

The Call of Duty The aristocratic Lady Seerava was going home to her native planet of Suzi. The Sham-banafest, marking the thirtieth decade since the founding of the Sariks and two allied families, would last for weeks. Every wealthy young man would receive points based on the number of older women he had made love to. Seerava intended to let no young man be disappointed. She would try to help them all to win. Were there extra points for doubles with the same woman?.. SPACEWAYS #1 OF ALIEN BONDAGE #2 CORUNDUM'S WOMAN #3 ESCAPE FROM MACHO #4 SATANA ENSLAVED #5 MASTER OF MISFIT #6 PURRFECT PLUNDER #7 THE MANHUNTRESS #8 UNDER TWIN SUNS #9 IN QUEST OF QALARA #10 THE YOKE OF SHEN #11 THE ICEWORLD CONNECTION #12 STAR SLAVER #13 JONUTA RISING! #14 ASSIGNMENT: HELLHOLE #15 STARSHIP SAPPHIRE #16 THE PLANET MURDERER #17 THE CARNADYNE HORDE #18 RACE ACROSS THE STARS #19 KING OF THE SLAVERS BERKLEY BOOKS, NEW YORK The poem Scarlet Hills copyright (c) 1982 by Ann Morris; used by permission of the author. SPACEWAYS #19: KING OF THE SLAVERS A Berkley Book / published by arrangement with the author PRINTING HISTORY Berkley edition / January 1985 All rights reserved. Copyright (c) 1985 by John Cleve. Cover illustration by Ken Barr. This book may not be reproduced in whole or in part, by mimeograph or any other means, without permission. For information address: The Berkley Publishing Group, 200 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10016. ISBN: 0-125-07134-0 A BERKLEY BOOK (r) TM 757,375 The name "BERKLEY" and the stylized "B" with design are trademarks belonging to Berkley Publishing Corporation. PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA for Jape Cleve and another

quarter-century SCARLETHILLS Alas, fair ones, my time has come. I must depart your lovely home- Seek the bounds of this galaxy To find what lies beyond. (chorus) Scarlet hills and amber skies, Gentlebeings with loving eyes; All these I leave to search for a dream That will cure the wand'rer in me. You say it must be glamorous For those who travel out through space. You know not the dark, endless night Nor the solitude we face. (reprise chorus) I know not of my journey's end Nor the time nor toll it will have me spend. But I must see what I've never seen And know what I've never known. Scarlet hills and amber skies, Gentlebeings with loving eyes; All these I leave to search for a dream That will cure the wand'rer in me. -Ann Morris Let us each forsake every other kind of knowledge and seek one thing only ... to learn and discern between good and evil. -Plato, The Republic Prologue She wore black. It was a jumpsuit, black, and it looked sprayed on. The sinister night-gleam of it was relieved only by her skin, at face and neck and bosom. Her hands were sheathed in filament-thin gloves of black. They looked painted on, as the jumpsuit did. It caught highlights where the form inside rounded it out, seeming to strain it. At the upper back, and over the buttocks, and at the calves, which were unusually prominent. It showed a lot of skin in front, skin that was pale and looked almost white in its shocking contrast to the black fabric. The suit was cut down the front not in a V, but in a U, a huge capital U. Partway down were the curves of her breasts, bare inside the jumpsuit and within its cleavage, and they were firm unto hardness, those breasts. Warheads, the currently-in slang called them. Her skin was pale and her hair was more pale than that and her eyes, too, a silvery gray with only the ghost of a hint of sky-blue. Her name was Janja, and she was black and white. Mix those, and the result was gray. Janja was gray, and she was with The Gray Organization. Actually the super-policers, the war-preventers, the super-spooks were named TransGalactic Order. That yielded the initials TGO, and they in turn yielded the 1 2 sobriquet-the nickname, in plainer terms-The Gray Organization. Aristotle had written that black represented evil and white represented good and that the two could not mix. The result, Aristoteles of Athenos wrote, was gray: good and bad, neither bad nor good, both bad and good. And that, the philosopher-scholar wrote, was impossible. Good and evil could not at one and the same time exist in the same entity, Aristotle said. White and black could not coexist; gray was impossible. (In that, Aristotle was dead wrong. TGO existed, and so did Janja,

in black and white.) She was from a planet called barbaric, and the planet was a gentle idyll of lovers where war was unknown. She was from a planet called Protected and she had been stolen off that world, all unprotected, as a slave. She had never known violence on that "barbaric" world, and she hated it-and in time she slew her masters (her owners)-and sliced away their manly attributes as trophies. She abhorred violence and lawlessness and, back on her own planet before her capture and use, had been saving herself for marriage; and she became mistress of a pirate, a space pirate all in black. She wore a weapon and she had used it. She was of Aglaya where men and women, girls and boys were Lifemated, and she believed in that, and she had been sex-slave of her masters on planet Resh-and had killed them-and on planet Knor (she killed them, too, in order to escape) and lover to a woman named Hellfire and a non-human named Cinnabar and now a man . . . a man who bore five names (that she knew about), one of which was Rat. She despised the race that had enslaved her. Them, the Thingmakers, and she had joined them. She abhorred killing and had killed two of those men who had stolen her away to slavery to begin with. One, the one 3 named Jonuta of Qalara, she had killed twice. (And the anti-Aristotelean contradictions continued: Jonuta was alive.) She was Janja and she was gray. She moved with the ease and grace of the shadow of a soaring bird, or of a cat. She did not swagger. Instead she glided, using muscles developed on a planet whose sun was legend and whose gravity was not. It was high, that gravity. It created short people, strong people, strong-legged people of strong will. She was Janja, gray in black, and she was a hunter, a prowling hunter among the Thingmakers. She had become one of their guardians, their police. Only she knew that she was an alien among Them, a true alien. Oh, she resembled their dark race, except only in pigmentation. It was her mind that was different. In the mind, she was not human, not what They called "Galactic." She was more than that; more than Galactic and thus a pace beyond human. In her mind and because of her mind, she was an alien among Them. Stolen from her own world and her own kind-her very