

r. THE SLAVE MIDNIGHT POSTURED AND ADMIRERD HERSELF WHILE HER MASTER AND HIS FRIEND WATCHED. She had never been so loaded with twinkling jewelry nor dreamed of herself in such breathtaking splendor. Surely Cleopatra would have been envious of the slave Midnight, once Quindy of the spacer Satana Her fellow slave Love-fire, the former Capt. Hellfire, was hardly less resplendent in multicolor crystal, pendants. (Love-fire needed that extra color, in fact, to hide the whip marks. Drugs were not enough.) Both had knelt well and submissively, writhing and thrusting boldly while their masters grew steadily more drunk. It was then the two men, each proud of his slave and pleased with the other's, decided to flaunt their exotic possessions. Leaning on the jewel-flashing girls, they went out into the night: two reeling masters of Survival and their incredibly gaudy women. Cecil B. De Mille would have been envious.... SPACEWAYS #1 OF ALIEN BONDAGE#2 CORUNDUM'S WOMAN #3 ESCAPE FROM MACHO #4 SATANA ENSLAVED PLAYBOY PAPERBACKS SPACEWAYS #4: SATANA ENSLAVED Copyright (c) 1982 by John Cleve Cover illustration copyright (c) 1982 by 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. The poem Scarlet Hills copyright (c) 1982 by Ann Morris; used by permission of the author. Published simultaneously in the United States and Canada by Playboy Paperbacks, New York, New York. Printed in the United States of America. Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 81-85828. First edition. Books are available at quantity discounts for promotional and industrial use. For further information, write to Premium Sales, Playboy Paperbacks, 1633 Broadway, New York, New York 10019. ISBN: 0-867-21111-3 First printing July 1982. 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 1 The city sleeps below. I sigh For there dwells one, all testify, To match the maddest of dream's desire. -Thomas Hardy Barso swept his down-covered arm in a broad gesture that sent beautiful ripples through his iridescent tunic, while taking in all of the arcology that was his city. "And so we have lived here in our city inside the mountain, for eight hundred ninety revolutions," he said, declaiming proudly. "Snug as lichen tucked in sandstone, secure inside a world gone cold when our sun died. Survivors!" "Oh it's marvelous, my love," Janja told the short, downy Knorman. "And such a lovely, perfectly self-sufficient citadel of a city!" "Isn't it! Hard and substantial, Janjis. But not hard for its inhabitants, oh no. Toasty warm; well lighted! All our wastes contained and endlessly reused for our common good!" Janja looked at him as if he were a god who had created all this himself. It was almost a worshipful look, and Borg Barso swelled even more his tunicked chest- which was already massive by her standards, for the oxygen content of Survival's air was considerably less than twenty percent. 9 10 "And you are happy here, Janjis, aren't you?" "Oh yes, my love! Who could not be? We all are happy here, Borg Barso!" She gazed on him with dotting eyes, slavish eyes. "We are so glad. I am rather fond of you, you know, you strange hairless creature!" Noting what pleasure the words seemed to give her, he kindly fondled her breast. It was shockingly firm-and of course she was not hairless. The hair of her head was almost white as the snow Outside, and her eyebrows were rather thick. She was not, however, of Knor, and she was not coated all over with light brown down. "You are really

not a bad slave at all, Janjis, and you are definitely improving." "I'm trying, beloved master." "And you are both decorative and will be such a valuable addition to our gene-pool." He laughed. "If only we could get you with child, that is!" Janja pouted and thrust out her bosom, a portion of which was precariously contained in the two strips of ultra-soft cloth knotted behind her neck. "Oh I know," she said. "But. . . Borg Barso . . . my love . . . should we not be trying harder? I mean-is it a waste to spend so much of your wonderful seed to add protein to my diet?" He whirled and his hand was moving with the momentum of the turn. His face showed no sign of anger but she chattered. What was coming and had time to cringe. She took the buffeting open-handed blow on her half-covered right breast, and made a little high-voiced sound in her throat. She sank, whimpering and servile, chastened, to her knees. Her head was bowed. The narrow strip of pale blue cloth that depended from the woven cord circling her hips lay in folds between her thighs, and was beautiful. "That sounded critical, my big-mouthed slut. Such words are not for you to voice, nor to fill your pretty head with. Stop talking such intelligent-sounding stupidity, girl, and get that nice big mouth to work in the 11 way it best functions, wrapped around your indulgent master's digger!" Nodding, on her knees, leaking soft tears of contrition for having offended her lordly master, Janja pushed her head up under his tunic and began licking him to hardness. "Flourish, Barso," a voice said. "Flourish, Gebb," Barso told the passerby, and held back his groan of pleasure so as not to demean himself by showing that a lowly slave could get to him so swiftly. "Ah, that's good, darling little Love-fire," Torgex said, with his fingers entwined in his slave's hair. With her kneeling this way, she was indeed little, rather than taller than he. "Ahhh, that's good, yes. Yours is a good mouth for sucking a man, Shleefeemis, sweet darling Love-fire!-and you do know how to use it, sweet slut. Keep it-uh!-up. That's right, now hands behind your back and suck, suck hard, hard, sweet topaz-tressed slut. Ooooh. Yes, oh yes, yes. We are having company this night, Love-fire. Tranek, and Gaid, and Bromek. Important men! Once we have eaten and you and Misnais have cleared away the utensils and you have changed into your very most tempting attire, I shall make them the luckiest men in Survival! I shall let each of them experience your sweet digger-loving sucking mouth!" She could not sigh with her mouth so full. Glowing, palpitant and delighted that her lordly master was so pleased with her, the slave Love-fire, who had been the pirate Hellfire, fondled his darling testicles and did her very best to swallow his beloved erection. Immediately she turned her thought to the activities he promised for later, and his mandate for her "very most tempting attire." How pleased he obviously was with her, to wish to share her with others, important men! She decided that she would wear the floor-length skirt that began so low on her hips, with the bangles; 12 the aquamarine skirt that was slit five times all the way to the hip-strap. And just the faceted crystal tip-caps above, she thought, linked by the dainty chain of crystal beads behind her back and between the lobes of her chest. Planning, she felt his tremors. Quickly she linked her fingers behind her back and knelt up almost straight the way he liked her, while he began lunging in and out of her widely ovaled mouth. Unfortunately, once her master's lordly guests were suitably drunk that night, Borg Bromek denigrated her lack of breasts-"milkers," as Knormen liked to call them-despite the handsomely decorative nip-rings with their dangling ice-pearls. And he refused her mouth. He took her rearwardly instead, unprepared and dry, and though she tried hard she could not help crying out at the pain of friction. Bromek liked that. He enjoyed her little cries as he buggered the over-tall, under-fleshed strangeling. After they had left her master was displeased as she knew he would be. He slapped her and added weights to the nip-rings. He was justified, of course, and she wept for him. She had shamed him. She spent the night chained to the foot of his bed, not quite able to lie down. Naturally next day she was very loving and devoted indeed. Trafalgar Cuw smiled at this latest one, and sighed. She was lovely, again. They all were. This must be the seventeenth or eighteenth eager young

woman they had sent him. He wished he had kept a tally! He could not remember all their names, all these pretty and so-eager lovelies with their soft sweet eyes and their sweet soft down. They were short, almost uniformly so at 143 to 145 sems,\* seven to ten centimeters-usually-shorter \* Four feet nine or ten inches, Old Style. 13 than their men. Their Knormen. Few males of Survival were taller even than Janja, who was taller than any female here. Trafalgar looked upon this one, and smiled. Life certainly was good, in the underground city of Survival! So long as he didn't assert himself, or try. But of course that did not occur to him. He went to her and she smiled, lowering her head respectfully and provocatively, and slid liquidly down onto her knees. She wore a loosely slung sling bandeau of light red or deep pink, and a strip of iridescent cloth before and behind. The strips were slung from the extremely thin, delicate circles of polished flint that circled her hips. From the ring piercing the outer surface of her left upper arm swung an identical chip, flashing now and again when the light caught it. A nice touch, he thought. The floor-length "skirt" was weighted in front with polished quartz in green and smoky pink, to keep it firmly against her mound. "What's your name, dear?" "Dear" he spoke in his own language, Erts. They didn't know what it meant, of course, but his tone made it sound rather nice. Besides, it didn't matter. He was not Borg Trafalgar, not "my lord," but females of Survival learned early not to question males. She spoke to the floor, her face framed by tumbling hair about the color of redwood, naturally streaked with beige. "Shileele, Har Falgo." Always such soft liquid names, so feminine! Last night it was Laleemis. And . . . Shulalee the night before, wasn't it, or had that been Llullais? Lord lord, who could remember all their liquid feminine names? What a life! Each day he was interviewed two or three times while secretaries worked away taking down every word, and he was walked about through Survival the wondrously self-contained and self-sufficient, and each night he soared with a new maiden. If he was more than pleased and remembered a name to ask for again, he had but to say so. Back she would come on 14 another night. Pleased to be remembered and honored by his request, and even more anxious to please. It was almost boring, his trying nightly to do his bit for their needy gene-pool. Almost. Jisheemis wasn't, he mused with a smile as he gazed down at Shileele. Damn, not another eager damned virgin! Tomorrow I mean "next period" I'll ask for Jisheemis again. Lord lord, the enthusiasm of that girl! Wearing loose silky black bra to enhance its breasts and skintight trunks that showed off its penis and testicle, Cinnabar sat on the dais and talked to itself. The dais, decorated with carefully halved geodes, was in a front corner of the large banquet room. It was tiresome, this constant talking to itself while all these sawed-off Knorman farts and their sawed-off busty slaves dined and guzzled booze. But they loved it, the masters and their women, and it was this or be punished-tortured, perhaps killed. Yes, Cinnabar of Jarpi had been threatened with that. ("What good are you to us, weird alien? You look almost human except for your height and ranginess and your lack of bodily fur and your ugly cold-sun coloring. You are an alien! You cannot breed with us. All those pretty milkers and a nice little cave between those long shanks of yours, too. But-a digger and a single geode as well! But useless, useless to us. You are not of us, not even like those others who arrived with you. You cannot breed with us. No matter how great our need to expand our gene-pool for the good of the commonweal, we want no such chromatic chromosomes as yours!") So they consider me just not worth a fuck, Cinnabar reflected, literally! But how the sawed-off idiots do love for me to talk for their entertainment at their pre-orgy dinner parties. And keep talking!

15 That was the function of Cinnabar the Jarp in won-drously self-sufficient Survival of Knor. They made no effort to ascertain what might be in its brain, under that hair that was so very, so emphatically red. No, Cinnabar must talk. Just talk, in the language of Jarpi, and without its translation helmet. Cinnabar, who had been Raunchy of Jarpi off spacer Satana and who had never thought it would miss its translahelm, kept talking. For the masters of Survival. And the mastered. They were Survivors, the descendants of survivors

who had taken refuge within a mountain on this Cold Hell of a planet they called Knor. They worked to keep Surviving. They had Survived for almost a thousand years-Knor. They claimed to like the monotony of their height and their features and the almost uniform color of their hair and eyes, and yet they talked a great deal of their desire and need to expand their gene-pool. The need showed. They were the descendants of few, and not all those had been capable of breeding, the unscientific assholes, Cinnabar added mentally. Death lurked outside, in the keening wind beyond Survival's walls of natural stone. Within were two castes: men and slaves. They weren't worth a damn at music and writing fiction was forbidden, unless some of those males-for-males treatises on the proper training and use and punishment of slaves were embellished. Art was something they proudly claimed to have no tune for, other than their working with precious and semi-precious stones; the making of jewelry. With them that was an art indeed, even the mentally sneering Cinnabar had to admit. No such beautiful and delicate, ornate jewelry must exist anywhere else along the spaceways. They did not dance. Singing was unmanly, in Survival. Whistling was too; too sybaritic for the males, who considered it a frivolity for their womenfolk. Not worthy. Puckering the lips among the women was for digger-sucking. 16 Yet they appreciated music, and the advent of Cinnabar gave them an excuse. They need make no music; they need only listen. And so they let Cinnabar live. (Exactly one senator had expressed a desire to have the Jarp for a slave. The man was surely forty sems- four decimeters-shorter. But the "orange thing" had a penis as well as a vagina, and that senator was sneered at and muttered about. His motives had been much in question, and he suffered loss of face. Now he never never so much as looked in the direction of the orange thing from Outside.) Cinnabar became the property of the commonweal. They let it live. They kept it around solely to talk during their dinner parties, which always ended in too much drinking-among the men-and usually in orgies. (No Survivor may drink before night, the law said, and maintained further that no man could be held responsible for his sexual appetites and actions while drunk. That way they freed themselves of their exaggerated pride and machismo and enormous regard for keeping face-in a tight, controlled pressure-chamber of a society that could afford neither expansion nor violence. And alcohol was cheaper than cheap, and available to all ... males.) Cinnabar talked in its own language, its translator taken from it, and they considered that whistling art. Entertainment. Cinnabar gamed no esteem from it; it was just something the orange thing did. Seasoned spacefarer Cinnabar had become the dinner music of Survival. "Hey la dee lah you're an ugly little bastard, ole Borg Gorso-o," Cinnabar whistled, "you sawed-off fart-knocker. I'll bet your slicer-I-mean-digger is a nailfile pitted like an asteroid and too small to satisfy a yearling grat! Now it's true that I would enjoy the pointy warheads-I-mean-milkers of that whorish little digger-mouther of yours tra-la-loo; to shove my goodole orange digger-I-mean-slker up her till it clogs her stupid throat from the insi-i-hi-hide. Ah bugger, bugger 17 you all and all-all, my charming 'hosts'! And you, dear bandy-legged Borg Gamax the macho idiot with all your esteem and respect! You couldn't satisfy that limp-eyed combustion chamber of yours who keeps throwing me hot-eyed lickety looks tra-la, if you continued as Director of Recycling for a thousand years rickety-tickety-tin! She probably has a stash or a cave or tunnel, as you macho fatheads so delicately term vaginas, that is all sere and desiccating from acute lack of use. And nipples doubtless limp and black as raisins from your constant pinchings! Of course tra-la Garnax you ugly fuzzy son of a Sekhari gamel I wouldn't kick that big-eyed fat-bottomed mighty mammariied hust out of bed tra-la. Not till I'd made her soho-hore O-soarr so high she'd bang her fluffy head on the lid of your oversize cave of a 'city' and forever after prefer a limp thumb-size dildo-oho to you-hooo. Hey nonny la-le-lo! O-ohh . . . this is an anile world of hyper-macho assholes and I'd like to bugger it bugger it my dearest darling masters and all you little under-attired small-brained weak-mouthed tired-tongued cave-tunnel-1-lls! But I in my wisdom know you futhermuckers

have done something real-ly nasty to Janja's and Hellfire's (Love-fire oh boy-oh hoho tralelo!) and Quindy's and Trafalgar's heads not to mention their nice warm smooth bodies you creeps use and use and I'll bet my one-better-than-two-of-yours ball it's that soupy sweet-alcoholic stuff you make so-o-o-ho-ho sure I drink every morning and night hey nonny NO-O! If only la-la you knew! It doesn't affect a big sturdy plasteel-constituted bisexual hermaphroditic native of Jarpi, garden spot of the cosmo-ho-hose! Ah but one of these day-ay-ays, you anile mange-crotched furred-like-a-beagle's-head double-stupid sawed-ofE little fart-knockers and knart-fockers, I'll find a way to get one of them out of your heavy-handed clutches. Then-n-n we'll cut off all your furry li'l slicers you call 'diggers' and give them to all those fawning furry pitiful fitipul Slavies you mighty 18 Sons of Survivors call females! And toodle-wheet, you-" And Cinnabar talked on, whistled on, and on, dinner music, a one-creature chamber orchestra, sweet background music for the downy diners of Survival. "Oh I'm so glad that poor ugly orange thing came to us," Borgis Garnax-Meeshais told her noble lord. "Its sweet music is such an asset to our gatherings!" "It's just whistling," her husbandly master and masterly husband told her, slapping the bare weirdly down-less and gleamingly, intriguingly black bottom of their host's new servant to speed her and her jug of punch on her way along the long table's periphery. "That's the way the poor inferior homely creature talks, in what passes for its native 'language.' Or so Falgo says, the hulking weirdo." He was looking sidewise after the slave, thinking rather wistfully of how fortunate Boskar was to have gained that most exotic of women. "Well, I do think it's lovely music, my sweet lord and master," Meeshais was saying, as if Garnax were listening. "What pleasant stories it must be telling in its own tongue!" "Stories? That's highly doubtful, dear Borgis," Gedd said from Meeshais's other side. "It can't really be language, after all. Just its form of communication with its own weird kind." Her husband glanced across her at Gedd. "Only a stupid alien, called a Jarp," Garnax told him. "With an excavator no bigger than your finger, poor thing!" Both men laughed and continued the nightly ritual of sluicing down their throats with Survival's greatest asset, its marvelously absolutely free alcohol. The triple-earringed woman between them kept her pleasant submissive smile in place. But I wonder if it knows what to do with its digger, Meeshais thought, and wondered too what Garnax would do to her if he knew about such a thought in the mind of his dutiful and ever-decorative wife. 19 A little frisson ran over her and she shot the Jarp another look, well aware that her husband's gaze was directed at their host Boskar's new acquisition. Like polished onyx she was, with a marvelous contrast of hair the color of the best citrine. (The Jarp was commonweal property, given its assignments by Social Director Brond, based on the earliest request. Or so Brond said. Idly Meeshais wondered how the poor thing must feel, not only unable to communicate but without a specific master to guide its life. Maybe Brond acted as master to it.) (On the other hand, the fascinated Meeshais thought, tracing her finger over the unending silver-wire ara-besquery of her bracelet, the Jarp could not be said to be a woman, even though it possessed breasts and- they said-a vagina. It also, after all, visibly-she stole another glance-possessed a penis and scrotum. Could it be part master, part slave? (What an utterly fascinating creature! And what beautiful music. Its soul must be beautiful, Meeshais thought.) Her lordly master, meanwhile, was watching the new slave. Now she was pouring for Senator Gaid. The latter was not-quite-idly fondling the slave's large, obscenely hairless pubes. The lips were all bulgily swollen around either side of the tight strap that ran down between them and up between her buttocks. Boskar had cleverly chosen a thin strap of white that provided eye-catching contrast with her unbelievable, estimable and yet slicky-looking skin. The strap was securely attached to her corset, fore and aft, and it was taut. From the strap a pair of nice little bells dangled to tinkle between her shining black thighs. The sound was muted, thin and pleasant. Another such dainty bell tinged softly from the crystalline ring that pierced her right areola, just at

the base of the nipple. It was a nice touch, that gold-flecked transparent ,  
 20 ring carved from a single piece of rutilated quartz. It had been sanded  
 and polished to the smoothness of metal. Stone-working was superb in Survival,  
 and the working of various non-precious forms of quartz was a hobby Garnax  
 shared with Boskar. Thus Garnax knew that the slim circle had been opened with  
 meticulous care, to make an aperture only a couple of millimeters wide. Next,  
 either tip of that niche had been sharpened, into a needly prong. With a lot  
 of tugging and prying and forcing-and tears from the girl, of course-the ring  
 could be forced into a good-size pinch of skin, which bulged before it. A  
 little extra pressure applied just so, and the prongs sank in. Soon the ring  
 was rooted. The hard stone, harmless to flesh, was there for good. And it was  
 a nicely handsome decoration that twinkled and flashed and also tended to keep  
 the nipple attractively fat. Their host's wife had led the girl in by a leash  
 attached to that ring, and handed the leash's end to Boskar. He and the slave  
 had then demonstrated her obedience and truly beautiful submissiveness. Proud  
 Boskar! Fortunate Boskar! The whispered word was that this slave received no  
 daily libation. But that was just whispers and hard to believe as well. Garnax  
 did not believe it. How could this one be so like the women of Survival in  
 that regard, and so different from her fellows, the other captives? Why would  
 she willingly accept a woman's proper place, when the other strangelings with  
 her did not? It made a good story. Garnax watched her while his wife cast  
 glances at their entertainment from time to time, and Garnax felt lust, and  
 envy of Boskar. And Cinnabar . . . talked. 2 The qualifications for  
 self-government in society are not innate. They are the reward of habit and  
 long training. -Thomas Jefferson "But damn it all, sir," Tobodex almost  
 shouted. "No matter how we come at him with our queries and compare our  
 transcriptions of his replies, the alien Falgo says the same-that the most  
 noble Senator Torgex's slave was captain of their craft! That her name was  
 indeed Hellfire, not Love-fire or anything like. That the noble lord Boskar's  
 slave was her second in command!" His voice rang back from the carved stone  
 walls of the chamber of the Thirty-two, and he stared about at them from  
 Knoresely deep-set eyes of soft hazel. "Falgo says that he was not, ever,  
 captain of any such craft-he is or was merely a spy among them. She is the one  
 whose knowledge we should be seeking with these daily interviews,  
 Senators!" Borg Senator Gaid rose stormily to his feet. He was the tallest  
 among them at 164 centimeters-a meter point six-four-and invariably wore  
 uncommonly long robes even out of this august chamber to emphasize that  
 height. Now he was scandalized and wore his righteously offended look like a  
 crown of superiority. 21 22 "Query a woman, Senators? Ask and record the  
 opinions and 'wisdom' of a female, of whatever species, and one not fit for  
 reproduction at that? I protest even the intimation in this hall, my fellows  
 of the Thirty-two! What could we possibly learn from a woman?- The most noble  
 and distinguished Senator Torgex's slave?" Those last words were well chosen;  
 several men chuckled. Senator Torgex was among them, and he continued to smile  
 smugly. "Far be it from me to tell," he said mildly, and more of the  
 Thirty-two laughed, all in their gold-ocher robes and sapphire-set  
 headbands. True, Torgex was inclined to exaggerate, to brag. But Gaid had  
 enjoyed Torgex's brassy-haired alien exotic. He too had stated without  
 equivocation that she was extraordinarily good with that almost lipless mouth  
 of hers. As for Gaid-he was well known to be a milker-lover. What he meant by  
 "not equipped for reproduction" was that Love-fire was not equipped to nurse  
 children. Which was ridiculous; who knew what lactation might do to her chest,  
 or for it? Still-Tobodex was speaking plain heresy! "But-good my fellow  
 senators! They are different from us," Tobodex expostulated, in frustration  
 that was read as unworthy desperation for his failing appeal. What a stand to  
 take, for one who called himself not only a senator, a Descendant, but a  
 Knorman! "What can it hurt to try? It does not diminish us as men- she is not  
 of our people and therefore reflects not at all upon us. One or two interviews  
 with our distinguished compatriot Torgex's new slave, that is all I urge. An  
 application of the scientific attitude, my noble lords of the Thirty-two. She

might be of value to us!" The words were greeted with a staring silence. Into it Torgex said, "She is of value to me," in an austere voice just loud enough to be heard in that chamber of wonderful acoustics, and this time even more senators laughed knowingly.

23 Torgex, meanwhile, resolved to increase Love-fire's daily libation. He would double the sleek-skinned slut's dosage, by All-father and the Inner Fires! "But hardly of value for her head above the mouth, eh Senator?" someone called from among the aides, and that time nearly everyone laughed, senators and their aides alike. They were the best thirty-two of Survival's controlled population of precisely six eights of thousands. They had to be the best; each was after all a Descendant of the original Survivors' Directorate of four hands of men. Those first thirty-two had enabled the chosen few to continue living while Knor effectively died, Outside. Now for nearly nine Knorese centuries they had lived and lived well here within the planet, heated by the planet's own unquenched Inner Fires and guided by the Thirty-two. Tobodex was talked down and voted down and shunned later. He was a Descendant and could not be replaced, but he could be made to feel distance, to let him know he had lost face. He could be squeezed. As a matter of fact his younger brother was an eminently sensible man just past his youth. Doubtless he had a better head and more respect for the Thirty-two and all that was Survivalish. Violence was forbidden and all but unknown in Survival, whose confines could not countenance it. Still, there were some who thought all would be better off if Tobodex should happen to fall into the Flamepit. What had they to lose, the idiot had dared demand, and in this very chamber of polished redstone! What to lose! Why, their whole society! The few who had fought and striven and Survived Sundeath--so it was called, though the sun lived as little more than a glowing cinder--they knew! They knew what the position of the stronger sex must be in an eternal struggle for survival of looming racial death. And they knew what must be the position also 24 of the weaker sex! Tobodex was challenging not just the Thirty-two, but manhood-Knormanhood. Not just Knormanhood, but the social order of Survival and thus all Knor. For Survival was all there was of life on Knor. Naturally the slave Love-fire did not know why she was hair-bound on her toes and belly-whipped before being left for two full hours that evening, or why her master was so rough in his callous use of her. Still, she later received an unprecedented second mug of delicious lipith, and she knew that she was seen to, and wanted despite her lacks, and that sustained her. She lived for Torgex who was important, and he had taken time and trouble to discipline and use her. That sustained the slave called Shleefemis: Love-fire, who knew after all that she need not know the reason for discipline. There was more than one anomaly in Survival, Cinnabar reflected. It was alone in its cubicle, provided with sweetened water to restore its throat for tonight's gig. There was nothing to do and nothing to see. Cinnabar pondered Knor, Knormen, and Survival. Cinnabar knew that their science was advanced in some areas and sadly lacking in others--biology/ eugenics, for instance--but there seemed more wrong with their story of Survival than "mere" scientific ignorance. Was it merely a legend? Was it a deliberate lie? Was the truth lost in the past, or known to some here; locked up somewhere in their unwieldy records system that had nothing to do with silicon chips? Was it possible that they had come here from somewhere else altogether--their ancestors, that is--as spacefarers?-- and been trapped, and taken shelter here? Or was it possible that their tale of the founding of Survival actually covered centuries and centuries? Perhaps their sun had not cooled, consuming its hydrogen and then going on to burn its helium in a cooler fire; perhaps there had been some mighty occurrence. Something from outside this sun-system? Something from within it, perhaps--perhaps their own technological efforts, in their distant past? (That seemed to make some sense, the Jarp thought. That would account for their desire to forget it, cover it up, if they had upset their own sun or their planet's position. And it would account for their dread of change and of science, progress. Perhaps they suffered from a massive racial guilt?) Something, Cinnabar thought. As to their story: Knormen had lived on

their planet for thousands and thousands of years—they said. (Even that was wrong, Cinnabar was sure. It was millions, if they were native to this world. But even if it could speak fluent Survivalish, the Jarp was not about to try to tell these macho swell-heads anything.) They had progressed from hunters to farmer societies to civilization. Industry had awakened and then industrialization, and the civilization had risen. Knormen found leisure at last. Like the dwellers on other worlds circling other stars, they deepened their studies of the sciences. They learned enough—they said—to suspect the horror that was coming, with regard to their sun. Naturally most refused to believe it. Predictably, the governments on Knor argued and diddled and dad-died, while heat raged over their world. Amid all the squeal and jabber, a wealthy few began preparing for disaster. They talked and planned for what they came to call Sundearth, though that was not quite an accurate description. Those men expanded their number to take in scientists, and then a few engineers. Eventually they included a few of the most trustworthy of laborers. The sun-Survivors said-faded from its new brightness back to yellow-orange and then orange, consuming its finite supply of hydrogen. Meanwhile, an elite expanded the caverns of this mountain in a triumph of Knorese engineering. Meanwhile, supposed leaders and 26 savants still pondered and argued their predicament, and the actions they should take. Sixteen "solution" projects were commenced, in sixteen different directions. "If a scientific heresy is ignored or denounced by the general public," Asimov had stated, "there is a chance it may be right. If a scientific heresy is emotionally supported by the general public, it is almost certainly wrong." The projects under way were wrong, in one way or another. The argued thesis was right. Knor was about to become mighty cold. It happened. Life on Knor was doomed, far from a surly red sun, despite the outcries and prayers and "efforts" of those who had spent too long doubting, and then wrangling over what they must do. The temperature declined steadily, on Knor. The poles grew and spread their ice-caps like conquering armies in quest of territory. A few survived. Those who had begun preparing so long before, while others gabbled. No matter who the males, or why, or their ages. Some were old by then, and some were older than that. All of them were men, Knormen, who had the wherewithal and the foresight; those who could. They reached hard-nosed decisions. Those became one decision, since unity was essential. Surely there must have been some powerful dictator of magnetic persuasive abilities even over these "elite," Cinnabar thought. At any rate, in acceding to the Decision, some abandoned their wives. Some even ordered kidnappings. They knew that the "victims" were in truth the Chosen, the most fortunate women on Knor. They would survive . . . Survive. And so to their impregnable, geothermally heated and lighted haven they took only young females. They were men, and they chose as men. They chose the best-looking, very most attractive potential breeders for a handsome continuing race. Sure of themselves as the elite, demonstrably the only smart men on Knor, the 27 men assumed that they would supply the intelligence genes for their offspring. Knormen would survive! Those original Survivors were men of wealth and power, even of genius, in a few cases. Their attractiveness or its lack did not matter, for they were men of wealth and power. That power was many times magnified; only they had haven within a planet that was freezing, dying. The females were chosen—the Chosen. Their survival was assured. So was their status. On par with a carpet, Cinnabar mused, but that was going too far. The uniformly beautiful females of Survival were more aptly compared with pets. Handsome pets, and well trained and well disciplined in a carefully controlled "city" inside the planet. An ark of survival; an arcology. Marquis de Sade, who was far from the monster he had been considered, far less monster than the mass murderer Napoleon who had him shut up in an asylum for political reasons (meaning fear) . . . Donation Alphonse Francois de Sade would have been delighted with Survival. Perhaps he'd have wanted even more women, rather than the original Survivors' decision to include three per male. Never mind the emotional response akin to a knee tapped with a rubber hammer. Was that not



the male way? It was what they did. Now close onto a thousand years-ess had passed; almost nine hundred years-Knor. Expansion space was nil and so breeding was controlled, in the arcology called Survival. The number of males was controlled to preserve the status quo and a society that was almost free of violence. Never mind how it was controlled, with a greedy zeal akin to the limiting of entrants to medical schools, elsewhere. Males were held to thirty percent of the population of Survival, where size and available space was very finite indeed. And females were held in ... their place. In Survival. 28

They lived here-existed here. Survivors, on or rather in a planet whose surface was a frozen enemy to them. Now all semblance of their cities was buried under decameters, perhaps kilometers of ice and snow. The wood brought in 890 Knorese years ago had long since responded to a combined saline-algae-silicon treatment and become as one with the stone of their cavern world. Those plants, lichen and fungi that grew and could be cultivated in such an environment, fed the Survivors well. Naturally that science and art progressed. Their minimal energy needs were more than met geothermally. Water was simple, because it was simple to pipe a controlled measure of heat upward and pipe down water from the ice it melted. The things these Knormen could and did make of stone, from agate and flint and sandstone to granite, were ingenious and astonishing, and often consummately beautiful. Once food supply was stabilized at a guarantee beyond the merely adequate, they explored other uses for those materials their circumscribed world provided. Now their ability to create fabrics had leaped beyond that of other races that were technically far more advanced. Despite the fact that they used almost no machinery, there was no lack of leisure time in Survival. A realization of the danger of leisure in such a straitened society led to a banning of anything approaching industrialization. People had to be kept busy if they were to be kept out of trouble. Survivors did their mining by hand. Individuals made their own clothing and prepared their own food and cut their own stones, to stay busy. Those stones were wrested from within the mountain primitively, solely by hand and hand-held tools. Jewelry was their art. Other arts did not flourish, at all. "We are here for all time," the Survivors said. Cinnabar could understand that meant they dared not progress much further. Yet Cinnabar heard them make references to having 29 been Outside. Through the airlocked tunnels, onto the frozen surface of Knor. And the Jarp heard no references to the creatures it knew were out there. Squat, stumpy-legged bipeds covered with long hair. Creatures almost perfectly adapted to Knor, with their low profiles and thick dark fur shaggy on their thick bodies. Such creatures had captured the crew of spacer Satana. Yet there was no sign of them, no mention of them in Survival, where the crew of Satana awoke. As slaves. Slaves, Cinnabar mused cheerlessly. Captain Hell-fire, First Mate Quindy, Janja, short as these sawed-off masterly-bastardly Knormen, and Trafalgar Cuw. Slaves. Cinnabar was a slave, too, but in a different way. For one thing, it was not a sexual object-under what it suspected was the excuse or Knorese wishful thinking about their damned genetic pool. The sawed-off furbag fur-asses aren't about to impregnate three women of another species, even if Janja and Quindy and Hellfire hadn't been implanted with an anti-conception emitter! A grat or a Sekhari rock-lizard would do as much for the gene-pool these rectums yammer about! The Jarp's position here, however, was entirely different in another way. Since the alternative was likely death, Cinnabar was a slave by ... call it choice. Until it learned more, and made some sort of plan, and found opportunity to introduce a bit of nice violence to Survival. Lots of it, preferably! The Jarp knew that its companions were slaves, but not by choice. Whatever had been done to or was being used daily on the others-the libation of that lipith stuff?-to keep them such accepting slaves ... it was not effective on the Jarp. Its constitution was different, its metabolism was different. It was humanoid, not human; not a Galactic. The others were changed. They were different individuals altogether. They seemed to accept the base 30 situation and philosophy of the Knormen. They believed. Somehow they had become part of the systemry of Survival; somehow they were part of

Survival. Even Hellfire was as Survivalish as any of these cream-color, whiskery, thick-mopped, small-chinned, four-digitated, sawed-off Knormen with their wide- and deep-set eyes and their blunt, down-turned little noses with the tiny nostrils. And their covering of fine, extremely short down. Males and females alike, Knormen seemed oddly cool," as if their natural body temperature was considerably lower than Galaetics' or Jarps'. It was Cinnabar's theory that this was because the hair was fine, and quite short, but dense and clinging enough to hold the Survivors' natural heat inside, close to their skins. That's why I stay chilly most of the time, Cinnabar thought with bitterness. These dummies don't have the sense to realize I need more warmth than they do. Of course with their arrogance, they probably just don't give a vug. Why worry about the comfort of the "orange thing?" We'd all be sick as Reshi priests if we weren't immune to more things than have been discovered! Meanwhile, Cinnabar pretended to be as slavish as the others. To stay alive, it pretended. It wasn't easy. Cinnabar wanted very much to introduce violence to Survival. Were they so stupid? Or was it plain lying? The Jarp saw holes in the story of what they called the "death" of their sun, and the founding of this mammoth cavern town-called-city. Holes big enough to take a spaceship through. Was the real story lost in time, or deliberately suppressed? Are they so stupid as to think that a star cools within a few years-and that cats can impregnate dogs? Cinnabar understood their talk, because they had taught it to, along with the other captives. In the Jarp's case they seemed to have forgotten, because there was no way it could reply in their language. They might 31 have learned its tongue; they didn't care to try. Arrogance was a natural personality trait of Knormen. Cinnabar's translation helmet was of no value. It was ingeniously and specifically devised to translate the whistling burbling tweeting tootling language of Jarpi into Galactic language, Erts. The Knormen were not interested in learning that, either. Knormen were the Chosen! The eminently superior. Survivors! The best- masters. What could they possibly learn from others, to any profit? Their mental set was strange. They could not be considered logical beings. None seemed to consider the study of another language, even of an obviously alien creature such as the Jarp, as a practical use of their dangerous leisure time. Much less as an application of a science they could afford. Cinnabar listened, and reflected. And Cinnabar bided its time. And whistled for its daily bread. 3 / think all pirates are short a few jets somewhere- if they weren't they wouldn't be pirates. -LaVerne Thorndyke, Galactic Patrol The nuttiest, dopiest, wooziest planet in the galaxy -we would draw something like that to set down on for repairs, wouldn't we? -L. Thorndyke The brass-haired woman called Hellfire had acquired spaceship Satana as a result of biology, pheromones/ the sexual imperative, and the former captain's stupidity. She warned him when he took her on as crew. She had been certain to let him know that she was lesbian, exclusively. Furthermore and in addition, she didn't really like men. He looked at the long, lean, rather mean-looking young woman and nodded. He needed her as crew, and so he accepted her terms; it wasn't as if they were mandates, or that he was interested in her. He agreed. And they went into space. After four or so months between worlds, all that time combined with biology and pheromones and his own stupidity. He not only made a pass, he pushed it. So she killed him. 32 33 She had little choice, then. She decided to flee. The parsec abyss was vast beyond imagining; other ships had vanished along the spaceways. Several other crew were ready to join her. One resisted. That one did not survive. Without much choice and with a natural inclination besides, Hellfire turned pirate. Her first raid was successful, and she was in business. The ship was hers, and she renamed it Satana. An independent mer-chanter. To a degree, she nourished. Quindy, disgraced former military space officer, dyed a refulgent black by choice, had joined her some time later. Her advent was a stroke of luck for Captain Hellfire, pirate. Quindy was academy trained. Quindy was also the competent one, the stabilizer Hellfire needed. Quindy was just not a leader and had no desire to try. Hellfire found her to be an odd mix.

