "Ah." They stepped through the flow-field and city-stink and noise hit them. "Somehow one suspects that your ID does not agree with that. And you knew Srih off Coronet?" "Yes." "Umm. Might Corundum suggest that we avail ourselves of that taxi and put distance between us and the Parallax-swiftly? That is, assuming that you have no wish to waste your valuable time answering a lot of stupid queries and enduring an investigation." He was already motioning to the little electricab. Its sensors caught the gesture and it swung over to them. The door opened. "This is a good idea, Janja," Corundum said. "Since you have my stopper, you decide which of us gets in first." Janja chermed nothing approaching menace in the attitude of this charming man whose name she recognized. Jonuta's rival and enemy! How could she choose a better companion? She handed him his stopper and slid into the cab. He followed, rested the pistol on the lap her sari provided her, and said, "Point five kilometers straight ahead, then directly to the spaceport shuttle terminal." He leaned back, letting the stopper lie where he had put it. The door closed. Belts enclosed them and warning signs lighted. The electric vehicle eased along a few meters, then rose. The SAFELANE sign lit, then ENGAGED, and they were whipping forward at the cybermachine's max of 50kph. "Formally, Janja: Please accept that stopper as Co-rundum's gift." She continued to be charmed. "Thank you, Captain Corundum." She let the stopper lie in the hammock of dark blue cloth between her thighs. "You are wearing silver tights under that, ah, tent. Do you perhaps consider yourself decent enough to discard it?" 237 "The sari?" She gave him a glance, saw his nod,

and decided that he meant thus to change her appearance. She began wriggling. The safety belts were reluctant to allow that, and Corundum gave her efficient aid without fondling. "Do you have a sharp blade, Corundum? All this black hair is a wig." "We could fold it right in here," he suggested, folding the sari. "No, no-my real hair is . . . distinctive." She showed him by removing the wig. "Ah," Corundum said. Without further comment he opened his belt and extracted a wire so thin it was barely visible. Each end was equipped with a grip. In seconds he had bunched a mess of hair and sliced it with the precise ease of slicing warm cheese with wire. He returned the wig minus fully twenty centimeters of hair. While she put it back into place, he regarded her own hair. "Assuring you that neither Jonuta nor any sort of policers are friends of Corundum's . . . might one ask if you have ever been on Resh." Janja chattered no menace. "Yes." She engaged the wig's clinging field. "Ah. Two and two still make four: is it possible that you were once sold to that foul Chulucan and his swinish father by Jonuta? Perhaps having been snatched, somewhere, by Srih?" Janja gave him a look. "That's . . . all correct. You do keep abreast, Captain Corundum!" "One has one's sources." He regarded her. She was quite pleasantly spectacular in skin-tight silver with a little skirt and over-bandeau, both of deep red. Having wrapped the swatch of hair in the sari, he slipped it under the seat. "One might even assume that you covered yourself while wearing entirely different clothing beneath because, ah, you considered the possibility of this sort of emergency?" "Exactly. Are you skin over bone, Corundum, or a news computer?" 238 He smiled. "Very much flesh over bone; too, too human flesh. Good; Corundum would hate to think you covered such beauty in that tent for some sort of religious reason! Now, Janja. Consider: the presence of Srih would tend to indicate the imminent presence of Jonuta." "I wish it had been Jonuta in that bar!" "Oh my dear, so do I!" Corundum said, in a rare use of that most popular of pronouns. "So do I! Now if the most clever and extraordinarily feminine executioner of the twice-slimy Srih will accept some advice? Franjese policers are so callous and old-fashioned as to consider illegal the removal of such a piece of excrement. They would be persistent in insisting on discussing it with you, along with your identity. And your connection with Corundum, which only we know was accidental." "I think you brought that up because you have a suggestion in mind," Janja said. "Is he so transparent, this Corundum whose secondary focus in life is the removal of that swinish Jonuta from the spaceways! Yes, there is a suggestion. Since you are most definitely female and Corundum male; however, you may well question the motivation . . ." Janja handed Captain Corundum his stopper. "I seem to be in your hands, Captain. Do carry my stopper for me." He smiled, then chuckled and holstered the pistol. Then Corundum made her words literally true by taking her into his hands, and arms. "We obviously have a common purpose and goal, Janja. My bold suggestion is that we depart Franji tonight. Now. Already we have turned toward the shuttle station. My Firedancer is above, docked at Franjista-tion. If Jonuta is onplanet, he will soon be well warned, and seeking. Best to leave and believe that another and better opportunity will present itself. If you have valuable possessions somewhere, Corundum will happily replace them in honor of these two salutary occasions." 239 Jarija was exteriorly a bit less grim than she had been for the past year. Inside, she was smiling. Perhaps grinning. What great good fortune to have run onto this courtly co-enemy of Jonuta! "Two great occasions, Corundum?" "Two, yes. The occasion of the entirely timely demise of Srih, left hand of 'Captain Cautious'! And the equally felicitous occasion of our meeting, Janja." "Ah." Janja felt that what he said was precisely what he felt, along with a natural sexual desire for her. She decided to return his embrace, and she did. "Location report," he said, and for a moment she was disconcerted. Then she realized he had spoken to the electricab's cybercontrol. It displayed their present location and that of the shuttle station. "Est. one point three minutes," it said. "Shuttle terminal C," he directed, and to Janja: "Within the hour we shall be on Firedancer, where we will depart with all speed. All undue speed, Janja. In

space, away from this unworthy ball of dirt and fire-paint, we can become acquainted and discuss our plans . . . for Jonuta." Janja was very aware that she had fulfilled part of her mission-Srih-and had made a wonderful and potentially useful friend indeed. Qalara? Corundum could seek Jonuta in space itself! She was ready to turn this embryonic "friendship" into alliance. Corundum's attitude indicated he did too. She snuggled. "Corundum: I agree." His long arm was completely around her. He was not that tall, but Janja was genuinely short. It was a hard arm she felt. His hand was just short of her breast, and she knew that was deliberate. He could have it in his fingers if he chose, and wanted her to know that he restrained himself. A gentleman outlaw! "Then let us depart and plot the destruction of Jonuta," he said. 240 "You said that was your secondary focus in life. The primary?" "Ah, Corundum's primary aim has ever been his own pleasure!" Happily Janja said, "Corundum my dear, let's pursue both."

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