life-and trained only as slave and pirate and mistress, she refused to be any of those. And so she was with TGO, because she had to do and to be, and she could not return to Aglaya. Not with all the knowledge she had from Them. Native planetary populations should be allowed to develop in their own way at their own pace, the Galactic Accords said, and TGO enforced the Accords. She was Janja, and she was gray, and she was a cop. With The Gray Organization. She was working. Right now she was on a mission for TGO. White of hair and "white" of skin and sheathed 4 in black, she functioned grayly for The Gray Organization. In the dark, dark gray night. She was also being pursued. A slender belt angled rakishly across her hip and almost nonexistent belly. Four slim strips of leather-imitating black plastifabric called equhyde were braided together into the slim belt buckled with shining mother-of-pearl. From the belt hung a holster. Slim, straight, and narrow; a holster designed for a form of sidearm called a stopper. Her holster was empty. She was working and her stopper was in her black-gloved hand. Merely a squeeze-actuated black cylinder in a slim-fingered fist that did not squeeze. She was also running as hard as she could. That was hard indeed, propelled by those churning tensing muscular legs developed on her high-G planet, and it was fast. City buildings fled past the fleeing Janja, in the night. Aglaya's gravity was one-and-a-third-standard; this world's was only three-quarters-standard. This planet was called Franji., She ran fast and silently on Franji, on heels and soles of extruded prostyrene that was like rubber crepe and, made to TGO specs, was a lot better. She ran without looking back. That was part of her training. To look back while fleeing accomplished nothing, she had been taught. It did tend to slow one down and increase risks both known and unknown. Looking back to assess danger while running was natural to the human species and to the Aglayan species so much like it. A better model was the cat. Members of that species did not trouble even to glance toward the sudden noise or menacing smell that set their legs moving. They merely sprinted, at speed and without looking back, until they 5 knew they had taken themselves well away from the

source of the noise or the odor-the catalyst to their running. Then and only then did a feline pause to look back-pause, while poised to fight or to sprint on. Janja ran, stopper in hand, silently along a silent street. Since she made no sound with her feet and only a little with her breathing, she heard clearly the slapping feet behind her, the steps of her pursuer. She rounded the corner of a building of the same material as the soles and heels of her boots, and charged across a plaza and down thirty plascrete steps with a blurry churning of her black-sheathed legs, and around a neon-lit fountain all beautiful in six colors and eight hues, and past the menacing uniformed policer she knew was only a holoprojection designed to frighten potential lawbreakers (who knew of it and laughed and strove to perform obscene acts on the projection) and up thirty broad imitation marble steps, and around a corner again- In near darkness, she stopped almost as swiftly as if she had run into an invisible wall. She hadn't. She was fast, and she could stop fast, too. Gray Janja of far Aglaya. She waited, staring, holster empty and stopper in hand, up and ready. Poised. Footsteps clomped unevenly down the last of the steps, slap-slapped across Fountain Plaza, and came less rapidly up the steps she had taken with such ease. She heard those feet reach the top. The man who had been chasing her came hard-breathing, a man desperate to overtake her because she was intensely dangerous to him and his career. Winded from the steps he skidded around the same corner she had rounded, with his legs moving almost in the manner of a cartoon figure. Treading air while he turned, gun in hand. His hair was the blue that was fashionable on Franji and his conservative clothing was expensive. He saw her for something on the order of an instant before Janja said: "Hi. Chasing me here where we're alone is your second mistake, demagogue." And she squeezed the grip of her cylindrical weapon. He fell down unconscious. She did after all abhor violence and most of all killing and would not set her stopper on its killer setting, its number Three setting. She had set the modified outworlder stopper on Two. That sonic attack rendered the "victim" quite unconscious, almost in an instant. The man who had been lured into following her until she tired him and trapped him, a handsome man and magnetic-charismatic, fell down like a bundle of laundry and lay just as forlornly. Janja holstered her stopper. She stepped past him to look both ways. No one followed them. She squatted, there in the alley off a street of Marucan on a planet named Franji, and proceeded to strip the unconscious man until he was entirely naked. His clothes she took. His incriminating weapon she left in his hand. She touched the stud of his own beeper, knowing it would alert newspeople. They would come at the rush, because he was who he was, and more importantly what he was. The Marucan policers were coming now, noisily. Janja, taking his clothing even unto his boots and chronometer though not his government-issue beeper, disappeared. Disappeared by running silently up the dark alley. What she had done to him was, for a man of his sort (a doubly, hyper-male male of much pride and power and swagger), a fate worse than death. She had lured 7 and embarrassed and demeaned him. She had assured that he would become known as a butt. The newspeople, already on their way, would see to that. Pictures would be taken. Telecommentators would grin, perhaps giggle. He would be a butt, a joke. Oddly, that would benefit the people of his world. Within twenty-one minutes Janja was offplanet. Within an hour she was in space. She had successfully completed her first solo mission for TransGalactic Order. Grayly. Doing good by doing bad. It took a while-until the next election-but that ended the career of Senator Takiman of Franji, who had been so stupid as to make a promise of loyalty to TGO and accept its funds and then, in the arrogance of high office, fail to keep it. His wife left him, too. Worse, so did his mistress. 1 Biologically, the question is: Can the human brain gain control over inherited impulses that were appropriate for prehistoric man but are inappropriate in the twentieth century? -Harvey Milkman and Stanley Sunderwirth, in *Psychology Today*, October 1983 Manjanungo and Sibanda met on the gigantic wheel of a spaceship docking station that orbited the planet Qal-ara. The meeting was a fortuitous one, and pure serendipity. Once three princes from a place called Serendip went off in