Gloriously competent indeed, quite military with her crisp "Yes Captain/Right Captain" (while wearing a flaming red halter and tight, wide-bottom pants of fluorescent yellow), a woman capable of advising, of deciding, of running the ship. A woman with a mind of her own-and yet a need for domination. Hellfire provided that, in her well-appointed cabin, often in its large bed. Quindy had little desire to go offship. She contented herself with remaining onboard Satana, even during docking. She had been on the ship, working up a new course guidance cassette, when Hellfire docked at the toroid Thebanisport and went down onto Thebanis, just a few months ago. It was there, in the Loophole Bar frequented by spacefarers, that Captain Hellfire met the Jarp Raunchy, who was at loose ends just then; and the exotically pale, pale-haired Janja. Janja was short, very female, wiry, surprisingly strong, and with black-clad Captain Corundum. Incredible as it seemed to one who had never seen an Aglayan, Hellfire learned that Janja's 34 complexion, eye color, and hair were natural; genetic. Racial. (Later the Jarp Raunchy expressed a desire to change its name. "Cinnabar" had been Janja's suggestion.) Cinnabar and Janja had joined Hellfire in her hotel module for several firsts: Hellfire's first time with a Jarp; Janja's premiere sexual experience with her own sex. Stolen off the pre-tech "Protected" planet Aglaya by the slaver Jonuta,\* Janja had just spent several months with the cultured Captain Corundum of Fire-dancer. Corundum: suave, proud, eyeless, quick to draw and kill. (Corundum: a hard, abrasive substance forming emerald, sapphire, and emery.) Corundum: pirate. It was in Raunch on Thebanis that Janja realized she had to get away from the man. She did, precipitately. She departed his company with Hellfire, along with Cinnabar-then-Raunchy- without taking leave of Corundum.\*\* On the copper-rich little skungeball of a world named Mott-chindi and more often called Macho, the five off spacer Satana had hardly set foot onplanet when the insurrection began.\*\*\* It swiftly became chaos. Janja, Hellfire and company had to fight and run every step of the way back to the shuttleport. The rioting miners of Mott-chindi slew two of their number, Satana's gunners. It was during that horrid striving experience of constant tension that Captain Hellfire had really shown the neurotic instability that made her dangerous to everyone, including herself. She might as well have been called fulminate of mercury, Janja realized. Meanwhile Cinnabar saw that not only was Janja not the sort to be anyone's shadow, she was a leader. Janja bade the Jarp hush such talk. Around Hellfire, it was just dangerous. \* Spaceways #1: Of Alien Bondage. \*\* Spaceways #2: Corundum's Woman. \*\*\* Spaceways #3: Escape from Macho. 35 At the shuttleport they met the flamboyant, Three-Musketeerish personage improbably named Trafalgar Cuw, to rhyme with "cue." Blousy-sleeved shirt, bright yellow. Red sash, just as bright, as truly red-red as the Jarp's hair. Royal blue tights tucked into boots that matched his shirt. And a Wayne: an eleven-gallon hat. Hellfire liked the man about as much as she loved policers, and measles. He was knowledgeable, helpful, and charming hi his overdone sort of way, a courtier from centuries long buried. They had to threaten their way off Mott-chindi, and the clerk called up to Station Security the moment they were on their way up. Security was waiting. On the docking station, Cop-perdock, they were soon involved in a sort of running war-touched off by Security's arrogance and general incompetence in handling what should have been a minor matter, and by Hellfire's instability and inability to handle pressure. Copperdock Security was all but wiped out. Hellfire killed four. They'd have taken or killed her, too, but for Trafalgar and Quindy. Trafalgar not only saved them both-and was saved by them-he got Satana and all hands off space station Copperdock. A sub-deep cover agent for TMSM(ining)Co, Trafalgar Cuw; a man in his second ID "lifetime"; a man who told those on Satana that his mission on Macho had been to try to avert the insurrection. And a man with a TGO ID file in central databanks, identifying him as a prime agent of TransGalactic Order, the low-image answer-to-no-one peacekeeping force all along the spaceways. Thanks to that, to him, they gained release and departure from Copperdock and the planet called Macho, and were not even pursued. Not, that is, by the law. It

was Corundum who found them, in space. Just as Jonuta was one of the greatest tricksters and tacticians along the spaceways, a man who avoided violence assiduously, Corundum reveled<sup>36</sup> in violence and was surely the very best tracker of ships in space. He also could not handle Janja's abandoning him. The blow to his high pride and self-esteem was too much. He traced her, tracked her, attacked her. Too bad for Satana and everyone else aboard! Bothering with such considerations was not part of Corundum's makeup, as it was not part of Hellfire's. It was his vengeance that sent them floundering, with the ship crippled by its lack of computer. That resulted in their enforced bang-down on a strange planet under a cool red sun. This cloud-shrouded planet was cold; death cold. Cold as that one of several Muslim hells called the Cold Hell. Spacesuited inside their ship, they survived Sa-tana's forced planetfall into snow. The ship was not breached. It lay in snow, like a great beached whale. And they were stuck, until they could get the "computer traumatizer" off their hull; Corundum's attempt to award them a slow death. Hellfire blamed Janja, who had been Corundum's target and who had also had the con when he attacked. That was easier than the captain's blaming herself: she had been enjoying a three-way sexual wallow while an inexperienced crew sat oncon. They were alive, but Satana was far from free of tension. It was Trafalgar Cuw who went out into that windswept eternal darkness to remove the device from the ship's hull. He insisted that the captain accompany him outside. He did not tell her why. She guessed: Trafalgar did not trust Hellfire any more than she did him. Whoever or whatever he truly was, Trafalgar Cuw had no desire to save Satana only to be abandoned by its captain. Hellfire suspected his unstated reason. Hell-fire nevertheless went out with him. On dry snow and ice, assaulted by a whistling wind, they were brought closer by minor mishaps and errors. They fell together, laughed together, had to cooperate. That closeness hardly approached Trafalgar's with Quindy: they had<sup>37</sup> become lovers between Mott-chindi and Cold Hell-if "lovers" was the term for a pair of people who were fascinated with each other and shared sex together. Slipping and sliding, harassed by the banshee-howling wind, troubled because they thought they "kept seeing things," Trafalgar and Hellfire separated. Trafalgar went up on the pitifully grounded bulk of Satana. He was up there nearly an hour. The ship was merely a medium-size one, but that was a relative term. So the beached whale that was Satana was smaller than Moby Dick. It was still big, and massed plenty. He found the lamprey, a flattened pancake now, busily making itself part of the hull while it beamed a jumble of conflicting requests and commands to ship's computer-SIPACUM-until they had shut SIPACUM down. The lamprey had to be cut off. Trafalgar had brought a laser beamer for that purpose, and he put it to work. It was a tight surgical operation with the ship's hull in danger. It was not helped any by the illusion, in that dimness worsened by wind-driven snow and shadows created by his own suit-lamps, that he saw things, moving things. Meanwhile he was sweating in the pressure suit while he played surgeon to a spaceship on its hull in a 116-degrees-below-zero-C temperature made nastier by a pretty mean wind-in the dark. And he did it. "Almost ready! Ready, inside?" Quindy's voice, inside his suit: "Interior hull patch ready, Trafalgar." "Maybe you'd better just stay back now. I've got this thing set so that it can't possibly cut the hull, but-" "Oh God, Trafalgar, please be careful!" "Oh all right," he said, trying to relieve the tension that held him so tightly that his arm quivered. "Actually what I've been doing out here is jiggling around loosing random bursts with the laser, but if you think I ought to be careful-!" No one responded to that sickly sick joke. He fin-<sup>38</sup> ished the job in silence. "There! That's it! Get that patch up and on, my darlings! Lamprey is dead dead dead!" He began dismantling the laser and its tripod, and he started relaxing. Soon the three inside-Janja, Quindy, Cinnabar-announced that the patch was safely in place, a gigantic Band-Aid on the hull's interior. The ship was at least physically safe. He tossed the lamprey away, skimming the deadly pancake that had knocked out the Ship Inboard Processing And Computing Unit (Modular): SIPACUM. Next he called Hellfire. And then again, tension returning, and again

. . . "Oh quit shouting at me, you over-maternal idiots!" her voice came at last, and Trafalgar's stomach went all empty-feeling in a surge of relief. "I just got so excited when you announced that ifs all done that I forgot and tried to jump up and down. I fell. Come on, Traf," she said, while he laughed, bordering on hysteria in his relief. She went on, talking happily of how they'd crank up SIPACUM and it would be fine and crank up Satana and it would be fine and redshift this snowball of a world and hunt down that bastard Corundum and, presumably, live happily ever after. "Come on, Trafalgar, quit hanging around up there and let's be on our way!" While the others cheered inside like so many kids, Trafalgar started moving to get off the sensor-cluttered, scanner-festooned hull. Then Hellfire's voice came again, shouting, though that was hardly necessary, with the suit's commlink-mike two centimeters from her lips. "TraFALG-" And that was that. He paused, hanging onto an infrared spectrometer strut, and stared. Not only could he not see more than a meter or so through the rushing air filled with wind-driven snow fit only for skiing, the curve of Satana's hull made the ground and Hell-fire invisible anyhow. 39 "Captain? Hellfire?" "Hellfire!" Quindy yelled. "Hellfire?" Trafalgar Cuw's heart was pounding anew. Had she waited until he had fixed her ship to go hurrying back to the airlock on the makeshift snow-shoes he had improvised? Planning to lock out the man she had never liked or trusted? Lord lord and Theba's curse! It would not be abandonment, he knew. Not when the ship started to move, and him on it or nearly. He'd be the hottest thing on this Cold Hell of a world. But not for long. An instant later he'd be a part of this unknown planet, forever. "HELLFIRE!" He was doing his best to hurry without being so precipitate as to fall-again-when he saw the shapes. He and Hellfire had both thought they had "seen things," and they had agreed it was tricks of imagination aided by environment. There weren't any moving things on this world. It couldn't have any animal life. Now he knew they had not been imagining. They had been seeing things. Real things. And things was the proper word, too. They were on the spaceship with him. Low, hulking, dark, and furry. Immensely broad and bulgy chests. Shoulders that sprouted neckless heads. Shaggy things with splayed feet that formed natural snowshoes. Squinting, he saw that they were short bipeds with two arms-long arms. They were not as tall as a meter and a half, he gauged. Not a one of them with a sign of clothing, and arms down to here. Living creatures on a planet that should have no life; squatty bipeds with natural fur coats and snowshoe feet to make them perfectly suited for this world-Cold Hell. Dwarf yeti, he thought, fleetingly. The fact that his suit-lamps revealed several of the weird hairy dark dwarfs, obviously closing on him, made him think of the possibility of others. He turned. He was right. There were others. The two that had approached from behind now grabbed him. One burst 40 from the laser punched harmlessly into the cold gray of this low-temp, low-oxygen world. Janja, Raunchy and Quindy heard his voice inside the helmets of their pressurized, airtight and air-conditioned spacesuits: "Get your stinking paws off me, you lousy a-" "Trafalgar!" That was Quindy and Janja, almost in unison. "Hellfire!" That from Cinnabar of Jarpi. They did the worst thing possible. They snatched weapons and raced to the airlock. The hatch opened and they crowded into the chamber between pressurized, automatic doors. "Wait," Quindy began, as the inner hatch cycled shut. "One of us had better stay ins-" "You stay then," Cinnabar snapped, its voice doubly electronic, through translation helmet and suit's speaker. "I think you miss my point," Quindy said as the outer hatch began to open. "But you're right at that. It's best that I-" Then the outer hatch was open and all those short gorilloid creatures like sawed-off yeti with dark fur and eyes set way, way back in their heads came swarming all over them. 4 Everyone brays about the value of experience, experience! Lord, lord and Theba's eyelash! You get experience by experiencing what you don't care to experience! -Trafalgar Cuw When Boskar entered the chamber his slave lowered her head so that her yellow hair fell to sweep the floor. Very slowly she raised that head to cast him the most appealing of looks. Her eyes were those of a slave. Boskar loved

the way the light reflected from the shining, hairless black of her skin. "How lovely," he said, "Midnight. What a sweet slavish look! A look beloved of all men . . . you must have been practicing, girl. That must be your very most appealing of looks." She let him see the lowering of her long black lashes over large dark eyes before she lowered her head, slowly. "Are you slave, Midnight?" Long yellow hair shimmered as she nodded, slave Midnight, who had been Quindy and before that Lieutenant Quindy, and before that Quindaridi of Franji. "You nod without replying to your master? You neglect to say 'Yes, Borg Boskar' or 'Yes, Master' or ... What is it you have said in your former language? Oh yes ... 'Yes, "Capten," I am slave.' You say 41 42 none of these to your master upon his return? Will you not speak, slut?" Bound, a slave, she kept her head lowered and was still. "Can it be that I stoppered your mouth, so many hours ago that I have forgotten? Hmmm. I cannot remember. After all, you are only slave, Midnight, and lamentably slick and hairless of skin. And I have important things to occupy my thoughts. Raise your head, slave Midnight, and let me see your mouth." She did, slowly, until their eyes met. Then she lowered hers. He studied her face. "I see white adhesive tape on black skin, contrasting beautifully, but I see no mouth. Can it be that you are not bandaged but gagged, under the-ah yes! I remember now!" Boskar smiled. It was a pleasant enough smile, though Boskar could hardly be called handsome. Knormen, specifically Survivors, of Survival, within the planet Knor, were, by Galactic standards, which is to say, human standards, not, if one were to be factual, totally, a handsome, or even good-looking, race, physically. No matter. He was a worthy master. He knew women, and where women lived, within themselves. He knew his slave Midnight who had been Quindy. He handled her, played her, expertly and with patience and finesse, as the most expert angler had ever played a fish he knew was his. Midnight, who had been Quindy, did not consider herself a fish. Nor did she perceive her master as a fisherman, or as less than well favored. Indeed, she considered him striking, almost majestic, and strikingly good-looking. He knew her. He knew how to master her, to be her master. He knew where inside herself she dwelt, and how to seek and find and possess that person, that essence that was the inner Quindy, now Midnight the slave. His was the ability to make her come alive as woman. To make her leap to his touch, and to be small, 43 and to be truly happy as a woman; as a slave. He knew how to make her miserable, and he knew that in that misery lay happiness. He was kind, in his way, for at least he did not force upon her interminable lectures on the natural superiority of males over females. Borg Boskar, who had liked her slip which had her calling him "Capten" that day, in her (former, barbaric) tongue, knew that giving this slave a measure of misery gave her happiness as it gave him happiness. Her master could make her leap with a word or a touch, leap in her womanly pleasure, and the slave Midnight loved him for that and so saw him as more handsome than he was, for he had the power of life and pain and death over her, and had and could again bully and beat her up, and ring her nipple, and so she was his. And so he pretended to have forgotten that he had so cruelly gagged her, his slave, and only now pretended to remember, and smiled brilliantly upon his bound, gagged, helpless, lovely slave. It was a pleasant enough smile, and she responded. She looked prettily at him. Submissive, sweet soft, gagged to the tonsils. And slowly, she nodded. Yes, that told him, she was gagged because he had gagged her, cruelly, and she told him so with a nod though she knew that he knew and indeed had not forgotten at all. He was not wholly stupid, her master. He pretended to consider. "Let me see. Ah, I believe that I remember now why you appear so grotesquely long of chin. Now I recall! Your master lovingly and with care packed your mouth like a wound, didn't he! One of my crotchers, was it not? Stuffed into your oversize cavern of a slave's mouth? Was that not it?" He stared, then advanced a step. "Answer, slave!" Eyes huge and fearful above the several seams of tape on her lower face, which was indeed unusually elongated, she nodded rapidly. But yellow hair shimmered, like liquefied topaz. 44 "Ah! One of my crotchers, yes." He nodded, smiling. Then he frowned. "And . . . that is all, slave?" Her

eyes large and piteous, submissive and appealing, as she looked up at him from the floor, she shook her head. No. One unit of his underwear was not all her mouth contained. He frowned. "The slave's mouth is stuffed with more than one crotcher? Which, ah yes I remember now, I had just taken off! Wait, I have it ... your sluttish mouth contains two crotchers, mine, doesn't it, slave?" She nodded miserably. Yes. Her mouth was indeed stuffed so, to the tonsils. In fact at first the slave Midnight, who had been First Mate Quindy of spacer Satana, had gagged, repeatedly, because of the bulky pressure of that massive wad of fabric against the back of her throat. But she had forced her mouth and throat to accept her master's stuffing of soiled fabric as they accepted being stuffed with his flesh. That stuffing she relished. This she did not, save that it came from him and pleased him, her master. The two pairs of briefs his people called crotchers propped wide her mouth. They tautened her lips, which were terribly wide apart, hurt her throat, strained even her distended jaws. They exerted upward pressure sufficient to interfere with her breathing and yet she could not breathe through her mouth. Then he had covered her wide-propped mouth and cheeks with the self-adhering tape. She had been miserable for hours. Each hour seemed a day. Then the agony had become a numbness. She wondered if her tongue might not be permanently depressed, if her jaws might be locked forever open. Now she had been mouth-numb for hours, and she felt that she might never be able to close her mouth again. "Well," Boskar said, nodding, "that explains your long-chinned ugliness, doesn't it. You appear to have no mouth at all. But I know that you have indeed, 45 slave Midnight, and it, your mouth, is stuffed, and propped wide open as well, in a soundless scream . . . a shriek of silence! And over that gaping but silent and packed cavern, self-adhering tape from medical stores. My poor slave! And I have been gone and about my business for hours! How I tarried to talk trivia with my friends! The beautiful setting Bladrix made for that fine honey chrysoberyl—a gem big as your nose, Midnight —Gerdax traded for with Gorso, for Gorso's week-long use of Gerdax's beautiful slave . . . oh, what is her name, that beauty? I cannot recall. But of course she is only a slave. The trade, at any rate, was for a week's use of her, in-house, and Gerdax's wife's necklace containing three fine faceted sunstones! And of course Senator Gaid and I tarried to talk of Senator Tobodex, matters far beyond a slave's interest, of course. Too, I paused to watch that overlong Falgo creature as Grud escorted it to see the reflection from the Crystal Cavern! And all this time you waited so patiently! Ah! How slowly I strolled homeward, admiring the view of Senator Godar's slave as he walked her, entirely nude to display her beautiful shining coat quite the color of my own eyes, a lovely girl hi her nudity, save for the heavy cuffs and the lovely ribbons pinned so pertly to her long, long ovals of buttocks! All this time! Is your mouth dry, slave?" She nodded pitifully, glad he had not seen fit to recount any more details. Not just now! Her eyes were eloquent. They bespoke her soft submission, her love, her beseeching, her ability to be manipulated by the most callous verbal cruelty and bad dialog. "And now, would you like your master, Midnight, slave, said I, your master, to remove, slave, from your fat, distended mouth, all that tape, and perhaps, also, slave, my crotchers, both of them?" The silent slave nodded. Gagged by his duty underwear and the commas he employed in order to drag out his manly gloating over her discomfort. 46

"Do you know why, slave, it pleases me to keep you gagged in this way?" Answers were necessary. She shook her head in swirls of yellow, a negative gesture seldom seen in a slave, while he regarded the latitude and longitude of her hair, and the beauty of a woman reduced to a pet. No, Master. "Because it saves us from interminable 'said I-said she' conversations of vapacious idiocy," he told her. "Because my concept of manhood dictates that I crush and mangle you with words. What need have I to aggrandize me by forcing you to sob and sniffingly reply 'Yes Master' again and again while sobbing and abasing your reduced self? Perhaps I prefer you gagged because one grows weary of hearing 'Oh please use me, Master.' Because you are mine, mine, and I and you both well know it, slave who was Quindee and whom it pleases me

to call Midnight." He looked at her in silence for a time, studying her. Then, "Stand for me," said he, "slave." Confused, helpless, a slave and soft, lovely in her bonds, she wriggled for him because she knew that was what he wanted of her. Long had she been secretly aware that she was a natural slave. It was the secret truth and the secret dream of her. But she could not rise for him, as he knew. She knelt as he had left her, hours ago. She had done nothing since. Said nothing, heard little, and moved not at all. She had not napped and had not toppled over. Of that she was proud, in her slavery. Her waist was constricted by a corset of the supple stuff these people fashioned, from some mold or lichen. It was like equhyde, which was like leather; horsehide. It gripped her, restricted her tightly and sorely. It curbed her stomach and her waist and her breathing. Six rings of crystalline agate, each like the rutilated quartz ring in her nipple, glittered on the corset. They were sewn to it, at even intervals around its circumference. Through each of the rings a cord had been 47 passed. He had threaded it there, with fetishistic metic-ulousness. The two ends of that cord ran behind her, taut as she knelt. It was tied, as he had tied it, hours ago, to the rings sewn into her ankle cuffs, behind her, which were of a pearly gray. She was on her knees and her cuff-encircled ankles were thus linked to her corseted waist. The slave Midnight could not rise for her master, as he knew. Her arms were bent upward at the elbows. The cuffs on her wrists were linked to her collar. She was quite helpless and had exerted prideful effort to remain erect rather than topple sideward to the floor. Her natural state, he said, which was slavery, made her proud and careful of her appearance. It was unassailable logic- in Survival. Her legs were long since gone numb. Her hands and forearms were not quite numb; they tingled. Their circulation was only hampered, not restricted. Boskar, all 161 sems of him,\* went to her in his masterly majesty. His iridescent tunic shimmered in polychromatic glory as he went to her, watching her kneel and cower submissively before him, a free Knorman of Survival. Kneeling, she was of course shorter than he. He bent to touch her. He touched her, his slave. Her body rose to his touch, as a slave of Survival. She trembled, yearning to his touch. He straightened and turned from her. He clapped his hands with a flash of his bracelet. "Quemesse!" he called sharply. "Come and rip the tape from the face of this slave!" Behind him and at his feet the nostrils of his gagged slave flared. Rip, he had said. Still, she supposed, that was probably more merciful. Peeling the paste-backed stuff off slowly would hurt \* Five and one-quarter feet, Old Style. 48 more, and longer, than tearing the tape off swiftly. Merciful master!-so long as none of her skin came off with it. (He had already learned that her shining blackness was not merely superficial, that is, epidermal. Whip-torn or -burst skin came back black. Knormen, of course, had no knowledge of the science of cyto-chromatic engineering-that is, cell dye.) His slave Quemesse came racing in on bare feet. She was naked but for her down and jingly bracelets and ankle cuffs and heavy dangling piercing earrings and single, belled milker-ring and the three transpiercing rings of multi-faceted crystal agate that formed a row down her downy left arm. Her heels, as she ran, did not slap, for Quemesse was a well-trained and dutiful slave. Both of them watched with pleasure the fear and pain in the eyes of the slave Midnight while Quemesse ripped one, two, then three and four criss-crossing strips of tape from her lower face. Tears ran and the slave's cheeks quivered as the self-adhering medical tape was torn away and torn away. Once all eleven strips were removed, the slave Midnight's lower face was revealed. The blood that had rushed to the surface of her skin could not be discerned, because of her jet blackness. Indeed that lower face did appear long, with the mouth straining so wide-distended, stuffed! The stuffing of soiled cloth remained held in place by the slender cord that ran around her face, hofizon-tally, cutting into her cheeks. It was tied behind her head. It was obvious now that the tape had not been necessary, to hold the oral stuffing in place. It was just that it had looked better, or so he had felt, and it had pleased her master to place it there. The appearance of her face now was esthetically displeasing to her master. "Remove the cord." He



stood over them, the master of them both. 49 Quemesse tried. She tried, whimpering. She exaggerated her motions to show her master how hard she was striving to loose the cord from the face of the other slave, the funny-looking one with no smooth sheen of down to cover the obscenely naked jet of her skin. Quemesse found it most strange that this slave without body hair was so warm to the touch. "Oh Master," Quemesse said at last in a tiny voice, looking piteously up at him, helpless to untie the knot in the cord. It was his knot. "I am only a slavegirl, Master. I cannot free my master's knot." The slave Midnight had a most un-slavish thought. Stupid little mouse, she thought. Glaring down at his slave of four years-traded for, with Garnax, without further consideration on either side-Boskar drew his knife of native Knorese obsidian. She stared fearfully at the instrument, its needly point directed at her face, its grip of leathern wrappings in his fist. The blade, a better surgical instrument than steel, glittered. He touched her cheek with it. Only touched, watching her flinch, then flipped it so that it flashed pure menace hi the light of the chamber. He caught it by the blade, expertly despite its surgical sharpness, and extended the grip to her. A Master of Survival proffered his needle-pointed, razor-edged knife to his fearful slave. A bright ruby bead of blood marked her cheek where it had touched, only touched her. She took the knife diffidently. Her attitude showed that she did not wish to take it from him. She did not want it in her hand. The slave Midnight flinched, now. Quemesse did not like her, she knew. Quemesse had the gleaming sliver of obsidian. She looked at Midnight. Midnight grew warmer, with tension. Her large dark eyes looked at the knife, and into Quemesse's face. Quemesse cut the cord that circled the face of the 50 cringing, fearful new slave. Good woven cord, it nevertheless parted in an instant. The master extended his hand to Quemesse, palm open. Knormen grew no down on palms, or soles, or nose-tips, or nipples. The skin there was cream, or pale buff, 01 a sort of oyster-white. A bare palm was extended to Quemesse. The knife she held would have severed those three fingers in one second, transpierced his palm in two. She laid the knife in his palm. He closed his hand on the grip. Holding the knife in his left hand, he slid his othet hand into Quemesse's hair. He tilted back her head a little, baring her throat, where her down was paler. Her pulse throbbled there, visibly. Her eyes closed and she trembled. He tugged, her master Borg Boskar. She came sinuously up from her knees before the kneeling other slave. Her movement was fluid, unconsciously sensuous. "Run, slave." Quemesse turned and fled, rings jingling. The rings piercing her arm were arranged so as to overlap slightly, forming a sort of triple-8 down her upper arm. They chimed when she ran, really ran, as she now did. Lights flashed from the crystal facets, in yellow and purple and cerulean. Then she was gone from the chamber. Boskar squatted before his down-less, onyx-hued slave. So the skinny one was commander of their craft and this was her second, eh? This cringing natural slave with her soft soft eyes and flashing topaz waves of hair and gleaming skin like polished onyx and black lashes and brows and her hairless, meaty pubes. Borg Boskar chuckled aloud. Oh, of course! "Push with your tongue," he bade her, and slowly, making it last unnecessarily, he drew out of her mouth one, and then both pair of his undertrunks. "They are not sodden," he observed. "They are not 51 as wet as one would imagine, for crotchers having been stuffed in your cavernous mouth for so many hours." She made no reply. She could not speak. She was slave, and she was working her jaws or trying to, wincing, .moving dry lips and a dry tongue in a mouth imitating a desert. She could not form words in her arid throat. She said nothing, his exotic topaz-haired slave of black jade, for she could not. She continued to wince as she worked her jaws and her lips. "The slave would like a drink?" "Yes-s-s . . . Master." It was hard for her, forming the words; they emerged as the husking sound of dry deciduous leaves blowing in autumn. "And to be untied?" "If . . . my mas-ter wish-es," she managed, slowly, the slave. It was a good answer, she was sure. He shrugged. "Later. First, the drink." He rose and stood over her. She tilted back her head and opened her aching mouth, his dutiful and dry-mouthed

slave. He gave her a drink. Later she said, "Does it not make me ugly for you, Master, having the rope passed around my waist and stomach this way, three times, and twisted so tightly by the stick, and tied so tightly? I bulge over the rope." At the last her voice was almost a wail. He cuffed her so that she turned her head aside, half obscured by the streaming yellow swirl of her hair. "Black flesh bulging over white cord. No, Midnight. It does not make you ugly. Your master's constriction makes you beautiful." "Beautiful? Really?" He did something swift and obscene to her. "Now you are merely asking for compliments, brat." They lay in bed, not quite in darkness. He was naked. So was she, but for the three strands of finger-thick rope about her middle, and the ring imbedded in 52 the puckered skin of her right areola. The nipple was larger than its former twin. She sighed. After a time she stretched, rubbing luxuriously against the soft, soft coating of fur on her master's body. She writhed as she stretched, like a great black cat, and parted her legs into a broad V. "Master?" His hand pressed into the fulcrum of the V, pressed. "Never get enough, do you? Say it." "Use me as a woman, master, though I am only a slave?" "My slave." "Your slave, Master." He squeezed her mound and his sigh was just short of elaborate. "The trouble with you natural slaves is- you are a natural slave, Midnight?" "Yes, Master. I am a natural slave." "Umm. I believe it to be true." "Uh," she gasped, as his three fingers bent back and entered her. "The trouble with you natural slaves is that you expect so much attention. You are so selfish, and so ... unimaginative. You expect your master to do everything, and even beg it of him. Thus do the chains of slavery have two ends! All-father and Inner Fires of Knor, girl, what arrogance! What sickly lack of imagination!" "A slave is naturally . . . diffident, Master," she told him, putting a hand on his thigh with the trepidation of one touching a stove to see whether it was hot (It was not; the down-coat served to keep in the body heat. Thus he always felt cooler than she-but she was the one who was usually just short of comfortable with the temperature. "We are accustomed to being told." "Told?" "Yes, Master. Told. Tell your slave what you wish, Master." "I tell you that a man need not always take. A man who has no doubt of his manhood has no fear of a 53 woman who makes love, who is what might be called 'aggressive,' rather than merely providing a convenient cradle with a hole in it. I tell you, Midnight: Love me, slave." She turned and partially rose over his supine form. Her touch was diffident, at first. Her hand fondled high between his thighs. Bending her head, she began to tongue his nipples. Soon he was writhing, and she was proud. She moved lower and began to tongue, then to suck him. In her mouth, he grew. After a time his hands were in her hair. Thus he forced her and she was happier, more sure of herself. Secure. A proper and natural slave, Quindy thought, insofar as she was just now capable of thought, knows where she stands when she's being held and face-fucked. 5 Lichens can grow in very hostile environments, including many regions of Antarctica. -James Oberg, in *Omni*, 1981 In icy Antarctica ... eukaryotic algae and fungi, which are more complex organisms-with nucleus -and more closely resemble cells of higher animals [live inside rocks]. They form a primitive, lichen-like association. -Gene Bylinsky, *Life In Darwin's Universe*, (Doubleday), 1981 Some lichens... modify the rock on which they live by boring into it. . . . Algae, and higher plants, split water into hydrogen and oxygen. They remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and combine it with hydrogen to make carbohydrates, or sugars and starches. -Bylinsky, *ibid*. After its "performance" Cinnabar retired to a small rearward mini-cavern-these bulge-chested, downy shorties called them rooms, and that was easiest. It settled onto the bunk provided there for a snack and . . . loneliness. 54 55 Long ago Thomas Wolfe wrote that loneliness was the "central, inevitable fact of human existence." That was hyperbolic Wolfean exaggeration, and totally subjective. Furthermore, the Galactic-human-captives of Survival were not lonely. Loneliness was, however, a central fact of Cinnabar's existence here. Loneliness and horniness. The Jarp lingered over its snack, wishing for a good stiff jolt or three and a platter of butter-soaked, poached Jarp ayolsh.

Oh, this stuff was tasty enough. Still, it was hardly proper food. Oh, of course it is, Cinnabar thought. It's perfectly good food, really. Better than a lot of the cloned and recycled stuff I've eaten on Satana. It's just that I am lonely, and bitter. That makes me try to feel superior, and that means being snotty-critical. Which I cannot express to them, and -would not if I could make them understand me. I'm lonely, set apart, snotty, critical, and homy. And, thinking it would give a finger for a holoviewer and a cassette or two-and two fingers for some sort of sexual companionship-the Jarp munched its late-Survival-evening snack of the food of Survival. The food of the mountain-contained city derived from a variety of lichens and various fungi and fungoid forms. Ingeniously cultivated, manured, husbanded, cultured and amended, harvested and combined and prepared. It was the epitome of scientific achievement in a contained, precarious culture that had to fear and eschew science because it dared not progress. Survival's perimeter and parameters were fixed. Survival had nowhere to grow. The likeliest result of progress in such a society was ruin. Change could destroy Survival, as it had so many cultures on so many planets, throughout the past. And science brought change. The lichens and fungi that were its foodstuffs came brilliant, in yellow and pinks, scarlet and white and lavenders that ranged into violet. (That was rathix, 56 which tasted more like peppered potatoes than anything and which was just ridiculously packed with protein.) Tiny brown mushrooms did their best to seem/taste (almost) fruity. Big black ones could almost pass for bread. Its spores were positively peppery. Andwig was a good carbohydrate source. With water and the borer-lichen called llemira, it readily formed dough. The dough baked well. Unfortunately its flavor was hopelessly bland. That, along with its moribund whiteness, called for coloring and this or that flavoring. Salt, for instance; that mine was nearly two kilometers away, along a tunnel. Sucrose, for instance, from fralt. A bit of degral helped, too, and a tinier bit of berand, which was too fiery hot to eat but did yield a nice pink dye. (It also induced diarrhea in some, regularity in others.) Then there was the filamentous lichen called Eye of the Beholder and often merely (the Knorese equivalent of) Eyebolder. It was easily woven into a fabric and thence into clothing, thin as gossamer or almost as thick as anyone might want. Eyebolder fabric was an iridescent stuff, like dewy cobweb seen through a prism of warm sunlight. It led to the shimmering, beautiful clothing that was so prominent in Survival. Boiled, Eye of the Beholder yielded a blue dye and a sort of gluey stuff that aged to become sugary crystals. Despite its purplish shades, rathix when subjected to extreme cold and then to heat yielded a maroon or brown dye that was only occasionally that lovely hue with the distinctly unlovely name: puce. It had a prettier name in Knorese. Knormen calling themselves scientists devoted themselves to the attempt to produce that color willingly, consistently. Fry the very meaty yellow fungus degral and it became a really dreadful crystalline gunk whose hardness was a five, on the gemstone scale-slightly harder than a copper coin. It was cut as a decorative stone. De- 57 gralite formed part of the design on many walls, in Survival. Bake degral, on the other hand, and it might have been a tightly packed meat loaf. Deliberately overheat the mushroom in its natural living state, with a carefully small infusion of water and the tiniest addition of urine, and it sprouted a weird red-and-tan mold. That mold was not only inedible, it was poisonous. It was called degralex, and was not for eating. Yet with the addition of a bit of Eye of the Beholder and a varying, controlled heat plus a lot of elbow-grease pounding, degralex became leathery. From that, gran, came tabletops and chair covers, doorway hangings and even doors (inner-braced with human bone), belts and sheaths and shoes. And straps that were like rawhide. They ranged from broad thick ones to sum laces and binding cords for slaves. (The partial lacings of gran in the upper portion of the tunics of many men was a flaunted symbol; binding strap for women was always ready to hand!) Glass was easy; there was glass in Survival. It was hardly the best, but it was glass, and it was prized. Despite a lot of ancient speculative bullshit, silicon had never produced cognitive or even intelligent

life, the next form down. But it still made glass, even in Survival, within the planet called Knor. Silver and gold the original Survivors had brought in with them, and iron and steel as well. No vein of either had been located in all the hundreds of years-Knor of tunneling. Coated with a paste made from boiled berand infused with a bit of copper, the iron refused to rust in this underground environment. Iron of fantastic age was still in use, in Survival. Those first Survivors had also brought wood. Seren-dipitously, they had learned to petrify it. That accounted for the wood-grained walls and pillars and even furniture of stone, in Survival. Silver and gold were of course eminently salvageable, 58 retrievable; capable of being reworked and re-reworked. Little of the wonderful jewelry of Survival was forever, no matter how beautiful and intricate. Only in the matter of jewelry, gauds, were the Survivors effete esthetes. That bracelet, these fine thin woven-wire earrings, this armlet no matter how ornate or inlaid and stone-studded, were expendable. The same was true of belt buckles that could be called magnificent, and shoe buckles. The artisans merely reworked. Or the owners, since jewelry work was a popular hobby in Survival. A tunnel dug for thirty-one years had come upon a fabulous vein of amethyst, containing also rose quartz and the strange black crystalline rods of tourmaline. A branch of that tunnel encountered a smallish vein of aluminum oxide: corundum. Smallish . . . but this was colored corundum. How huge, after all, could one wish one's rubies and sapphires to be? (True, the colorless variety was popular in Survival, too, prized for its hardness: nine, on the gemstone scale of ten.) That dangerous and eerie hole they called the Crystal Cavern yielded a great deal of both rutilated and clear quartz-crystal-at a depth of about a half-kilometer. And, once they had broken into the Crystal Cavern centuries ago (and liberated its gas; there was a monument), a form of rathix had begun to appear there. They called it filathix. Wonderfully rilling, filathix, if a bit loosening of the bowels-and for some reason loaded with chemical vitamin C. That it also colored the urine a shocking yellow was of no consequence; the yellow-to-orange dye was wonderful and welcome. Filathix dye provided the distinctive color of the robes of members of the Thirty-two, for one thing. Irreverent Survivors still occasionally (and quietly) called those men piss-robes. Knormen died, going down into the Flamepit to make use of the ever-bubbling lava there. Its noxious fumes (most of them) were chimneyed away along a natural tunnel. It in turn was extended and turned so as to 59 harness the hot gases for Survival's use. Thence it was "piped" to the surface: Outside. Nevertheless the Flamepit remained a dangerous place to be, and to descend into, and rotten duty. Now it was mostly women who went down into the Flame-pit. They were watched, supervised, monitored, and guarded-by men-for they were rebels, Societal incor-rigibles. Woe to her who displeased too seriously!-who truly rebelled against her master-or was accused of it. She became a hajanis, or lava-worker, and her life expectancy was not impressive. It was no tribute to Survivor society that the very word for lava-worker now ended in the feminine form. One of the ugliest pieces of intelligence learned concerned the woman Shilthees. Call it unintelligence. Shilthees just could not keep her mind and hands off designing gauds. That was art; creation. Art was for the artisans. It was not a woman's work; a woman could not be an artisan. Shilthees would not stop because she could not. Now she was a hajanis. (An ugly footnote was that here and there throughout Survival were cherished gauds, never to be "recycled" or even parted with. They were the creations of Shilthees.) Everyone knew that much of the design and even the intricate work on the genius Bladrix's creations came from the brain and wonderful hands of his woman Lee-ralis. But that was different. Leeralis knew her place. She made Bladrix famous and respected and in demand; she was well treated and allowed to continue to do what she loved to do. What more could a woman want? Not even that dangerous and doubtless deranged liberal Tobodex was so mad as to suggest otherwise. Tobodex was intelligent, and possessed a mind that at least tilted on its axis toward the scientific pole. It was the noble Senator Tobodex who had recognized Cinnabar's "yes" and "no" whistles. Calling

them signals, Tobodex spread the word among his fellows. 60 They did not want that knowledge. Most refused to believe (or to accept) that readily provable concept. They were unwilling to give the orange thing opportunity to prove cognition; high intelligence. It was simple: Cinnabar was not human. Therefore it had to be a lower creature. Therefore how could it possess language? Oddly, it was not Tobodex but Graborn who secretly questioned the Jarp. The circumstances were very private. Cinnabar had retired to the boredom of a bunk—a "divan"—in a rearward chamber of Commonweal Hall. The Jarp had given up watching what followed Knorese dinner parties, since it had only its own four-fingered double-thumbed hand for release of sexual excitement. Yet it was so hard not to watch, however frustrating! Clandestinely peeping while its boozy "betters" disported themselves in licentious freeform games. . . . The entry of Graborn surprised Cinnabar more than a little. It was even shocking. Graborn had to be the only man who had not gotten drunk at this evening's dinner party. The only person there who was not participating in the orgy! Graborn carefully arranged the gran doorway covering or arras after his entry. "I would like to talk to you," he said quietly, "quietly." Cinnabar went tense. Then the Knorman/Survivor added, "Actually it is my hope to talk with you," and Cinnabar's tension became soaring excitement. 6 There are many routes to a common language between civilizations in space. We can teach each other laboriously as babes are taught . . . even if we are one type and they are a band of 14-legged spiders. —Frank Drake, SETI (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence) Cinnabar did not rise from the low beige-spread bunk it occupied, but it poised, ready for-it hoped-anything. Anything except what came. "Is it true that you understand me?" Graborn asked, a Knorman of Survival fully two decimeters shorter than the orange hermaphrodite he surprised and began at once to question. "Please don't gesture or nod- reply in your language." Cinnabar blinked those huge eyes and said, "T'lee." "Is it true that the sound you just made is your name?" "Twoo," Cinnabar said, in the language of Jarpi. "Is it true that that sound signifies a negative response?" "T'lee." Why, this homely little Knorman was actually asking intelligent questions! Cinnabar sat up excitedly, but decided not to rise and thus point up the dis- 61 62 parity in their heights. Simply put, Jarps were not short; Knormen were short. Graborn was nodding, eyes narrowed. He scratched his finely downed chest under the ornately coiled medallion he wore, of gold and silver and formed crystal set with patterned jasper and chrysoprase and a good flashy cabochon of citrine, yellow as the jonquils he had never seen. "Is it true that the sound you just made—" Graborn attempted a badly trilled t'lee—"is the positive, or assent?" "T'lee," Cinnabar repeated, instantly. "Is it true that my name is Balodrex?" "Twoo." "Is my name Grathbo?" "Twoo." "Is my name Graborn?" "T'lee." "You are an intelligent creature, are you not?" "T'lee." "Were you captain of the otherworld craft?" "Twoo." "Was the one called Falgo captain?" "Twoo." "The one called Janja—was she captain?" "Twoo." "Is she—the one called Janja-Borg Barso's woman?" "Tlee," Cinnabar agreed, reluctantly. At least this man had not said "slave." And Cinnabar was excited. It was actually being interviewed, treated as other than an animal—an orange thing—and a single-instrument chamber orchestra! "Was the one called Hellfire captain?" "T'lee." "And the one called Quindee—was she captain?" "Twoo." Graborn studied the alien. Graborn, too, was excited. An intelligent being! A thinking being! It under- 63 stood; it responded, and every response was correct or at least in accord with what Falgo had told them! Now to test further. Graborn formulated a more difficult query, one that called for understanding beyond basic; an ability to reason in something approaching the abstract. "Then it is true that the one called Hellfire was not captain of that craft?" Even a human, even a Knorman would have hesitated a second over that one, to make sure it had the convolution right. Cinnabar did, and replied: "Twoo." "Ahhh;" Graborn smiled. "So, then. You are more than a musician, aren't you." "T'lee." "Umm. You were a passenger on that craft?" After a hesitation: "Twoo." That unexpected and seemingly reluctant denial brought a frown to Graborn's face. "You were not a passenger