search of a lost lady. Each struggled and squeaked through various adventures and wound up with something of value entirely different from what he had been seeking. The word serendipity was born. It applied to Dr. Alex Fleming's accidental discovery of penicillin, when he was looking for something else altogether (since a broad-spectrum killer of bacterial infection was obviously impossible). Serendipity applied to a million other fortuitous accidents. It applied to the meeting of spacer captains Sibanda and Manjanungo in the busy, ever-noisy lounge on Qal-arastation. Both ship's masters had business on the planet below; business involving this or that matter of 9 cargo, replacement part, and supplies for their galaxy-spanning ships. Both were awaiting the return of their agents, down on Qalara, and for the moment had little to do. The very striking Manjanungo soon learned that the underclad woman was not just another pretty face and desirable, well-displayed form. Her color was a golden tan: skin, hair, and eyes. A jewel-flashing jerkin over nothing but skin and a pair of low-on-the-hips pants, snug and white and arabesqued in gold, left bare her nicely tucked-in waist and a navel around which had been painted a starburst, in Bonestell blue. She affected arabesquery-traced gloves to the elbow, snug-as-skin and of a perfect blue that matched her longish vest. A single pair of golden frogs and a single taut, royal blue lacing prevented it from showing more than half of her very round breasts. This was Captain Sibanda of spaceship Serendip. In her turn she soon learned that this Manjanungo was more than the oddly-attired, foppish, and imperious dandy he appeared. As a matter of fact she had heard of Manjanungo of Jorinne. He affected long hair drawn straight back into a queue and held by a scarlet bow. His long coat of shining black taffetas—a wrinkle-free synthefabric, of course-imitated the attire of a more than ancient sea captain of Espanya. With his own modifications: the coat was long and belted, and skin-hugging black pants or tights disappeared into equally black jackboots. The fancily-tooled ball-and-cap pistole tucked into his wide belt was surely a replica—surely a stopper, the common weapon of the spaceways, was concealed in the ridiculously primitive and inefficient handgun. Not tall and not unhandsome, this was Captain Manjanungo of 10 spacer Starwolf and other names. Sibanda and Manjanungo discovered that they were in the same business. In a privatized booth, they talked. Just how it came about is neither here nor there; suffice it to say that the two struck a bargain. It involved their mutual business, which was piracy, and a certain huge luxury spaceliner well advertised as being well-armed. The liner was called Starqueen and its master was Captain Trinn Yosef. The finest prize in space, Starqueen—and any pirate would have to be a fobbin' fool to tangle with the liner with its new armaments and capable master. Two pirates, however, met serendipitously and made such plans. One possessed Starqueen's precise voyage plan, and Manjanungo agreed that in exchange she would receive 60 per cent of the proceeds of their joint venture. The rendezvous with Captain Lortice would keep, Manjanungo thought, his gleaming sable taffetas rustling as he strode back to his ship's docking berth. He was a deeply tan man of absolutely normal height and weight, neither ugly nor handsome. He walked, however, like a king. Some people gave him stares, but somehow none remained in his way. A man perhaps to be scorned or pointed out with smiles behind his back, but not to be crossed. So it is the second-largest and best-armed liner along the spaceway, he mused. / hardly have time to await something small and safe. And once we have Starqueen allow in space, we shall see who receives sixty per cent of nothing and who takes all! He was met at Starwolfs inner airlock by a quiet beauty, unrelaxed of face and very erect in her tighter-than-skin one-piece skinnTite of gleaming white. It flattered her waist, which was corseted, surely painfully, to an unbelievably tiny 43 sems.* A stern woman, respected by the several female creatures Captain Man-janungo kept onboard for his amusement. They were not called women; this one was. "My Lord," she said quietly but with clear enunciation, with her head deferentially bowed as he required. (Once one of his girls, in the throes of passion in her lordly captain's lordly bed, had quite forgotten herself and called him by name. She had spent the next 25

hours painfully bound in a standing position: elbows snugged quite together behind her back, her offending mouth stuff-gagged with expandafoam so that her jaws creaked. And she was plugged both fore and aft. Man-janungo had intended the punishment as a lesson, and as her shoulders and calves first told her they were dying and then went into a fearsome chill numbness, she learned. Now she was chief of girls, and she stood before him. Never mind her name; now she was called Intaglio. And no one on Starwolf called its master other than "Captain" or "my lord.") "Kenyo?" he queried, striding past her. He had used the commlink concealed in a button of his coat's sleeve to order contact made with his lieutenant. "Javad began comm-seeking him at once, Captain." Manjanungo nodded shortly, striding to his ship's con-cabin, which he liked to call the bridge. There he found Javad, one of the two Joser jailbirds he had taken on as crew, waiting. The link was made, with Kenyo. Manjanungo snatched the commlink and gave his instructions quickly. The moment he had Kenyo's very-long distance and succinct "Firm," Manjanungo passed * 43 centimeters: 17 inches, Old Style 12 the commlink to Javad and took up the inship unit. "As soon as Jenk comes up from onplanet," he announced to all onboard, "we clear and redshift. We have a most important mission in concert with another captain, and we will be boosting. You brats had better ease each other's corsets and strap down. Topaz: to my cabin. Intaglio, see to our guest. Ah-shipdoc will be a nice safe place for her! See to it!" Elsewhere on the ship, the girl whose hair he had caused to be dyed yellow and then named her for its hue disengaged herself from another girl and hurried without reluctance toward the master's cabin. While Intaglio was covered chin to toes and past the wristbones in refulgent white, Topaz wore only the corset Man-janungo mandated. It proffered her breasts without covering them above a full, semi-transparent swish-skirt of pale cream yellow. Quite short and propped on tall slim heels, she nevertheless walked rapidly and with ease. Intaglio had trained her well. Topaz had no desire to spend further hours stuff-gagged and with her elbows touching, behind her back. Alone in the captain's carpeted and wall-hung cabin, she prepared a drink and inserted a redjoy stick in his holder before she took up her pose of awaiting her lord. On her knees. A considerable time later and a long way from Qalara, the two pirate captains had arrived at their widely separated rendezvous points and made commlink. Hanging like tiny ornaments in the eternal twilight of space here near the center of the Galaxy's tightening spiral, they made more specific plans and oversaw shipboard preparations. And then both their SIPACUMs reported the approach of a third spacecraft. 13 "Give me a plot," Manjanungo said, while Sibanda said or keyed in a similar command to the Ship's Inboard Processing And Computing Unit (Modular) over on her Serendip. SIPACUM obligingly brought up the simulation on its main screen: the twin dots that were Serendip and Starwolf- lately Ruy Diaz, in the Great Five-Year Race. Less than a hundred thousand kilometers away bulked the big mass of Starqueen-a ship twice the size of either of the two lurking in wait. "Closer to you," Manjanungo said. "Want to move back five degrees off opposite, and when you're in position I'll move in from here?" "Firm," Sibanda's voice crackled into his con-cabin. "Actuating scrambler." "Scrambler actuated here." "And here. To our mutual good fortune then, Captain!" "Indeed," Manjanungo said, and his lacy white shirt-cuffs flashed against the black of his coat as he off-commmed. He and a silent Intaglio watched Tigress move away on the simulation screen. Javad and Jenk were at their DS posts, standing by Defense Systemry that, not unusually, would shortly be employed in an aggressively non-defensive role. Topaz, having displeased, would ride out the operation in the master's cabin, strapped to the ring-equipped wall. Manjanungo of Jorinne was smiling. What Sibanda of Serendip did not know was that Kenyo-the former Manhar Uls-was on his way at speed in the excellent spacer he had stolen from his former employer, CongCorp. Three ships would be even better against Starqueen than two ... and after 14 that, Manjanungo mused, his eyebrows coolly lifted, after that, two-to-one odds will change Captain Si-banda's notions about splitting the

take! Captain Trinn Yosef of Archducal Lines' Starqueen had been delayed nearly a week, thanks to an overbooking snarl that had left several would-be passengers stranded on Ghanj. Some of them vowed personal vengeance. The nobles promised lawsuits and pressure. On top of that came delays because the thrice-be-damned ministell-pinching Ghanjis had taken half an eternity to repair a beacon-which had not one damned thing to do with Starqueen's departure lane anyhow. What called Captain Yosef, as he watched passengers and crew devour groceries, was that any ne'er-do-well stepson of a noble Ghanji lordling's younger brother would walk away from more small change than the beacon repairs would have cost. Now it would come out of Saf Yosef's share. At last came the day and the hour: "SIPACUM loaded," the mate advised. "Ready?" The chief steward's haggard face appeared on the display. "I think so, sir." And the face instantly disappeared. The "jump into subspace" (conversion of Starqueen and everything and everyone on it to tachyons in order to race out past the stars at a velocity faster than that of light itself) was the usual bitch. It was violently disorienting even for an experienced spacefarer. As usual, the identity problems of some passengers demanded that they demand to be on their unrestrained feet. Beautiful. When they ended up bleeding and vomiting from double bank shots off this or that (bulkheads/walls/seats/the bar/other passengers/etc), machismo invariably trans-15 lated into whiplash and a "You should have forced us" attitude. Stewards stayed busy. Yosef could sympathize with the poor dogs of stewards. On the other hand, he had problems of his own. Stewards had been racing about the ship for over two hours, buttoning down passengers and coaxing those who resisted. The ancient offer of "free drink" helped in some cases. In others, a steward provided the final solution: a discreetly administered shot right through the passenger's clothing, to supplement the whopping load of tranq already packed into the "midday" meal. "Here goes," Captain Yosef said. Before SIPACUM could initiate the jump this time, the hull of Starqueen resounded with a faint yet ringing clang and six several meters and telits went wild. "Abort," SIPACUM said. "Evaluating damage from missile." "What?" the mate sounded as if he'd been goosed. "Oh Lady Booda's bleeding cervix!" Trinn Yosef moaned. "Another flaining pi-rat! Why can't TGW spread a little flea powder?" He flicked on the inship comm. "Report!" Starqueen's Defense Systemry, which was strictly that, could baste, fry, and bake any ship in the Galaxy. As a matter of course SIPACUM had long since advised that two small craft-presumably pilot boats or private yachts, maybe lost miners-were in the neighborhood; i.e., within a hundred thousand kloms of the liner.* It certainly had not occurred to Trinn Yosef that either or both might be in the area by design. Or that one or both might presume to annoy him! After all, Starqueen's DS fitting had been well publicized and as usual the media had fallen for the glamor and given the Line and the * 100,000 kilometers: about 60,000 miles, Old Style 16 ship billions in free advertising. Superior weaponry was supposed to be a deterrent, wasn't it? Well, Trinn thought grimly, so is execution . . . "Forward cargo section holed," SIPACUM reported blandly. "Conversion delayed until hull integrity is restored. Is return fire desired?" "You're sure it wasn't a mistake?" Captain Yosef asked. The signal was so close that the comm blasted it out at a volume that drowned SIPACUM's reply and threatened eardrums. "Starqueen! Prepare to be boarded." "Hmp! That's what I call a-" "Never mind," Trinn Yosef snapped. "Give the bastard a direct answer. And when you fire, hold the beam an extra half-sec. Melt the sisterslicer into a solid globule we can haul along as a trophy!" If he swatted one fly hard enough maybe the other would go away and let him get on with his business of hitting the Tachyon Trail. He still hoped to pick up one of those lost days, at least. With the unipolymer plasteel and cyprium of its hull sublimated away, the metal of that audacious bastard out there might almost pay for the hole it had shot in him. The hole that was self-healing right now. The con-cabin was quiet. Lights dimmed momentarily as one of the many arms of SIPACUM main drew energy from the ship's drive, stored it in enormous capacitors, and released a bolt sizzlingly powerful enough to rock a