on the craft of which the one named Hellfire was captain?" "Twoo." "But ... ah! Were you one of the workers on the craft?" These poor creatures don't have spacecraft, or ships or even seas, Cinnabar thought, or any damned sort of conveyance at all. "One of the workers" translates as "crew," then. And the Jarp whistled the affirmative. Graborn's face re-lit. Nodding, he pondered for a time. Then he held out his hands, well apart. "If this hand is true, yes, right; and over here is false, no, wrong . . . what lies between?" " 'Woo'dleetl." Graborn tried that sound. He failed to reproduce it. It held not just two notes but three, one so close to another as to require, for instance, an extra key on a piano. Not possible? Ah, but it is not only possible among those of Jarpi, it: is truth. "Ahhh. So now we can really converse, for you can say 'yes' to me, and 'no' and 'perhaps,' and I can understand. Wonderful! Is that not so?" "T'lee!" And the excited Jarp added, " 'Woo'dleetl." "Yes." Graborn smiled wryly. "Perhaps, indeed. Almost, we can converse. Now you are both male and female, is that correct?" "T'lee." "But neither one nor the other-is that correct?" "Twoo." "Hm. You are indeed both, then." "T'lee." "Functioning? As both?" "T'lee." I'd be glad to demonstrate, squirt, "And the man Falgo s-ah. He says that your name is 'Cinnabar,' which means quallac. Is that true?" "Tlee." Cinnabar pointed to itself, to its skin, and to its questioner's bracelet. Part of its design was obviously enameled with orange-red mercuric sulfide: cinnabar. Quallac, in their language. The Jarp trilled. "Hm." Graborn put his head on one side. "That sound means quallac, used in this enamel--which in Falgo's language is 'zinjafr' or 'cinnabar'?" "T'lee." "Your name then is Cinnabar?" "T'lee!" "You would prefer to be called that, here, than the same word in our tongue, quallac?" "T'lee." "And Falgo is your craft's captain, is that so?" "Twoo," Cinnabar trilled instantly, and added four notes that meant "Asshole!" "Hoho, with emphasis and something added, eh? He was part of the workers, then, as you were?" Cinnabar hesitated, gestured, then whistled, "T'lee... twoo." "Ah! Another concept? Another abstract? Have you said 'yes and no'?" "T'lee." "Now you have initiated an abstract! Wonderful! 65 Meaning that what I said is true and yet not true-sort of true? True only to a degree?" "T'lee." "Falgo was less specifically a worker on the craft than you?" "T'lee." "Ah! And you can conceptualize, and think and answer in the abstract! We do progress, Cinnabar! Oh- can you learn to speak our language?" Cinnabar looked sad, made the Sadness Gesture, and touched its mouth. "Twoo." "It is impossible for you to speak my language because of the way your mouth is made?" "T'lee!" No sense trying to go further, and get across the concept of its narrow, pointed tongue. Graborn seemed ready to dance about. "It is incredible how far we have progressed so swiftly! All because I pondered, and tried to--has Tobodex made such an attempt?" Cinnabar waggled a hand. " 'Woo'dleetl." The Jarp paused a moment before adding, "T'lee . . . twoo." The Knorman considered that. "Tobodex made some attempt, but you and he did not progress to the extent you and I have done?" Cinnabar gave him the Respect Gesture of Jarpi. "T'lee." "Hmmm. And a gesture," Graborn said, his fingers moving under his medallion. Not quite scratching. "What-oh. You cannot explain. Ah-is the gesture also an affirmative?" "Twoo." "A sign for emphasis?" "Twoo." "A ... congratulatory gesture?" "T'lee!" Graborn stared, then laughed aloud. "I believe I have just been congratulated on my perception by an alien my fellows consider a lower life form, without cognition or language!" 66 Cinnabar sat quite still and looked at the Knorman solemnly. Cinnabar recognized dangerous ground, and wished it had never made the gesture. These arrogant flainers! Still . . . Graborn seemed more of a pure-knowledge seeker than one more arrogant bastard of a Survivor. "Cinnabar . . . I've an idea I know the answer, but. . . could I learn to speak your language?" "Twoo . . . Voo'dleetl." "Urnm. Probably no, is that your meaning?" "T'lee." The short Knorman in the longish eyebolder robe nodded. He looked solemn, pensive. "Cinnabar . . . my name is Graborn. Grahb-bornn. Can you say that?" "Twoo." "Hmm. Can you invent a simple sound, then, that you can use as a name for me? One I can recognize instantly?" Cinnabar considered. Studied

the man before it. Call him Yes-Yes? No, that was stupid. Cinnabar nodded. It uttered four notes, slowly. They were unheld, with equal emphasis, to make up one bar; G, A, F (down a full octave), F. Re, mi, do, do. Graborn hummed his attempt to reproduce the sound; Cinnabar repeated; Graborn tried again, heard the difference--thought all these monkeys were tone-deaf, the Jarp thought--and tried again. Got it. Cinnabar nodded frenetically and whistled double-yes. It decided against the Respect Gesture. Graborn tried it again--wrong; again, and had it right again. The Jarp whistled yes and this time made the respectful sign that Graborn took for congratulation. "That, ah, set of notes for me ... they don't mean something . . . bad, do they? Disrespectful? Obscene?" "Twoo." Cinnabar whistled G-A-F-F again and made the gesture again. "I believe you. The sound stands for Graborn. Nat- 67 urally your language doesn't substitute sounds for our vowels and consonants or even combinations, specifically ... it is your language. And it has more sounds, more shadings, than our language, hasn't it?" "T'lee." "And more sounds than the language of the other four? Your companions?" "T'lee." "I know this is exciting to both of us, Cinnabar, Quallac. But we must bring it to a stop, for now. I have an idea, and I shall try to implement it. Sunlight and All-father! You are alien to them, your companions; and to us, and you are as intelligent as I ... and you are allowed only to ... to provide dinner music. Music! Indeed it is--the music of an intelligent-cognitive people: your language!" Cinnabar looked dolorously at the Knorman. "You must be lonely! Even unhappier than your- but no, they are happy." Cinnabar felt it wisest not to comment, not even with a "yes-no." Despite his efforts and his enlightened attitude, Graborn was after all one of them. A Knorman of Knor; a Survivor of Survival. (I only hope that I survive Survival, the Jarp thought.) Best not to let the fellow know that the "orange thing" was aware of the chemical control of the others off spacer Satana--and that the drink did not affect the entirely different Jarp system. "Best I depart your company now, Cinnabar, and- oh! But of course, wait! You are mammal, and a sexual being. Was one of your kind on the craft that bore you here, Cinnabar?" "Twoo." "Hmm. Do, uh, your kind have sexual drives? Needs?" "T'lee! T'lee!" Graborn was too obviously fighting back his smile at the Jarp's vehemence. "You are both sexes in the same form, is that so? You- 68 "T'lee." "You bear eggs and you fertilize them? Your own?" "Twoo." "Hm. Too much question? Probably. Again, then: you have breasts for nurturing young, and the female sex organ. Does it produce an egg?" "T'lee." "You also have the male organ and, I am told, one testicle. Does that mean that you also function as the male?" "T'lee." "And fertilize the egg of a female?" "T'lee." "Uh--in the female? That is, as we do?" "T'lee!" "Yes to everything. You are as you appear. Functionally bisexual. But your negative reply . . . oh. Is it true that you do not fertilize your own-" "T'lee!" "--egg," Graborn finished, and smiled, nodding. "I see. It takes two of your kind, then, just as it does ours. It is just that you have the necessary equipment for both functions. Oh--are all your kind so made?" "T'lee." "Interesting. Fascinating! Some would call it incredible. Some would say too that it is a primitive mechanism . . . yet the man Falgo has dared say that an advancement of science long ago among his people proved the male to be unnecessary. That was not well received, in Survival! Thus who is to know what is primitive and what is advanced?" Certainly not your people, Cinnabar mused, but kept a straight face and looked attentive. "Perhaps the most advanced mechanism would be one that is female only, and that . . . what?---produces two eggs, that bond to each other? Hmm. Sounds hardly controllable! And who would provide guidance in a world only of females?" No matter how bright and scientifically minded and 69 curious he is, the Jarp reminded itself, I must remember that he is unable to think beyond his Survival/Knorman acculturation. Who to provide guidance, indeed! "I must ponder and puzzle on that one," Graborn was saying. "But--in that case, the next most advanced form of being might well be one that combines both sexes in the same organism. You, then. Your kind. Hmm." Abruptly Graborn gave his head a hard shake, as if to clear it of extraneous thoughts that could be thrown

aside physically. "But I have lost track of my original reason for asking you about your . . . sexuality. Another question then, Cinnabar. Oh-Jarp, is that it? You are called Jarp-that is, a Jarp?" "T'lee." "And on the craft that brought you here with those others-not Jarps. They are different, but essentially the same. You are the very different one. Among them, with them-you functioned as both male and female?" "Flee." "You functioned sexually with both the women and the man Falgo?" "Twoo." "Hmm. Equipped for both, but you . . . did not act, sexually, with Falgo?" "T'lee!" Graborn looked happy with that answer, but then he frowned. "I asked that badly. Did you act, sexually, with the women of your craft?" "T'lee." "With . . . all of them?" "T'lee." Cinnabar held up three fingers. Long fingers, and very orange. "By the Inner Fires! I had not even thought of counting! But we are communicating; what need have we to count or try to do sums? We know our intelligence. Now-and will you tell me, did you act, sexually, with the man Falgo?" "Twoo." Again Graborn showed happiness, the poor hung-up 70 Knorman pig-monkey, Cinnabar thought. So I am not-ptui-homosexual, eh bigot, and that makes me better? Doubtless homosexuality is disgrace and crime, in poor backward Survival! Hmm . . . but among the women? I just wonder! "Thus when not among your own kind, you perform the sexual act but not with males?" Cinnabar had experienced it both ways, but felt it expedient to whistle yes and let it go at that. When in Survival, say what the Survivors want to hear! "Ahh." Graborn was smiling. Then he went all dolorous of face. "But now, since you have been here you have been denied, isn't that so? You long, and have need for . . . a female?" Cinnabar nodded with much enthusiasm and whistled yes, twice. Graborn nodded slowly, thinking. Pondering. "Hmm," he said, scratching idly under his medallion. "Certainly I understand the mandates of hunger and sex, the anarchy that can result from their denial! Cinnabar: I shall try to help." Cinnabar remained still, refraining from hugging the homely downy little fellow. "Now can you tell me of some ability you have that I can use . . . that Survival might perhaps use?" / have to prove worth to these sawed-off farts? I? Simple, surely. Except that most of its abilities and knowledge were beyond the knowledge and level of Survival, and thus of no value in Survival. Cinnabar pondered, and began to sweat. The Jarp stared, huge-eyed as always, at the Knorman. 7 The mere endeavor to see and learn the truth for our personal satisfaction is indeed a commencement for making it prevail. -Matthew Arnold Big round eyes stared at Graborn of Survival from the roundedly triangular, rather sweet face of the Jarp. And then Cinnabar had the answer. It knew. It put forth a staying hand before rising slowly from the bunk on which Graborn had found it taking its rest. It pointed to its eyes, and closed them tightly. For good measure, it held one six-digitated hand over its own closed eyes. Again it made a staying motion with the other hand. "You-want me to approach you?" "Twoo!" Dummy! "You do not want me to approach you." "T'lee," Cinnabar replied, and took a step toward the Knorman. "Ahh-you wish me to back as you advance?" "Twoo, twoo!" "Ah! You cannot see, but do not wish me to move, is that it, Cinnabar?" "T'lee." Slowly, emitting a sustained series of high-pitched notes from the little round aperture of its mouth, the 71 72 Jarp approached the Knorman. It stopped just before it reached him, just when Graborn knew that the next step would bring collision. "G-A-F-F," it whistled, and began backing, still emitting the high note, very rapidly. When it sounded about the same returning frequency and time as before, Cinnabar stopped and opened its eyes. The Jarp did not glance around. It stood a sem this side of the bunk. Graborn was staring, uncomprehending. "You approached me with your eyes closed and covered, and stopped, and you returned, backing away. You stopped." "T'lee," Cinnabar said, feeling helpless. Oh to be able to say more than yes-no-maybe! Had this creature no concept of that ability that had been Jarps' since they were only animals, competing for survival and eventual dominance on Jarpi with its ridiculous rotation and its long, long nights? Was there no way to make this Survivor understand how those pre-Jarps had evolved to become the dominant race and rulers of Jarpi-because they could see in the



dark and move swiftly in the dark, among other things? Had there never been bats in these damned caves of Knor? How, with a vocabulary consisting of yes-no-maybe, to explain such a relatively simple concept, when it was inconceivable? A few gestures persuaded the puzzled Graborn to remove his sash and hand it to the orange being that- to him-was a towering giant by thirty or so centimeters. Cinnabar demonstrated. The sash was to be a blindfold. After satisfying himself that it could not be seen, through, Graborn nodded. Cinnabar knelt on the bunk, facing the chamber's rear wall, while the Knorman tied the cloth about the Jarp's head. Graborn satisfied himself that Cinnabar was blinded. Then he backed away. He watched while the alien slipped back off the bunk 73 and onto its feet, turned, lowered its head a bit, and began emitting that steady monotony of sound best described as peep-peep-peep. The sightless Jarp walked around the chair unerringly. It paced to the wall. It stopped just before reaching it. It turned, pointed, and pantomimed. "You want me to move the chair?" "T'lee." As the puzzled Knorman was doing so, quietly, the thought occurred to him: "Do you want it out of your way or merely somewhere else-oh." With a sheepish smile visible to no one, he repeated the first part of the question. Cinnabar replied in the negative. "Then you want me to place the chair somewhere else, but not out of the way?" "T'lee." Graborn did that. He set the chair down quietly. He moved away from it to stand by the "leather"-curtained doorway. "Ready." He was impressed by the speed with which the sightless Jarp walked forward. Head lowered partway, peep-peep-peeping. It swerved this way and that in a way that seemed careless. It approached the chair, stopped, pointed at it, leaned forward to tap it. Turning from the chair, it paced to another wall-and stopped just before impacting the decorated stone. There it turned to face the staring Survivor. "All-father! You have shown me that you can move while blindfolded and avoid any obstacle!! So long as you make that constant sound . . . the echo warns you? Can your sense of hearing and distance possibly be so well developed?" "T'lee! T'lee!" "Hail and ice! Incredible! You could walk in darkness! Traverse the utter darkness of an unlighted tunnel even, and swiftly! Very well, friend Cinnabar, I perceive and I am convinced. Why try to trick me? I have 74 to believe you could do what you have done no matter what the size of the room. Do remove the blindfold." Cinnabar did, blinking a few times, and eased forward to hand the cloth to the Knorman-at the length of its orange arm. That way, Cinnabar knew, it did not seem so towering to this being of a much shorter species. Graborn accepted the sash and restored it around his three-quarter-length robe. Meanwhile, he frowned. In thought, Cinnabar hoped, rather than in puzzlement. Graborn had grasped the concept of echolocation, hadn't he? "Hmmm. Cinnabar, in a way that has not been too insulting to one who for all I know is a genius or a senator or a practitioner of high knowledge, we have established your intelligence. Also your cognition, and possession of language. And now this ability. Hmm. Perhaps your species developed on a dim world or some place of much darkness, so that your eyes are so large and you have the, uh, echo-recognizing ability?" "T'lee . . . twoo." "Yes and no. Almost right, is that about it?" "T'lee." "Umm. And the ability is impressive! However, it is dangerous to you here, or potentially dangerous, anyhow. You could be condemned to the darkness of a new tunnelway. We are constantly digging, excavating tunnels, winding about within the mountain, and moving off into new side-corridors. Thus we had best not, you and I, use that ability as my reason for wishing to interview you. That is, to have private time with you." Graborn sighed. "I shall think of something, Cinnabar. You are a patient individual, I know. The reason for your patience shames us. Together, you and I will do what we can about that. We must be careful, and ever-cautious. We must even be secretive, I fear." "You will fear more than that, my dear Borg Graborn, if you do not find a means to include me in your next 'interview' with this . . . visitor to our city!" 75 That voice came from behind Graborn. He whirled just as the doorway hanging, of the leathery mold gran that grew on Eye of the-Beholder, was thrust aside. The hand was small and encrusted with no less than five rings--on its three

fingers-including the one connected by a delicate golden chain to an ornate bracelet. The woman swept into the chamber in a swirl of iridescent "skirts"-eight ankle-length strips seven or so sems wide. She was careful to arrange the heavy arras behind her so that it completely covered the doorway. This woman of Survival was not unknown to the staring Graborn or to the larger-eyed Cinnabar. Both of them recognized Borgis Meeshais, wife of Garnax. Milady Hot-eyes, the Jarp mused. "You know I have but a moment, lest I am missed and made to suffer." She spoke quickly, softly, before Graborn had gotten his mouth closed, much less open again to speak. "But I have stated my terms for silence. I have overheard you, Borg Graborn. I heard your plan to be 'clever and cautious and secretive.' Dangerous, eh, my lord Graborn? So-when you arrange your next interview with our under-rated visitor here, find a way to include my presence." Well! A woman of Survival who dares speak up to a man! What might this world come to, Cinnabar mused. And made a satirical mental addition: civilization? "Be assured that I wish neither of you other than good will," Meeshais said, while the startled Cinnabar admired her cleavage, among other things. "Cinnabar is even more fascinating to me, now that I know he is intelligent." Cinnabar took note of the pronoun. As Hellfire always called it she/her, despite its penis, Meeshais thought of the Jarp as male, despite the obvious evidence of its haltered breasts. Because I am "fascinating" to this pointy-warheaded wife of the noble Borg Garnax, puffed-up Director of Recycling!! "For now, my lord, please escort me back to the 76 others, for my noble lord and master will not take that as amiss." And she bowed and stood ready. "Borgis Gamax-Meeshais-" poor Graborn began, but they all knew that this tune a woman of Survival had a Knorman by the balls. "Please, Borg Graborn. My danger increases with each passing second. Thus yours does as well, and your . . . secret. Let us go among those gamboling others, where we belong!" The threat was clear. Graborn shot Cinnabar a helpless glance. Then he swung to the doorway and through it. A woman of Survival, Meeshais had held herself ready for his move and took up her proper place to "accompany" him-a pace behind. Cinnabar gazed upon the rearward view, which showed even more the niceness of her waist, the breadth of her hips. Between them bulged the two fine bowlshapes of her presumably downy bottom. Nice, Cinnabar thought. Fascinating to you, hmm, Meeshais? You do fascinate, too, dear Knorwoman. Let us get together for some gamboling, where we belong-together again for the first time! The Jarp stood gazing at the final trembles of the leathery hanging, and felt some matching tremors of its own. Surprise after surprise, it thought, and began slowly to smile. And so dear hot-eyed Meeshais does indeed want her doubtless neglected plumbing plumbed by a good old orange pipe! Now let's see . . . when a woman is used to being treated as a slave and taken, used, do I make more points treating her that way, or letting her discover what the gentle way is like? Well, it was something to think about-and thinking about it would be fun. 8 To wear the marks of whips like rubies. -Shakespeare, Measure for Measure Again the slave called Love-fire waited. Her position suggested only humiliation, ownership. She felt it, along with pain and, perhaps worse, a maddeningly nagging discomfort. It was constant. She could not move or speak. She could only wait. At least the icy coldness of the plug had long since risen to the temperature of the distended orifice it occupied. She waited. Plugged, gagged, bound. Totally exposed, forearms folded and bound under her, arms tingling. Legs splayed apart by the way he had bound her ankles to the backs of her thighs. It was an obscene position. She knew that she was obscenely open. This spread-legged position on her back displayed the orifice he had chosen not to plug rather than the smaller one he had. Accepting, Hellfire sighed softly and tried to keep her mind off her discomfort and her lewd posture. In servile acceptance, she concentrated on how good it would be when he came, and released her, and used her as a woman was made to be used. 77 78 "We cannot understand it, Falgo," Borg Grud said. "Not one of those who came here with you is with child, and neither so far, is any of the girls we have sent you." "There has been hardly enough time to be sure, Borg Grud," Trafalgar Cuw

said amiably. But I can assure you, he mused, that none of you is going to impregnate Janja or Hellfire or Quindy. They're all impregnable as castles, with their anti-conception implants working away until they choose to have them negated. Which they sure can't do in Survival! Nor am I about to succeed in shoring up your precious-but-staggering gene-pool with my wondrous superior genes by making a baby in any of these charming girls you keep sending me! We're aliens, you jackass! Borg Crud! We're not even the same species! "Still," Grad said, "it is disturbing. And two of those you have enjoyed are definitely not with child, Falgo." "Well," Trafalgar said with a sudden stroke of genius, "we are a different race, Borg Grud. With the three women of my kind, two months are required to be certain." "Two months?" Trafalgar nodded. "Absolutely." Grud's face lit up. "Oh! This I did not know, Falgo! Their periods are so far apart?" "Why yes," Trafalgar said, inwardly smiling as he decided to embroider on his lie. "I'm sorry I failed to tell you. It just didn't occur to me, and no one asked. Furthermore, they are shipmates, and synchronized. And I know for a fact that all three of them ended periods only a day or so before we were captured." "Shipmates? Synchronized?" "Of course. Standard practice," Trafalgar said. Lying was easy for him. He'd been doing it for a long time. He was good at it. So one led to another and another. As long as a man kept the series of lies consistent without being just boringly dull, and kept it all straight in his own head, it was both easy and fun. He gave Grud 79 his ingenuous-boy look a moment longer, then replaced it with the "Oh gee I'm sorry I failed to tell you that before but you must know how it is" look. "Ah! Then that is good news!" the little Knorman said. "Knorese seed might be quickening hi the womb of one or all of them then, even now as we speak!" Trafalgar gave him a shrug that indicated "sure" without his saying it. "Ah, that is a good thought indeed! But . . . Fal-go . . . how I do wish that you would not use the word 'captured.' You are after all our guest, and enjoying much privilege and many women, no?" "Oh, sure, Grud," Trafalgar said, daringly leaving off the Rnorman's title of respect. The fellow wasn't really a lord anyhow. And he decided to push it a little further. "But . . . you see I still miss my own kind.. And . . ." He broke off. Which one shall I mention? If we ever get-I mean when we get ourselves free of you nuts and the hold you have on us, my mentioning Hellfire right now would not be a good idea. Having enjoyed the favors of deare aide shipmate Hellfire might be very dangerous for me! As for Quindy . . . well, is it possible that she is enjoying herself here? You studs do play her sort of game. In that case . . . Trafalgar made his decision. For Borg Grud of Survival, though, he made a sad face and said nothing. "I understand," Grud said, looking down. After a moment he looked up into Trafalgar's (carefully ingenuous, carefully morose) eyes. "Were you about to add something?" Trafalgar heaved a great sigh and turned away. "Why should I tell you? Why open my heart to you? You do after all pamper me with your w-girls." In hopes I'll get 'em every one big in the belly and prop up your precious but ever-thinning gene supply. "I am well treated. Yet . . ." Again he broke off, and let his shoulders indicate a small sigh. 80 "Falgo . . . please . . . continue. I am listening. I am no enemy of yours, Falgo." "I am well treated," Trafalgar said, as if reluctantly. "Yet... do you have feeling for someone, Grud? Some individual? Are your women only slaves, or have you feeling as well for them, or for one of them?" "Oh of course, Falgo! Why my Sh-ah! But you are referring to yourself! You mean that you ..." Looking away, refraining from giggling as he performed, Trafalgar Cuw nodded mutely. I'll just let the little prick coax me for the answer. "Falgo, Falgo. Twice have you called me by my naked name, and twice I have accepted it. Is that not proof enough that I would be your friend?-that we have no wish to be considered your captors? Trust me. Tell me, Falgo. One of the three who came here with you was ... is special to you?" "yes," Trafalgar said, in a tiny, choked voice. Grud moved to him, laid a hand on the man's shoulder. Never mind that he had to reach up considerably to do it. Poor Falgo's back was bowed and he was obviously in pain and reluctant to admit what some construed

as weakness in a male: real affection for one of the three slick-skins that had come here with him. (There were four, of course, but certainly this man could not mean the two-sexed creature, the orange thing!) "Name her, Falgo, and let me see what I might accomplish. I can make no promises, you understand." "I do understand. That is why I hate to bare my soul to you, my friend," Trafalgar said, with a wink to the wall he faced. "I . . . see. Certainly I understand," Grud said with some emotion. "I shall not press you, friend Falgo." What? Press me, you little flainer! Pry her deare sweete name out of my locked heart, damn you! Ah Traf, m'dear lad, you are too great an actor and surely missed your true catting in life! You should be making 81 holomellers with Setsuyo Puma, not to mention making Setsuyo Puma! Now I've gone and overdone it! "However," Grud said reflectively, "all I can tell you is that I shall try on your behalf, did I know which of them the woman is. Hmm . . . the tallest of your group are you, the orange thing, and the girl Love-fire. Is it she, then? Torgex's slave Shleefeemis?" "Hellfire!" Trafalgar said quickly. Attaboy, Crud, persuade me to reveal the name of my One True Love. Mention just one more now, and you know without my having to be so un-macho as to tell you, you sweet ugly little pharttei "No! Never Hellfire, whom you call Shleefeemis: Love-fire!" "But-surely not she who is so near to our height and so far from your own, Falgo! Is that possible? The pale white-haired one . . ." Trafalgar heaved a great sigh and hung his head. From behind, his shoulder was pressed. Then the four-digitated hand withdrew. "I have my answer, and am sorry for prying, Falgo. Perhaps it will be for the best. I shall try, then, to persuade Borg Barso to allow his si-uh, the white-haired girl to, uh, visit you." Doesn't even know Janja's name, Trafalgar thought. He did not turn. A wet sound told him that Grud was licking his thin lips. Then he heard the beige-eyed idiot leave, quietly. And Trafalgar Cuw grinned and clapped a hand over his own mouth to hold back the triumphant laugh the departed little crud might hear. Now if this works and ole Barso agrees to let his "slave, Janjis" come and "visit" her fellow weirdo alien slave-me-all she and I have to do is find a way to have some very quiet conversation.

All! 9 People can be divided into three groups: those who make things happen, those who watch things happen, and those who wonder what happened! -John W. Newbern He who mistrusts most should be trusted least. -Theognis The Council of Thirty-two heard and debated the strange request of Har Graborn. Simply stated, he wished to utilize the orange thing in some sort of musical experiment. Several senators chuckled. Music! Poor weird Graborn! Hardly the sort of thing a real man would concern himself with! Now Har Graborn's problem was that he was unable to think of a way to arrange for Meeshais's presence during Cinnabar's visit to his quarters. As a matter of fact, Graborn couldn't even think of a way to broach the subject to the Director of Recycling, her worthy husband. It did not occur to Graborn that he had no problem at all. He was about to be involved in that unlikelihood that occurs again and again in reality, and only in reality, because no creator of fiction would employ such coincidences as occurred daily, not only in Survival but all along the spaceways. 82

83 To begin with, Borg Director Garnax very much desired the opportunity to entertain that slim-hipped yet so very buttsy slave of his assistant. Entertain her, that is, most privately indeed. Further, that assistant was just as anxious to do Garnax a favor. For months Garnax had had to shake off visions of that broad, round-cheeked backside turned up for his pleasure. For months and months he had tried to think of some way to turn the vision into reality without losing an iota of face or giving up an iota of advantage. No way had presented itself. Face was important in Survival, and massively important to Garnax. So was advantage, gaining without losing. Garnax and his wife had one long-standing agreement he did not wish to break-simply because she was no stupid woman, and was swift to take advantage. The agreement was that he brought no strange women or girls into their home. No temporary playmates. To do so would be to give Meeshais an advantage. All was well with them and she was no less dutiful than any other wife of Survival, so long as he maintained his position with relation to her. His

advantage. Meeshais was the sort to turn any advantage into opportunity and any opportunity into action and further advantage. Otherwise she was the perfect wife: decorative, dutiful, and properly submissive. And now Graborn had come before the Thirty-two. After he had broached the subject of his request before the yellow-robed men and the discussion was just beginning as to approval or disapproval (with a mellifluous flow of words from that smug dam' Gandax), Garnax suddenly realized. He was hearing the loud knock of opportunity to advantage! On two occasions now Meeshais had talked glowingly of the beautiful music of the orange creature. Why, Garnax realized, he could get her out of the house for hours! Further, he could make her think it was a favor to her. 84 An advantage for Garnax! (A double advantage, he slyly thought, thinking of his assistant's buttsy slave. He actually felt a tremor. Once again he envisioned that upturned bare bottom and his own bared digger, high and hard and ready to plunge into the dark tunnel betwixt those exciting hills.) He waited without patience. Eventually Gandax satisfied himself that he had heard enough-for the moment-of the sound of his own voice. Immediately Garnax rose. Though he was not of the Thirty-two, his position was a high one and he gained immediate permission to speak. Indeed, invitation! Swiftly Garnax spoke in support of Graborn's harmless request. Sensibly he pointed out that no harm could come of such experimentation with the alien, and added that some possible good might ensue. He even mentioned his own lady wife's appreciation of the orange thing's music at various dinner parties. (A bit of advantage, there: it served also to remind the Thirty-two that Borg Garnax was invited to most dinner parties that amounted to anything, even when some of them were not.) After a bit more discussion, the senators agreed, twenty-eight to a mere four, to the request of Hai Graborn. Later Garnax managed to see to it that his path intersected that of Graborn as they departed the senate chamber. (The Thirty-two still met, now to discuss the matter of another obvious half-wit born among them. It was happening too often. The chromosomes of the Knormen of Survival were stretched too thin, and tainted, and not one damned thing was coming of their supposedly fortunate capture of the five strangels.) Just outside that august chamber, two men were feeling very lucky indeed. Each was also doing the other a favor, though Garnax did not know it. "Ah, my lord Director Garnax! I do appreciate your support today!" the smaller, leaner man said. At that instant a thought occurred to him, and nervously Graborn reached up to scratch under his medallion. Why not magnanimously offer to allow Garnax's wife to sit in on his "musical exploration 'interview'" with the Jarp! "My pleasure, Graborn," Garnax intoned. Instantly recognizing his superior position in the matter, having done the other a favor and thus gained advantage, he omitted Graborn's minor title as a subtle reminder. "I am glad to be of help to a deserving fellow who seeks only the mutual benefit of all Survivors." "Umm . . . yes," Graborn said, trying to look open and like a man who had in mind only the benefit of the commonweal of the wonderfully self-sufficient city of Survival. "Well, as I said inside, it does seem to me that this Cinnabar creature can be of some v-ah! Borg Garnax! You said that Borgis Garnax-Meeshais is much moved by the music of the creature?" Aha, I have him, Garnax thought, but kept his face cool and his almost inexistent eyebrows casually arched. "Yes, so I said. She does love to hear the orange thing, indeed. I really can't bring myself to consider that a vice, can you?" Aha, Graborn thought, I have him! "Why no, Director, it is a simple pleasure, surely. And-why then well-met, sir! Might I make so bold as to suggest that your lady wife be allowed to visit while I am working with the creature? Cinnabar, it thinks of itself, that Falgo fellow tells us." "Thinks?" "I should say that is what Falgo calls it," Graborn said, slipping a couple of fingers under his medallion. "At any rate, your lady wife might enjoy the change. And surely she will be most appreciative both of the opportunity and the outing." Won't she! And won't I be the considerate hero, Garnax thought, although he had no idea just how much his wife would appreciate the opportunity. He said, "Why, thank you, sir. I shall ask her myself this very evening, and see that you are advised next 86 period. Hmm