moon. An instant later Captain Yosef's straight, short-cropped hair stood on end. The con-cabin's air crackled with ionization. Coronas formed on the ends and sharp corners of every object. "Musla's . . . balls!" the mate gasped, and it was the first time Yosef had ever heard him shaken. 17 Yosef was astonished, if not shaken. He had hardly expected a yacht (which SIPACUM clearly showed was the attacker) to be equipped with energy weapons. Usually the pleasure-craft used drives not large enough to charge the devices. He had a sudden deep-stomach feeling of having erred. "I.D.!" he demanded. "If you are a duly constituted policer ship, ID yourself immediately. We are a passenger liner-and loaded with passengers!" His hair lifted again as another bolt hit Starqueen. "Damage sustained in peripheral DS," SIPACUM unemotionally reported. Captain Yosef slammed a fist onto the console with force enough to make needles waver. "Don't waste time! Blow the bloody bastards away!" He still could not believe that his magnificent liner was in any real danger. It was just that repairs were expensive and they always came out of his share. Still, just to make sure, he decided to call battle stations. The crew were not really combat types but they'd had some training. They could even handle swivel pods if SIPACUM should be disabled and it came down to the primitive. "Third ship approaching," SIPACUM dispassionately advised, and routinely put up a display onscreen. Trinn Yosef gritted his teeth. If the piratical swine were going to keep popping up like breeding rabbits this could get serious. He worked to keep his voice at a level command tone: "Override," he said. "Forget about hull integrity. Convert!" "Hull breached in four places. Coriolis strains during conversion to tachyon and ftl movement allow a survival probability of .0001." "Cap-tainn-" a voice said, on a rising note and starting to quaver. 18 Yosef was stuck. He would have to fight it out with this veritable swarm of pirate scum. "Give it your best shot," he said, "and call ship's company to battle stations." Sirens began whooping. An instant later the ship shuddered, and the wailing sound began dying. SIPACUM was crippled! "Suit up! Suits, suits! We may have to repel boarders!" "Red Rover," the outship comm said in the pirate's voice, as if on cue: the usual code for "We're coming over"-meaning to board. A new voice intruded, close to hand. "Captain: I am the Viscount Sirandary. I must demand that we surrender the ship, lest we sustain more hits-Captain, we can all be killed!" Yosef swung around in the master's chair to face this unauthorized newcomer in his con-cabin. "They don't want to kill us, they want to rob us. No pirate is going to blow away a-" "Captain Yosef I insist!" "Red Rover, Starqueen," that other voice came. "Stand by to receive us. Want one across the drive intakes?" "Get this . . . person out of my con-cabin!" Trinn Yosef snapped in one direction, and in another: "Listen, pirate, we can blow you away and you know it!" "Why don't yer ask your passengers, Captain. Think all those richies'd rather die, or let us come onboard and take a few well-insured baubles?" Behind Yosef as he started to reply, someone yelled. A moment later a cool pressure against his neck made the captain turn, carefully, to face his mate. "Sorry, Captain. Someone's got to do something sensible, and it isn't sensible to try to bluff it out or fight 19 with three well-armed attackers. Your pride is in command, sir, and it's endangering us all." " You rotten-" Captain Yosef started moving, getting up, turning toward his stopper-wielding mate, reaching for his own sidearm tucked into the pocket of the master's chair -and receiving a number Two holt from his mate's stopper that set him all ajiggle and kept him that way. "Open outer airlocks to boarders," Starqueen's mate said, to crew and SIPACUM alike. One or the other had to be functioning. Trinn Yosef no longer could. And to the outship comm: "Arvaga here, in charge. Red Rover." "What the Santa Maria Mahal is that about?" Man-janungo demanded of his own outship comm, the one linked with both Kenyo's Gelor and Sibanda's Serendip. "Who's Arvaga? Is that a code?" "Arvaga is my person onboard Starqueen," Sibanda advised in an equable tone worthy of a computer. "The liner is ours. Shall we board together, partner?" Manjanungo stared at the commlink. "Your p-you have a person on-you've had a spy on that liner all along?" "Pos, Captain. I had a spy onboard that you didn't know

about, and you had another ship that I didn 't know about. Looks as if we both sort of lied by omission, hmmm ? Honesty among thieves, where art thou, hmmm? Shall we board together? I'd say we're even now." "Even?" Manjanungo smiled. "I have two ships, Captain, and you are one. My other ship's DS isn't trained on Starqueen, Sibanda-but on you. What is even?" "I had better give you the opportunity to reconsider, 20 Captain Manjanungo. My employer outranks you. You might call him . . . admiral." Manjanungo could not keep out of his voice the fact that he was rattled. "Wha-at? Employer?" "Pos, Captain. I know that you are working at collecting a fleet, and will doubtless soon be calling yourself admiral. No one begrudges you that. . . so long as you tangle only with victims and such minor forces as TAIandTGW... ." What kind of-Manjanungo's mouth was open. TAI was a minor force, sure. But TGW! Abruptly it wasn't that he had opened his mouth; it acted for itself. It was agape. He closed it with a conscious effort. Swallowed. Licked his lips, with a glance at the wounded Starqueen on his screen. Before he could comment or ask the obvious question, Captain Sibanda answered it. "My employer, and Arvaga's, is Ramesh Jageshwar. We really mean you neither harm nor ill will, Manjanungo. Just please don't cross Ramesh Jageshwar. You just aren 't ready." "Shit." That third voice was Kenyo, on the private commlink to his ship, stolen from CongCorp and named so as to embarrass the company-after the man who had showed CongCorp up as a bunch of murderers.