... if she does leave my home and enter yours, we might both be wise to have care for our faces. We might both be grateful if her servant accompanied her?" Garnax smiled knowingly, but was hardly so gross as to wink or touch the other man. "Others would see that as more seemly, her being accompanied and escorted, as it were. While . . . you might gain some . . . amusement, from the dear girl, as Borgis does from the creature!" He laughed. "Though perhaps you will not care for her music!" I take your meaning, Graborn mused, though what you do not know is that our amusement-taking, Mee-shais's and mine, will be of the same kind though not together! Why yes, dear charming so-innocent Garnax, if I must accept Meeshais's threat and support her desire to dally with the alien, I shall be happy to excavate her slave while I am . . . waiting! "A good thought, Borg Director. The wise man suffers not his wife to go abroad without accompaniment, after all, and I am sure that her loyal servant will serve the three of us well." "So I shall suggest to Borgis Meeshais, then," Garnax said, hiding his exultation at getting both of them out of the house at one time, and without even half trying. "Once I return home-it has just occurred to me that the commonweal good demands my return to my offices, to confer with my assistant." They took leave of each other and went their ways, Garnax and Graborn, each feeling most clever and fortunate indeed. A short time later the worthy Director of Recycling's aide also felt both honored and fortunate, to be able to render his superior a favor. Thus he'd gain a bit of advantage with the portly and pompous fellow. His slave did not feel so fortunate when he told her of the plan, but she after all had no say in the matter. Neither did Borg Garnax's lady wife when he told her of Graborn's plan to gain musical knowledge of the alien, and his own magnanimous decision to allow her 87 to be included in that session. She covered her exultation and expressed her appreciation to her lord and master for his concern for her and her harmless little pleasures. As a matter of fact Meeshais, thinking that it might be a lovely idea to see to it that Graborn was distracted for a goodly period of time while she realized her fantasy with the Jarp, suggested that her girl Laleemis accompany her. Garnax blinked. He was hardly able to believe that absolutely everything was going his way. Naturally he took a line that insured a bit more advantage: "Surely you cannot mean to suspect or fear such a harmless scholarly fellow as Har Graborn, woman!" "No, my dear lord. I thought it might be more seemly, best for your honor. If you disagree, then certainly I shall go alone." He pretended to ponder. "No. I see your point concerning my good name and face, and yours as well. Well thought, wife. Laleemis shall go with you." And he nodded again, as if still considering the merits of her suggestion. "And does my lord and master know when Borg Graborn intends to interview the alien?" "Interview? Madam! It is a lesser creature!" She lowered her head and great silver arabesqueries of earrings swung all aglitter. "It was a mis-chosen figure of speech, my lord husband." "Mis-chosen indeed!" Garnax said, pursuing his advantage. "At any rate, it shall be tomorrow evening, as the creature's trilling is required at dinner parties each of the next three nights in Commonweal Hall-as you should know." "Ah yes." She had thought the time might be scheduled for an evening after those three, and was delighted that it was to be so soon. Her heartbeat speeded again. A good and dutiful wife, she did not offer her husband the useless explanation but said only, "Tomorrow night, 88 then. And shall we send Laleemis to apprise Borg Gra-born that we will join him?" Garnax shook his head, since no date had been discussed with Garnax, and he had merely decided this instant on tomorrow evening. If it was of some mild inconvenience to the fellow to conduct his "musical researches" tomorrow night, why then what matter? Graborn could and doubtless would change his plans and acquiesce with grace. Garnax's position, after all, put him on a level with any senator or nearly. Certainly he was far superior to most lords, borgs, much less one who bore merely the title "Honored"-har. "No need," Garnax said. "I shall send someone to him next period. I have many employees subject to my will and commands, remember, whether they are of a personal nature or not." He fixed her with a look. "I've no care as to the appearance of your servant, Madam,

but do you take care not to be over-fetchingly attired, abroad at night without my company!" Again she bowed her head. It was one of her principal talents, as well as a principal activity during inter-' views with her husband. "Indeed, my lord. I shall do you credit." Besides, it doesn't matter what I wear, my dear sweet lord, since I will not be wearing it long anyhow! Not once I have arrived at Graborn's and that little slut Laleemis is occupying the dull fellow-while I have that exciting Cinnabar all to myself! No more "day" or "night" existed inside the planet than on its sunless surface. Indeed, even less; the caverns were even darker than the landscape, except for occasional pallid patches of Lavender Light-a phosphorescent stone-lichen. Yet for nearly a thousand years the Survivors had held to the old day-night cycle determined by Knor's rotation. That was simple enough. The same vast store of energy at the planet's core that heated Survival also lighted it. "Day" had become "period"; night was still 89 called night. Never mind what Knormen and their women did within the confines of their homes, walled off by stone and petrific wood and the leather from the fungus-born mold. Nine-tenths of the light in the main cavern-the "city skies"-was dimmed at the end of the formal work-period, and dimmed more later at the dinner hour, and then extinguished each night. During that night when Meeshais and Graborn and Garnax all congratulated themselves on their cleverness and good fortune, the new slave Janjis was abed with her lord Barso, and she was not unhappy. The slave who had been Janja of Aglaya liked the lovely soft feel of his down, well enough. And Barso was not too difficult, really. It wasn't as if he was a truly sadistic man or rather Knor-man, and it was not true that a slave must always suffer. Borg Barso demanded only the complete surrender of her free will, combined with the utmost slavish devotion or its appearance. That was all she must do. He liked sleeping next to her warmth. She liked the radiant or reflected warmth from his fine coat of short fur, and the soft, soft feel of it. Each pressed to the other, they slept. Elsewhere in Survival, Trafalgar and Llullais-second time around, delighted with him and most hopeful of impregnation-lay talking. Since the women of Survival were not prized for their intelligence and were hardly educated either, her knowledge was limited. Still, Trafalgar kept learning, all he could. He was aware that he was drugged-that they were drugged-and that it must be the reason he and Hell-fire and the others accepted their situations here. Yet it did not hold his mind completely, the drug they must be giving him. Unlike Hellfire who had become "Love-fire" however unlikely, he was able to remember, and to think. In a way, he was plotting. At least he was gaining information, and storing it away, just as the Knormen were daily gaining some information from him. 90 Coaxing Ms night-partner was easy. He had but to tell fabulous tales of exotic and exotically named otherwheres-and to demand stories of Knor and Knormen, Survivors and Survival in return. Not that they all made sense. None of the women and girls-the distinction was real, even to him: Llullais, for instance, was something past eighteen years-Knor, but he had established that the girl last night had been just fifteen-could understand that. They reveled in words that were the names of planets and spaceships and suns and other aspects of the world outside the stone walls of Survival. Jasbir and Franji and Jahpur and Resh, Shankar and Saiping and Sam-mana and Meccah; The Maelstrom and The Carnadyne Void and The Corsi Cluster; Aristarkos and Eynsteyn and Front and Nevermind; all these were words that rolled trippingly off his tongue but not theirs, and that flowed and glowed romantically within their heads wherein had never danced visions of sugar-plums. Why would such a fabulous personage as this tall, tall traveler of inconceivable distances, this truly good lover, wish to hear their talk of dull old Survival on twice-dull old icebound Knor? He did, though, and so they talked. No man, after all, could just go and go all night. Never mind that a woman could. Or even a girl, which seemed to say something about which sex was superior, at least in certain matters! For a man, there had to be time out for such things as talking. And fondling that was almost idle. He and Llullais had already established their roles in lovemaking. The very totality of her

surrender and better still the illusion, at least, of her enforced surrender were best for her-as he knew to be true for Quindy. This very submission and self-effacement heightened the truly soaring heights of pleasure Lullais was capable of. (As Quindy was, for Trafalgar had 91 not forgotten Quindy, and their secret lovemaking on Satana.) "It is not written among my people," he told the youngster lying beside him, "that A Woman Shall Be Submissive." "Many things are different for people without fur," she said coolly, with what was certainly logic to her. "It is stupid for a woman not to be submissive to a worthy man." Her hand lay on his thigh, infusing it with warmth. It was damp, as was her golden-furred vulva. Inside, his seed cooled. "It, uh, isn't the easiest thing in the world for the male, you know," he said. "Chains do have two ends. Imposing one's will requires constant application and attention. It implies some competence, and responsibility. It carries responsibility, Lulu." "A girl is thus relieved of responsibility," she said just as coolly as before. "We know it." "I'll bet. For us, it requires the acceptance and imposition of responsibility." "Oh I know that, my dear lord," she murmured. "I should not care to have to be a man, with such responsibility!" And she wriggled a little to kiss his ear, while she let her fingers wander to explore the physical badge of his maleness and his responsibility. "Have you ever considered this?-that unfortunately, the irresponsible are often led to dominate? It is a need, to compensate. Women, attracted, discover their error rather swiftly, Lullais. Girls take longer to realize. The usual result is unhappiness. Resentment. Sometimes it's worse. Horror, pain, or death. That isn't the imposition of will, but a pressing of inner needs without regard for the other person-or the benefits of domination." "I-think that such philosophic depths are beyond my mind, Har Falgo." "I don't believe it is, Lulu. I think that when a man loves women, he has a natural desire to possess them. When a man dislikes or fears or hates women, he wants to-needs to-demean them. Crush them, with cruel 92 words and plain dam' meanness and nastiness, along with physical cruelty beyond the fun of domination games. What-" "Talking of it, it seems, makes you hard and long and thick," she said softly. "And oh so warm!" "No, it's you and your moving hand that causes that. Anyhow-what a man gets in return for that sort of flainin' meanness isn't love or even respect, from the animal he's made a woman into. It's fear. I really couldn't bear to have you cringe at my beck or my touch, Lullais. Or flop on your knees, hands behind, every time you see me approaching." "There are times when you like me on my knees, though." "True, rascal!" And he squeezed her furry thigh with a bit of strength. "That was a non sequitur, and no, I am not going to explain. You also heard me, and know what I mean." "I understand you, my lord. You are forbidding me to cringe from you." "No, damn it, I am not forbidding you to cringe from me!" "Oh-Lullais is sorry. You are just telling me not to, then." "Shit. You can't even get the concept, can you? Lord, lord. And there's no use my warning you to be careful whom you allow to have power over you! Anything male has power over you, doesn't it, just because it's male." "This has power over me," she said, squeezing. He shivered. "You are intent on wearing that poor thing out, aren't you?" "Your digger could never wear out, Borg Falgo!" "Oh boy. And watch my head swell along with my 'digger'! So now it's 'nobly-born lord' Falgo, is it? Uh- ease off there, woman. You're liable to break the bone in it!" "Make me." 93 "Oh stop! Listen, did you know that my name isn't Falgo at all? I am Trafalgar Cuw." "All that?" "All that. I'm from a world called Outreach. We Outies don't get a lot, but we do get good names. Usually." He pronounced it again, slowly, for her. "Trafalgarrrrr Cuw." "This is not Outreach, Borg Falgo." She put her head over to give his nipple a lick, while maintaining her fisty grip on his erection. "As ... as for what you have said to me," she said softly, softly, "or tried to say ... I understand." He knew that she was saying that only to make him happy. To shut him up. She didn't understand at all. She couldn't. All she knew was a place called Survival, where men were men and women sure weren't. Sweet Theba's eyeteeth, he thought, / am living the dream of most men-and I'm getting bored with it! Since he was neither making her let go nor



particularly responding, Lullais eased off the efforts of her hand and tongue. "It is written that pain inflicted on the body disciplines the soul," she said, returning to an idle fondling of him in the darkness. He slid his hand over the down-soft hillock of her breast and pinched a small nipple, tight in its youth. "What does that do for your soul?" "I-I cannot be sure," she said with a shudder, and she spoke from the throat. "I know what it does for my body, Falgo my lord. It makes me hot and quivery." She pressed a fingertip into the seam of his scrotum, wiggled it. "Would-would you like to turn me over and smack my lazy slavish backside a fewscore tunes?" In hopes that'll excite me so much it'll just segue right into another wallowing slicing session, he mused. Except that it isn't "slicing," here-here it's digging and excavating. And that phrasing! Lazy slavish backside, is it? Where'd she learn that-at her daddy's knee? Neg-more likely across it! "Neg," he said, turning on his side, to her. "I think 94 I'll just munch on these lazy slavish breasts for an hour or three and then see about digging a tunnel to paradise!" Lullais was in favor of that. A few minutes later she was reminding him that he was being too gentle. Trafalgar took note of that, and of the visible marks on her breasts. He began trying to make her more content. Once her legs were bent double at the knees and her thighs were pushed right down to frame her head, she was happier. When he crushed her calves down onto the backs of those thighs while he lunged as rapidly as he could, going into her as deeply as he could, she was happier still, and let him know it. He continued making them both content. She was helpless under him, sighing, alive to his touch. The feel of him against her, on her, pushing into her, pleased her while it inflamed her lust and his. She looked up at him from a strained face clamped by her own doubled legs, and she smiled. Now she was content. Elsewhere in wondrously self-sufficient Survival, the slave Midnight also was content. Never mind that her mouth was stuffed full of desert-dry cloth unto the straining of the hinges of her jaws, and then wound about to insure that the stuffing remained in place, right back to the tonsils. She was accustomed to her lord's penchant for gape-mouth gagging. He loved stuffing her face. He loved seeing her that way, even merely thinking about her that way, awaiting his return, when he was elsewhere. Her lips and indeed all of the interior of her mouth were forced into a wide ring around the packing. She accommodated it and endured it with serenity, though she had rather stuff her face with Borg Boskar's digger. Her corset was restricting but far from unbearable. She was proud that she could bear to have her waist reduced by as much as sixteen sems, twice the length of her middle finger. She was accustomed too to the 95 rearward plug. She did not mind his mandates concerning it, concerning her eating and her performance of bodily waste elimination. Indeed, she almost reveled in those orders and their consequences. This little night-plug was after all only three sems in diameter, anyhow. Midnight scarcely noticed it except when she moved. It did prevent her from lying on her back, but that was a minor inconvenience. It was all bearable, and it was wonderful to have her arms free. So land of her master! The weighted mittens were no great inconvenience. All she had to do was keep from accidentally striking Boskar with them, in her sleep, as they lay abed. A few whippings and the hours with the nipple-clamps had worked wonders for her ability to concentrate her subconscious, even while she was asleep. Corseted, gape-gagged, plugged, mittened so that she was fingerless, she rested happily in his bed. Her bottom was pressed back against the softness of his down, which was hardly long enough to be called fur. Had she been able, she'd have smiled. She was content. And soon Quindy, the slave Midnight of Borg Boskar, slept. The slave Love-fire, on the other hand, could not be called happy or content this night. Once again her high-placed lord had loaned her out. Not in payment of political debt, but to incur one. To gain an advantage, as they called it. This very young- too young!-brother of Senator Tobodex was intrigued by her long leanness, her distinctly un-Knoresse shape. She was many sems taller than he, yet he had more pectoral development. She was not taller now, not on her knees this way. Her ankles were linked by a

dainty but firm chain of carved crystal. She kept her back bowed as he wished, to elevate and emphasize her small oval buttocks into rounder hills. Should she move so as to break a fine dainty crystal link, she would be, punished stringently. He meant that, 96 and had shown her the four-tailed little whip with the loaded ends. This way he was taller, kneeling behind her this way, plunging and lunging into her, using her while his hands went slipping and sliding over the strange delightfully hairless smoothness of her cool, lean hips and the buttocks he had wealed and striped so well with a less vicious whip. That had been to no purpose, really; he had whipped her because she was slave and he could, and because he wanted to. Now this boy would not only be in Borg Torgex's debt to a degree, giving Torgex advantage, but Torgex would have something on him as well. The slave Love-fire was loyal to her master. She would report to him that Tobodex's sadistic younger brother had wasted the opportunity in their continuing efforts to impregnate her, this stranger to Survival. Never mind the idiocy of their hopes in that direction: even were she fertile, no issue could come from this lunging diggery in her rearward tunnel! Still, Hellfire called Love-fire was only a slave and knew it. She knew that this was her lot and besides cock did after all feel good up her. It was what women were born for, wasn't it? If only they did not insist on making her put her mouth on the disgusting thing! Naturally that was a sentiment she never made mention of, else All-father only knew what horrible punishment would be justly inflicted on her! 10 A man who is drunk is like one struck on the head. His wisdom and his skill are of no use to him. Get drunk only thrice a month. Better not to get drunk at all- but who can wholly abstain? -Jengis Khan Next morning the Director of Recycling dispatched poor unhappy Blangex to the quarters of Har Graborn. Blangex was grateful for the mission. He was grateful to get out of the offices for a while. Only two days ago it had been established, definitely: the second child Blangex's wife had borne him was, like the first, a halfwit or less. That the same horror was happening to others, that the production of wittings and weaklings was definitely on the increase in Survival, was no consolation to Blangex. A part of the problem was that the Thirty-two would not budge from its collective decision that a child must be one year old before the final judgment would be made. (The esteemed senators said "could be made," but anyone knew that was not so.) Now Blangex and his wife must care for this little dolt for the rest of a year before it would be recycled, as their firstborn had been. The Thirty-two! Hurrying along, Blangex made a 97 98 face and received a strange look from the man he happened to be passing at that moment. The damned Thirty-two! So many important matters needed to be decided, to be ruled upon, and what were they doing? Debating such as the wisdom of allowing that worthless Graborn to "examine" the orange thing privately! Music! Blangex would, he mused, like to roll the Thirty-two into a large ball and drop it down the Flamepit! Surely those silly old fellows were not worth recycling. Who wanted such fools mixed back into self-sufficient Survival? So now Blangex was on his way to the doubtless littered quarters of Har Graborn. On behalf of the Director himself-on behalf of the Thirty-two! Blangex of the highly important Recyke Center was to advise Graborn that the orange thing was his to "examine" this very night, and that Borgis Garnax-Meeshais and servant would arrive at Graborn's at the thirteenth hour. (And if they were late, the esteemed Har Graborn was to let Borg Garnax know.) Blangex did pause briefly, on his way with his stupid message to a stupid busy-minded man. For here toward him came a strange trio. In front walked Borg Grud, side by side with that ridiculously tall sounding-pole of an alien. Remove his head, Blangex thought, and that ugly hairless creature would still be too tall! Just behind them walked another Knorman. Blangex could not place the burly young fellow. He seemed to look at nothing but the alien's back. And the alien's garb! The fellow wore a bright red tunic, redder than anything Blangex had ever seen except on a woman, and a mostly yellow iridescent sash, and some sort of leg-covering! (Poor hairless subhuman creature, Blangex thought; 1 suppose he or more likely it gets cold, with no hair on his legs to hold in his body

heat! What a mistake-how could the All-father have erred so?) He also wore an amulet that contained too many over-bright chips of too many colors 99 of quartz, and a bracer of gran that was set with-the same. Too many chips, too many colors, too much flashing refulgence. What a gaudy tasteless individual, Blangex thought, and turned to be on his way. Trafalgar Cuw was delighted to walk through Survival, almost freely. He kept his eyes and his perceptions unconditionally open, trying to register and record everything and everyone he saw. With him as guide was Grud, and they walked side by side. He had made Trafalgar a present of the leggings Trafalgar had talked so much about. Though they were a dull green, Trafalgar wore them happily. Also along on this outing (an inning, Trafalgar thought, since the "city" was completely contained inside this sickening planet) was a mighty young fellow called Dobomex. Dobomex was large, extra chesty even for a Survivor, and built for wrestling. All he seemed to do was watch Trafalgar mistrustingly, and not just because Dobomex was so dully dressed and doubtless thought the alien some called the tall thing was overly flamboyant in attire and gauds. Dobomex must be an official guard, Trafalgar assumed, with a mental shrug. He was delighted that Grud wanted to show him something marvelous and important. He had already established that it was not Janja; Grud was sad about that, but had not had time or opportunity to work on such a reunion. That was all Grud would tell him. Smiling, playing mysterious and enjoying it. "Something important, Falgo. Marvelous and important." Trafalgar could not be sure because Dobomex hadn't said a word, but he had an idea that the burly Knor-man was not overly bright. Perfect for Security, Trafalgar uncharitably thought. What one passed in a "city" such as Survival was 100 doorways and doors, and people. The truly enormous Commonweal Hall where the hotshots partied had been constructed (of pretty neatly cut stone) and so had the Whatsitcalled Chamber of the Thirty-two. There were a few other little buildings. Otherwise, Survival consisted of doors and doorways. Oh, and stairs or ladders, and upper walkways with more doors of gran or even merely fabric, and open doorways. Survivors stared at Trafalgar, as usual. Many had seen him before. They still stared. As usual, he stared back at some, ignored some, spoke pleasantly to others. To a man in the yellow robe of the Thirty-two he said, "A fine good period and much advantage to you, Senator!" (The title he used was a Knoresse construct that shortened their phrase "member of the Thirty-two." It translated best as "senator," since that was essentially what the Thirty-two were.) The senator thus greeted looked surprised, a shade amused-and pleased. "A fine good day" was nowhere near a Knoresse greeting. Days-that is, "periods"-did not differ much. The light was the same, with never a cloud. The temperature variation was no more than a degree C or so from the standard 20 degrees C.\* It did not rain and it did not snow and there were no leaves to change color or fall, and no droughts. Wind did not exist although occasional little warm breezes came up from below. There was intensive recycling, little real pollution including really bothersome noise, and no traffic accidents other than an occasional collision of pedestrians. They were the only traffic. Legs were the only transport. Crime did not exist-not against men, anyhow. Only what happened in the life of a person each day could change, be different-and not very. Thus in glorious self-etcetera Survival no one wished anyone "a good day." Greetings took the form of "Health to you!" \* A cool 66 degrees, Old Style. 101 and "May you sustain the advantage you have" and even an innocuous word, its meaning lost, that might as well have been "hello" or "hi" or "gleeb." Trafalgar wondered whether he might have invented a new phrase in Survival; a new greeting. He doubted it. "New" was not a popular word here, other than in the matter of jewelry: gauds. Even truly new experiences were hard to come by. "New" recipes were a century or three old-or were a euphemism for a cooking failure. Experimentation was not the Way of Survival. Even seeing Trafalgar Cuw wasn't a new experience anymore, for most Survivors. "You should not speak to a person of higher rank unless he speaks to you first, Falgo." That chiding came from Dobomex, who suffered from acute youth. "I am called Har Falgo, Dobo, an honor granted me by persons of higher rank. And you

are not to tell me what I should or should not do. That senator didn't mind. He knows I'm just an ignorant barbarian, which is to say not a Knorman, and far inferior to such a worthy person as you, Dobo. The senator is both pleased and amused." "My name is Dobomex," the dull voice came from behind Mm, stolid as a plow-pulling mulero on Meccah. Ignorant enough to have said "worthy person such as myself (is)," Trafalgar thought. He turned and walked backward while grinning at the young Knorman. "And my name is Trafalgar. Trah-FAL-grrrr. But see I can get away with all sorts of things, Dobo . . . mex, in return for being such a sweet and docile fellow. That takes effort. I guess persons of higher rank know it, and that's why they've got you behind me, as 'escort.' Did you know that I know thirty-two ways to kill with hands and feet alone-three of them with this finger?" He winked, backed a couple of paces more while grinning at the staring young Knorman, and turned to walk on. Dobomex was probably sure only that he had heard "thirty-two," a familiar number. It was a round 102 number, four times the fingers on his two hands, as well as the name for a gaggle of geese of higher rank. "This way, Har Falgo," Grud said. "You know-I have never seen anyone walk backward before!" "It's dangerous," Trafalgar said. "Also takes imagination. This way, hmm? Taking me to the Recyke Center, are we?" "Yes, Har Falgo. One of the very most interesting places in all Survival." "And just about the most important too, hmm? Except for the water-fetch plant, anyhow! Don't tell me we're going in for an interview with Director Garn-ox him-higher rank-self?" He glanced back at Dobomex, grinned, and winked. "Three ways," Trafalgar said, again showing the fellow his middle finger. "Garnax," Grud corrected equably. "No no-I told you I would show you something, remember? Something marvelous and important." "True. Garnax is important and certainly he thinks he's marvelous! Is Dobomex supposed to be my guard, Borg Grud?" "Quiet, about the director," Grud murmured. "Dobomex and I escort you. He is my aide." "Meaning yes, he's a security man. Is he a fighter?" "No one fights, Falgo, in self-sufficient Survival." "I'm sort of looking forward to proving that," Trafalgar Cuw said under his breath, but not loud enough for either of his escorts to hear. He looked all about as they entered the special big scooped-out squared-off cavern etched with the Knorese characters for Recycling Center. The entry area was decorated-somewhat. Sure aren't much on decor, these people-except personal! And Trafalgar admired his new bracer, which sounded better than bracelet. They moved through the Recycling Center. Trafalgar didn't think much of what he saw, or of the working conditions either. There was color in Survival, plenty of it-but no paint. He was tired of stone and stone and more stone and brilliant use of everything from ruby/ 103 sapphire to mica and flint to-something; that stone so soft that they pounded it and made it into a decorative paste. Calcite, maybe? And he was tired of the sameness of the people. (Not to mention of seeing so few females working in almost any capacity. Just occasional shit-jobs.) Sameness. We Galactics aren't all that different either, he thought, in a minor revelation. Our skins, our hair, the color of our eyes differ little. From copper to chocolate, and mostly in between, dead center. At least we do vary ridiculously in height! And we use color to add variety among us. Both Hellfire and Quindy have changed themselves that way-from celldye to rinses to tattoos, permanent and chemo-removable, to simple bodypaint. And then there are Aglayans, and Jarps! But a comparison of Galactics with Knormen was like comparing pears and cantaloupes. He stopped bothering with comparisons and parallels and differences. He kept observing, working to remember what he saw and heard; what he felt and what he smelled. Survival of Knor! It really was a hell of an accomplishment! Polite ritual greetings followed one after the other, exchanged with Recyke employee after another, each in a pale green tunic or lab-coat, to the kneecaps. Each wearing a cute little grass-green skullcap. But they don't call it grass green here, Trafalgar Cuw thought. The greetings were followed by explanations of Trafalgar, and to him of this and that aspect of Recyke. Ugh. This chamber smelled like urine. Which was what it was, of course. And this one smelled like . . . oh lord. It was. There were no

cemeteries or crematoria in self-contained, self-sustained Survival. . .

. They paused, only paused in another doorway to observe a line of stupid-looking bottom-line laborers entering through another doorway. They were burdened with double-reinforced gran bags that were more like baskets. They were mounded with garbage. Last night's dinners, and vomit, and . . . other stuff. They dumped 104 their baskets onto an enormous moving track. Trafalgar was relatively pleased to see that it was mechanical. At least it seemed to be. He saw no slaves laboriously turning a giant wheel or something. The carriers made a rounding turn and went back out again. After more garbage. Different people stationed along the track picked out different items. Bits of garbage. Specific bits. They went into other baskets. Trafalgar saw bits of cloth, pieces of rope and broken straps of gran, and worse. The room, despite the carefully induced currents of cool air, stank. Grud -moved on through the installation. Trafalgar gratefully accompanied him. Dobomex followed like a German police dog on the scent. Trafalgar knew by Grud's attitude when they reached their goal. Grud showed pride and some excitement. (What was that smell?) The visiting trio was admitted to a busy inner sanctum. It was the size of a small factory and reminded Trafalgar of a hospital nursery. (Here came the head nurse, in pale green smock over nothing, and pale green skullcap. Male, of course.) Except that all these tables held not creches or cribs but vats. And the thick tubes entering them through the stone walls and leaving them, into the floor, were not familiar life-support paraphernalia. The room was chillier than usual. Trafalgar met the head nurse, except that the fellow was called Supervisor of Stiglulation. Stig-lull-ation. His name was not Stiglul. He was Har Dorvo. Supervisor Dorvo, this is Har Falgo. Ah yes. Right this way, Borg Grud, Har Falgo. With a look at Dobomex. (What was that smell?) "My aide," Grud said, and did not bother with Do-bomex's name. The vats squatted on tables that were lined up solid along every wall, broken only by two doorways. Grud was smiling happily, proudly. Dorvo looked happy and proud as a new papa. Each vat was long enough to accommodate a reclining Grud and wide enough for him and Dorvo both, lying side by side. Nice over-broad little coffins, Trafalgar thought. Of ceramic. Sides about fifty or so sems-for-Galactic-centi-meters high. The odor was more pronounced. And- He looked into the vat Dorvo led them to. "Ukh," Trafalgar grunted, with feeling, as he gazed down at the Thing he had been brought here to see. Marvelous and important. Ugh. It was not exactly lying there, or squatting there, or sitting either, and certainly it could not be said to be standing, in this big vat that was obviously designed just for it. It looked as if someone had just dropped it in, plopp, about seven seconds ago. Laboriously designed, molded, fired these vats, and labpriosly, lovingly smoothed to the sleekness of satin. Or satiny slate. Three fat tubes jutted from the wall and into the vat. Two tubes led out of it, from the floor of the vat, and right down through the floor. Sssl11P . . . sssl11pP! All within this big chamber within the bigger chamber that was the Recyke complex, within the incredibly vast chamber that was Survival, the most mammoth cave ever. In each vat was an it. Each it was a hideous damned furbaggin' Thing. A sprawling huge blob of red-purplescent Jell-O, without the glistening sheen. The mounded, amorphous Thing was dull, glossless, and it was alive. Sluggishly, quiveringly alive, as if it were indeed just a big dollop of gelatin and someone had just dropped it here, or poked it. It just lay (?) there, quivering slightly, and making little sssl1111P noises. It made Trafalgar Cuv consider throwing up. "At the risk of being considered unimaginative and a dull fellow who repeats himself," he said, "ungh! What, ah, is it?" He glanced around the big underground chamber 106 with all its nice muted lighting. All those vats on all those tables? Each contained one of these? He looked down again. The Thing had no particular shape. Just a blob. He wondered how squatty and broad it might be, if it were not contained by the vat. Sssl11P, it said, and quivered as if he had poked it. I wouldn't poke that thing if they offered me space-suit, pulsar beamer, and Satana! "We call this one Bamax," the Recyke Center's attentive attendant said, and he sort of chuckled. "Thank you,

Godonex," the supervisor said. A hundred and fifty-two sems in height if he was one, and with a cute blaze on his forehead below the rim of his skullcap; a yellowish triangle in the darkish beige down that grew so sleekly there. Big hazel eyes like marbles. Dismissed, the attendant backed away while the boss and the three visitors replaced him in watching over dear old Barnax. "Barnax," Trafalgar said, wanting to look at anything but the Thing, and yet unable not to look at it. What the vug was that smell? Pretty color, actually . . . "It is a stiglul," Grud said, and he sounded borderline reverent. "A stiglul," Trafalgar said. "Named Barnax. And I'll bet the lord Director doesn't know about that name! What is a, uh, stiglul, uh, for? What's it doing?" (SsslllP!) Really rather pretty, he thought. He supposed he'd soon learn what that odor was. Sort of sweet, sort of sour. One of the incoming pipes glugged and Barnax quivered as if poked anew. Cute, thought Trafalgar Cuw. His hands were clasped firmly behind him. Nice color for a shirt... He had asked a question. Grud and Dorvo smiled and Dobomex laughed. Someday, Trafalgar thought, someday soon, I absolutely must introduce violence into the wond'rous self-contained slum of Survival! "Bar-this stiglul," Supervisor Dorvo said, "is a 107 quite incredible and useful life form. One can't help loving them all. It is the most efficient still ever devised, and its energy efficiency and neatness are enough to make even a member of the Preserve Our Environs party smile." "A . . . still." Trafalgar stared down at the little beastie. It slurped, mouthlessly. "Positively. It thrives on garbage, provided there is some sugar involved. It extracts nutrient, every last mi-cromilligram, from wastes." "Wastes." "Just so. Excrement and urine-ours. All of it the stiglul processes into hexose. Or something resembling hexose. Basic sugar, but . . . mirror sugar, mind." "Mirror ... oh. Left-handed sugar. This?!" "Just so. The kind that is sweet yet nutritionally inert. Useless. In other words, the ideal sweetener, since sugar is a known poison." "Ah-hum. Poison. And . . . that's it." (Glug. Slllp.) "That would be enough, would it not, Har, ah, Falgo? We have here a garbage disposal and cess-pool whose by-product is a non-fattening sweetener absolutely safe to Knormen-and your kind as well." He made a happy-faced gesture, rather sweeping. Almost, Trafalgar admired that gesture. "But no, Har Falgo, that is not all. I said it was a still, remember?" "I do indeed remember. The most efficient ever designed. Your very words. Yes, I remember. Oh. It distills the sugar into ... no! Alcohol? This?!" (SsslllpP!) "You have it, Har Falgo. It-" "Call me Falgo, Supervisor." "Thank you," Dorvo said, with a glance at Grud, who nodded. "It creates the alcohol as its own source of energy." Lord, lord and Theba's lactation ducts! A cow makes milk, a chicken makes eggs, and stiglul . . . Stillwell here makes sugar and alcohol! We milk the cows for butter and cheese; we steal the hens' eggs for omelets 108 and souffles and brinks. And, . then there is . . . Still-well. Lord, lord! "We take very, very good care of our stigluls. The sugar we obtain whenever we want it, you see. It ... excretes some in a really strange by-pass process that sounds disgusting." "Then please don't describe it, Dorvo." (The supervisor frowned and glanced at Grud. Grud smiled, nodded, made a tight gesture. Humor the fellow. Falgo just doesn't respect titles, his own or anyone else's. He respects people and knowledge, Falgo does. And knowledgeable people.) "I don't see any teats," Falgo was saying on, gazing ruminatively at the-at stiglul. "How do you go about milking it for its alcohol? Oh-are we talking about al-koh'l? Ethyl alcohol?" "It is made from sugar, you will recall. Yes, it is ethyl alcohol. The drinkable kind." "The intoxicant," Grud added, almost breathlessly. "Booze," Trafalgar Cuw said, almost whispering. Reverently. They did not know the term. "An ancient and honorable word," Trafalgar explained. "Persian, Boot." He smiled, nodded, and stared again into the vat. Stiglul quivered and slurped without visible mouth or slurping orifice. "Right," Trafalgar murmured. "Left-handed alcohol from left-handed sugar. But Stillwell isn't left-handed. It doesn't seem to have anything remotely resembling hands. Or feet. Or even a definable head. As a matter of fact, it's as if I am looking at it through a microscope ... an ameba! A great big booze-making

ameba, in red-purple." "Still-well," Dorvo echoed, and nodded. The alien's rather feminine sounding pronunciation of "stiglul," he assumed. "Yes. A stiglul cannot walk, or grasp, or even make a sound." As if to dispute the supervisor, Barnax/Stillwell the 109 stiglul made a loud slurping sound. And quivered. An outgoing pipe glugged. "A stiglul can get about by ... oozing, so that we keep him in this nice wet and deep container. Its inner walls are the most traction-free surface we could provide. Even stiglul cannot get out-usually. It has happened, and so now we have attendants here on constant duty, to make sure no stiglul creeps over its vat. On the other hand, why should stiglul wish to leave its vat? It receives lots of nutrient. That is, she does." "She?" What a beautiful color, Trafalgar Cuw was thinking. Now that I really take note, the odor is lovely. An aroma, not an odor. Beautiful beastie! Is this little fart kidding? Alcohol, from that? Booze?! "She or it," the supervisor said, with a throwaway gesture. "A stiglul is unsexed. That is, it is a unisexual animal. A stiglul's sole purpose is the same as any other creature's: to exist." (Grud raised an eyebrow at that, while Dobomex positively frowned. Trafalgar, who was not religious despite his affectation of being a Thebist,\* merely nodded his interest.) "To exist," Dorvo went on, "to reproduce, and so to continue to exist, as a species, by reproducing. You are correct: it has no teats. Or any external organs. As a matter of fact there is not much in there in the way of internal organs. It absorbs its food through its skin, wherever it wishes. If it can be said to wish. There is no brain, you understand. No mouth, and no anus. It converts some sugar, excretes some, and stores alcohol, for energy. It keeps some of the sugar, and grows. That means that technically it is a mirror or- \* Adherent of the extremely ancient goddess Theba. Origin unknown; place or even planet of origin unknown. A Theban is a native of or dweller on the planet Thebanis, star Janski. 110 ganism. The energy is stored against the day stiglul reproduces. That takes a lot of energy." Trafalgar laughed. "Now that's true everywhere, Supervisor! Even sex without reproduction takes quite a bit of energy!" He swept a hand in a magnificently grandiose gesture that put Dorvo's to shame and included the entire chamber, all the vats, at a sweep. "All these vats? Each a stiglul, busily consuming shit and producing sugar and alcohol? Not a one a he, or a she? All its?" "Just so, Falgo. Stiglul reproduces parthenogenetically. Like the orange th-the, ah, Jarp, it is two sexes combined into one life form, one unit. Unlike the Jarp -so I understand-it does not need another sex. Fed very well indeed, stiglul reproduces every thirty-seventh day. Its young are tiny. They grow rapidly! They eat waste-or anything else organic--and produce sugar; hexose. Some of it they excrete. Most of it they convert to alcohol and store. Given a sudden stimulus of heat, extreme heat at any part of the, ah, body, and they . . . excrete." Shock 'em or beam 'em and they wet their pants, Trafalgar thought. Makes sense-so would you, Dorvo! "You-hurt them, with extreme heat, and they excrete alcohol at once? On demand, so to speak?" "Exactly. One in four dies." "Ah. But . . ." Trafalgar glanced around at vat after vat. "Too bad, hmm. Bye-bye, little Stillwell. Plenty more where you came from. Tomorrow your mama will consider you waste matter and consume you." "Very good, Falgo. You do have understanding! I had not realized, not really, until now that I-meet you." "Oh, we barbarians do pretty well. We'd rig a simple shock-stick or incorporate an electrical wire into the tank-which we'd make of frictionless polymer-plas. No attendants necessary that way." A burst of light went off inside his head. "Ah, if only I could get to my craft with one! I'd show you what I mean. Why, even 111 in my suit-the clothing I was wearing when we ... came here, you know?-there's a shock-stick. It's called a stopper. Certainly would be fun to show you what I mean. A real revelation for you, Borg Dorvo! A step forward in knowledge, and the science of stiglulation!" Dorvo glanced around. He looked almost shaky with excitement. A true man of science, Dorvo-for a Knor-man. "I-I-the title is not mine, Har Falgo." "Really?" Trafalgar gave the man his best astonished look. "Disgraceful. Oh! Excuse me-I meant no criticism of Survival and the

Thirty-two! I am only a guest, a visitor, an Outsider. Still ... a man of science . . ." He broke off, shaking his head. I plant a little seed here, he was thinking as he played the role, and another seed here, and we see what may eventually germinate . . . I hope, I hope. "At any rate, Stillwell the stiglul is an efficient everything!" Dorvo smiled wanly, nodded, swallowed. Still thinking about all those wonderful things Trafalgar had said, obviously. "Just about," he said. His smile broadened. "And good company, as well. Stiglul neither moves nor talks nor thinks. It just sits-uh, rests there, and makes sugar and alcohol." "C-two H-five Oh," Trafalgar murmured. "The volatile intoxicant. Free. And every night . . . it's drunk-time hi Survival!" He looked up and said in his normal voice, quickly, "I admit that at first I thought stiglul was about the most unwholesome-looking thing I'd ever seen. Dare I ask what you do with the alcohol, Supervisor?" Carefully, he had returned to the man's title. The "borg" stuff had been deliberate flattery. So was this. "You already know, Falgo," Grud said in a slightly amused tone. "We collect it. It is tested, to make sure it is quite clear and pure." "It has to be, of course, and is. And-?" 112 Trafalgar gazed upon that rather icky purplescent mass of tissue and thought about all the nightly drinking in Survival. And all the urination that led to. And so back to stiglul, and so back to the Survivors. Recycling Center, indeed! And that pompous Garnax wasn't the director-stiglul was! "And we color it, and drink it." "Yum," Trafalgar Cuw said. 11 I could halfway fall in love, For part of a lonely night, With a semi-pretty woman in my arms. -Dan Jenkins, Semi-Tough Trafalgar was a prisoner. Enslaved and helpless. Yet he knew that, and his brain was working. And so he was not helpless. He had done what he could, and he would continue. He had learned a lot. Grud was going to try to arrange a "reunion" with Janja. Supervisor Dorvo was charmed and fascinated. He must want to visit with Trafalgar. He might want to find a way to get Trafalgar to Satana, to see some of the miracles Trafalgar had talked about so superficially. A few references made Trafalgar believe that the Knormen had been Outside, and had been to Satana. They could not get inside the ship. Nor would they. Knormen hadn't weapons or technology to force their way into a spaceship whose airlock was sealed. Of course Trafalgar Cuw could not get into Satana, either. The outer hatch would respond to the code of its captain, who had created the code and programmed the hatch. Satana's captain was Hellfire, whom these swine knew as Love-fire. Her code-signal might be verbal, or physical, or it might even be visual. Some prearranged code, some "open sesame" that bade Satana 113 114 unlock itself. It would hardly be anything so simple as a doorbell or a key or an ID card. Maybe Quindy had the code, too, and maybe she didn't. Trafalgar felt that he could be certain neither Janja nor Cinnabar did. He had to consider his hopes a tractor beam, clamped onto Grud, and Dorvo, and Janja. And whatever else he thought of. Meanwhile he would continue his lovely-lonely existence in this cage the Survivors had him in, barred with their clamp on his resistance, if not the totality of his mind. And furnished, lined with the velvet draperies of the eager females they kept sending him. Grud was shocked. Barso, who had planted a child when he was thirteen and was now the still-young parent of a nubile daughter, wanted her "done," as he coolly put it, by Har Falgo. And Borg Barso wanted to watch. "That, uh, is unusual, Borg Barso, and yet perhaps arrangeable. Your desire emboldens me to make a request," Grud said. "Oh?" Barso raised an eyebrow. The look clearly advised the other Knorman that if he asked for Barso's daughter he would be making a serious error. "Before the strangers came to us, Falgo had a, umm, relationship with one of the women. Janjis. He has exp-" "Do not express his request, Grud. It is not possible. Janjis is my property. So it fell out when we captured them, and so it is. She is my-happy-slave. I have feeling for her, and am not prepared to loan her to Falgo. Particularly since they previously had a relationship! She has forgotten it. She does not need to be reminded. No." Your daughter-while you watch! But not your slave, hmmm? You, Barso, are not a well man! "I hear you and I understand, Barso. I make no request. Nor have I heard yours." 115 From her headband of loose-plaited silver wire,



little crystal pearls dribbled over Meeshais's forehead and temples like drops of Barr-dew. She was otherwise quite utterly enveloped in a night-cloak of polychromatic iridescence. It covered her and concealed her figure from throat to instep and wrist. Those wrists were, Graborn saw, unusually unbraceleted. Foresightful of her, he mused, as well as nice. She cannot harm Cinnabar with heavy jewelry-nor will she have to bother taking any off. In a hurry, is Mee-shais! I wonder if she wears anything under that cloak? He wore a long robe, green as the forests that did not exist on Knor. He said, "As you know, my lady, I am able to communicate with Cinnabar, to a degree. Since we fed it the learning lichen as we did the others, it understands our language. Yet it can never speak to us. The very composition of its mouth-parts makes that impossible. The language of its land is the whistling we call music." "Yes," Meeshais said shortly. "Laleemis: remove your cloak!" Looking down, her servant obeyed. She wore a tunic that did not fall as far as her mid-thigh. Its color was a rich, deep red. It was slashed in a V to the waist so that it could be laced up the front. It was laced. Tightly, to the lower curves of her breasts, where it was tied. Above that, the lacing was very loose. The cuffs on her ankles and wrists were dyed red. Graborn's brief look at her told him that she was not just desirable; she was more. She was sexuality itself. He had no doubt that Meeshais had seen to that, for his benefit. With an effort, he dragged his gaze from her to her mistress. "Still," he told Graborn's cloak-tented wife, "a form of communication is possible. Cinnabar's 'yes,' 'no' and 'maybe' are readily distinguishable. Shall I go with you to it and assist you in-" "Dear lord Graborn," Meeshais dared interrupt, "contrary to what all you men think or choose to pre- 116 tend to believe, all women are not stupid little creatures requiring care and explanations as to a child. Children, that is. Some of us think. Some of us even delude ourselves that we are relatively intelligent. Should I wish to converse with the Maker of Music, I shall-with thanks to you for the suggestion-learn the three sounds in no time at all." Graborn gazed at her, impressed and non-plussed. A woman speaking satirically! He nodded. Not only did he consider himself in her power, but Cinnabar had a need. "I understand," he said. "As I had no intention of insulting you, madam, but truly sought only-foolishly! -to help, you need not be harsh with me." She looked at him, blinking. "Oh my lord," she said at last, in her softer voice. "You are truly more than anyone thinks! Laleemis: this is a man! Respect him, as your mistress does." "Yes, mistress." The girl sounded unconvinced. After all, a man who was so diffident and very nearly apologetic to a woman! -to Meeshais, who was her husband's diffident and submissive slave! Now there was a man, for the lady Garnax-Meeshais was no easy or meek woman! Graborn stepped a pace back and aside. He indicated an arras with a gesture. "My lady?" "You understand all, my lord," she said, and went in to Cinnabar of Jarpi. Hardly knowing how to behave, how to be arranged when she entered, the Jarp sat on a sleeping mat against the wall to the left of the door. It watched her enter, covered as it had seen no woman of Survival covered. It made a gesture of greeting. Meeshais glanced around. A padded bench of greenstone squatted to the right of the door. She moved to it, but did not sit. "Please say to me your word for 'yes,' Maker of Music." 117 Cinnabar blinked large lemur's eyes, very dark. Not another language game! "T'lee!" "That means yes, the affirmative-acquiescence?" "T'lee." Shit. I didn't know we were going to talk! They did; swiftly Meeshais established its 'yes' and 'no' and 'perhaps,' after which she raised its surprise to astonishment: she repeated the sounds, and she did it extraordinarily well. Cinnabar made the Respect Gesture as it whistled yes, three tunes. "Gestures are part of your language, Sin'bar?" "T'lee." "You look pleased and said yes three times. I did well?" "T'lee! T'lee!" "And was the gesture one of ... surprise?" "Twoo." "Of ... of congratulation?" Meeshais asked, her head on one side so that several of the crystal droplets pendent from her headband swung aflash, in the air. "T'lee," the Jarp said, and wished it could tell her it was more, for the gestures of Jarpi were solemn words and

often gifts. She smiled. Slowly the smile faded. Her head straightened. "I ... find that I am . . . uncomfortable." "Yes," Cinnabar whistled, and showed her a Jarp smile. It started to rise, then beckoned. Best it not approach her, only to tower intimidatingly over the woman who was many sems shorter. She went to the fascinating creature. It took her hand, gently, in its many-digitated one, so smooth and furless--so very orange!--and tugged. She sank down onto the mat with it. "I've gone shy and speechless! How foolish! And I was going to walk in and throw off my cloak!" Gently, Cinnabar unlatched the cloak's three fastenings, and pushed the garment away. Lady Garnax-Meeshais wore the headband with its spherical pendants, and small earrings that were green 118 stone "wire" piercing her small lobes. In addition she was gauded with an upper armllet that was large but of such thin silver wire so intricately filigreed that it must be very light; a rather short necklace of silver-linked amethysts cut into the half-lozenges called cabochons, each the size of a thumbnail; and a tiny and delicate areolar ring of milky quartz, no thicker than ten hairs. Her clothing consisted of a woven-cloth hipband from which depended a sort of short narrow apron, indigo. That was all. Bent on sexuality, heart and mind and genitals set on the Jarp, she had vowed to come naked to her chosen lover. Only at the last moment had Meeshais gone nervous and added the hipband and bit of cloth called a swinger. Cinnabar's hand slid over her, and it trembled. It has been a long time. Slowly, Cinnabar, it bade itself, slowly! Her sleek beige down was beautiful. It was also short and soft as the fur on a beagle's forehead. A long time, Cinnabar thought, and felt a tremor run through it that was close to being hit by a stopper on a #2 setting. She sat still beside it and interestedly watched the movement of the orange fingers over her. Four fingers, and so long. Two thumbs. Fur-less. Such a beautiful contrast with her own natural coat, she thought, with her lips curving up at the corners, just a little. Solemnly it kissed one of her breasts, then the other, and she shuddered. The breast-ring was placed well back of the nipple's base-by her husband, Cinnabar thought, and doubtless with care that ifs out of the way jor his own convenience. Knorman swine! It withdrew its hands from her then to remove its halter, and she stared at its liberated breasts. How pretty! They were cones half the size of hers, which were both meaty and troublesomely bouncy. The Jarp's nipples were thicker, though no larger. And bright red! Fascinating . . . Putting a hand on her shoulder and pressing down in 119 a signal to remain where she was, Cinnabar rose. Mee-shais sat on the mat and looked up that long, long orange line. / think this may not be easy, she thought. His legs are as long as my body from the shoulders down! We haven't stood together, but my head would be on a level with- She smiled. Her chosen lover's state of excitation was obvious even before it removed its trunks. Meeshais was pleased, complimented, and excited. Despite the breasts, her thinking of the orange, scarlet-tressed alien as "he/ him" was justified by that erection. She watched it remove the trunks. Its penis sprang to attention and saluted her. Without her volition, Mee-shais's thighs drifted apart. Erection, testicle, and vaginal opening below and behind were not large. There was after all only so much room. The 46,XXXYYh chromosomal array of the (genetically, hereditarily) hermaphroditic natives of Jarpi did not provide for anything approaching a massive display of either female (X) or male (Y) characteristics. It began sliding the dark red trunks down those long, long legs. "How perfect!" Meeshais cried, clapping her hands so that her breasts bulged together and jumped, Cinnabar watching appreciatively. "How beautiful! Haw . . . complete! A woman and a man all at once! Oh, I do want both, all!" After that it was easy for them both. "You are here because your mistress wanted a private interview with Cinnabar the Jarp," Graborn said, "and I am to be distracted. I really don't care, for I know the sort of master Borg Garnax is. You would not dare even think of discussing, much less disputing any 'request' of him or his lady wife. My life is given to seeking knowledge. It is an attitude that few under- 120 stand. I do not care about that either. Do what you wish while we ... wait, girl." She tried. "Of what use is knowledge, my lord?" "It is all there is of value, g-Laleemis,

in all the universe!" Shocking! What a weird statement! What a weird attitude! "But-we of Survival dare not gain overmuch knowledge, my lord, or progress, for we have noplac to go!" Graborn shrugged. "You are right, Laleemis. By the way, you can put your cloak back on if you wish. We-" She did not wish! "My lord does not like me? The tunic?" "I like the tunic and the way you look, Laleemis. I do not know whether I like you or not, for I do not know you. You are hardly merely a body, as I am more than mine. I bade you do as you wish. I wanted you to know that includes resuming your cloak, if you wish, in the presence of a stranger you have been thrown at." Weird man! Standing, Laleemis quite unconsciously expanded her chest and pushed it forth. "I was about to say that you are right-we have noplac to go. We have only our Survival: closed, finite. Yet our visitors came from Outside. We know that Outside it is too cold to live, save as beasts. Or what we consider beasts. So it can be said that we have nowhere to go. Still, we are going somewhere. We are going down the Firepit, in a rush! More and more of our children are idiots, fit only to be beasts. I have chosen to have none." "Oh my lord!" She was nearly in tears, that quickly. "No one speaks that way-no one dares! What are you saying?" "How can you know, Laleemis? No one speaks of anything to a slave, is that not true? You know what I am saying, unless you are hopelessly stupid. That is not what I think I see in your eyes, Laleemis. I see intelligence there-and now tears. I am sorry for that. Per- 121 haps you are better off being a slave. A shadow no one speaks to, other than to give orders. But you know what I am saying. Survival is dying." "Lord! Borg Graborn!" "Yet we continue as always," he said, ignoring her. "Doing nothing. Sneering at knowledge and those who seek it out. Pretending. Producing half-wits and idiots. Failing even to learn from these Outsiders. Refusing to learn from them!" His arm moved in a gesture of helplessness. "I try to learn, Laleemis. If we learn, perhaps we can survive. If we do not-why should we survive? What are we? Lichen! Stigluls! Unlearning, arrogant hi ignorance, unquesting and unheeding!" The very young woman showed that she was both terrified and fascinated. No one had spoken to her in this way, nor in any way that approached this. He was right. Who spoke to a slave, but to order and chastise? This man was like none she had met or seen or thought of. He frightened her and stimulated her; challenged her and terrified her. Revolted and attracted. She wanted to strike him and to be embraced by him. Laleemis moved herself. She went to stand before him. He disconcerted her again, by seating himself. She was looking down at a man! "I will not put on my cloak again unless you order me, master." "I am not your master." Deliberately he looked her up and down. "Well, I certainly won't order you to cover up your beauty, Laleemis." Half-turning, she made an exaggerated expectorative noise. "Then I spit on my cloak!" And she turned back to Graborn amid a rustle of fire-red tunic. For a long time she said nothing, only looking down into his face. Then, "It is strange, looking down at a man!" He chuckled. "It is strange, looking up at a woman." Laleemis's eyes widened, then she blinked. "Oh. No one has . . . ever called me that before." "Woman?" "Yes," she said, softly and from the throat. 122 "Well, Laleemis, that is what I see. And that is my doom, I suppose. I don't say what others say. I don't even think the way others do. I am I." She put her head on one side and stared. Slowly, she repeated the two Knoresese words. "I am . . . I.I am I! What a thing to say! What words! What a thought! Oh! I am I!" She was jiggling, practically jumping up and down. There is indeed a brain in there, Graborn thought. And he wondered: should he be glad, or sorry for her? Then of a sudden her luminous hazel eyes widened and she was staring, truly staring at him. He returned her gaze levelly and at least with seeming cool. At last he said, "Oh, stop staring at me that way. Get rid of that tunic and come down here, woman!" "Woman," she murmured, and did exactly as he said. She wanted him, wanted him to have her-and at the same tune she hoped that they could talk some more . . . Meeshais lifted her mouth from Cinnabar's breast, though her hand remained on his digger-with a ringer running under, inside the small-lipped, small crevice behind the tight scrotum. She ran her tongue out

to lick a nipple whose size she had increased. "I always wondered what this would be like," she said, heavy-lidded, lazily smiling. "Ha! You call me 'he' and kept saying 'dig harder, dig harder!'-but you are most fascinated tonguing and sucking my warheads," the Jarp said in amusement. Since it spoke the only way it could, in its own language, she understood none of it. "I hope that was something wicked," she said. Cinnabar moved its fingers inside her and watched her shudder, felt her shudder. Cinnabar said nothing. Suddenly Meeshais's eyes were wide. "It might be dangerous . . . and perhaps this is best . . . but oh how I wish I could understand you, 123 talk with you! Oh!" She winced and shuddered at digital movements inside her. "Uh. Yesss . . . I understand . . . this is not a time for talking. You are ready again, aren't you, lover! You love mouth on your breasts as much as I do, don't you! But. . ." Her eyes clouded. "How could we do that? Cinnabar? How could we converse, really converse? Oh-one of the others? Those who came with you, I mean?" Cinnabar tried not to show excitement. "T'lee." "Hmm. A translator-the man? Far-no no, Falgo?" "T'lee . . . 'woo'dleetl." "Maybe the man. Hmm. The one he says was . . . she, then? Love-fire?" "Twoo." "Well, that leaves only two!" Her hand was moving steadily, skating up and down the red-orange digger, ringers nudging into the soft little vaginal mouth below it on each downstroke. "Janjis?" "T'lee," Cinnabar said, nodding, and pulled, and arranged, and Meeshais's thinking broke off as for the first time in her life she was put into position to take a digger up into her. She rode it happily for a time, rising and sinking, exulting in the new experience as she rose and sank on it, the feeling of, of power. Then that palled, and she ended it. She slipped sidewise and pulled her lover with her, still firmly imbedded. "Dig me hard, lover," she whispered hoarsely, and Cinnabar played Knorman. Its lithe orange body jerked and pumped and swung in a swivel-hipped ecstasy and her furry sleekness felt wonderful. The voluptuous downy cradle of her hips was rising rhythmically from the mat, losing the rhythm, regaining it, thrusting to her lover in a fiery desire for more and more. The considerable disparity in their heights-lengths, in their present position-was no more than that between many cheerleaders with the pituitary stars of the basketball team. She could not get her hands on Cin- 124 nabar's tight-cheeked, bobbing backside; Cinnabar could not get its mouth onto her breasts while they were coupled. She enjoyed, and came close to fainting, though Cinnabar thought that Meeshais probably did not know what orgasm was, and had never experienced that ultimate completion. Cinnabar did not share that problem. She loved the way the Jarp made helpless, throaty warbling sounds as it came, and came. In the adjoining room, both Graborn and Laleemis proved orgasmic, and had to bite each other to keep from yelling. The lady Garnax-Meeshais and her servant, cloak-swathed, returned home in silence. Both were enthralled, cloaked hi lovely thoughts as well as cloth. Each was imbued with that selfishness or enchantment that made her think that only she was, neither thinking of the other. Nor was either of them thinking of Borg Garnax, who had at last realized his ambition between the fat hills of his assistant's slave. He found them jiggly and loose and floppy, those rearward hills, and furthermore she was a virgin there, and squealed and wept. Garnax was gratified and spent. He was not, however, enchanted, enthralled, or in love. Furthermore, he deemed it wise to be home before his wife, and of course could not be sure when that meant. Thus he was ever aware of the time, and felt pushed. Furthermore still, both Meeshais and Laleemis were better bed-partners than this silly buttsy girl he had so long lusted after. All in all, it was only a fair experience, Garnax reflected morosely, as he hurried home. At that, he arrived only a very few minutes before his devoted and dutiful wife and her servant. He pretended to be asleep. That was absolutely fine with Meeshais. And Laleemis, who had a very hard time getting to sleep. The 125 poor young woman's brain would not turn off. It was full of Graborn (the magnificent), and of her being a w\*o\*m\*a\*n, and of her having a brain, acknowledged by him who must surely be the most intelligent and thinkingest man in all Survival. At last she wept, quietly, for Laleemis was only a slave, and the slave of Garnax and Meeshais

at that, and she was in love. Somehow, a couple of days later, Borg Garnax succumbed to his wife's expertise and was soon intimidating the man closest to Borg Barso, and then Barso himself, in the matter of the latter's slave Janjis. Laleemis became part of the bargain, but she would be told later; what business was it of a slave's, the arrangements her master made for her? It was a strange transaction for Garnax. Although he succeeded and that fed his ego, he gained no advantage of anyone. 12 You can never run scared, no matter what the score is. -Billy Martin "Borg Graborn," the slave Janjis said, "of course I will interpret. I am at your disposal, sir. Unfortunately I understand little of Cinnabar's language, and can whistle perhaps . . . ten words in it." "You can!" Graborn's voice rose and his face showed Ms excitement at even that tiny revelation. "Then-but then learning its language is possible, after all!" She looked steadily at him-strange, for a slave- from eyes pale as water standing in a quartz bowl. "I spent months as fellow slave with another Jarp," she explained, "on-in a place called Resh."\* (It was a planet and the proper word was on, not in, but Janja took the simplest route past the ignorance of Survival. They knew little more than her own lost people of the pastoral planet Aglaya-who were not, however, ignorant by choice.) "I was in constant close proximity, Borg Graborn, to that creature called Whistle, as fellow sufferers. I learned to understand a little. I learned to speak a very little. Our mouths and tongues are not \* Spaceways # I: Of Alien Bondage. 126 127 made for the Jarp language. That's all-and no, I wouldn't think it would be possible. What I was about to say is that our people devised a sort of helmet for Cinnabar-for all Jarps. It translates its speech into our language, and translates what we say into its language, or can. If we had that translahelm, Borg Gra-born, I could relay Cinnabar's every word to you." "From its language to yours, and from yours to mine." Janja nodded. Graborn sighed. "I will try," he said. "Those things are all in a protected place. I would have to be given authority to go there, much less fetch something away. I know the head-harness you mean. I saw it." "The ship was entered?-The craft that brought us here, Borg Graborn?" "No. Everything worn or carried by all five of you, however, was brought here and stored." Janja's heart began to speed its beat. "Stored? Not studied?" Strangely indeed for a man of Knor, he looked down. "Not studied." And the shake of his head was in obvious exasperation. "Just lying there!" Idiots, Janja of "barbarian" Aglaya thought. "Part of the helmet is any of several cylinders in individual holsters, designed for them," she said, meanwhile fighting back her heart's desire to race as she lied. Her stomach had become a little tremulous. "To translate, I would need one of those." "It is obvious that your people are . . . very different," the Knorman said, scratching idly under the medallion at his breast. "Those sheathed cylinders . . . they are somehow connected to the helmet?" "Yes," Janja said, shamelessly and happily lying to this representative of a society of slavers and blatant users of women. To be on the safe side she added, "Borg Graborn." He waved a hand no larger than hers. "Do not worry about offending me, Janjis. I know that Survival is not 128 all there is of the universe. I know we once had what we no longer have-do not dare, we think. I am convinced that... that your people are more than just very different. They have the science that Knor once had, do they not?-and more." The Knorman-size woman of Aglaya nodded, she who was short among such Galactics as Quindy and Hellfire and Trafalgar. She was surprised. Watch your own bigotry, Janjaheriohir! she reminded herself. You are as susceptible to it as anyone, daughter of Aglaya! All Knormen are not alike. This man thinks, and tries, and anguishes, and he dares much. He is a man of intelligence and almost, he is a man of science. Almost. He would be, if they had science beyond numbers and bracing tunnels and melting snow for water and . . . stone faceting! And he is our hope; may be our only hope among them. With his help, witting and otherwise, perhaps I am our one hope! He said, "I do not understand, naturally, but I believe that your people have a means of translating Cinnabar's speech, as you say. And much more. I will try, for I want very much to talk with Cinnabar." "I would be so very glad to help, Borg Graborn." Carefully she looked at the floor

between them, the slave Janjis. "Will you . . . will Borg Graborn accept or hear a suggestion from a mere slave?" He sighed. That damned lipith, he mused. It keeps you so very sickeningly subservient and cautious, when I have so much to learn from you and your kind! Damn them-damn us all! I cannot even talk with her as if she is a person! "Of course," he said, looking as if he wanted to touch her. He did not, because he knew she would not be able to understand, to take a touch of warmth as he meant it. He had no way of knowing about her ability to cherm, to learn beyond those normal senses his kind had in common with Jarps and Galactics. She chermmed his warmth and sincerity, and something else . . . an- 129 guish, perhaps. She nodded. Strange Knorman! Why he might also be . . . but no, she mused. Don't assume too much and presume too far! And carefully she began making her "suggestion": a complete plan and somewhat complicated plot she had just devised and polished as she related it. Gra-born listened in awe. And this was a mind his people were just so sure was inferior because it was in a different body, and fit only for sexual slavery! It was indeed a plan! Only two Knorese days later Graborn had his permission. Soon after that he had those things the pale-haired woman had specified, from the cache of her people's things! His elation was brought up short at discovery that he had to wait still another day: Janja, Barso coolly said, was "unavailable." It pleased that damned Barso to be indulgent with one such as Graborn . . . and to be contrary, too, because that emphasized the advantage gained. And the following night was also impossible; Cinnabar had duties to perform. Dinner music at the party of that stupid bore, Gebb. Another day gone, with Graborn unable to concentrate because of his anticipation. (As it turned out, during Gebb's party Torgex and Boskar decided to get together privately the following night, for the little party each had long considered and coveted. Just the two of them, tomorrow night, with their slaves Love-fire and Midnight.) Next day Graborn was able to arrange his gathering for that same night. Barggax had stated austerey that he did not wish the "orange thing to make those distracting noises" at his dinner party this evening. Other seeds were germinating, in Survival. On that same day Dorvo stood staring in excitement at his precious stigluls. Dorvo was excited. He was fascinated with things Falgo had said. Since then he had been as if possessed by the Outsider's knowledge and promise of sharing. On this day, Dorvo ceased torturing himself 130 and decided. He would take that Falgo fellow to that secret chamber in which were stored the (former) possessions of the Outsiders. Tonight, tonight, while others drank and drank that which Dorvo and his stiglul farm provided. Sssllp, the stigluls seemed to comment, as if they approved. It was going to be a very big night in Survival. 13 If you do not think about the future, you cannot have one. -John Galsworthy Violence, it has been sententiously said, is the last refuge of the incompetent. I agree. It's also the last refuge of those who are just dam' tired of being shoved around so damned much. -Trafalgar Cuw Cinnabar was astonished and more excited than it could remember being. After all these weeks or months of captivity by these swine (forty-six dinner parties; the Jarp had kept track of that), here was Janja! And didn't she look marvelous, in her "master's" idea of clothing and with various lovely pieces of the superb gaudery of Survival! And then here was its translation helmet, in the hands of a triumphant and visibly excited Graborn! Good old Graborn! And then the final astonishment-or so Cinnabar thought-Graborn was smilingly handing Janja . . . a stopper! And what the vug was Laleemis doing here? "Because my master and mistress are at the party of Borg Senator Barggax and will be there late and late," Laleemis told Graborn. "And because . . . I wanted to 131 132 be here with you, my lord." And she looked at Gra-born as if he had created all the gems in Survival. Too bad Meeshais can't be here, Cinnabar reflected. She won't enjoy that dumb dinner party much, without me there "entertaining!" Janja was watching with surprise while a man and a woman of Survival embraced with real affection, just as if Laleemis was a person and Graborn had genuine feelings for her; as if she felt something for him other than fear. And then Graborn was handing the translahelm to Cinnabar, and to Janja . . . a sheathed stopper! She smiled

as she took it with a polite bow of her head. Aside from my own will, the most powerful weapon in Survival! All she had to do now was hold it, to pretend that it was an integral part of her converse with Cinnabar. O Sunmother's Light but she wanted to hug Cinnabar, after so long! She watched it don the system of straps and hardware that was a miracle and yet was so very very simple. As simple as a few tiny chips of silicon. And then, in the translation helmet, it truly looked like Cinnabar again. "What terrible lie did you tell our beloved but gullible friend that persuaded him to put that weapon in your hands, Janja?" She laughed aloud at that, and there were tears in her eyes. Borg Barso with a loaded whip could not have prevented her embracing her friend, then. Aglii and Sunmother's Light, how many months of isolation! Heedless of Graborn and Laleemis, Janja practically hurled herself at Cinnabar. While they embraced and patted each other, tall Jarp and short Aglayan, the short Survivors stood watching. Standing close, hands on each other. "I believe those two are lovers," Cinnabar said. "Tell Graborn that I like him very much and appreciate nun as well, and that this is a gesture of respect." 133 Janja turned to relay those words, and Graborn blinked while Laleemis sidewardly hugged him in delight and pride. And Cinnabar made the gesture it had not quite been able to explain, with a vocabulary of yes-no-maybe. "Oh, I ... I am overcome," Graborn said, with emotion. "So now, Cap'n Janja, you have cleverly got us a weapon!" To the Jarp she said, "Stop calling me that, darling idiot!" and to Graborn, "Cinnabar says that it has one friend among the Survivors, but it appears that friend is two in one." Graborn smiled and hugged Laleemis to him. Gauds jingled and twinkled on her. "I suppose I should not test you, but . . . how can I not know some uncertainty? Ask Cinnabar to tell you who interrupted us just as we were ending our first . . . interview." "Since you understood him," Janja said to the Jarp in Erts, the language of the Galactic "race," as they called it, "answer his question after I tell you that I am not a Galactic, but alien to them as you are, to Trafalgar and Hellfire and all of them, and I have been pretending with all my might and skill. I am not affected by the enslaving swill these rotten swine feed us so carefully, and now I have a weapon!" Cinnabar jerked in surprise and new hope. "That's two of us!" it said excitedly, and added, "His answer is the Lady Garnax-Meeshais, wife of the Director of Recycling. And she's a pretty good lay." "Even though you have the key and the words and I defer to you, Supervisor Dorvo, I have direct, explicit orders. I cannot let you into this chamber." "I have permission, damn you!" Dorvo growled at the guard. "I am sorry, Supervisor . . . but you must show it to me, then." To have gotten this far, Dorvo anguished, while be- 134 side him Har Falgo stood looking down as befit his lowly station. To have gotten this jar, Trafalgar Cuw thought, but not in anguish. We won't be stopped now. He elevated his gaze, just a little, and totally without warning-or precedent, in Survival-his leg swept up and he kicked the guard in the balls. "Ah!" Dorvo gasped in horror. Violence! In Survival! The guard said rather less, having other uses for his breath. With tears in his eyes, he grabbed himself and sank back against the stone lintel, then sagged to his knees. Trafalgar stepped easily forward, turned the Knorman's head a little, and poked two fingers to a particular spot on the lightly furred head. "Ah, they are that similar to us, at least," Trafalgar muttered, as the Knorman collapsed. "He-he is, is-what have you der-done?" poor Dorvo stammered, his real horror. The master of the stiglul chamber was practically wringing his hands. "Kicked him in the gemstones and put him out for the next hour or more," Trafalgar said in an easy, informative tone. "Unconscious, you know. Shall we open the door, Supervisor?" "What-what kind of man are you? You-you struck him!" "That is true, Supervisor," Trafalgar said respectfully. "To help further your aims, Supervisor. You wish to enter the chamber, and he sought to stop you. He was also disrespectful." "He-but he wasn't! He was doing his duty as he saw it, and was most polite. Oh, Falgo!" Trafalgar looked down. Inside he raged and fought, but that swill these bastards fed them was working away, and he was slipping back into the slavish role it induced. If Dorvo commanded

him to heel or come along meekly to be punished or tied or something, he knew in anguish, he would do it. To know that he was controlled was not to be able to break the hold. Now and again he was able to slip out of it, briefly. That was probably because these dodoes had not thought to 135 allow for his size and provide a larger dose. And of course there was his training, and certain modifications to his body. Theba's labes, this damned stuff of theirs was more potent than TZ-tetrazombase, to which he was supposedly immune! Poor Dorvo, meanwhile, was in just as much agony. Indecision had returned to him, here at the very door that was their goal! Why had this barbarian done such a thing? No such act had been perpetrated in self-sufficient Survival for centuries. For in such action lay the seeds of chaos and worse for Survival. Survivors could survive in Survival only by avoiding the truly independent acting of individuals as individuals, bullying, merely taking. They must remember always that they were inter-dependent and had to be part of a whole. Part of the community that was self-sufficient, eternally endangered Survival. Striving for advantage was one thing. That and violence confined to the exertion of independent will over mere women—those were the sublimations of that drive, the compensations. But this! Much as he wanted what lay beyond this door, to see what Falgo did with the alien things and learn what he had to teach, to demonstrate—did Dorvo dare accept such an act as this downing of a man merely doing his duty? Supervisor Dorvo fidgeted, gnawed at the inside of his mouth, tried and pushed his brain, hard. He reached a conclusion. Self-interest and individualism were as natural to Knormen as to other races. Selflessness was as unnatural to them as it was to those of Trafalgar Cuw's strange hairless race. It was just that here, it was necessary to fight selfishness, individualism. On the other hand, Dorvo reflected, there was more than one way to cut and facet a stone! Dorvo saw the way, and it involved selfishness. He made his decision with self in mind. He would open the door. He and Har Falgo would take what was needed and he would hurry this barbarian to the Re- 136 cyke Center and to the stiglul farm. There he would watch and question Falgo, learning what he could. Then he would turn the slick-skinned violent alien over for custody and discipline. With a nod Dorvo keyed open the iron bar that secured the great slab of door. Together he and Trafalgar Cuw forced the heavy door of stone. "Open . . . sesame . . ."

Trafalgar breathed, staring at the glittering treasures within the small chamber. It was all there. While her master and his friend watched with indulgent smiles, the slave Midnight postured and admired herself. She had never been so loaded with jewelry or anything even approaching this much mass of gaudery. She had not dreamed, could not have dreamed of herself in such splendor. Surely Cleopatra would have been envious of the slave Midnight, once Quindy of spacer Satana. Her arms flashed and tinkled, scintillant and jingly from biceps to the fingers on which had been loaded no fewer than eleven rings. At her throat a single ruby flashed from a band of braided silver. The ruby was big as her thumbnail and thick as her smallest ringer. Just below it, depending onto the slopes of her bare breasts, a heavy, almost massive carcanet gleamed and sent forth polychromatic flashes. The color flashed from silver, and tiny inset quartz chips, and an even eighty stones, in eight colors and five shapes. Below the carcanet, a pendant swung freely from the pinch-clamp about the base of each azure-tinted nipple. They were diamond-shaped pieces of constantly twinkling crystal, faceted beyond the ability of any com-puter-and-laser-using stonemason among all the teeming star-worlds out beyond Survival. (They did hurt; that was undeniable. They hurt both in the pinching of the clamps and the weighty swinging tug of the pendants, which were ostentatiously large.) The earrings did not hurt, though they were heavy, 137 bothersome, and not quite comfortable. Three swung from the loop of gold piercing each lobe. In addition a topaz the color of her own hair flashed from each recently pierced hole above the lobe, in the rounding upward curve of her ear. She could not help prancing, which made her hip-band flash and tinkle. It was an amethyst-studded little rope of two ultra-slim strands of gold wke woven with three of hair-Knorman hair. Or



rather Knor-woman hair. Pendants seemed to dribble from it to varying lengths all around, attached on tiny gold-link chains at intervals of six millimeters-the standard small measure of the Knormen of Survival. A thin ring of large diameter gleamed refulgently on the outer curve of each rounded black thigh, which the rings pierced. The rings were of clearest crystal quartz, brilliantly wrought in perfect circles. The yellow-haired black woman was as aglitter as a vista of twinkling multi-color stars in space, seen from space unsullied by atmosphere, and far more breathtaking. Watching, her smiling lord Boskar and his guest Torgex refilled their cups with the gift of the chamber of Supervisor Dorvo. Standing near her fellow slave, Love-fire was hardly less resplendent. She bore a bit more color, in fact, since the marks of whips showed more on her less dark skin. Both had knelt well and submissively, and sucked well, hardly pausing when their masters changed positions, and had been bound and whipped and then used, writhing and thrusting boldly, while their masters grew steadily more drunk. It was then the two men, each proud of his slave and pleased with the other's, decided on what they called a reward. They had simply loaded on Love-fire and Midnight every last gaud they could find, including those they themselves had worn this night, to impress each other with their splendor and high advantage. 138 Could two men be happier? Yes. "You know what would be fun, my lord?" Tor-gex said. "What, my lord?" Boskar asked. "To get these two blindingly flashing sluts together wi' that tall freak they came with. You know, the one who's bein' treated f-excuse me-far too well. With our women." "Oh! You m-eean-escuse me-Fal-go." And Boskar belched again. "Righ'! 'Har' Falgo, they're ax'ly caw-calling hi-im. Spin, Love-fire, you stupid slut!" Boskar slapped his leg and watched the hand slide off to swing loosely at the end of his arm. "Show him? Let th' bassard see wha' we've got?" "Right!" "Flaunt our slaves to that bassard they ca-ame here wi-with!" "Right! Show him how lu-lucky they are! Ump! Escuse me!" "You gettin' drunk, Torgex?" "I cer'nly hope so! Be a terrible waste of all 'at good liquor if'm not!" And Torgex laughed, slapping his leg or rather at it; he missed. Boskar laughed, too, lurching, and almost he forgot himself and touched his friend. Almost-not quite. "Abs'lu'ly! Le's do it!" They helped each other up, which was permissible touching and which did not take as long as it might have done, considering the extent of theii inebriation. Still, Knormen were accustomed to it-Knor-men. They decided to link each slave's arms behind her and lead her on a leash, outside and up to Grud's, where Falgo was staying. After a time it seemed a better idea to forget the leashes and sort of use the jewel-flashing girls to lean on. That worked. That way they could walk with relative sureness. And out they went, into nighted Survival. Two reeling masters of Survival and their incredibly gauded and 139 gaudy women. Cecil B. De Mille would have been envious. "Let Graborn know that I consider him friend, my only friend in Survival," Cinnabar said, "and let me have a quick jolt with that stopper just to be sure it works. Number One setting, mind!" Janja didn't like that much, but as she relayed the Jarp's words to the Knorman, she switched the stopper from 2 to 1 and-squeezed it. It was aimed at Cinnabar. Cinnabar showed nothing. Shook its head. Janja made sure of her aim and tried again, meanwhile noting the emotional impact the Jarp's words had on both Graborn and Laleemis. "Nothing," Cinnabar said. "I'll steel myself-try the second setting." "Please tell my friend-" Graborn began, but Janja gestured hurriedly. "Excuse me, Har Graborn-we are having difficulty with the translator. Just a moment." Now she could let Graborn see her switch the stopper to 3, then back to 2. She tried it again, on Cinnabar, though she certainly didn't want to. It didn't matter. Nothing happened. The stopper was not functioning. "Spent cartridge," Cinnabar said glumly, with a shrug. "Three might work, of course." Janja was just as glum, seeing all her hopes for brilliant rescue blown away on the breeze of a spent 01 defective stopper. In a lackluster voice she said, "I hope you don't mind if I don't try to find out if Three works." Cinnabar shook its head, looking disconsolate. "Lord, lord," Trafalgar murmured. "All here, all here!" He inspected the contents of the storage room. That mass of rumped yellow was the spacesuits. All five were

intact. Airtanks were far from empty. Helmets in- 140 tact. Aircontrol functioning. Here were the four makeshift snowshoes he had rigged for himself and Hellfire, from one of Satana's interior grilles. That meant their captors had troubled to pick him up off the ground or rather snow. He had removed them because they were impractical in his going onto the hull in quest of the Computer Traumatizer called a lamprey. This was his suit, or the one he had worn. He smiled. Repair beamer tripod still attached to the belt. His closefitting undersuit lay beside it and beneath that . . . ah. The beamer. A small laser that could be hand-held or mounted on the tripod. It was a precision tool, a cutter. And the other spacesuits. Two stoppers, even! Quindy's and-whose? Janja's or Raunchy's-I-mean-Cinnabar's? Which one was caught unarmed? Their undersuits were here, too. Stained, two of them. Tsk. "Damn," he murmured. "Falgo?" Dorvo was still nervous and fidgety as a beagle at the smell of food. "Cinnabar's translahelm isn't here. Hope there's another on the ship." And he was smiling, picking up the laser, examining it, thinking. The ship. We are going to get out of this. If only no one gives me any commands, I can do anything!-Get us out of here, get us back to the ship! "This is what we want," he said, squatting, glancing up at Dorvo with a reassuring smile, ingenuous and open. (Trafalgar was good at that smile. Trust me, it said. I'm just a nice well-meaning boy.) He glanced around. "I'll bet we're right near the tunnelway to the Outside, aren't we." Dorvo shuddered. "Close," he said, with a rather elaborate shrug. "What-what does that do, Falgo?" "It provides heat, Dorvo. It's a cutter. It cuts just about anything, quickly. It's also dangerous. I'll have to put on this special suit." "F-Har Falgo . . . please . . . we should not be here . . . we cannot stay here . . . ." "Supervisor, please, please don't order me out of here 141 yet. I will move very very rapidly. What are those bags?" Dorvo looked at the big limp containers. They were furry. Trafalgar thought the Korman shuddered. "Outside bags," he said. "For carrying things out, and in." Dorvo blinked with a little frown, watching Trafalgar hurriedly strip and as hurriedly start dragging on the undersuit he had worn, gray and blue. "Falgo . . ." "It will be all right, Dorvo. A real education. Let me explain." Just keep talking, slave. // he decides to forbid it, I won't be able to disobey him, or hurt him either. This is going to work. It is. This has to work, Traf me lad. Has to, has to! "The beamer-that's what this is called, Supervisor Dorvo, a beamer-is dangerous. It directs a highly focused monochromatic beam of light. Light, yes. The beam carries a lot of energy. Knormen probably had the principle, once." Oh sure, sure. "To use it safely, we're better off with me in this special suit." He toed the m.l.s.s.-mobile life support system. It had been Cinnabar's spacesuit, the next tallest of the five of them. It was yellow, with blue sleeves. "Before I put it on, though, I need this one under it. See?" No, of course not. "Falgo . . ." Dorvo was looking askance at him, both figuratively and literally, head cocked to one side. "You-you are not thinking of trying to go Outside in that special suit, are you?" Molecro closed. Undersuit on. Kidneys, hang on! Trafalgar shook the miss and poked his foot into one leg. "Supervisor Dorvo, I would not try to go outside without my companions." "Your companions!" Damn it, creep, be as stupid as you look, won't you? I could burn him right now. That would be that and I could get on with my business. Big night in Survival! But . . . damn. If's the difference between Necessary Defensive Measures and murder; just-killin', Hellfire 142 style. NDM is not called for, yet. Don't make me burn you, Dorvo-and don't give me any orders I'll have to obey! He had Ms foot in and all the way down and was pulling on the other leg. "The ones who came here with me. You know. We are like that, aren't you of Knor? Anyhow, since they aren't here, Supervisor Dorvo-" Drag it out, drag it out, Traf m'boy. Make it last!-"I am not going to attempt to go Outside, anyhow. Anyhow, I don't even know which direction that door, that tunnel is." He was watching the Knorman, then, and pulling up the suit. It sheathed him. He saw the swerve of Dorvo's eyes and was careful not to look that way. Over there, hmm? All right, Dorvo. Thank you, thank you! "What-what was that noise?" "A self-seal. The suit seals itself, piece at a time even

though it's one piece. One filament, really. It's made of a cloth made from chemicals, Dorvo. Excuse me: Supervisor. Together with a fellow scientist, I forget myself." That didn't make Dorvo preen, but he showed his pleasure, however briefly. Seals closed. Trafalgar was suited. He picked up the helmet-no, wrong one. He got the right one. "Now you won't be able to see my face, Supervisor, but I will be able to see you clearly. Try one of the helmets, if you wish. You'll see." He laughed. "A little joke, see? Notice the little device like a gaud here, and another in back. Those are speakers. You will also be able to hear me, quite clearly." "Falgo, I think that such things should not go into Survival. This is why they were left here. This is science, and that is dangerous to Survival." "Hmm. That's fascinating, Supervisor," Trafalgar said, dogging the helmet. (Better to have someone else do it, but naturally the suits were made so that one person could suit up, and survive, alone. He now had better vision than before, 143 because of the wide-angle lens on the helmet's TP- telepresence camera. Its picture appeared on the screen mounted inside the suit, directly before the wearer's eyes. The communications receiver was there, too.) "Tell me a little about that, will you, Supervisor?" Keep talking, it's going to work, stall. . . "I don't believe this is the time or the place for that, Har Falgo. I believe that I have let you go too far already. I'm afraid that I had best insist-" Helmet and suit secure, Trafalgar cut the input speaker. " , " Dorvo said, with some force. "Dorvo," Trafalgar said, in an oddly unnatural voice that made the Knorman twitch and stare. "This is the suifs communicator you hear. I regret to advise that I can no longer hear you, Dorvo, or anyone else." It worked, Trafalgar exulted. At least I think so-hope so. If I can't hear 'em, how can I obey? I feel queasy, being a non-submissive slave, but it's been a lot of hours since I last ate or drank anything, and by Theba's eternal mercies, Traf old lad, I do believe you have outfoxed 'em! Dorvo was talking excitedly, pointing, accusing. "I really-honestly can't hear you, Supervisor. Please observe the left sandal I just removed, while I direct the beamer at it." Partially, Dorvo saw the beam, and lurched back. It was not quite invisible; more visible, for instance, than a stopper beam. Then Dorvo saw the hole in the sandal, and the bright flash that was the reflection of a beam of tightly bound light off mica in the stone flooring. Dorvo was impressed. "Supervisor, I am going to gather up all I can carry and still leave this hand free." He waved the beamer and Dorvo watched its tip as if it were a cobra. "I would like for you to accompany me, but I can leave you here if you insist or make it necessary. Under- 144 stand that I cannot hear you. Protestations, exhortations, threats, orders, pleas-all are useless. I now have hyper-acute vision, Dorvo, and I am deaf." He squatted and began gathering space- and under-suits. His TP-enhanced vision showed him Dorvo looking past him at the door, considering, tonguing his lips nervously. "Dorvo, you are considering trying to run past me to the door, and you just licked your lips. Dorvo: Please Don't Do It! Whatever you're considering- Don't. I see you by visual Waldoes, a TP-means long distance being-there, although there's no distance involved this time. This helmet is opaque for safety." And disguise, since I just came off a pirate ship! "Believe it. I see better now than I did before. Do Not Try Anything, Dorvo. "Look, you people just beat up on women to get off, I know, and you're really out of practice at anything really violent. Fighting, for instance, and killing; isn't that a hideous thought? The death of one person directly and immediately caused by another, you understand? For instance, Supervisor, your death, caused by me. Oh, against my will, because I don't want to hurt you. But you swine have made us hate you, and I will certainly kill if / think I have to. And that means, Dorvo, if you don't do as I say and not one damned thing else!" Dorvo sagged against a wall, staring. "You-you tricked me!" "Ha!" Trafalgar was tucking one stopper into the suit's utility belt. "Read your lips! 'You tricked me,' you said! You betcher ass I did, Knorman!" He stored away the lase-beamer, too, and held out the other stopper. The very nervous Dorvo said something and pointed. Trafalgar wasn't watching, but saw. "That

time I wasn't looking and didn't lip-read. In case you told me there's a great big horrible snake coiling up to bite me, Dorvo, I don't believe you. In 145 case you're asking about this cylinder, it's called a stopper. It stops people. It can make you lose all control of yourself. Like a slave, Supervisor-I'll bet you understand that! But worse. And, it can also kill." Trafalgar checked the weapon's setting. It was on Three. Ooops. He didn't really want to kill anyone. He paused to thumb it down to Two. Dorvo stared at the apparition. Man-like, tall in the baggy yellow suit with its bright blue sleeves. Sagging looped belt from which depended various fearsome Outsider devices. The helmet, a slightly ovaled sphere. And no face. Without a face, it was no real head! It was hard to believe that Falgo was in there, though Dorvo had seen it happen. And looking at him! Trafalgar decided that the sensible thing to do was let Dorvo occupy his arms. He would do the carrying. The fearsome faceless monster from another world would walk right beside him, just slightly behind him, with a weapon in each hand. Dorvo didn't even look outraged. The Knorman was positively stupefied. He carried four spacesuits, all yellow, and three of the large furry bags that Trafalgar Cuw knew were made from the hides of those creatures Outside-the ones no one ever mentioned. The ones that proved that life, at least relatively intelligent life, was possible on Knor, outside this glorified hole called Survival where men were men and women were lower than snake's asses. The snowshoes stayed behind. So did two helmets; Dorvo just could not handle them. With a stopper in his suit's belt, Trafalgar carried a laser and a stopper. He gestured the Knorman out of the chamber. The unconscious guard was outside. Soon he was inside, and Trafalgar managed to keep Dorvo in view and get the door shut, too. He did not lock it. They walked out into nighted Survival, a laden hobbit closely escorted by a faceless bright yellow monster from outer space. 14 The impatient are told that All things come to him/her Iit -who waits. I appreciate that piece of bullshit. Those who just wait make it ever so much easier for those of us who don't arid won't. -Kislar Jonuta of Qalara