* Manjanungo snapped a glance at that commbox, then back at the one from which came Sibanda's voice. Santa Maria and Lady Vike, is it possible? I've been hearing about this Ramesh Jageshwar for years. "King of the Slavers," they call him. A legendary figure . . . but not a legend? Is he real, truly real? If he is, he is the most powerful of us all-though hardly so powerful as In SPACEWAYS #16, The Planet Murderer 21 to make TGW "minor," as she brags. She may also be lying, of course. Damn! Do I dare risk it? Ramesh Jageshwar! Manjanungo had to make a decision, and he did not like making it. He made it. It cost; oh how it cost, in terms of his vaunting ego! "Kenyo. Captain Sibanda of Serendip is our valued ally. Do be sure that you have not so much as a stopper aimed at her." As he spoke, Manjanungo half-rose to depress a button on his console, locking his own ship's DS here at the con. "Jenk? Javad? You heard?" The dull "Aye Captain" came from two comm-boxes in three voices. The fourth voice was female, and it carried no sound of triumph. "Captain?" Sibanda said. "Shall we board together, Manjanungo and Sibanda?" She wasn't even going to rub it in with a "Wise of you" or a sarcastic "Thank you," Manjanungo thought. A real professiona-sweet Lady V! She must really be what she says! Ramesh-name-of-Hell-Jageshwar! Manjanungo did not want to board that liner. Not now. Not with her, and not with her spy on it. Not with her and her "corps of cybers." Yet, assuming that she was sincere about sharing-he just couldn't let her go onto Starqueen alone. He had to be with them! He swallowed, and swallowed again, and seized control of his voice. "Captain Sibanda," the pirate Manjanungo said; "partner. My trusted Captain Kenyo will bring his eminently maneuverable Gelor in close, and board with yer. Kenyo?" "Shit." 2 It must have been three real days now that she had been a prisoner. Nine times the tiny hatch had opened in the door of the too-small cabin. Each time an orange hand with two thumbs had pushed through two trays of food. Seera never knew which of the Jarps that hand belonged to-Vampy, or Serendip, or Vermillion. Although each of those perfectly round-eyed, point-chinned, orange-skinned, and oddly sweet-faced bisexual aliens had had carnal knowledge of her, Seera could still not distinguish among them. At first she had wondered: What was Karmal Pak up to? Now she knew the answer to her own question: Mutiny, that's what! I'm kidnapped by my own crew and a prisoner on my own space-yacht! If the handsome rascal wanted a ship, why hadn't the dear boy just asked her on that tender, tender night when he could have asked anything? It took Seera a moment to realize the answer. Because she was the Lady Seerava and he was her hired help, her ship's steward. The reason he had not asked for a ship was that he knew she would say no. What he had done instead was worse than outrageous. Of course she knew that Karmal Pak

could not 22 23 have seized the ship alone. Captain Lortice had to be in on it. Probably in charge. And the ship's mate? No. She did not believe that Najendra could be involved in mutiny and spaceship seizure and kidnap. (On the other hand, Seera had thought better of the captain, too. She had to—she had hired him. And Karmal Pak! And they had all treated her so shabbily.) Mutiny! Kidnapped on her own fine spacegoing yacht by her own chosen crew. Ah God, it was all so unjust! Spaceyacht Lewuvul was hers. Well . . . technically, the ship, larger than many liners, belonged to the Clan Sondelayne. So? Few in all the Galaxy were richer than the clans of planet Jorinne. Only two of those were richer than the house of Sondelayne. Even this superbly constructed and equipped yacht with its sumptuous interior was a mere bauble, to Clan Sondelayne. Such a bauble would hardly be missed by the sprawling clan. Besides, there was the insurance. Besides, they wanted to get rid of me anyhow, Seera reminded herself miserably. Lewuvul was hers. She had had it withdrawn from parking orbit, with her own funds. She had interviewed and employed the crew. She had refused family help and advice; she'd had enough of their damned comments and advice. A Most Noble Lady could make her own decisions, and her own mistakes. Most Noble Lady Seerava had done both. Captain Lortice, she had been told, had a mind like a computer. She sought him. What she didn't consider was that puter chips had been known to go fobby; to go plain bad. Lortice was a handsome Older Man and she admired and liked the honesty of his grayed hair. How really different of the man, to have it grayed to match his age, the 24 way the hair of the ancients had done! Everyone of the Galactic race had dark hair. Both the genes controlling balding and graying had been brought under control and adjusted centuries ago. Hair no longer departed heads, prematurely or otherwise, and it no longer turned gray much less white. Many dyed their hair something other than the standard browns or black; Seera had worn hers orange, for a while (to the yammering tune of the usual criticism of That Woman, That Outsider: Seerava off planet Ghanj). Nearly everyone dyed at least some area of skin, too (often way down at the cellular level, with skindye or permadye, rather than the temporary but keep-it-as-long-as-you-want-it sub-skin dye), and lips, and even eyes. Making something else of the uniformly brown eyes the one race old Home-world or Urth had produced was simple. Some even dared flaunt blue eyes, after all these centuries. So—Lortice, and his handsome hair. Despite her preference for younger males, she had not been averse to the wiry Lortice's subtle hints that his cabin was suitable for more than a captain's solitary rest and reflection and gaming. It had proven so, too. He did well in bed, too. Of course Seera did; Lady Seereasy, some of the more cruel tongue-waggers had called her back on Jorinne. She hired Lortice. Lortice engaged a ship's mate. Seera had expected and hoped for another male. Najendra, however, was a competent spacefarer with excellent papers. What really sold Seera on her was Najendra's unattractiveness, her absolutely zero clothes consciousness and color sense, and her lack of interest in those activities dear to Seera's heart. Lortice looked upon Najendra solely as ship's mate, not a potential temporary one, and that was just the way Seera wanted it. 25 Najendra wore her almost-black hair in a whacked-off-at-the-cheeks cut that did nothing to enhance her face. She preferred comfortable baggies to the usual skintight spacefarer's garb. Furthermore she didn't seem to bulge anywhere. Good! Too, the colors of the short young woman's pants and tunics never matched and seldom complemented. Green with orange seemed to be her favorite combination. Enough to twist the eyeballs. For some reason she had caused her irises to be a very, very pale bluish-gray; washed-out eyes. If there had to be another female on Lewuvul, Seera could not have sought out a better choice than Najendra. Accordingly she applauded Lortice's wisdom, and Najendra was taken on in the softest berth she had ever known. It was Seera's bemused impression that First Mate Najendra was so ignorant of such matters that she wore clothing to keep warm and to protect her body from scratches. Not so Karmal Pak. She had been warned that the steward had done time for smuggling. So? What were half the members of the Twelve Clans up to? The difference was that

Jorinne's nobles made the laws to suit themselves. That way, when Clan Caldera or Jacath or Katara did it, smuggling became astute business practice. (Hardly the same as that dreadful Manjanungo of the Jacaths, who had secretly headed an operation that enslaved who knew how many of his fellow Josers of Jorinne-until the whole slaving ring was uncovered and Manjanungo escaped.* To become a pirate, no less! How declassé!) Besides, Seerava thought it likely that what Karmal had been smuggling was that iron bar in his pants. Cheerfully and charmingly unrepentant, the new stew- * Both Manjanungo and Pak first appeared in SPACE WAYS #8, Under Twin Suns, which concerns itself with the Satana Coalition and the slave-ring on Jorinne. 26 ard of Lewuvul adorned his slim elegant body in shimmering glow-fabrics that were a bit garish for old money. Still, after having been arrested on Jorinne's space station Soljer* and having done time, who could blame the dear boy? On the other hand there was no excuse for what he had done. Try to give a convicted criminal a chance, even let him into your bed, and look what came of it! Seerava had been almost asleep that night. Alone. When the knock came she had naturally expected a visit of a different sort. This time it was Karmal who entered. Since Lewuvul's temp control was naturally set to Seera's exact liking, she slept in the altogether. One never knew who might care to visit, and she was proud of her well-kept altogether, and she did hate to waste time. Splendid in his shimmering glow-in-the-darks, Karmal looked down on her nudity. "Please come with me, Lady Seerava." "So formal! What's wrong with right here, Karmal?" "A surprise, my lady ..." "Oh. How nice." After three days in space, Seera was ready for some diversion aside from these little drop-ins of this or that of Lewuvul's complement. She slipped a peach-and-gold colorswirl negligee around her altogether and followed the steward down a ship's corridor-"tunnel"-toward the anomaly: the cargo area. The clans were like that. Always the streak of practicality. Even a pleasure craft paid its own way, when possible. Seera and Captain Lortice were hauling a load of multicolored Joser fabrics, clothing, and a load of * Both Manjanungo and Pak first appeared in SPACEWAYS #8, Under Twin Suns, which concerns itself with the Satana Coalition and the slave-ring on Jorinne. 27 concentrate for the smelter on Franji. Had the Lady Seerava not put her foot down firmly, Lewuvul would also have been messily surrounded by a "deck load" of external cargo pods. Fine way for a noble lady to travel, much less appear in a foreign capital! "In here, my lady." She raised her stare from Karmal's tightly-clad butt to see him step aside with a polite gesture. With a little smile, Seera went right in, "accidentally" brushing him, and stepped over the slight threshold of the cabin's emergency air seal. She stood uncertain in the darkness, idly pinching a nipple through the silken-thin peignoir while she waited for the steward-her steward-to switch on the light. Or just lay lustful hands on her, in the darkness. That was a nicely romantic concept. What other purpose could he have, fetching her here to this remote section of the ship in the middle of its scheduled "night?" Karmal Pak had another purpose. Karmal Pak had not reformed, to walk the path of righteous-but-poor lawfulness. He departed and closed the door behind him. Against her. That was when the Most Noble Lady Seerava Sonde-layne, widow of the Lord Hivala Sondelayne, began to suspect that she had made an error in judgment. First she discovered that her voice did not actuate the light. Even after she found the switch and could see, Seera could not get the hatch open. Cargo holds locked from the outside. A glance around showed her her pet man-mountain snoring on one of the close, narrow chamber's two narrow bunks. She made her tone imperiously noble. "Wake up there, Boroboodhi! Open this door for me!" The giant lay inert. Seera approached and poked at him. She slapped his broad face. No response. With a 28 growing sense of planned betrayal, she knew that the only man on Lewuvul who was not a stranger, who had served her husband and stayed on to serve his lady widow ... had been drugged. Boroboodhi was a peasantish Joser who'd have spent his life in the gem mines or back-hectares, farming. Instead he had long ago been taken in, befriended and trained by Seera's husband. Boroboodhi had all but worshipped the man and extended his fealty to the widow. Juggernaut, Ship's

First Najendra called him. She meant no malice; he was. What Boroboodhi the Juggernaut lacked in genius he made up for with a stubborn and unswerving canine loyalty. Besides, he was very big. Here he was, and he'd been here first, and he'd been drugged. None of this was encouraging for his female master. He awakened eventually. He had tried the door at once. He had tried the door for, as near as Seera could figure it based on nine meals, three ship-days. His composure continued. Not Seera's; she was about ready to go out of her skull. It was not the first time, but damn it, this was manifestly unfair. Just when she'd been about to have some fun-at last! In the two years since her husband's death, the Most Noble Lady Seerava (ne-Sarik) Sondelayne had been decidedly at loose ends. She did like jewels, and the planet named Jorinne was famous for them. Jewels were lovely. They made her feel good and she adorned herself with liberal quantities of them. Jewels, she felt, distracted attention from those few imperfections she secretly admitted in her face and form (which was one to inspire lustful fantasies in 29 an ayatollah). She did like gemstones and jewels, Seera Sondelayne did, and she did like men. Her jewels had departed her with the same dramatic suddenness as her husband Hivala, leaving her with more sense of loss than his untimely death had done. For the first time in her rather long life (fifty-one years, for all her looking thirty-three or so), she came to appreciate