Trafalgar decided that Dorvo's new agitation and gesturing probably meant the Knorman didn't want to pass this close "to Commonweal Hall, where the usual bash and drunken orgy was going on. Trafalgar did not dare open his helmet's input comm so that he could hear Dorvo and be sure. He started steering the Knorman to the other side of the cleared area that served as (The) street, in Survival. That seemed to mollify his laden prisoner a bit. Trafalgar sighed. He'd just as soon not attract the attention of a few hundred lurching, sexually aroused Survivors, too! It was about then that he realized he should broaden his field of vision. That was relatively easy, with the suit's TP. Telepresences had begun as devices to aid the non-implant-able blind, and to serve as Waldoes. Hand-extendors (even across kilometers, electronically), grip-enhancers to add strength, and as eyes. The TP camera built into the spacesuit was not so large as his thumb. It 146 147 moved with his head and he saw what it saw, via camera-lens rather than periscope. Feedback was two-way, with the screen on the inner surface of the opaque helmet. Its setting was variable and presently fixed at one-to-one. Trafalgar changed that setting, broadening it. Now he could turn his head a quarter-way around and see behind him, a full half-turn. Now 45 degrees equaled 90 degrees-and just in time. Trafalgar's first rearward view showed him that he still had a shadow. Worse than that-here came that damned bulky dolt Dobomex, in mid-charge. "Oh, wonderful," the spacesuited man from Outreach said, and, tucking in his shoulders, dropped to one knee and bent forward. Whump! Dobomex was too close to stop or slow, and ran right into the back of a target that was suddenly reduced to about half-size. While the suit went rigid to protect its wearer against the impact, the im-pacter went right on over the top. A dragging foot didn't hurt Trafalgar, because of the suit. It did catch on the rigidified back of his shoulder, and that did hurt Dobomex. He sprawled on solid stone, both hands out and receiving a nice abrading, while his body dragged over Trafalgar's and flattened him, too. A flying foot banged his helmet. To have vision far broader than normal and then to have it dance about

as if in an earthquake-knorquake-was severely disconcerting. "Uh. Shit," Trafalgar Cuw commented. Dobomex unfortunately only brushed one of Supervisor Dorvo's legs in falling. Dorvo staggered, did not fall, and jerked his head around to look. It occurred to him that this was an excellent time to run like hell. Dorvo ran like hell. A space helmet fell and clattered noisily, spinning. Trafalgar didn't notice that at once; he was concentrating on crawling desperately up along Dobomex's back. Dobomex was concentrating on getting himself 148 up. The banging of a nice hard stopper barrel into the back of his head slowed him down but did not flatten him. He rolled. Trafalgar flopped noisily. Dobomex got himself to one knee, shaking his head and looking mean, and lunged. "Oh dammit," Trafalgar Cuw said, and jerked a knee up. "Don't you know you're supposed to be knocked out, you idiot?" Dobomex's eyes popped wide and he said something Trafalgar could not hear. It was most likely something on the order of "uk," since Dobomex had just run into an upraised knee, stomach first. Since the suit went rigid in that area immediately before his crotch impacted, he developed a sudden desire to get his falling down over with so he could curl up and grab himself. Trafalgar helped by kicking the thick "guard" away with his other foot. Dobomex immediately curled up and grabbed himself. Scrambling, Trafalgar flopped onto his spacesuited stomach and stared after the fleeing Dorvo. Had the fellow had the good sense to drop his burden of space-suits, Knorese bags and helmet, he might have gotten away. He was in panic, however, and hung onto everything except the space helmet he had lost. Then he suddenly dropped everything and began a rigid and entirely demeaning little dance. For the first time ever, a Knorman had just been hit with the beam of a stopper set on Number Two. Only semi-frozen into rigidity, he could only jerk, jiggle, and twitch all over, while executing an unsightly and entirely helpless shuffle. "Uncooperative dummies," Trafalgar Cuw muttered, getting himself up. "Be grateful I didn't use a Three setting-or use the beamer!" It did occur to him that Dorvo would keep for a moment, and that the heavier beamer was a better tool for Dobomex than the stopper. Dropping into a squat, Trafalgar bonked the huddling, shivering fellow on the temple, using the shining barrel of the laser. Dobomex 149 relaxed and settled down for a nice nap. Trafalgar half-swung in place to pin Dorvo with the stopper anew, and then he rose. It seemed safe enough now to open his comm to outside noises. He did. With a glance-using the TP, he had only to swerve his eyes-at the fallen, rocking space helmet and then another at the fallen and nicely motionless Dobomex, he started walking toward the man he pinned with his beam. "Wha's goin' on up there? In-ner Fi-res! Boskar! It's some kinda monster!" "Oh, wonderful," Trafalgar Cuw muttered. "Definitely going to be one of those nights, Traf m'boy! Not all the dam' drunks are at the dam' orgy!" "Tha's no monster, Torgex you idiot, thass Dor-vo! Hey, Subervish'r! You gone crazy, dancin' like 'at?" And then: "WAH! You're right! I didn' see'm before- a monster!" Realizing that the two drunks down the, "street" saw better than he did, Trafalgar added a bit of night-vision to his TP. As the screening field flicked into place, orange-red, he saw them clearly. And he saw the two with the Knormen, who had stopped and were staring, pointing. "Theba's navel-Hellfire! Quindy!!" "'s no mons'er-'s that Falgo!" "He's a monster!" Boskar snapped, and, considerably less inebriated on the instant, thoughtfully stepped behind the slave Midnight. "Be still," he muttered, and she was submissively still. Seeing that, the sobering Torgex at once realized Boskar's genius. He saluted it by emulating his friend. "Be still, Love-fire," he said, from behind her, and the glitteringly bejeweled slave was submissively still. "Oh, wonderful," Trafalgar muttered. He continued to pace toward them while keeping Dorvo, waveringly, on a number Two. Dorvo kept dancing. Just stand there quietly, don't yell, you two 150 creeps, and let Uncle Falgo walk up and flatten both you big brave masters of Survival! Still, a necessary decision was imminent, and Trafalgar Cuw was good at them. Maybe he was a sub-deepcover agent for TMS Mining Company, as he had convinced those others on Satana, and maybe he wasn't. He was definitely responsible for the setting off of the insurgence-into-riot that had caused

them so much trouble on the planet called Macho, and he had definitely lied to them about that. His resourcefulness in getting them off Macho and then its space station, Copperdock, had been extraordinary and exemplary. It had involved plenty of use of weapons (on legally constituted authorities, however stupid those Copper-dock Security men had been), though he had been careful not to kill—something that could hardly be said of Captain Hellfire, now the slave Love-fire. He had also used his wits and some mighty fast thinking and talking. Gaming the release of spacecraft Satana from electromagnetic lock had proven impossible. Captain Hellfire had immediately, insanely determined to proceed with the most ghastly violence. Trafalgar had gained their release by evoking a series of codes and demands; they convinced the station controller that he was dealing with an agent of TGO—an agent Prime, at that. And Satana had been released, without endangering both Copperdock and the planet below by resorting to DS-gunnery. Whether Trafalgar Cuw from Outreach was lying when he told Hellfire and the others that he was not TGO but had gamed that superb cover was something for them to ponder. If ever they regained use of their brains for such activities as pondering. Whatever and whoever he was, Trafalgar Cuw was a resourceful man of action with a disarmingly boyish-nice-guy persona, a man who at least pretended to sneer at heroism while performing the most heroic acts, and a man perfectly capable of making very ugly decisions when necessary. TGO or not, the flamboyant 151 Outie respected expediency. He considered his goals, his ends, of sufficient importance to use even ugly means to reach them: NDM. It began to look necessary when he was still many steps from either Dorvo or the two others shielded by their slaves—his former companions Hellfire and Quindy. It approached necessity more closely when Boskar and Torgex, shocked into something approaching sobriety, began backing away. Naturally they stayed behind their shields, which or whom they tugged along after them. Then necessity took a sharp upward turn. Boskar pointed at Commonweal Hall. Torgex agreed. The two diminutive masters and their slaves swerved that way. Outside, almost within reach, were half of Trafalgar's companions. Inside were a hundred or hundreds of their captors. Necessary Defensive Measures were the order of the day. In a time when "Defense Systemry" meant guns, no matter how used, the D of NDM often covered blatant aggression. And now Trafalgar's enhanced vision could just barely make out others coming, way down the "street" past Supervisor Dorvo. Trafalgar hated to use the laser on Dorvo, who was not one of the bad guys. On the other hand, Dorvo was occupying the stopper and Trafalgar could certainly not use the beamer on the others! The stopper, however, would stop them. "Oh, dammit, I hate to do this," Trafalgar muttered, and paused to raise the laser. He took aim at the helplessly jiggle-shuffling Supervisor Dorvo. He swallowed. His yellow-suited arm wavered. And he lowered the beamer. "All right, Dorvo. I can't do it. Go on home, damn it." And he took the stopper off the man to swing it, ruthlessly, back and forth across the highly ornamented 152 but mostly naked bodies of one he called captain and the other he called lover. Both stiffened and began jiggling and shuffling, with a great tinkling and twinkling of gemstones and precious metals. The men holding them, because they were holding them, also began imitating devotees of the most ridiculous new dance craze. Dorvo, meanwhile, collapsed like a dropped bag of Jasbiri chick peas. Holding the quartet captive with his stopper, Trafalgar approached them. He didn't like making Quindy, dance and really shouldn't enjoy doing it to Hellfire, after what she had endured here. The point was that a stopper's Two setting, like electricity, affected the person beamed and anyone in direct physical contact as well. By beaming the two women he meant to rescue, Trafalgar also snared the two big strong brave masterly Knormen hiding behind them, hanging onto them. (And hiding was the proper word; even Quindy was taller than her master.) (Former master, Trafalgar Cuw grimly thought.) He approached coolly, already planning the next phase of getting them all free of these nuts. And then the little group of people approaching from on down the "street" began calling out and hurrying his way, and Dorvo stumbled to his feet and went

shuffle-running toward them, still disconcerted by a minute or so under the beam and Trafalgar Cuw decided ah, what the vug, you never knew what might work: "Hey! Stop that man! Hold that fugitive!" From the group burst the incredulous/joyous voice: "Tra-FALGAR!" Not possible! Lord, lord and Theba's calves-Janja! And there was no mistaking that towering skinny orange freak with the red hair, either! "Janja! Cinnabar! Stop him and fetch him back here -no, over there!" Trafalgar pointed with the laser, 153 indicating a darker area across from the communal Hall. Then he was walking around his helplessly shuffling, spastically shaking captives. With a great deal of pleasure, he bashed Torgex in the side of the head with the beamer and almost simultaneously used an elbow of the other arm to crack one of Boskar's ribs. Both Knormen fell away from their shields, who slumped, staggering in their release from the stopper's control. What appeared to be tons of jewels glistened and flashed in a wonderful kaleidoscopic foudroyance of ... wealth, Trafalgar Cuw thought. Not too well dressed for a night on the town, but they sure are wearing enough to buy a planet-and a better one than this one, tool Quindy was on one knee, shaking her head with much jingling and tinkling of multiple earrings and a carcanet fit for an empress; Hellfire stayed vertical but staggered on wobbly, flashingly bejeweled legs. She had been hit with a Two setting before. So had Trafalgar Cuw. As a matter of fact they had been together at the time, trying to get off Copperdock, a long, long way from here. O the filthy bastards, Trafalgar thought, they've ringed her nipple! Oh I'd like to turn weapons and fists and feet loose around here to spill enough blood that they'd rename this hell-hole Gore! He didn't-but he did give Boskar a nice thump in the thigh with his booted foot as he half-turned his head. That showed him that Janja and Cinnabar, behind him, had poor old Dorvo. With them was a pair of Knorese, one of each sex, who certainly did not appear to be captors or enemies. But how did Janja break the-oh, I guess she didn't. She obeyed my command in grabbing Dorvo! Well, maybe Cinnabar's metabolism didn't accept their serum or whatever it is. Better get Janja into a suit and helmet, fast. Which reminds me-it could complicate mat- 154 ters, but I'm better off if I cut off incoming communication! And he started to. At the same moment that Torgex, head bleeding, looked up and snarled a guttural order. "Falgo! Slave! Freeze and kneel, slave! Love-fire! Take those things from him. Boskar? Boskar, are you . . ." Without even an "Oh, wonderful," Trafalgar Cuw slumped and dropped to his knees, head bowed as befit a slave, commanded by a master of Survival. "Release me, orange thing!" Dorvo was saying. He struggled. "I command it! Ow!" "Not on your life, little fella. Janja? What-look at Trafalgar!" "It's the drug," Graborn said. "One of them's given him an order and he is powerless to disobey." "Knock him out or something, Cinnabar," Janja called, already breaking into her run. "This is our big chance and we've got trouble." Her last words were almost lost. They blew back in the appreciable wake of her charge. The short, pale woman from a heavier planet than this ran on those legs with the overdeveloped thigh and calf muscles, and she ran with an almost unbelievable fleetness. Hardly seeming to pause, she swerved slightly to snatch up one of the bulky helmets dropped by Supervisor Dorvo when the stopper beam hit him. The useless stopper she had thrust into her hip-band. Torgex was on his feet, one hand to his bleeding head. He reeled a little. Boskar had got himself to one knee, leaning away from the side where the rib was cracked, with his hand clamped to it. Trafalgar was still a helplessly kneeling thing. Quindy was looking around dazedly, blinking, a tear running down her cheek. Hell-fire, squatting absolutely obscenely, was unwrapping Trafalgar's hand from the beamer that had not hit Torgex hard enough. Since she alone was turned in the right direction, she saw Janja racing at them. 155 "My lord! Look out!" And with a jingle-tinkle and flash of jewelry, she pointed over Trafalgar's shoulder. Oh great, Janja thought. She isn't just enslaved- she's even learned what loyalty is, for the first time in her life! Janja didn't slow down. Boskar twisted around to see her at the same time as Torgex did. Both pointed, though Boskar winced at the pressure on his rib. "Slave! Stop! Throw down that-whatever it is!" "Right you

are, swine," Janja called, head low, body bent, racing at them. "Here you go!" And she slammed the space helmet into Borg Boskar's face. His cry burbled. Blood splashed and a female voice cried out in horror: "Master!" Then another voice was raised in the same anguished shout, as Janja's extended arm slammed three stiffly straight fingers into the throat of the noble and masterly Borg Torgex. He collapsed. Eyes bulging, mouth striving for breath. Borg Torgex was dead in less than forty seconds. Janja didn't wait to see that. She was whirling back to Boskar. He lay twitching, making gutted rooster noises, bloody of face and gurgling blood from his ruined mouth. The Survivor-sized blond bent to slip her fingers into his hair. "It is the way of my planet, Borg Pig, that women are supreme among the tribes. It is our way also to reward slavers with death, and to sever the genitals of such slain pigs. Those we offer to the Sunmother, that we may continue worthy of Aglii and Aglaya! Yet because of such swine as you I am no longer so sure that I believe in Sunmother or Aglii . . . and surely your scraggly genitals would insult the gods of Aglaya or anywhere else!" Her voice was more vicious than any alive had ever heard it. Those two murderous and sadistic slavers who had briefly owned and tortured her, on Resh, had heard it so, and it was the last they heard from her or any- 156 thing else. The same was true for Boskar. The helmet had ruined his face. Now Janja completed the job by smashing his forehead against the stone "street" of gloriously self-sufficient Survival. Its gods had to have hearts of stone; perhaps they appreciated the libation of blood. "Falgo!" a voice called forcefully from behind her. "Rise and behave as a man! You two slaves-to me!" They all looked: Hellfire and Quindy and the kneeling Trafalgar, faceless within the big compressed oval of his space-helmet. And Janja turned, warily yet almost wearily, to see what she must deal with now, when she thought she had done with bloody action. She had; striding toward them was Borg Graborn., Janja smiled. Not another enemy, Graborn! He was their ally, however unlikely. "I salute your genius, ally!" she called. "And I your startling abilities, Janjis." Meanwhile the two gem-heavy slaves went to him as commanded, and kneeled as slaves of Survival to a master of Survival. And there were the five of them off spaceship Satana, loose on the main thoroughfare of Survival, with a clever ally. And the young Knorwoman who ran to him with love in her hazel eyes. Trafalgar Cuw rose from his knees with a grunt. "Well, Janja," the electronically hollow voice said from the speaker in the chest of his yellow suit, "well met." Janja laughed aloud. 15 Obligations have no meaning without conscience... No important change in ethics was ever accomplished without an internal change in our intellectual emphasis, loyalties, affections, and convictions. -Aldo Leopold Janja broke off laughing. She would say nothing about having saved Trafalgar and thus all of them. They were not of Knor, and she had seen no indication that his male ego was in jeopardy or need of bolstering. They all knew who had begun it-him-and accomplished it-him-and now who had saved him and thus all of them. "Was this part of a plan, Trafalgar?" "Not this!" he said, gesturing at the dead Knormen. "But yes. I was coming to find you, Janja. All of you, I mean. We need to get suited up and out of here! I have to ask. You're wearing a stopper. Why didn't you use it on those two?" "So much for my cleverness," she said. "It doesn't work. Burn-out maybe, or a spent cartridge." "Uh. Nasty luck. Well, all things come to him who takes direct action, I always say. Oh-uh, how did you test the number Three setting?" She gave her head a jerk and he noticed that her 157 158 platinum hair wasn't a mere short cap anymore. "I didn't. First and second settings are zero, though." "Suppose you test it on those two. A stopper's third setting sure is a nice way of disposing of bodies! It's also a separate mechanism, you know." She had the cylinder half out of the hipband of her abbreviated slave's "skirt" when she frowned and thrust it back. "No. Let's don't. Not now. The sight of this thing disintegrating a pair of Knormen, however dead, and leaving behind nothing but dust-motes . . . that might be a little too much for our fr-oh, you don't know them." She turned to gesture at the Knorman who stood over Hellfire and Quindy while another, a most shapely woman of his own



kind, clung to him. His arm was around her. "This is Har Graborn, Trafalgar. He-well, you can see. He is definitely a friend. He alone saw Cinnabar as something other than an 'orange thing' that whistled dinner entertainment, and tried to establish communication. He did, and he got Cinnabar and me together, too. He's the one who managed to get Cinnabar's translation helmet, too-and unfortunately the wrong stopper! And this is Laleemis, also our friend." Brief greetings were exchanged and Trafalgar handed Janja one of the other two stoppers. "This one works." He watched her check its setting. While Hellfire nearly always kept hers on Three, Janja hated that killing bolt. She hated killing, Trafalgar knew-and now he knew that she also had a code all her own, and a real feeling for the justice of vengeance. And a temper! He'd have to tell her about the old "berserker" concept someday. He tucked the disabled stopper into his suit's utility belt, which had hooks and loops and PressOn space for all sorts of things. "As to suiting up-the street isn't the best place for that, with who knows how many people in there, right now!" He gestured at Commonweal Hall. "Cinnabar! We'll need to get you two into space-159 suits-and I guess we'll be helping Quindy and Hellfire suit up, too." "Good!" the Jarp's translation helmet said. "Trafalgar, will you hold this li'l fellow?" "That is Dorvo, Supervisor of Stiglulation, and he is not an enemy. I still mean you no harm, Dorvo. No, we will escort him to his stiglul farm in the Recycling Center, with the suits and helmets. Let's suit all of you up there, away from the possibility of ... drawing a crowd. Janja?" She was already collecting the dropped spacesuits. "Right." Moments later the strangely composed little company was hurrying away from Survival's great party/orgy hall and toward the sprawling Recycling Center. The unhappy and thoroughly confused Dorvo was "escorted" by the Jarp, which towered over him. Quindy and Hellfire tinkle-rattled along with them because Graborn bade them come along. The constant jewel-noises that accompanied their movements were not unpleasant, but they did make their fellows uncomfortable. They were busily trying to be silent. Seeing the piercings of human flesh, and the marks of the whip across Hellfire's under-padded buttocks, Janja felt that Boskar and Torgex had been lucky to die so quickly. A frightened but brave and committed Laleemis followed in her scarlet halter and "skirt"-a fore and aft pair of long strips. She kept a watch back the way they had come. Trafalgar had at least dragged the bodies of the two prominent citizens into deep jet shadows in an out-of-the-way place. Nevertheless there had been all that noise, and blood remained out there, in the most traversed area of Survival. Janja and Trafalgar led. They exchanged explanations of their freedom from the lipith that should have held them enslaved as it did Quindy and Hellfire. Trafalgar's mind had remained his own, he explained. It 160 was-just that his will had not; he could not disobey commands. Thus he had had to try to plot and plan, while biding his time. As Janja had been doing. And Cinnabar! "What have you been doing? What have they done to you?" Janja asked. "Oh, they questioned me incessantly while making all sorts of notes-by hand!-and showed me this and that around town. I even tried to get them to bring you to me, Janja." All that was true and sounded better, he felt, than had he straightforwardly answered, "I've been screwing, mostly." Janja was nodding. This and his mention that he had made himself deaf within the suit explained the anomaly; the weirdness of his having accomplished so much, actually gaining control of two Knormen, only to kneel so submissively on Torgex's command. Cinnabar heard Janja's lie about her master Barso's having forgotten her "dosage" of lipith two days running. The Jarp nodded silently. Janja did not want Trafalgar Cuw-who remained not quite a known quantity though his quality was not suspect-to know the truth. That, simply, was how truly different she was from his kind-the Galactics who were far more like her than they were Cinnabar. Like the Jarp, Janja had been unaffected by their daily "dosage." Cinnabar would never tell. It felt more kinship with Janja, now, than with any other. It respected her as well. The Jarp would tell no one, as a matter of fact. That was Janja's business-the business of her Cinnabar had more than once called Cap'n Janja, and not really in jest. Ever

the non-human alien surrounded by them, the Galactics, ever having to wear the translahelm so as to be understood in their language while so constantly aware of its different-ness and alone-ness among them, Cinnabar had some secrets from the Galactics, too. Janja and I, the Jarp thought, would make the greatest pair since Akima Mars's! 161 As it hustled Dorvo along, the Jarp glanced back. It wished it had not. Laleemis was backing along after them. Barefoot. Bent slightly forward to stare behind them. That brought her own behind into some prominence, and the scarlet strip of cloth dangling from her hip-band to her ankles was only about as wide as the length of her own little hand. Cinnabar hurriedly eyes-fronted. "But I trusted you, Falgo," Dorvo said. "How could you do this?" Cinnabar tightened its six-digitated grip on the little Knorman's wrist until the fellow winced. The Jarp's fingers overlapped. "Suppose you lead us to your woman, Dorvo. Suppose you watch us enslave and use and mis-use her, order her as an animal and rape her as a whore, bind her as if she were a prisoner and punish her as if she were not even a rational person, master. Then ask how we can do this! We want to be out of your slimy 'city,' Dorvo! I for one would be just as happy to bring this whole mountain down on Survival if I could, and you'd better just put a seal on your mouth!" Dorvo did not understand, since the translahelm spoke in Erts. Dorvo did feel the painful grip, and heard the vicious tone, and heard his own name twice, spoken with malice. He clamped his lips. Janja and Trafalgar, who did understand, exchanged a look. They reached the Recyke Center. "Janjis," Graborn said suddenly. "Falgo!" They paused in mid-pace, turning to look at their Knorman ally. The two "slaves, Midnight and Love-fire," flanked him, jingle-tinkhng. Was that longing in their eyes? Just how aware were they? There was no longing in Graborn's gaze. The Survivor was worried and showed it. "What is our purpose here? What is your. . . intention, Falgo?" "She is Janja. I am Trafalgar. Our intent is to have 162 a relatively private place to suit up and get the vug away from Survival, Graborn." "But-here. The Recycling Center . . . Survival's very heart." "Oh. I understand, Graborn," the faceless spacesuit said. "Please believe me: I intend no harm to this place. I understand that without the constant operation of Recyke, Survival would not survive. I intend no harm here. Although I'm not sure it wouldn't be a huge favor to Survival if we destroyed every stiglul!" He raised a gloved hand. "But that is not our intention, Graborn. We aren't interested in doing Survival that kind of favor! Your people call us barbarians because we are different. We are indeed very different, but we are not barbarians. We do think that your people are! We also have plenty of grievances, which is what is bothering you because you're no barbarian, either. But we will not harm the Recycling Center, Graborn." "But you-aowwwk!" Dorvo's beginning protest was broken off by the tightening of an orange, double-thumbed hand on his wrist. He lapsed back into silence and unavoidable lustful thoughts about Janja, whose walk he had been watching, from behind. Graborn was nodding, satisfied. They moved on into the Center. A couple of bored night monitors stared and looked nervous. Graborn waved a hand and smiled reassuringly while Cinnabar changed position slightly. That way the pair of Re-cykers missed the orange thing's grip on the green-smocked man they recognized, Dorvo. This sudden incursion of all these people was weird, the monitors decided, but not to be feared. (One yawned in spite of himself.) That orange thing, now. Who should fear a thing that did nothing but sit passively and provide music for the nightly dinners of the nobles and high-placed Survivors? Try to forget its formidable height. Rumor had it that Graborn the Dreamer was conducting some sort of musical experiments with it. 163 That creature in the all-encompassing suit the color of topaz, now-that was pretty scary! Still, Dorvo did nod at them, as if to say everything was all right. A bit tight of face, Supervisor Dorvo; maybe because the two were staring at him and . . . his guests? The pair went back to their duties, not without a few more curious glances. How had Har Graborn and ole Supervisor Dorvo got all five of the strangels together this way? Still, that was hardly the business of a couple of night monitors. And what could possibly be amiss in gloriously

self-sufficient Survival of Knor? 16 Everything you could possibly imagine, you'll find that nature has been there before you. -N. John Berrill In the Chamber of Stiglulation two workers stood back to back, gagged and bound. The sudden invasion of the strangels had overwhelmed them before they could commence thinking, much less flee or consider resistance. With large eyes they watched while Janja separated out the shortest spacesuit-the white-sleeved one, otherwise just as bright yellow as the others. She doubled up her strip-"skirt" to draw it through her hip-band, fore and aft; removed the strange cylinder from that same hip-band and laid it carefully on the floor; looked around with a little frown, wrinkling her nose; and started pulling on the mobile life support system. She wore a really nice shimmery multicolor bandeau and a few gauds of Survival, and she retained them. They would not interfere with the m.l.s.s. she was drawing up one calfy leg. The stiglul-tenders wondered why. Dorvo stood trapped in a corner. Escape was impossible and there was nothing he could do. The orange thing was donning another of the yellow suits, this one with brassy gold sleeves. Dorvo wasn't watching. He 164 165 was watching Falgo. What did the accursed Outsider intend? Why had he come here? Why was the faceless devil pacing about, looking into each vat? The slaves of the late Boskar and the late Torgex wore no clothing but more gauds than anyone had ever seen on just two women. All that mass of precious stones and ingenious, loving work was worth, Trafalgar Cuw was sure, a fortune. Or two fortunes. Unique all along the spaceways, these beautiful creations of Knorese gem-working would bring far more than the worth of their stones and mountings, because there would never be another quite like any of them. Trafalgar had murmured a few words to Graborn, who ordered both women to remove most of that jewelry. Both obeyed. Laleemis helped. So did Graborn. Everything went-with care-into one of the large furry-hide bags from the storage chamber. (That smell. And that noise. SsslllP!) Trafalgar had not lied, but he had omitted something from, his assurances to Dorvo. He recognized another source of wealth here, not to mention a scientific improbability to delight researchers on many worlds. (While it delighted, in a different way, the captain of about every spacecraft along the spaceways!) That wondrous improbability was right here in this chamber. Possession of a couple of stigluls had become almost a compulsion for Trafalgar Cuw. That was why he had fetched the three big sacks, presumably cold-resistant with natural fur, from the storage chamber way back up the "street." He found a young stiglul big enough to be an assured survivor. "H'lo, little Stillwell. How about taking a nice ride?" SssllllpP! He began handling the deep-lavender thing with care. Yukh. Felt pretty much like picking up a human brain, Trafalgar thought, although he had never picked up a human brain. Dorvo lost his head when the spacesuited trickster 166 began slipping the small creature into one of the fur-sacks. "No!" the Supervisor of Stiglulation shouted, and started for the man. Weapons were not necessary. A long, long leg shot out. With another cry Dorvo tripped over that orange leg and sprawled on the floor of the room of his responsibility. Hanging onto its partially donned space-suit with one hand, Cinnabar hop-pounced. "Easy!" Trafalgar called. He was holding the mouth of the sack under the vat's intake pipe, adding food for the stiglul. Double-yukh. His call was not necessary, either. Cinnabar demonstrated a swift move the man had not known the Jarp knew about, and Dorvo was painlessly unconscious. "Should have done that a long time ago," Cinnabar muttered. When it straightened and resumed suiting up, Dorvo was lying nice and still. "Why didn't you?" Janja asked, turning a helmet around and around in her hands, frowning at it. sssss-sllpp-SLPP! "Because it was easier walking him here than carrying him!" Cinnabar said. "None of these helmets fits this suit, Trafalgar!" "Had to leave a couple in the storage chamber, Janja. I didn't bother trying to pick the ones I brought. I just brought 'em. You and somebody will have to be helmeted later. Don't worry about it." "Don't worry about it, he says," Cinnabar muttered. "Sure, sure, don't worry about a thing! Uh! Damn but I wish Hellfire was taller. This dam' suit's tight in the crotch, too!"

(And what's that icky smell?) "All right," Janja said. "But when we leave this place you'd better cut your incoming comm again, hadn't you?-except for the link to other suits, I mean. That way Cinnabar can relay to you anything you need to hear." "Hey, very good, Janja. Perfect! But what we have to do now is help these two into suits. Quindy! You 167 are not slave Midnight-you are Quindy. Quindy, First Mate, spaceship Satana!" "T-Traf . . . algar?" "Right! Can you remember how to suit up, Quindy?" "I think so," she said without petulance, and almost added "master." She did not. Divested of her jewelry, she stood gazing at the crumpled m.l.s.s.'s on the floor. No one would have accused her of looking overly bright. It was interesting to Trafalgar as a passing thought that she also did not look attractive as a dumb blond. But then, I'm not a Knorman! "What's that smell, Trafalgar?" Innocently Trafalgar Cuw asked, "What smell?" Graborn looked at the yellow-haired black woman, then at Trafalgar. "Quin-dee?" "Right," Trafalgar said, while Quindy said: "Yes, master?" The last of her gauds went into the big sack. Except for the ornaments that were attached to her skin: piercing her flesh. "Get yourself into that suit," Graborn bade her, "like Janjis and Falgo." "Yes, master." "Janja and Trafalgar," the man from Outreach corrected. "It's important, Graborn. We've got to do everything we can to help Quindy and Hellfire back into their former roles." A surprise, then: "May-may I put on one of the suits, too, master?" It was Hellfire's voice, softer than Janja had ever heard it. Hellfire pointed. "That blue-sleeved one is the one I wore when I came here, although that one is mine." She pointed at Cinnabar. Good, Janja thought. She remembers, at least. Still slaves, both of them, and we'll just have to hope it isn't a permanent or even long-lasting effect. But not stupid, either of them. And Hellfire does remember that Cinnabar's suit was the only one that would pos- 168 sibly fit Trafalgar, so that Cinnabar took the captain's because she's the third tallest among us. In truth Janja was short and Hellfire was an unusually thin woman, which made her appear taller than she was. The lean Jarp was a bit taller than that, while Trafalgar had to be above 18 1/2 decameters or 185 sems-a giant among these Survivors of Knor, by 20 sems or more! "Put it on, Love-fire," said Graborn, who was just Janja's height. He turned. "Trafalgar-" "Hellfire," the chest speaker of Trafalgar's suit said with that odd electronic sound. "Captain Hellfire, spacecraft Satana. Captain?" She was slipping a long thin leg into the suit. She nodded. "Pos, I remember. I have always remembered my name-my real name. I am Captain Hellfire and Satana is my ship. Love-fire is a nice name, though, don't you think?" "No," Trafalgar said, shaking his helmeted head at Graborn, who was giving him what he took to be a questioning look. "And neither will you pretty soon, I hope-Captain Hellfire." Sslllpt Janja was looking around the big odd-smelling chamber with its big creche-like tanks. Each contained one of those weird slurping things, with pipes entering and leaving each. She was not sure what they were, or why they were here, or what Trafalgar wanted with one of those ugly shapeless things. Obviously he wanted one -make that two, she saw-badly enough to come here, out of their way. She had decided not to ask, and stuck with that resolve. What disgusting noises the icky little purplescent horrors made! And that odor! Hellfire's voice was a simple declarative, rather than plaintive: "This is not as pretty as that jewelry you made me take off, master." Janja saw Trafalgar sigh with a rippling of jonquil-hued spacesuit. I'll bet he wishes he could hear her 169 sneer just as much as I do-and call him "Trafalgar Pew" again! "The suit will become you more, though, Captain Hellfire," he said, again stressing the name and title. "And all the jewelry goes with us." Then, impatiently: "What is it, Graborn?" Graborn had been trying to say something for several minutes. As he spoke, his hand nervously toyed with his medallion. "You said you wanted to do all possible to help get these two back into their 'former roles,' Fal-Trafalgar. In that case, it would be best to give them a drink." Several pairs of eyes stared at Graborn. Trafalgar Cuw spoke for them all: "A drink?" "Yes. Trafalgar, plithenase is a natural substance in two of the fungi we must eat. When it is removed, so is their food value." "Plithenase?" "Yes.

All of you and certain others here in Survival are steadily given a concentrated extract of it, mixed with slightly sweetened water." "The lipith!" Janja exclaimed. "Right," Trafalgar said. "And so-?" "My theory long ago," Cinnabar said rather proudly. "And none of you has been allowed any alcohol," Graborn said. "Just as the women of Survival receive very little-and many none at all. That is up to their fathers, husbands, masters." He glanced at Laleemis, who was looking at him rather sadly. "Alcohol tends to offset the effect of plithenase, F-excuse me, Trafalgar." Many eyes continued to stare at Graborn. Plithenase had to be some kind of ... will suppressor; depressant. Alcohol offset it. And the captives had been given a highly concentrated dose, daily, in addition to that which they received in their food-and no alcohol. At last Trafalgar said, "Well I'll be damned." 170 Cinnabar said, "Then you mean all we have to do is-" "No, not all, not all," Graborn said hurriedly. "I said tends to offset the effect. And they have received concentrated plithenase in lipith form for a long while now." Trafalgar was looking around, teeth in lower lip. "A little shot then, hmm? Sounds good to me! Except that all the booze these little darlings make goes out the bottom of the tanks and right through the floor. Storage tanks must be directly below. And purification, I guess." "And coloring, I believe," Graborn said. "Uh." Trafalgar glanced at the outstretched Dorvo. "Well, we can't ask him!" He walked, all menacing and faceless and seemingly huge, to the two captive Knormen. Bound and gagged, they cowered. "You fellows know Boskar and Torgex? They are dead. Dead. We killed them. We do that. You have enslaved five killers! We'll do anything to escape, including turn you into stone." He pulled the dead stopper out of a belt-loop and poked one of the Knormen with it. Enormous dog-like eyes rolled at the sinister-looking cylinder, and at the yellow-clad thing that towered over the helpless Survivor. "Oh Trafalgar," Janja said in aid of his ruse, "please don't turn those two poor men into stone! They haven't done anything." "Is there drinkable alcohol in this room? Shake or nod!" Trafalgar prodded. One of the men nodded. "Look at it," Trafalgar ordered. The fellow did, turning his head fearfully. Spacesuited now, Cinnabar moved quickly to the shelf containing three lidded jars of almost-clear glass. Each contained clear liquid. He touched one with a gloved finger. "That?" Trafalgar asked, and received a nod. The 171 Knorman flinched when his gag was pulled down. "It's purified? You would drink it?" "I have, I have, please-do not turn me into stone, Har Trabblegar! I haven't done anything! I won't do anything! I won't, I won't!" "No," the wekdly hollow voice said from the middle of the faceless yellow thing's chest, "you'll just go home and beat your wife! Hush! Do not say a word, or-" He prodded the trembling Knorman with the harmless stopper. "Cinnabar? How's it smell?" "Better than this room! Smells like booze, Trafalgar! Just hasn't been colored yet." "Well, let's make sure we have a small amount, less than a couple of centiliters each, and the three of us will just have a snort. The four of us-my buddy here gets to taste it first. Then we get the vug out of this place!" "The captain has a far greater capacity for strong drink than that," Cinnabar said, squinting one huge eye as it poured into the jar's lid. "Did have," Trafalgar reminded the Jarp. "Me too. But it's been a long time between drinks!" The first pouring went to the prisoner. He snaffled it right down, shuddered, and looked happier. The next tot went to Hellfire. Graborn bade her sip, carefully. She did, and gasped. Her eyes watered a little. Then she knocked back the rest, and shuddered. Quindy got the next two-tenths of a liter or so of concentrated elixir of stiglul. She coughed. She also finished donning her spacesuit, wearing also a small smile. "Trafalgar?" Cinnabar asked, decanting another portion. "Probably a good idea, but I don't feel like coming out of this helmet. Janja-" Cinnabar smiled, nodded, and knocked back the trickle of Knorese liquor. "Ahhh," the Jarp said, making a great show of wiping its small mouth with the back of its space-gloved hand. Janja, smiling, refused a drink. But she had an idea. 172 "Let's take those jugs with us," she said, squatting beside the prone Dorvo. "His tunic will do to carry them, since we have three bags full of jewelry and

those things." She gave Trafalgar a look as if he were cracking up. "Stiglul," Trafalgar said, and grinned "Stillwells! But why burden ourselves with three jugs of booze, Janja?" She looked up at him as she peeled poor Dorvo. "I wasn't thinking about drinking it, Trafalgar. You're carrying the laser, and alcohol burns." "Ah! Brilliant!" a smiling Trafalgar Cuw acknowledged. "Graborn, what's the problem? Hellfire, I was right! You are beautiful in a spacesuit!" "This bag of gauds-it is a very heavy load, Trafalgar." "I can handle it," Cinnabar chuckled. It carried two of the three jars of alcohol over to set them on the tunic Janja had spread on the floor. "Not a bad ass, huh," it said, eyeing Dorvo. "Excuse me, Cinnabar," the blond said and, rising, grasped the Jarp just above the knees. She lifted it easily, turned, walked. Smiled at Graborn. "Eeek," Cinnabar parodied. "Rape, rape!" "Stop being silly," Janja said. "I am showing Graborn-and you-my strength." "Shit," Cinnabar said succinctly, and smiled. Janja lowered it to its feet. "I can handle the bag of jewelry with ease, Graborn." He stood staring, a couple of fingers unconsciously scratching the fine down under his medallion. "I had no idea! I have naturally noticed your powerful legs, but-hmm! A woman's muscle just doesn't show the way a man's does, does it? I had no idea you were so powerful, Janja." "Neither did Boskar or that other hog. And I don't really have all that much muscle, either. I am from a high-gravity planet, Graborn. Knor is a low-G world. I am stronger here-and I can probably make some just 173 ridiculous jumps and cavorts, too, if need be. That I've carefully kept from my 'master'-Barso'd probably have had me dancing while Cinnabar 'sang'!" Cinnabar was chuckling. "Greatest team since Car-kan and Narzhavaris!" Graborn was shaking his head. "I do not understand, but do not waste any more of your time trying to explain now!" Everyone was spacesuited. It was not a slow process; the fact that the suits sealed themselves, section by section, speeded their donning. The bloodstained helmet fitted Cinnabar. Trafalgar locked it in place and tested the seals. The Jarp accepted the good stopper with a nod. The other was thrust into Janja's suit-belt, as the bad one was in Trafalgar's. He also had the laser, which was intended only as a cutter, a repair beamer. It would serve as a weapon. He hated to use it that way, but they all knew he would if he had to. NDM. The other helmet fitted the suit Hellfire wore. Soon her brassy hair vanished as Janja helped her settle the helmet, seal it, and test it. Janja and Quindy would just have to wait until they reached the storage chamber to add helmets atop their garish, awkward-looking mobile life support systems. Every suit was undamaged and fully functional for protection against the airless cold of space, which was worse than the surface of Knor. All three helmets were airtight and undamaged. Telepresence systemry functional. Level of insuit air-mix was high enough to last for hours. (And the richer oxygen content, Cinnabar said, pretending to be drunk on O2,was mighty mighty nice.) All that was necessary, too, because of the temperature outside Survival. Knor's surface-at least in the area where the ship had come down-was 116 degrees below zero Celsius.\* They remembered the constant icy wind that cruelly raised the chill factor by many \* Minus 177 degrees, Old Style. 174 degrees. And oxygen was understandably in short supply on this frozen, previously unknown planet they had called Cold Hell. The five off Satana looked at each other. "I do believe it's escape time," Trafalgar Cuw said pleasantly. "Let's go," Janja said. 17 It isn't getting into the trap that stumps the mouse. -John Myers Myers They were happy to leave by the door Graborn indicated and take the route he suggested. It avoided the main area or thoroughfare, and thus bypassed Commonweal Hall. They were soon in a tunnel-wide enough for three to walk abreast and smooth enough for them to run. Except for the turns; the lights were extinguished for "night." Thus Graborn and Laleemis learned of another ability of these five from off their world. Little beams of light streamed forth from the helmets and knees of the spacesuits, broadening so as to carry far ahead of them. Bidding her be very, very careful with it, Trafalgar handed Quindy one of the bagged stiglul to carry. He bore the other one and kept a hand free. He saw no need to carry a weapon in his hand, but the laser was available at his

belt. Janja and Cinnabar went first, with Janja carrying the big sack that made such interesting noises and was worth so much. Both carried stoppers and neither could be affected by the command of any Knorman they chanced to meet. They went silently. They had met no one when, after eight or ten minutes, Graborn quietly called, "Right." The tunnel branched and Jarp and Aglayan 175 176 followed the rightward arm. They passed darkened doorways and door-coverings and abruptly a man appeared, stepping from one of them. He stared. His mouth was just opening when Cinnabar happily put a number-2 beam on him. The Knorman went into that familiar jiggle-shuffle rictus while Cinnabar walked over to him, a tall thin yellow shape without a face or sensible head. Cinnabar did not cease squeezing the cylinder's grip until it was reaching for the Knorman. The fellow was then put to sleep just as Dorvo had been. "Nicely done," Trafalgar Cuw muttered, and paused to tidy the sprawled fellow as he passed. He had no compunctions about relieving him of his handsome gem-set bracelet. Interestingly, almost at once they passed another Survivor in a very similar posture. "Drunk," Cinnabar commented. "Passed out. Must be a lot of that going around about now." And he and Janja walked on by. Trafalgar paused to squat and relieve the fellow of his intricately carved bracelet of silver, and a nice ring with a fat smooth-cut sapphire. "Left," Graborn said. He and Laleemis walked behind Hellfire and Quindy, who followed Janja and the Jarp. The tunnel dead-ended. They took the leftward turn, and almost at once swung right again in response to Graborn's soft-voiced call. Janja walked right into one of the pair of men. They wore green smocks, which probably indicated they were on their way to late-late duty at the Recycling Center. One got out a "Wah!" before she punched him in the stomach and then the head with her gloved hand. He fell, groaning, and Cinnabar squatted to put him to sleep with a couple of fingers, applied just so; Janja was forearming the other, banging him into a smooth-stone wall, and watching his wide eyes cross, lose their 177 luster, and close when he bonked his head. He fell forward and she eased him down. "Eyes closed," she said. "He'll be all right." "Nasty headache when he comes to, though," China-bar said, as they paced on. "You sure are a tiger for such a little woman, Janje." "What's a tiger?" "Shit," Trafalgar's voice came quietly from behind them, "neither of these poor idiots wears a bit of jewelry!" "What're you doing back there, robbing everyone we pass?" That was Cinnabar, voice entering Trafalgar's helmet on the suit-to-suit commlink. "Oh no. Just the unconscious ones." "Hmp!" the Jarp came back, suit-to-suit. "From now on we'd better do our own battlefield stripping of these sawed-off farts we knock over!" "You and Janja just keep on keeping on," he said, with the familiar Cuw smile in his voice. "You do the work, I gather the spoils." After a few paces he added, "Seriously. I'd as soon our allies didn't see me playing the part of thief. And if we get out of here and if we get back on the ship and if we get off this Cold Hell of a planet and if we make it onto a nice hospitable planet, Cinnabar ... I think we should consider everything we take away from here as spoils, with standard crew-shares division. Make sense?" "Sure. Forty per cent for captain, sixty per cent divided among crew. I guess the captain might consider you crew, after all you've done for us all." "Hmm. Not fair enough. Love-fire?" There was no reply. Then, "Am I not Captain Hell-fire, master?" Trafalgar grinned. She'd be all right! Already she was asserting her name and title-but with the "master" tacked on, indicating she was still much under the pernicious influence of that nasty lipith stuff. Plithenase was one wondrous Survival substance he 178 was not interested in carrying away. His kind had synthesized far more effective and specialized drugs, long ago, and they were still being improved. If "improved" was the word for tetrazombase and cataleptase and other controller drugs. He decided to have a try at doing them all another favor, while Hellfire was still . . . malleable. "Yes you are Captain Hellfire, and yes I am master. All those gauds you and Quindy are wearing weren't gifts, not just your property, obviously. I feel the same way about the two Stillwells I, ah, confiscated, to use an anciently honorable word for theft! All are for all of us of Satana. Pirate spoils. Except that

this time the shares are equal for all, including the captain. Right, Captain?" "Uh--'right,' master?" "Oh." Not masterly enough, he told himself. "I mean, agree and say yes, Captain Hellfire." "Yes master." "And agree and say pos, Captain Hellfire." "Pos, master." "Shash, Trafalgar," Cinnabar swore, "you are rotten!" But there was a smile in the Jarp's voice, too. Clever flamboyant rogue! Quietly it spoke to the short woman beside it, open speaker: "Janja? The captain's just agreed that all we're carrying away is to be shared equally among the five of us." "Good. That's as it should be. It really ought to be equal this tune, instead of standard ship's shares." "That's what she's agreed to. Equal shares, Janja, not standard pirate-ship Captain-gets-forty-and-crew-divides-sixty. Equal shares, Janja. Twenty per cent apiece." "Wonderful! It's fair, after what we've all been through here." "Better than that," Cinnabar said very quietly, bending toward her. "Trafalgar's robbing the ones we meet and leave unconscious. And that passed-out drunk, too, I gather." 179 Janja chuckled aloud. So did Cinnabar, a strange sound. "Close to the end of this passage," Graborn said. He, Laleemis and Quindy had of course missed all the suit-to-suit and sotto voce conversing. "We're about to emerge onto the main, uh, thoroughfare again?" Trafalgar said. "Yes. The storage chamber is off a tunnel opening about a dozen paces to the right of this one's mouth. Toward Commonweal Hall." "Which is way down there. Good! And the way out, Graborn?-out of Survival, I mean." "It leads out of the storage chamber, Trafalgar," Graborn said, and paused. Probably to congratulate himself on getting the other's name right on the first try, this time. "Through the rear wall. There are multiple doors into the corridor to Outside, of course." "Right. That's what I got from Dorvo's eyes, but I sure didn't see a door! Janja? Cinna-" "We're there," Janja said, halting. The Jarp peered around the corner. "Ah! Good for us! It's blacker'n the Carnadyne Void out here!" The others came up to them, bunching at the tunnel's mouth. "Good," Trafalgar murmured. "We can find our way by turning left and moving along the wall. Without suit lights, we may not even be seen." "This is all going mighty nicely," the Jarp said. "I'm not at all against its just keeping on being easy!" "Uh-huh. Suppose Graborn and I go first this tune. Then you, Cinnabar, all right? Others-Janja, will you follow us all, stopper ready?" "Suggestion," she said. "If you and Cinnabar and Hellfire go first, anyone who might be abroad will see three 'monsters' without faces and surely run like everything. Also, that way they won't see Graborn." Trafalgar agreed instantly. He went first, edging along the main cavern's leftward stone wall in the pitch blackness. Cinnabar was close behind, with Hellfire. Then came Graborn and Laleemis with Quindy. Janja, hand 180 against the "wall, backed carefully after them, stopper ready. The blond from the so-called barbarian, supposedly "Protected" planet Aglaya was still learning, and already she understood the wisdom of maintaining a watchful rear-guard in times of strife or potential strife. Now it occurred to her that one of the helmeted members of the party should be on this detail. The helmets' telepresence cameras could be set on UV or IF, and nicely pierce this darkness far, far better than her staring eyes. She thought, If I were ever to be the ship's captain that Cinnabar likes to tease about, I'd make those instant decisions when need be--otherwise I'd counsel and try for the best decision, rather than just the fastest! "Trafalgar has rounded the corner into the short tunnelway," Cinnabar reported. "I am at the door to the storage roo-oo! Whoof!" The attack came just as Trafalgar started to apprise the others that he had reached their goal. He was hit by the driving head-down charge of a burly, chesty Knorman whom he recognized as the indomitable Dobomex and whose skull had to be pure granite from crown to chin and ear to ear. Trafalgar's spacesuit of course went protectively rigid in that area at its first sensing of impact. That was immediate, if not instantaneous. Unfortunately he was hit in an area that was extremely susceptible. Not even the automatic mechanisms of the spacesuit triggered rapidly enough to prevent Trafalgar from taking a driving hard blow right to the crotch. He was not able to curse the Knormen's shortness or his own height. He was busy gagging and



dropping to both knees, trying to clutch himself. The suit's rigidity in that area prevented that. He couldn't curse that, either. Besides, the awakened and determined Dobomex had 181 rebounded, fallen flat on his tail and was already scrambling up. He slammed a beautiful and un-Knorish blow to his enemy's head. The space helmet rang and Dobomex howled. The force of that fisty blow did succeed in driving Trafalgar backward onto his butt. The suit went rigid there, too, but didn't help much. He wanted to kick the two stubby, furry, erratically moving legs he saw so close, but he couldn't bear to part his thighs. Not just yet. "Dobo . . . damn . . . you . . . fuckin' idiot. . . ." The furry, stubby legs were dancing. Their owner clung to his sprained hand with the other and bounced frenetically in pain. Then he stumbled over Trafalgar's thigh and fell into the spacesuited man's lap. "Arrrrr! Theba's . . . ; something! Get this creep off me!" Without really thinking about it, Cinnabar leveled its stopper on the irrepressible Dobomex, and squeezed. The spacesuit would not absorb the effect of the beam. Not a suit that afforded full protection against the cold of space or icy winds far below zero, and even protected the wearer from most impacts and falls (which, in space, were "up" as often as "down"-oftener). Trafalgar was safe from the effect of the #2 beam . . . but not its effect on Dobomex. The pugnacious Knorman, lying all over the sprawled spaceman, began jerking and twitching wildly. Trafalgar Cuw was utterly helpless, not to mention miserable. And nervous about the bag he had been carrying: Stillwell. Cinnabar did think and act fast. Seeing its mistake, it swung the stopper away and kicked Dobomex hi the side of the head. Only after that could the Jarp think about untensing its grip on the stopper. Now Trafalgar Cuw, still pained in the crotch and wishing he could curl into a ball, lay under a dead weight. Unconscious, Dobomex seemed to have taken on the mass of a spaceship. 182 Moments after Cinnabar ceased squeezing its stopper and bent over the inert Dobomex, someone well down the "street" screamed and screamed some more. Whoever it was had just been accidentally caught by a number Two beam for a few seconds. Now, released, he was in absolute jibbering terror. Cinnabar gained a grip on Dobomex. It slung him away and started helping Trafalgar up. "Uh-ow! Oh! Damn-it-a whole bagful of jewels we've got, and mine feel like they've just been jellied by that idiot's head. Damn that damned Dobo! Brain like a rock in a head just as hard!" Cinnabar, trying hard not to giggle, supported him. Meanwhile its big round eyes were squinting in an effort to see the cause of all the ruckus down the way. "Get that flainin' door open! I'm weak as a baby. It isn't locked, it just looks it." Then Trafalgar lowered himself into a squat-slowly, with a pained grunt-to open his precious sack. "How you doin' in there, li'l Stillwell? You hurt, baby?" Ssllllp-SLPl "Nah, I guess not . . ." The others clustered around Trafalgar and the closed door. It was a slab of stone, they noted, hardly like any other door they had seen in Survival. This one was definitely to keep people out, and provided with a bar and a lock, too! Then the Jarp, grunting, was wrestling the thick slab of stone open and aside-and a Knorman came charging out, bent low. Cinnabar didn't think fast enough to thrust out a leg, this time. Nor was the guard Trafalgar had knocked out and stored any longer interested in acting the role of guard. He came out running and kept running. Down toward the main part of the city-the sprawling cleared area before Commonweal Hall. Janja dropped to one knee, aiming as she had seen Quindy the (former?) expert do, with both hands. "Ah, shit," Trafalgar Cuw said, pulling out the 183 stopper that had refused to function on its first two settings. "Here's a good chance to find out." And he laid the cylinder across his left arm, squinted, lined up the red dot, and squeezed. The third setting over to Three lined up and actuated the second slender barrel within the larger one. No one called it a distintegrator ray; that was too ridiculously melodramatic and old-timey. That was what it was, though. It worked. The fleeing Knorman seemed to shimmer. There was a flash of light, not overly dramatic. After that the fleeing guard-and potential source of big trouble-was merely floating dust-motes. "It works on Three," Trafalgar said unnecessarily, and thought, That's the nice thing about a number Three.

It poofs 'em-and cleans up after itself! Janja, on one knee beside Trafalgar and aiming her stopper at a lower setting, shuddered. She stared at him. She decided to say nothing. The man was hurting. They had been enslaved and callously, hideously misused, and she was almost ready to believe that the only good Knorman was a dead Knorman, anyhow. She held back while the other six crowded into the smallish storage room. She heard Trafalgar bidding Quindy take up the snowshoes he had rigged. She was backing in, looking down the "street" toward Commonweal Hall- And Dobomex, lurching up still again, pounced. He was reaching to grapple with the spacesuited woman who was about his height but far less bulky. That left him nicely open. Janja drove her stopper into his belly just as his hands clapped onto her shoulders. She saw his eyes go very wide and his mouth open to release forced-out breath. Then she banged back against someone, who fell into someone else, and for the next minute or so the storage room was a tightly contained melee far more active than a can of agitated worms. A Knorman had attempted to break out of the no-violence mold of Survival, and he should not have done. 184 Dobomex was not quite beaten to a pulp. Almost. He was hit more than once by everyone in the little chamber except Graborn-even Laleemis kicked the wallowing Dobomex when his hand flailed into her calf. Dobomex lay unconscious-again. "Graborn," Trafalgar said, panting just a little, "where's that flaining door?" "This room is ... chilly," Laleemis murmured, and Janja looked at her with an eyebrow up. From a Survivor, equipped with close-growing and sleek down and accustomed to a nearly constant twenty degrees, that was quite a surprise. And the girl was right, Janja noticed, settling her helmet onto her suit. In a few moments she would not notice the most extreme cold. But just now-yes, this chamber was chilly. Because it was closed off? Yes- and because it led to a tunnel that led to the surface! She nodded, and had to refit the helmet. No matter how many doors or valves lie between us and the surface, then, they are not absolutely airtight. Graborn had moved to a rearward corner. Since he said nothing about the others' stepping back, the door must open outward. They all watched. Graborn did--something. When the grating noise began, he pushed, then stepped away from the wall. Janja's guess had been half right. The top part of the door swung outward. The lower half, though, after quite a bit of grating of stone on stone, cantilevered into the storage room. The "door" was half the wall, hinged in the middle, to swing. They'd have to crawl out. Two more helmet seals and airtanks were sealed and tested. The result was positive. All five off Satana were safely shielded and equipped for the surface of Knor-Cold Hell. Graborn regarded them. "All five of you can see clearly?" "Perfectly," Trafalgar's suit speaker told him. "I wish we had two more suits and helmets, Graborn." "We wouldn't wear them, Trafalgar." 185 "Well-man, you're our ally, and you've helped us right down the line. Now what? What will they do to you once we're gone?" Graborn's face shifted, but he did not quite smile. "Nothing, Trafalgar. That is, I hope that is true-you will take us with you?" "Oh, Graborn! Oh-ohboy. Man, are you sure? Everything you know . . . whew. Every society of our kind is incredibly different from you and yours, in almost every way." "Yet you know it would not be wise for us to remain here. There are several who know we aided you. And besides, you know my interest in gaining knowledge! Now that I know about your society-societies-other worlds!-how can I not beg to go and see them, if I must beg." "Graborn ... I am not captain. It isn't my decision." Graborn looked at the forefront of that unwindowed helmet for a time, then directed his ga/e on Hellfire's helmet. "Captain Hellfire. Laleemis and I have already talked, however briefly. We want to go with you. Take us with you." Well, Janja thought, that's the way to do it-ask and then tell the captain, O Master of Survival! But oh are those Master days coming to an end for you, Graborn . . . will you be able to handle that? -and will Laleemis be able to handle that! "Of course, master," Captain Hellfire was meanwhile predictably saying. Cinnabar chuckled. Like all the others, it had caught what Graborn had just done. But where were the Outside clothes for these two Survivors? It was a good question and an important one; Trafalgar asked it. "Trafalgar." Graborn

approached the other man, then took a step backward to allow for their considerable difference in height. "Please. Do not concern yourself with that. Only move; be away from here! They are 186 coming-I feel it. And look, please look well, on my medallion." Trafalgar did. He saw a form of triskelion. A central point radiated three spirals that coiled lighter and tighter, in chips of green and russet stone, to a brown core. The medallion was round. Its perimeter was composed of alternating bits of brown and green gemstone. "I hear you, Graborn, and I see your medallion. I do not understand, though." "Understanding is not necessary now, Trafalgar. Please-all of you our friends-go! We will accompany you as far as we can, Laleemis and I, and then we will join you." Abruptly the Knorman wheeled away. He made a gesture to Laleemis. She joined him, but paused to turn back to face the five Outsiders. She drew a pendant up from between her breasts. Strung on a thong, it was simple enough. A translucent, pale green stone in a teardrop shape. Without knowing why they should study and be sure they could recognize the pendants of their Knorese allies, the five aliens did. Then both Survivors squatted and passed out of the storage chamber. "Captain Hellfire! Quindee!" Graborn snapped, from beyond the suspended horizontal slab that was the door. "Come." Quindy went. Lurching a little, as if uncertain. Resisting? She dropped to hands and knees and followed the two Survivors under the slab. Hellfire, meanwhile, hesitated. Her helmet looked at Trafalgar's. Questioningly? Good, Janja thought. Already she's progressed beyond instant mindless obedience. Yet she's not her own master yet-she's checking silently with Trafalgar. She'll be her own bitch-self in no time though, surely! Janja knew what had to be done. She had reason to agree with Graborn, though none of the others knew it. The ability of the Aglaya-born to cherm was less than 187 telepathy. She could know the basic mental attitude or disposition of another, within a radius of one to two meters' distance. The ability was heightened by the "louder" volume of group emotion or the thinking of a group bent on one purpose. An attacking force, for instance. That sort of cherm extended to one and a half or so Moms. And she was able to cherm, now, the approach of a mass of angry Knormen. Graborn spoke truth, however he knew. (Could Knormen cherm?) Knormen knew of their activities and apparently their location; angry Knormen were coming. Janja hurried to the doorway, spacesuit rustling. She squatted, bent. Touching one gloved hand briefly to the stone floor, she passed under the door and was hi the tunnel. "Captain?-Hellfire?" Hellfire followed, awkwardly. So did Trafalgar and Cinnabar. Their height made their passage under the counterbalanced stone of the half-door even less graceful. Straightening quickly, Trafalgar turned and exerted-himself. The stone swung back into the vertical position., It crunched into place and instantly they were in darkness. Suit-lamps came on. Beams like yellow-white cones thrust aside the subterranean blackness. Graborn swung away, with Laleemis's hand in his. The others followed. Trafalgar Cuw lagged. As the others moved on, he turned back to the door. The laser beamer quickly slagged its lower edge, fusing it with the floor in a line of something between glass and trinitite. With a little smile Trafalgar turned and hurried after the others. The seven hurried along a gently inclining tunnel of pure stone, hi pure darkness dispelled by the lights of their spacesuits. The only sound was of their passage, eerily echoic. Temp gauges registered a decline from Survival's twenty degrees to nineteen, then eighteen. It was 16.5 degrees when they came to a blank wall of strangely mica-less stone. It was unnaturally smooth. "Effort is required here," Graborn said. 188 But not, as it turned out, on the blank wall that had to be another door. On a distinctive slab in the otherwise smooth wall to the left. Janja joined him in giving its lower area a strong push, just ahead of Trafalgar. The slab yielded, almost silently. Not so this previously invisible door. With a grumbly grating sound, the blank wall revealed itself as a door. A counterweight dragged it up until it cleared the passage floor by a meter or so. Cold air must have gusted, because temp gauges fell rapidly. "A slight pressure holds it, Janja," Grabom said and without a by-your-leave be

flipped himself under. Laleemis followed closely. Then Cinnabar, horizontal. Hellfire. Quindy, and bag. Trafalgar, and bag, while Janja stood with one hand braced against the slab that controlled the counterweight somewhere back within a hollow area beyond the wall. Just as she started to wonder how she could join them, a squatting Graborn called to her from beyond the portal. "The mechanism is slow. You have a few seconds. Just move swiftly." Janja blinked and raised her eyebrows, neither of which he could see. Rather nervously, she tensed herself, then moved swiftly to roll under the ton or so of stone slab. She was with the others well before it grated down. It thudded into place with a minor seismic concussion. Janja had cherned no pursuit for a long while, but she was not sure of the ability's effectiveness through solid stone by the megaton. They went on. The passage was the same. Stone above and below, stone on either side. All was artificially smoothed, though not totally, and the floor was far from glassy, which would have made it dangerous. Darkness held them in a velvet glove but their suit-lamps beamed out, commingling to illuminate their way well up ahead. The temp was well below ten centigrades, now. And 189 they went on. The five Outsiders knew of the drop in temp only by their suits' gauges. They checked their companions from time to time. The two Knormen were not shuddering. They continued forward, and up. The rate of incline was not regular. Now and again it leveled for meter after meter, which was a nice change for legs and backs. The tunnelway was wide enough for four to run abreast, if four had dared. It was big enough for Cinnabar to carry Trafalgar on its shoulders, had they been stupid enough. The incline was gentle. Now and again the passage curved, gently, and once they circuited an old stone-fall. There was a sort of ramp to flank it, pretty steeply. Now the temperature was the freezing point of water. Still the hurrying Survivors were not shivering, even in Zero C; their body heat was up because they were hurrying. Their breath was visible now. Hearing only the ever-echoing sound of their own movement was eerie. The total darkness behind and to either side was eerie, beyond human comfort. Or Jarp comfort. Or Aglayan comfort. They went on, and on. Since heated air tended to rise and cold to sink, it was odd to be ascending into increasing cold. Not chill-real cold. Obviously the geothermal warmth of planet Knor held the cold at bay. And the doors? And ancient Knores science, long buried both literally and figuratively? (Except that Cinnabar did not believe that the Survivors were native to this planet, because their story was worse than implausible. Holes big enough to navigate a spacecraft right through. Just as mountains were a long long time forming, suns were a long time cooling.) Janja tried to remember the rate of temperature increase as one descended into the interior of any planet. Well, almost any planet. She could not remember. She had studied so much, learned and been force-taught 190 so much, while she was unconscious! (So long ago, her captivity and enforced learning of their language, their culture—some of it.) She wondered if the Knorish couple could handle it. She wondered, as she had before because somehow she had never quite accepted, whether she could handle it. "Along this same passage the Founders came, so long and long ago," Graborn said. He was breathing just a little hard. His breath formed puffs of visible gray, like fleeting smoke. "With all the things they brought into Survival," And all the women, Janja thought, with a certain austere grimness she knew was not quite rational. It's too easy to be a linguistic bigot! "Just ahead is a great fall. It goes on and on. The jumble of stone is impassable and it was not considered intelligent, if feasible, to try to clear it. We cut a way around it—that is, Survivors of two centuries ago did. Now there are stairs, of a sort." There were indeed! A stairway, inside the mountain! Each stair was twenty sems high and just under a meter in both width and depth. Up, take a step, then up, take a step, then up, then. . . . Thirty-seven times. All seven were breathing short by the time they reached the landing. None knew how far they had ascended; the steps alone had brought them up about three-quarters of a kilometer. The suit gauges showed a temp of minus nineteen. The door turned out to be on the left of the landing. It was of metal "weatherproofed" with

gran, and hardly so ingenious as the ancient doors. They passed through, Trafalgar lagging, and were in a narrow tunnel. It was hung with form-fitting arrases of gran at two-meter intervals. That kind of passage was not pleasant, but at least the space-helmets helped. The fact that the ceiling was only a meter and a half above the floor did not help. They were more than ready for the old tunnel again, the main tunnel, when they emerged into it. 191 LCD lights flashed to indicate a plunging of gauges. Suits' monitors reported an exterior temp of forty-two below zero, which was approximately the same by either Fahrenheit or Celsius measurement. Graborn and Laleemis were visibly cold and huddling. Graborn brought the company to a halt. "There are two more doors," he said in a shivering voice, "and then the final valve. We must stop at the next door-Laleemis and I, I mean. Listen. The door beyond this falls into the floor when three stand directly before it. It is that simple. Let them stay while the others pass. The three can then pass over/through in safety, provided they move unhesitatingly, in unison. You understand?" "Of course, Graborn," Janja said, surely answering for them all. "Man, you're cold," Trafalgar said. "Of course. That is why we ... we ... must stop at... the next portal." "But-" "Please, Janja! Listen. The final door is double. It is a valve. Two doors, two body-lengths apart." "An airlock," Cinnabar said. Yes, they understood that. Beyond that-Knor. 116 degrees below. Cold Hell. "You cannot open the valve's doors. You must wait for Laleemis and me. We will join you. Please do not be alarmed at ... anything. My friends, listen. There is no menace to you, along this tunnel. Please believe that." He was backing away, out of their light beams, seemingly squatting a bit. Hunkering against the cold, presumably. "I think you want to tell us something," Trafalgar said, "that you aren't telling us." "You are right. Wait, at the valve-the door of metal. We ... uh ... two-o-o . . ." He broke off. He and Laleemis were shivering. Hunkering, huddling, and his voice sounded growly. 192 Something's wrong, Janja thought in alarm that was not quite sudden. Are-are they-could they be intending to freeze to death, deliberately? "You remember the creatures that captured you?" "Via," Cinnabar swore, "that is the first time anyone has mentioned them to us, Graborn!" "Yes." "We remember, Graborn. Gr-Graborn?" The two Knormen had passed behind one of the arrases, which filled the tunnel from ceiling to floor and wall to wall. "We will send two to aaidd youuu ontoo the surr-face." The voice of Graborn was muffled, throaty. He seemed to be having difficulty in pronouncing the words. "Waaaait a-a-att. . . porrr-tl." "But-" "Please!" Laleemis's voice. Pleading. She too sounded growly, and almost tearful. "Go-ol" "Please, Cinnabarr my friennn! A-accep! Is this cor-r-recc'?" And Graborn whistled the four notes the Jarp had assigned to him, as name, in the language of Jarpi. Re, mi, do (down-octave) do. "Pos," Cinnabar said nervously, and Janja hurriedly translated Erts into Knorese-knowing that Cinnabar had said "T'lee." "Good, then. Turn and press the wall to the left, in the corner, with a foot. A door will open. Leave it. Go!" The voice was laboring, deep and hardly like Graborn at all. "But-" Cinnabar said, and Janja pushed past it to thump her reinforced boot against the wall, low. Again. With a grating rumble, the wall opened, to her right. The temperature dropped. "Go-o! We-e . . . jo-inn . . . 'u!" Mystery, Janja thought, and she and the other four off Satana passed on, this time unwillingly. The temperature was plunging. Minus sixty. Lights flashing red, flashing. Minus seventy. It was hard, but they obeyed, or acceded to the 193 wishes of Graborn. He was in trouble; none of them doubted that. Yet surely he and Laleemis had known what they were doing-still did know. It was necessary that the five former captives believe that. Graborn and Laleemis were all right. They were not freezing. They knew what they were doing. They would be along. It would be all right. . . They did not look back. Yet all five felt a sense of loss, and of foreboding. And spine-plucking mystery. Cinnabar suffered, worrying and fearing for Har Graborn of Survival. They went on, and on. As it turned out, the weight of three people was not necessary to trip the opening mechanism of the final door-the final one before they would reach the air-Jock. The combined weight

of Trafalgar and Cinnabar was sufficient. The others passed through. They turned nervously, ever worried that the person holding each door open might be in danger. The Outie and the Jarp coordinated, and moved together. They joined their companions with ease, as Graborn had predicted. That did not prevent Trafalgar from making a fervent whew sound. They were still together and still unmenaced. The five went on, almost guiltily comfortable in their temp-controlled spacesuits. They moved in silence. Everyone wondered about their mutual allies-their Mends. Perhaps they all jumped when Trafalgar broke that unordained silence. "I, ah, slagged that very first door," he told them quietly, suit-to-suit. "I mean I used the beamer to fuse the door to the, uh, floor." "Good!" "I hope it holds the sawed-off little bastards!" Janja thought it had, because she had felt no further indication of pursuit. She could not be sure, not amid all this rock. She would not tell her companions, under any circumstances. Her ability to cherm was still her 194 secret. She was among friends, but she was always aware of being very alone among them, the thingmaking Galactics who looked upon her lovely world of Aglaya as a sort of breeding preserve for slaves. Her chermmg served her. It was her only edge, as she saw it. She had needed that advantage before, and it had served her well. She had no doubt that she would need it again. She did not sense Graborn and Laleemis, but was hardly surprised or nervous. They radiated no truly strong emotions for the aliens to their world anyhow. And they were only two, arid well back there now, with walls of living rock separating them from her. She glanced back. "Do you think they will join us? Laleemis and Graborn, I mean?" "They certainly intend or intended to," Trafalgar said. "Graborn has a real case of the mouth waters about seeing and experiencing our culture." "But-they seemed close to the point of freezing to death!" "Maybe they had outside gear tucked into some cubbyhole back there they didn't want us to see," Cinnabar said. "I admit that just about has to be the case, but it just doesn't seem-likely? Sensible?" "Well, my point is this," Janja said. "They said it would take three of them to make that door open. It took two of us because you are tall and heavier. Now the door is closed, and I assume that this is the trip, uh, switch I'm standing on, and how can they possibly follow us?" There was silence. At last Trafalgar said, "Surely Graborn knows some other way. He'd have thought of that, Janja." "Would he? We didn't, when he was telling us about it. Suppose we tried to roll that huge rock onto this spot, to hold the door open for them?" "That's fine by me," Cinnabar said. "If lots of cold 195 air flows on down and gets to Survival-I absolutely do not care!" "Well . . ." Trafalgar began. Janja squatted to set down her sack. Cinnabar joined her purposeful advance on the big chunk of loose stone that had fallen but failed to block the passage. Passing "Stillwell" to Quindy, Trafalgar joined them. They braced themselves, counted, exerted- They fell to their knees when the stone moved easily. It grated and banged onto the desired area of the floor. Janja had been right about it, too. Ponderously, the door grated and ground, and opened. The five off Satana stared at what stood on the other side of that portal, staring at them. There were two of them. Shorter than Survivors and far broader and furrer. Gorilloid, and yet like sawed-off yeti with dark fur. Hulking creatures, luxuriantly and shaggily hairy. Splayed feet-two each-that almost formed snowshoes and heads that came right out of their shoulders with only the hint of a head-thick neck. Their arms were long, very long-to the cavern floor-and the eyes were almost invisible because they were set way, way back in the furry heads. In about two seconds both were covered by three stoppers and a laser beamer. Both creatures looked down, in submissive poses. Neither wore any sort of clothing, but each of those miniature yeti (or homely hobbits) slowly lifted a stubby-fingered, furry hand to its massive shaggy chest. From the natural fur coat there each drew forth a shining pendant. Both pendants were immediately recognizable to all five outsiders:" "Oh no," Janja murmured, thinking that they had left Graborn and Laleemis to a horrible fate-these things had gotten them! Then one of the creatures opened its mouth to utter, in a growly sort of hum, four sounds. They were not 196 words. They were unheld, equally emphasized notes, and

made up one bar. The fourth note was an octave below the third. The four notes were re, mi, do, do: G, A, F, F. "Vla!" Cinnabar said, while a beamer and three stoppers wavered. "It has to be!" "Name of Aglii," Janja gasped. "It's-they are Gra-born and Laleemis!" 18 Lose your mind and come to your senses. -Paul Moses, *The Voice of Neurosis* For there is more than one way of skinning a gerblakul. -Booda They were Outside. The airlocks were easy. Despite the natural inclination to leave them wide open, Trafalgar insisted that they be closed. He and his companions bore Survival much ill will, but none really wished to condemn an entke people. (Well, maybe Hellfire would, but she was not yet able to make decisions and stick with them. It was hard enough for her, Janja remembered, even when Hellfire's system was not full of lipith!) The temperature on Knor was not 177 below; now it was 181 below. The spacesuits of the five former captives did not mind, and neither apparently did the dense shaggy fur of their companions. And about those unpleasant, squat little creatures Janja and Cinnabar were right: they were Graborn and Laleemis. Cinnabar accepted it readily enough; on Jarpi three several elements and one tree changed both size and shape with the seasons, or in response to artificially induced temperature changes. 197 198 Janja, of iron age Aglaya and educated by machines and drugs-and her own constant application-looked upon the impossibility with the insouciance of a true scientist: the impossible was often true. It was not possible to reject even the impossible when it was proven fact. It even occurred to her that if they could weigh these two creatures and then weigh them again in their quite different forms as the real (?) Laleemis and Graborn, the scale must read the same. Only distribution of weight had changed, along with mass. Trafalgar knew a bit more. He also knew that such a metamorphosis was impossible, and never mind the legends more ancient than ancient: the werewolf. He also knew that the impossible was something no one had yet been able to prove. The proof did not have to be accomplished in laboratory, scientifically. It could be an engineering, proof, a fait accompli. So any scientist knows it isn't possible for any creatures to undergo such swift drastic metamorphosis, he reasoned, or sort of reasoned. So these two Knormen are engineers, not scientists. They just do it. That is-they just did it! Seven now, they moved out onto the snowbound surface of a planet in perpetual twilight. The wind shrieked and filled the air with a pale gray or off-white, for without water vapor the snow was powder. Great for skiing. Unfortunately the five off Satana had no skis, and only two of them possessed something that might almost pass as snowshoes. Trafalgar Cuw and Janja were the strongest; they got to wear the snowshoes the former had made from inship grillework. That was because they now bore all burdens, taking all the weight they could. And they hoped. It didn't work. At her third step, Hellfire sank in and kept right on sinking. Cinnabar, trying without thinking to get her out of that white mire it dubbed "quick- 199 snow," slipped. The Jarp slid ten or eleven meters. Messily. Meanwhile the two Knormen were damned near scampering, effortlessly. That was disgusting. It was all disgusting. "Just don't panic," Trafalgar said. "She's safe inside her spacesuit, and nothing can go wrong. We just have to get her out of the snow, that's all." That was all, but without traction or leverage it took ten minutes, and some ridiculous and thoroughly maddening tunneling. At last Graborn and Laleemis dragged Trafalgar out by the heels. Trafalgar dragged Hellfire out by the armpits or worse. Janja, meanwhile, was worrying her lip with her teeth. Wrestling with an idea. When the others were out and Cinnabar had more or less crawled back to them, Janja broached the idea. It was simple enough. The disintegrator barrel of a stopper, actuated by the number Three setting, was effective only on living organisms. That is, it disintegrated no inanimate things. On the other hand, it did affect them: it generated a great deal of heat and raised the temperature of its target rapidly. "And melt a path through the snow!" Cinnabar enthused. "Brilliant!" "We wouldn't have to go quite that far-I think," Janja said. "We could melt just enough. We could walk in slush, couldn't we?-with care?" "We probably could," Trafalgar said, "but it ain't gonna work. This stuff has to

be water vapor. That becomes snow at the freezing point, right?—maybe it's a bit below; I forget. That's zero. Here the temperature is a lot lower—good old Cold Hell's temp is halfway to Absolute Zero! I don't think we can raise the temperature enough to get the snow to melt. If we did, it would be in that spot, and it would re-freeze the moment we moved the beam a little. I'm sorry, but I think it just won't work. If it would work, it would take us forever 200 to get anyplace. We don't have forever—and neither do the power packs of our stoppers." "Shit," Cinnabar succinctly said. "What—what about the beamer then," Janja suggested, a little desperate now. Quindy had just shifted position and gone in to the knees. "Better, but the same problem with the extreme temperature. We move the laser on and get a re-freeze where we just had a melt. Look, this stuff is deep." He was glad for the helmet, then, so none of them could see his embarrassment at having so fatuously stated the obvious. It was then that Graborn and Laleemis staged their demonstration. It was he who lay down, not she. He composed himself carefully on his shaggy back, legs parted in a shallow V, arms slightly out from his squatty body, stubby hands like furry little gloves flat on the snow. "All right," Trafalgar's suit-speaker said. "So if we were at the head of a hill we could give him a push." The demonstration had just begun. Now Laleemis moved in behind the other creature's head, and he swept his arms back. She seized his wrists. Tugged. He slid easily. "Vla!" Cinnabar almost shouted. "Not to mention aha!" The Laleemis-thing released both the Graborn-thing's wrists, turned 180 degrees. Reached back, found his wrists again. And moved off, easily tugging the other mutated Survivor behind her. A few meters away she stopped and released those wrists that were not only not human but not recognizably Survivalish either—but which were definitely Knorese. His only effort seemed to have been to keep his legs apart. He had not sunk into the snow more than a couple of centimeters. They returned. Their growly noises were not recognizable as speech. Gesticulations were only a bit more helpful. Then the Graborn-thing composed himself on 201 the snow again. Laleemis pointed to him, to Hellfire, to him, to Hellfire. And pointed away. "You know where the ship is?" Janja suddenly asked. The Laleemis-thing nodded with exaggerated effusiveness. "And you want to tug Captain Hellfire there? You can do it?" Again, noises from both Outsider-things and more nodding. "My friend Graborn has shown us that it was easy for the lighter Laleemis to pull him," Cinnabar's translator said, via suit-speaker. The prostrate creature struggled up and made the Jarp's own gesture of respect, to the Jarp. In other words, right; you caught on fast. Cinnabar's suit-speakers spurted a chuckle, fore and aft. Hellfire had to be ordered. She lay down and Laleemis pulled her with manifest ease. "Wonderful! Keep your legs well apart now," Trafalgar said, and was glad that no one could see the rolling of his eyes. Just lie sprawled flat on your back and keep your legs spread, Captain-sir! If only we had some rope, damn it! Everything would be so much simpler with a bit of line! Lord lord, even that old-fashioned braided stuff would be more than acceptable! Graborn was pointing at Quindy and at the snow. The directions were issued and Quindy assumed the position. Graborn began pulling her away. The Laleemis-thing, tugging Hellfire, had not even looked back and was plodding on, on to vanish into the wind-driven snow. "Uh ... I seem to have a problem," Cinnabar observed. "Not if either Trafalgar or I carries all three bags and the other pulls you! I can do either, Trafalgar." Cinnabar's enunciation was exaggerated: "Gulp." "Uh, well, Janja, you're the one from the heavy-G 202 planet. If you're sure you can manage all three of these sacks—" "I can. And it takes a lot of man to make that kind of admission, Trafalgar." "I," Trafalgar Cuw said, striking a cumbersomely spacesuited pose that missed flamboyance (with a bagged stiglul in either arm), "am indeed a lot of man, woman!" The sound Janja made was almost a giggle. Despite her adventures-taught learning and her various abilities, she was barely past girlhood, if indeed she was past it at all. "And I," she said, relieving herself of the bag containing treasure to rival Ali Baba's (also stolen) hoard, "am a lot of woman, man!" "Well blah-blah-blah to both of you," the



Jarp said. "There go Quindy's feet out of sight in the murk and we'd better be on our way fast! And all your ego-soaring cannot match this, my dears: I am a lot of woman and man!" 19 All's well that doesn't end with you in the hospital, -Trafalgar Cuw Just over a kilometer and a quarter, suit odometers told them. They had taken the long way, surely, since they had climbed no hills and plodded up only one gentle slope. They had to stop now and then. Trafalgar bore the most weight, and was working for breath before he proved that he was enough man to admit that he couldn't keep up. The three being pulled had to stop, too; they complained of the strain on their arms. They relieved that for a while by suffering an even worse indignity: they were pulled along by their feet. It worked, but was hardly satisfactory to the pull-ees. "I think I caught movement," Janja said after a while. "Way back." "You, ah, mean you think we're being followed," Cinnabar said, sliding along behind her almost comfortably. "But I didn't see anything." "Keep watch, then." Janja had told at once the truth and a lie. She was sure there was pursuit, but she had not seen anything. Many Survivors were coming after them. She was sure of it. She had chermmed it. That was easy; the pursuit was intent on vengeance and restitution. That was easy to cherm: intended violence. 203 204 Trafalgar wanted to say that their capture had proven that the Survivors were quite capable of violence in this their miniature yeti form. He did not say it simply because he had much better things to do with his lungs and throat and yes, even his voice. It was called breathing. Still, leaving behind even one of the Stillwells was just as unthinkable to him as dumping the weighty, clanky-jingly bag of jewelry. He staggered on, gasping and stifling his groans. Eventually they discovered that they had ascended, though very very gradually. Yes, the things that were or had been Graborn and Laleemis had taken them the long way, to avoid obstacles and even hills or dunes. This they discovered when they came to the edge of a long, long decline. They were not at the edge of a cliff; the slope was gentle and sweeping. At the bottom, perhaps a half kilometer distant, rose an un-Knores shape, all in snow. It was as if some complete idiot had begun a snow castle or some sort of sculpture, and this was its final result. Even coated with snow that mounded here and there against this or that sensor projection, the shape was recognizable. It was spaceship Satana. They stared down at it, and no one voiced its thoughts until Trafalgar Cuw did, for all of them: "Hello, Satana. 'sbeen a long time." "Yessss," Janja said, wondering at the emotion she felt. Not for the ship, surely. For the concept it represented: freedom. Normalcy-or at least the new normalcy for her, which was not Aglaya, that most natural of worlds. And then she added, frowning, "And a long hill to negotiate." "Ha!" That was Cinnabar. "No prob! Spacesuits are made to withstand anything!" And the Jarp sat, at the very edge of the hill, and pushed off. Its feet dug in about three meters down. 205 "Shash, not to mention shit." With a great deal of floundering, it got itself out and over onto another surface. Smooth, un-wrecked by its movements. "One . . . more . . . time!" Cinnabar announced, and lifted both feet. It hardly had to shove off, spacegloved hands taking the place of ski-poles. Booted feet well up, it shot down the long slope, on its butt. Its "Wheeeeeeeee" trailed behind, riding the wake of fine snow that rose behind it like the dust of passage. That bit of ingenuity-or the ludicrousness of it- had both Knores cavorting about, flapping thek lengthy arms and bouncing on stubby, shaggy legs. Their big splayed feet made even that possible for them, without thek sinking into the snow. The sight of that as well as of Cinnabar's long yellow-clad form whizzing away downhill to vanish in the snow of its own wake had Trafalgar and Janja helplessly laughing. Then the foreplates of thek helmets turned each toward the other. "Think we can do that?" "I can't think of a reason why not." "I did it! I did it! I'm all the way down. Come on- it's fu-unnn!" That burst into their helmets' comm-receivers from Cinnabar, now far below. They saw the Jarp up on its feet, staggering in the always-treacherous snow even while it happily waved both arms in delight and triumph. It was also no more than six or eight meters from the ship. "I guess all you do when you want to

stop," Janja said, "is drop your feet." "Better ease 'em down," Trafalgar said. "Drop 'em and they might dig in so fast you'd break both legs." "Not in this spacesuit!" "Oh. Sorry. Oversight. I think my air recycler's misbehaving. I'm not thinking clearly. It might well catapult you head over toes, though, which mightn't be a lot of fun." After a pause, "You've never sledged, Janja?" "This is the first snow I've ever seen." 206 "Lord lord and Theba's cold heart! Well, you'll enjoy it, that's for sure. Can you handle one sack as you slide?" "I don't know. I'll have to find out." Even as she spoke her cherm-sense almost blasted the "noise" into her awareness. They were coming. Many pursuers, and their intent was definitely violent. "Trafal-" she began, but he had started to talk, too. "Suppose you go, then. When you're down there with Cinnabar I'll send Hellfire, with a sack, then Quindy. I'll come last. That way each of us is on one end in case something goes wrong." He waved his arms, flap flap. "Like turning sideways and rolling, I mean, or letting the feet down and digging in. Otherwise-should be as easy as it was for Cinnabar." Their two Knorese allies were dancing, gesticulating, noising. "Trafalgar." Janja turned to look back. "Look." He did. A whole army of creatures was coming, fast. They were far enough back so that they were little more than large spots. But they were coming, and the Outsider form of the Survivors moved a lot faster than their former slaves-whom they obviously did not see as former at all, but only temporarily escaped. "Oh, wonderful," Trafalgar Cuw breathed. He saw that Hellfire and Quindy were looking back that way, too. "Captain . . . Quindy! You heard us and you saw what Cinnabar did. We've got to move fast! Sit, each of you, as Cinnabar did. Take one of our sacks apiece. Janja and I'll shove you off." Quindy took one of the sacks, sat at the edge of the slope. "Ready." "Don't forget to hold your feet up, and ease them down as brakes when you see Cinnabar or hear it say stop. Cinnabar! You reading me?" "Pos." "Why don't we just wait here till they're closer and burn the bastards down?" Hellfire snarled. 207 "Oh boy," Trafalgar said, and pushed Quindy off. Away she went, feet up, knees bent, sliding on her spacesuited ass while a cloud of powdery snow whooshed up behind her. "Captain, I'd really rather we were at the ship first, you know? Let's get on down there." "Right," she said, and swung around. She took a long step to the edge of the slope and sat the hard way: she fell. She didn't chuckle and she didn't curse. "Sack," she said, and was handed one. She's coming back, Janja thought. She actually asserted herself-a little-and she said 'right,' not 'yes, master.' Hellfire's becoming herself again and oh I wish we could be off this planet first! She was a meter or so to the left of Quindy's glide-mark in the snow. She pushed herself off, and was gone. They heard Cinnabar's "Stop" and hoped Quindy heeded without any problems. They couldn't see, because of the snowcloud of Quindy's passage. Now Hell-fire's blew up whitely. The wind had subsided. It returned, howling. Trafalgar and Janja squinted instinctively, but no one knew. He merely waved a salute, pointed, and hurried off to the left, trucking along on the home-made snow-shoes. Janja understood the gesture. She turned and moved several paces to the right. Then both of them were rushing down the long hillside on their butts. It was exciting. It was fun. It was also scary. Janja was aware of taking on more and more velocity. Fun, though, she thought, and heard Cinnabar's (translator's) voice: "Trafalgar: Stop. Janja: start stopping." She eased her feet down. Felt them touch the snow. She was still rushing. She imparted a little downward thrust to each booted heel and slapped her hands down on either side of her. And went blind, as snow sprayed up from her gouging heels and covered her suit and helmet. Trafalgar, meanwhile, didn't mis-gauge; a tired mus- 208 cle betrayed him. When he started to lower his heels the right one dropped. He went sideways, then up, and over-sidewise, and splashed windmilling, splayed, into the snow at the base of the slope. His suit had gone protectively rigid. That didn't help his attempts at getting up a bit. Then the suit relaxed again and he flopped again. Quindy and Cinnabar were there, demeaning him by helping him up, and Trafalgar Cuw did not mind a bit. "How're the others?" "Both fine. Perfect all the way around. Great tactic," Quindy said. "Well, almost

perfect," Trafalgar said, slapping snow off his suit. "Cinnabar, it was a crazy thing to do. You know that crazy's another word for ingenious, don't you?" "Sure." "Look!" They all looked up the slope. And stared, mouths open. Here came the Laleemis- and Graborn-things, skiing on their big flat splayed feet, hands out for balance at the ends of long, long arms like shaggy ski-poles, butts bobbing up and down as they jacked their knees. The ungainly beasts were absolutely beautiful. Fish look silly on land, too, Trafalgar mused, and then both their local allies were executing magnificent stops, swerving, digging hi the edge of one foot and then both, hurling high big sprays of snow. "Beautiful!" he called, at about the same time Janja did, and the Grabora-thing cavorted. Toward the snow-coated ship. Trafalgar and Janja turned to find that Quindy and Hellfire were down again. Deliberately this time, they saw; the two were "swimming" toward the nearby ship. Obviously they had chosen that in preference to being pulled. Cinnabar was already there, brushing at snow. "Janja! Please take the bags, and stay low. A stopper 209 will sure heat the ship enough to get rid of that snow, anyhow-or let us see how deep it is!" He was right, or partially. It didn't matter. They soon saw that the constant winds had allowed plenty of snow to accumulate against one side of the hull, but only a little on it. Trafalgar thrust the stopper into his suit's belt and hurried to the others. They were clearing an area around the airlock. Movement at the edge of his vision caught his attention and he looked up. At the brow of the hill they had just descended he saw two Survivors in Thing-form. They were bounding agitatedly about and waving their slower fellows on- and pointing downward. Trafalgar made one of those ends-justifies-the-means decisions. An object lesson could be effective about now. "Too bad for you two," he muttered, and pulled out the beamer. The two fastest Survivor-things became an object lesson, and a messy one. One flopped where it had been holed. The other collapsed to slither-slide partway down the slope. Once it stopped it lay still. Trafalgar wondered if wind was whistling through the nicely cauterized hole he had put through its heart, and wished he hadn't had the thought. "Hurrayyyy!" Cinnabar called. And then they were all before the airlock of the long-abandoned spacer Satana. The five who had been kidnapped off her. Their two (presently) bestial allies. Two bagged stiglul, which Trafalgar Cuw fervently hoped had survived and would survive. And a big bulgy bag containing the ransom of a planetary king, if anyone could find a planetary king, and cared to ransom it. And Trafalgar felt a new pang of nervousness trying to become fear. Was Hellfire's mind her own? Did she remember how to open her own ship?-and if so, could she? Any spacer's outer hatch locked. None was openable from outside except by the person who knew how to get in. The mini-computer controlling the hatch might re- 210 spond to a series of button pushes, in a code sequence. The key might be a little handle-more likely two handles-turned this way and that, in a specific sequence. A slot might respond to one ID card only, or two, depending upon ship-hatch's programming. However a hatch opened, the key would definitely not be anything so simple (and so potentially problem-prone) as a real, physical key. Most often a ship's captain arranged it so that the hatch responded to some specific spoken phrase, usually only in the captain's voice. Hatch heard, instantaneously analyzed, opened. Perhaps the voice of the First Mate was included-and even then the phrase might be different. The point was, with the wind whistling and the snow flying and a whole herd of angry Survivors in Thing-form coming at the run . . . was Captain Hellfire capable of remembering and handling her own key? It was a tense moment, but only a moment. Hellfire said, "O little town of Bethlehem?" "What the vug does that mean?" Trafalgar demanded. The hatch said snurr-click, and opened. "I haven't the faintest idea," Hellfire told him, stepping into her ship's airlock. "Just a phrase. 'Bethlehem' isn't on any star-chart or map." Janja was hustling the bags into the airlock. "Careful!" Trafalgar said, and looked up the hill again. He saw only wind-driven snow; the damned wind was up again. "Oh, wonderful." He moved to the open hatchway. "Captain? Would you and Janja please close the lock, move the sacks into the ship, and open for us again?" Janja poked her head out

of the hatchway to look upward. "You don't want me out here to warn off pursuit? There must be fifty." "Or worse," Trafalgar said. Oh no. He was nervous now that Hellfire was sufficiently herself to be as unstable as ever, and as mean. Once again he feared that she might decide to strand him here. He dared not ask 211 her to emerge, but he definitely didn't want Quindy inside. Hellfire wouldn't try to leave without Quindy, who knew more about ships and ship's computers- SIPACUMs-than anyone Trafalgar knew including Trafalgar Cuw. "Quindy is the shootist among us," he said. "And I'll bet you can handle a stopper against our captors, can't you, Quindy?" "Pos," she said, a little dully. Not back yet, he thought, and knew that he wasn't either. He was definitely tired, and only part of that came from exertion. He was sure that the air recycling equipment in his suit was malfunctioning-and getting worse. Temperature was fine. Air was breathable. It was just that he was becoming more and more certain that he was getting the side effects of a gradual carbon dioxide build-up. Janja withdrew into the little chamber. The hatch eased shut. Inside, air would be gushing in-unnecessarily, with both Janja and Hellfire in their spacesuits. Those outside stood nervously, shuffling, exchanging glances that could not be seen through faceless helmets, shuffling and aimlessly moving some more, shooting glances up the long slope-at a wall of sideward-driven snow-and waiting. Shuffling and waiting. And waiting. "Takes time," Cinnabar said, unhelpfully. The wind shifted. The wall of snow drifted down onto the hillside. "Oh wonderful," Trafalgar said, looking up there. The shaggy, stunted Survivors in thing-form were on an overhang to the left of the sledding slope. It was also directly above the ship. They were a regular ant-swarm of activity up there. "What are they doing?" "I'd say they're arranging a snowslide," Quindy said. "Oh wonderful," Cinnabar said, unconsciously picking up Trafalgar's opposite-meaning expression. "Damn. We don't dare try sweep-shots-we could knock that overhang loose with one twitch of the laser!" 212 "What about the stoppers?" "The heat might set the flainin' thing free," Trafalgar said. "Meaning bring it rushing down, bringing a gaggle of Survivors with it-and a few tons of snow it would pick up along the way." "We're in trouble." "Oh." "Pass me the beamer, Trafalgar. I am going to show you some sharpshooting." He handed the laser to Quindy. She arranged herself, slid down into a squat, arranged herself, aimed two-handed as if the beamer were a gun. It hummed briefly, quietly. The activity above took on a different tone. "Got 'im!" "Quindy. When that hatch opens, you're needed inside, remember. First that flainin' lamprey screwed up SIPACUM, then we shut it down in self-defense. We don't know if it's going to work or not. If it can be trusted, I mean." She was sighting. "I hear you, Traf." Traf. She's coming back, too. Thank Anything-that dam' stuff wears off! "If anyone can test it and get Satana off this junky world, it's you." She said, "Got 'im! Aha. They've pulled back to discuss this nasty interference with thek nasty plan. All right, Trafalgar. I hear you." "Right, then. Well-that means when the hatch opens, it's you who has to go onboard. I'd better stay until you're sure we can get out of this. I'll try to stop those devils from snowing us under. And ... I can't help being nervous." "About Hellfire's leaving you? She won't." "No, she won't, because if she tried I'd be roast Outie. What I mean is-" "Trafalgar! I'll be in there. She will not try to abandon you." The hatch swung open. "Hurray!" Cinnabar called out. 213 "I hear you, Quindy. Thanks. Inside. Let's get the vug out of here!" She handed him the beamer and entered the airlock. Cinnabar extended a gloved hand for a weapon. Trafalgar ordered it inside. Cinnabar demurred. "Go on, Cinnabar, dammit, she might need you! There's work to be done in there!" The Jarp glanced up the slope. "There's work to be done out here, too. When the wind comes up again, you won't know whether they're at it or not. And you won't dare shoot blind." "True, true, all true. Except that the wind may not come up, and if Quindy needs muscle in there and you're not there to provide that extra pair of hands, it doesn't matter anyhow. Go!" "You're a born hero," Cinnabar said, entering the airlock. "You just can't help it, can you?" Trafalgar made an ancient and brilliant retort that meant he couldn't

think of anything else to say: "Yer ass." The hatch closed on the words. He spoke Knorish. "Graborn? Can you understand me?" Snarl and gesture meant yes. "We may get off your planet and we may get buried. Except that I know it isn't your planet. Your kind came here from somewhere else. Crash-landing, maybe. Maybe you had the shape-changing ability then and maybe it developed, as a means for surviving out here rather than burrowed inside the mountain as a static culture. Maybe the ability was created hi you-genengineered, if that means anything to you. I know that, or part of it, because the other story is as full of holes as a piece of Shanki procheese. The interesting aspect is-where the flainin' vug are you people from to begin with?" Staring at the faceless spacesuit, the were-Survivor gestured helplessly and made a couple of unpleasant attempts at speaking. "Uh-huh. Well the point is-uh-oh. Excuse me." Trafalgar dropped to one knee, cursed, eased up and eased to one knee on the snow so that this time he 214 didn't sink in. He set an elbow on his thigh and carefully aimed the beamer in a two-handed grip. It was wavering and he knew it. Getting positively woozy. And to think of all the times I've made fun of dead heroes! He aimed high because he feared hitting the overhang. He missed. Lowering the laser a little, he triggered and swung it. Activity erupted up there this time, since two of the changelings collapsed-along with a neatly severed arm. Their companions withdrew. Nobody I know, I hope. Rising to his feet was an effort; he remained in the genuflected position. Breathing was becoming less and less fun. "Can you Survivors understand each other when you're in this form?" (yes) "Just a question. Will you, uh, change back, once you're on the ship?" He couldn't think of anything that could have disrupted Satana's thermostat, and certainly preferred not to. "Your metamorphosis is temperature-initiated, isn't it? When it's warm enough you'll become the Graborn I know and when it's a certain degree of cold you change to this form?" (yes) "Mighty nice survival technique. Beats living inside a mountain, I'm thinking, but I guess esthetics got involved. Larry Talbot never liked his were-form! Hmm. Well, we have minerals and, uh, metals-sorry, my thinking is slowing down (so am I) and, uh, manufactured things that can do that, but not people. Change form at different temperatures, I mean. I wonder if I'm making sense. No people. No races. You two will be even more a curiosity that you would be anyhow- make no mistake about that. You'll never find anyone of shorter stature than you are, or covered with fur either. Uh-excuse me. That dumb bastard thinks he can ski down and take me out." The two Knorese hobbits turned to look. Another 215 of their kind was racing down the slope, skiing on its big splayed feet. Head wavering, arms wavering, Trafalgar kept the thing more or less in his sights all the way down. He used the stopper to poof her/him/it a few meters away. The Laleemis-thing took the Graborn-thing's hand and pressed close. Good, Trafalgar thought, more or less. Woozily. He was sure his nasty little action was seen from above, and was being discussed. Damn! It was both weird and unpleasant to have the firepower to destroy every one of those little bastards, with his stopper or beamer on sweep, and yet not be able to do it. Because he dared not do it. Should have agreed when Hellfire wanted to poof 'em all. Squeamishness is for sociolologissts who think their-their own lives are less imp-important than their uh whatever it is shit I can't think decently anymore! Mus" be breathing eighty-plus percent CO2! "Does it, uh, bother you, my killing . . . Survivors?" (yes) " 'm sorry. I wouldn't allow the two big doors back there to be left open, and I wouldn't go along with, uh, a suggesthun to wait up on the slope an' kill 'em all. We can. B'lieve 'at. I will also try to pruv-prevent our ship's makin' a sweep, 'f I can an' 'f I can get off Knor. See, I think I'm goin' to die of bad air firs'. I don't dare open a helmet vent an' try to breathe yours b'cause I think it'd freeze m'lungs. Anyhow. Ship has th' power to destroy all Survival, I think. I-" "Trafalgar! SIPACUM's cranked up and Quindy's checking it out. We have to be sure ifs functioning properly before we trust it to get us off this skungeball planet! How you doing?" "Fine thanks don't wait f'me. Although come to think, Graborn, and Lalalal-damn! Laleeli-shit. Well, you know your name. Come to think, Survival is buried way back in that moun'ain, right? Well ...

my 216 point is this, Graborn. I want to-my point is ... what the vug's my point?" They approached him. Concerned, probably. How the vug could he know, with those ugly faces? Besides, the wind seemed to be blowing red snow. Everything he saw was reddish. It was pretty, but he didn't care for it or his headache or the roaring noise in his ears. That wasn't that dam' overhang coming down, was it? He tried to aim up there. He gave it up. He couldn't see. Too red. Is that bubbling noise my lungs or blood in my nose? Lord but breathing was hard work! "Oh yes. M'point! Point is, are you two still sure you want to c-want to-want to leave . . . want . . . to . . ." He collapsed. 20 Lefts see you burn a hole in the ether. -E. E. Smith, Galactic Patrol "It's functioning," Quindy said. She sat at the con, putting a reactivated SIPACUM through its paces. Panel lights flashed nonsequentially as if winking at her. Palest turquoise and azure gauges; pale cinnabar and lapis telits; gold and panels the dull yellow of fading paper. Sound was less impressive; sound was always more impressive in those movies called holodramas or holomel-lers. Reality was quieter, for sanity's sake. Quindy's spacesuited arms moved and ungloved fingers danced over keys with the loving, expert touch of a concert synchordist. "It's responding only a half-billion times faster than our own neuronal junctions." "How do you measure that?" That from the hovering Cinnabar. The Jarp was also still spacesuited, also un-helmeted and -gloved. "Uh-autocheck," Quindy said in a rather subdued voice. Admitting that information about SIPACUM's functioning was provided by SIPACUM. What else; SIPACUM was ship's computer: Ship Inboard Processing And Computing (Modular). Ship's computer was the true god of spacefarers. When spacefaring was impossible without SIPACUM, what else? "Ah, good." The very black woman was nodding happily, a mama hen clucking proudly over her per- 217 218 forming chicks. "See, there's a commerical way of checking SIPACUM units. Too, a couple of years ago I made one. A testing cassette. It's even more complicated." "A more complicated way of checking? That's good?" "Absolutely. It's the test that's more complicated, not the means. That's just to inslot this cassette and watch-and hope! Extremely complicated computations and decisions that involve multiple exercises of logic- including conflicting logic. Each has only one answer. I pose the problem. SIPACUM comes up with the one right answer-or else. It just completed my version, which it has never encountered before. I think we're safe. Safe, Cinnabar!" "Hoo-ray! Let's hit the ether!" "Lord. I recognize that-it's the Galactic Patrol holomeller, with Lance Sessakimey and Tigere San-yana! Anyhow-not quite yet, Cinnabar. SIPACUM seems to have survived the discombobulation of Corun-dum's lamprey device, and shutdown. Now we check the ship, for possible systemry damage from cold or disuse." That process was an automatic SIPACUM function, once the request was keyed in. She pulled the suspended inship comm-mike to hang before her face. "Janja. How's the patient?" "Shipdoc says he's functioning at eighty-nine percent normal, with a prognosis for ninety-nine point eight-nine-nine percent complete recovery," the blond's voice came, from elsewhere onboard Satana. She went on, "More importantly, the little girl from Aglaya says he looks just fine. Sleeping. He's exhausted, for one thing. He needed a bit of medication, but definitely no sedative!" "And for another, oxygen-starved," Quindy said. Her smile was grim. "The big phony tried to kill himself! Being a hero! With all his pretensions about being strictly a pragmatist who sneers at heroes and heroism, he's a born hero. Can't help it, I think. Think of all the times he's intervned to help us! All the things he's accomplished for us-at risk!" 219 "Pos," Janja's voice came back. "Why, he's almost as good as having another woman onboard, huh." Her tone and accent were a fair imitation of Captain Hellfire's. Despite the unremitting tension, the others laughed. "Not to mention a good lay, hmmm, Quindy?" That sally of the Jarp's Quindy ignored. The remark would not have been made if Hellfire had been able to hear. She presumably knew that her First Mate and the unwonted/originally unwanted "guest" on her all-lesbian ship had been making it, slicing, before the enforced landing on Knor. She had been smart enough never to mention it. Neither had anyone else, until now. "This

time-this latest time, I should say," Quindy said, "he was staying out there to guard us. Even though he was nervous that Hellfire might try to abandon him. Even though his air recycler was malfunctioning and he knew it. It nearly killed him." "Did you say Hellfire 'might try to abandon him'?" "Pos. I wouldn't have allowed it," Quindy said flatly. "Neither would I," Janja said, surprising the yellow-haired black woman. Cinnabar sighed. "And so he passed out. Must have been just as we opened the airlock. I looked out and here came those two Awfuls, carrying him as if he were the most precious commodity in the cosmos." "He's a hero," Quindy said low, watching the continuing systems check. "That is the most precious commodity in the cosmos." To the floating mike she said, "Are they with you, Janja? Graborn and Laleemis?" SIPACUM continued checking the function of each component of the ship. Flashing pictures of components were followed by a green light for ASP, meaning A-OK. "Pos," Janja said. "All three of us shorties are hovering over Trafalgar, and not one of us is the least bit embarrassed. Or about to be." "What about those, uh, stiglul things?" Cinnabar asked. 220 "Both surviving so far. Graborn has made them a home and made them, uh, comfy." Quindy nodded. The two miniature yeti had refused to let go their loving grip on Trafalgar Cuw even while Cinnabar intelligently undogged his helmet to let in ship's air. (Just a little high in oxygen content right now; shipfarm had thrived while the O2 breathers were gone. Satana's air was rich and clean.) By the tune the pair had carried their spacesuited burden to the chamber called Daktari, he was looking better and they were starting to Change. This time both Janja and Cinnabar had seen the metamorphosis. Quindy had not. Her emotions were mixed about that. In a way she hoped that someday she could see it happen, Graborn and Laleemis into Things; Things in turn back into the two Survivors. In a way, shudderily, she hoped she never did see it. Normal human curiosity and scientific interest, on the one hand; normal human distaste for the hyper-unusual unto grotesque, on the other. She did and she didn't. Hellfire hadn't seen it either. Captain Hellfire-not-Lovefire, thanks to First Mate Quindy-not-Midnight, was asleep. Both had been mentally/emotionally functioning well enough to know that a drink was what they should have. An ounce of alcohol, to suppress or dispel further the effect of Survival's slave-drug. Quickly, they had a drink. Hellfire immediately wanted another. She didn't act slavish about it, either. Quindy tried to logic-talk her to the con-cabin. Action was of paramount concern. They could relax later, and unwind. Hellfire's insistence on another drink bordered on the nasty. Quindy temporized. She alone knew how to handle her chosen captain-usually, which was why Hellfire sneeringly called her Mother Quindy. (Meanwhile appreciating her enormously.) Quindy asked Cinnabar to prepare a drink for the captain, and take it to her in her cabin. That's where 221 SIPACUM's ultimate on-off switch was, for safety. Hellfire acceded to that. She hurried to her cabin- gracelessly bidding the Jarp hurry it up. "Yassuh, Cap'n," Cinnabar muttered. "Captain's no good to us right now, Cinnabar." Quindy was chewing her lower lip. "Agreed. Let's be nice and call it reaction to the wearing off of that lipith stuff. You are all right, First?" "Pos." "Right. What do we do, then, Quindy?" "We drug her drink and give her a nice nap." And Quindy did. Hellfire would never know-they hoped. Exhaustion, they would tell her, and reaction to the dispelling of the Survivalish drug. Quindy, the more knowledgeable and trustworthy of the pair-and the" more stable-hurried to con. Hellfire actuated the ship's computer she had shut down because it was malfunctioning, threatening their survival, thanks to that bastard Corundum. After that, Hellfire drank her second drink. "Maybe I'd better have an anti-intoxicant," she muttered, obviously considering a third drink, and collapsed. Hellfire went to sleep. Cinnabar lovingly put her to bed, still spacesuited, and strapped her in. Quindy, meanwhile, had been initiating the checking of SIPA-CUM. Next Cinnabar opened the airlock, to find the fallen and obviously dying Trafalgar Cuw. (Janja had been at DS station, trying to find a way to put the guns on their pursuit without bringing down half the hillside on them. She gave it up.

Meanwhile the pursuers continued their efforts to bring the hillside down on what they saw as their escaping slaves and two traitors.) Now Cinnabar said, "Can you interrupt SIPACUM's autocheck? I think we'd better try an exterior scan, visual." "We had better indeed. We make a good team-no matter how hard I try, I can't think of everything." Quindy initiated the scan, and focused on the over- 222 hang. It was still there, as menacing as a smoky-growly volcano. Snow on the external optic scanner interfered with resolution. SIPACUM applied heat and rapid movement to the 'scope, out on the hull. The screen cleared. The overhang had changed position. It was hanging at a different angle. Lower. Tilted down, toward the grounded ship. "Oh shit." "True. They're just about to hit us with an avalanche. Busy little bastards!" "Quindy." "Ummm?" Quindy was concentrating, almost quivering like a hound on the scent. Visibly and almost ridiculously keyed up. "Instigating engine ignition," she said, and did. "Crossing fingers," Cinnabar muttered, and did. A light as bright as Quindy's hair flared, briefly. It went out while a separate panel came alight in a horizontal oblong of malachite green. Engines primed and actuated. Potential function: 100 percent. Azurite tinged the green panel into a beautiful turquoise. Ignition. The panel went blue and others flashed alight. "Hoo-ray!" Cinnabar said, trying not to jump up and down. Satana shuddered. It felt good. In the captain's cabin, a woman sprawled loosely, spacesuited and strapped against acceleration. Her sleeping brain registered that most familiar of generalized shudders throughout her darling ship. And the corners of the sleeping woman's mouth turned up" almost angelically. Cinnabar was staring at the screen showing external view. "Can we get an extrapolation and rotate the computer image to look at the creatures, really see what they're doing?" "Pos. You sure you want to? You know what they're doing." And, almost rigid with concentration, Quindy continued, "Autocheck continues ASP." 223 All Systems Pos(itive), Cinnabar mused, and nodded. "Please. Give me an answer. Once that shelf starts to move, how long to impact?" "Problem requires effort on my part," Quindy muttered, pressing keys in a way that indicated she knew it all well enough, loved it all enough, to do this blindfolded or behind her back. Lights like gemstones flash-flickered on her panel in a showfly display of high-tech responses. "Requesting approximation." While SIPACUM monitored ship's life-support systems and the activated engine; while it continued all-systems check; while it monitored shipdoc; while it measure-monitored the engines; while it meanwhile "wondered" about the alien presences of the two stig-lul; SIPACUM diverted part of itself to "look" up the long incline, made a judgment as to the distance, another as to size and probable weight of the overhang (checking Knor's gravity and factoring in computation of snow composition and weight as well as most stone so situated, on this planetary body), multiplied, considered, re-checked, made an allowance . . . . . and supplied the answer in just under 2.4 seconds. The answer was expressed in seconds, too, and they were few. "Whew," Cinnabar's translahelm murmured. "That ain't enough time to blow a nose!" The Jarp reflected. "Quindy?" "Hmm?" Busy, busy. "Look, they're about to bury us. Maybe even crush the hull. We'd better hope we're ASP, cross fingers and toenails, and get the vug off this planet." Almost automatically one jet hand went out to the rack of cassettes, counted silently, pulled one. It was a simple course instruction applicable to any planetary situation: Consider Planetary Factors/All Soonest: Get Off This World And Establish Safe Orbit. "Ready, but I hate to-" Activity onscreen attracted their eyes like a malign 224 magnet. The overhang trembled. It tipped. It seemed to hover there, wavering, impossibly balanced. Two of those who had labored to detach it toppled. They fell to come skidding down the slope. Two beasties. They wouldn't be Changing back. No one I know, I hope, Cinnabar mused, and thought with fleeting wistfulness of Meeshais. Then the overhang of snow-piled stone or hard dirt-not-earth fell. Ponderously, tons and tons in slow motion, turning a little. It struck with an impact that actuated three monitors and four gem-flashing panels while sending up a snowcloud a half-kilometer into Knor's air. Again that mass of snowy matter seemed to hesitate. Then it was



sliding. With it the thing brought more snow, pushing, loosening, collecting. Tons of snow. Avalanche! Point of termination: Satana's location. "Quin-deee!" Cinnabar said urgently, staring at the screen. Here came death. Burial so deep under so many tons of matter that not even SIPACUM and Satana's engines would be able to get them out from under. "Autocheck not complete," Quindy lamented, and savaged her lower lip with her upper teeth. "That means SIPACUM and ship still aren't thoroughly checked out and we are in no condition to try moving." As she spoke, however, she was inslotting the cassette. And she remembered to hit the button and call out: "Emergency lift-off in progress! Stand by for heavy G-force. Going Up! Belt! HIT THE DECK!" Tons and tons of snow rushed down, filled the view-screen, loomed above the ship and its complement like the end of the universe- And with a titanic shudder and groan, ready or not, spaceship Satana freed herself from her unwanted nest and lunged up off the planet of its enslavement. "We're offfff!" Cinnabar yelled in high triumph, even while acceleration turned its features hideous and pressed it down, down. And the ship went up, up. "And we are fucking ri-i-ich!" Quindy yelled, and they heard Janja's laughter.

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