the difference between nudity and nakedness. Nudity was a nice word describing a nice state that frequently preceded a form of recreation she favored. Nakedness was being minus one's beloved jewels. She had said as much to her brother-in-law, who had assured her that any man would miss his jewels a lot more than a woman. Not if he were her husband, she had swiftly retorted. Life among the high-nosed clanners of Jorinne had proven stifling. Not at all like her fun-filled life on fun-filled Suzi before she had married the youthful Joser lord named Hivala Sondelayne. (Hivala of Sondelayne.) Each of them had been married once before. They were hardly children. He was not only at the top of a wealthy planet's wealthy ruling class, but of the whole blanking Galaxy's. And he was charming. Maybe he hadn't been. Maybe the first part had made her imagine the second, because she wanted it to be so. How could she have guessed what a fobbing old stick-in-the-mud the younger brother of the Sondelayne of Sondelayne would become over the years? Back then, Hivala had been totally immersed in the gaiety of the annual Shambanafest. And totally immersed in Seerava Sarik, first figuratively and then literally. That had ended. First Hivala's fun-loving quality went, and then his winning potency and interest-unto-fascination, and then Hivala. By that time her sons were making their own wastrel 30 paths along the spaceways, and Seerava did not feel abandoned and bereft. She felt free. Free! She proceeded almost at once to kick up her heels, and, to mix a metaphor or three, to round them. As swiftly the whole stiffneckedly lordly bunch of her clan-in-laws had proceeded to get bent thoroughly out of shape. Just because at long last Seera (that offplanet woman Hivala had fetched back, rather than marrying properly within the Twelve Clans; genetic engineering handily saw to no ill effects of inbreeding) had decided that it was time she had some fun again. They didn't even approve of her going in for rejuvenation treatments "only" a year after Hivala's awful accident, so that she was restored to about the same appearance as when he had married her. But damn it nearly everyone's apparent age was not its real age-and how long should one remain in the dull old white of mourning, anyhow? (It was cramped in this confounded spaceship "cabin"/storage chamber. There was barely room for the two monastic bunks, a sink, and the sitter her kidnappers had fitted it with. Sitting within grabbing distance on the other bunk was the largest man Seera had ever seen. And the Lady Seerava Sondelayne of Suzi and Jorinne had seen several planets and many men. Too many men-and not enough men. But-grab Boroboodhi?!) "I have no interest in how 'they' do things on other planets," her weary-eyed brother-in-law had said, once he had forced their confrontation in the privatemost chamber of his mansion. With a desk between them. Just a nice little intime throneroom, Seera thought. "My concern is how we conduct ourselves on this world, our beloved Jorinne. You,

madam, are the relict of my honored and honorable brother, and you are the subject of the gossip of the lowest servants!" 31 What lowest servants? she thought; we use cybers- robots! Robots don't gossip, nobles do. Mostly these damned Joser noblewomen who never enjoy themselves enough and naturally begrudge me my little diversions -purely out of envy and jealousy. "Your needs," he went on, stressing the word, "are your own affair, Seerava-even if yer unfortunately choose to consort with Jarps and Lady Vike knows what other non-humans. However. When your conduct scandalizes your own children and forces them to apologize for yer . . . when yer brings disgrace on the House of Sondelayne and thus all the clans, then your . . . affairs are no longer private." The Ja-Sondelayne paused while he regarded her steadily with eyes that had no interest in her face or her form or her experience and expertise. "You are daughter to Vijay Sarik of Shambana and thus claim a sort of nobility on Suzi, quite apart from my late brother's high station. You may if yer choose, madam, take your dowry and depart. Surely your own people will welcome a daughter who married so well and nobly on Jorinne." You arrogant old fart, Seera thought. Her father was long dead and the Sondelayne knew it. She no longer knew anyone on Suzi. Be friends with her sister and her mother, after all these years away? Not likely. True, her dowry might purchase her a palatial residence or a small planet. It was not much here, amid the anciently built-up opulence of the Galaxy's wealthiest planet. Too, she had long been accustomed to such surroundings. By now, she suspected that her well-aged dowry would be pretty small topatoes on Suzi, too. "Should yer choose to remain on Jorinne," the lordly Jasondelayne was saying on, gesturing with a triple-ringed hand, "your pretty boys and your non-human 32 playmates will be dismissed off planet." He gazed at her with eyes that belonged in a tomb. "Or dismissed in some more emphatic way, Seerava. Remain here and your life will be quiet, Lady Sondelayne ne-Sarik, and correct." Seerava was only just able to maintain her silence in the face of that inconceivably grim prospect. Holy Lady Vike and Booda-I'd rather die and go to Bleak! Her brother-in-law was meanwhile studying her (all circumspect, with skirt down to her instep and collar up to here). After a time, almost incredibly, his face softened. "Dash-blank it, Seera, you are old enough to know better! I quite agree that my noble brother Hivala was a bit of a wimp, but I can't have yer holding up this anciently noble house to ridicule. You must understand that. Go ahead off planet for awhile, hmm?" His gesture was a loose one that included all the Galaxy and seemed to say, Anywhere but here. "Get this-this rut out of your system someplace where everyone doesn't know yer. When yer return home to us, your true family, you may regain the respect of your sons. Meanwhile . . . the scandal of Manjanungo's slaver career and now piracy is entirely enough for us all. And you might even track down that bubble-brained daughter of my bro-of yours." Tamala! That bubblebrained girl was a large part of her mother's problem. Well and nicely betrothed to the young scion of a Clan Jacath family, Tamala had selected a casket of jewels that Seerava considered appropriate for the Sondelayne trousseau. As was customary, the Jasondelayne had added a valuable gaud. And ten days before the wedding, Tamala disappeared. She left only a hologram denouncing her mother's wanton ways. The charming girl's message went on to avow that True Happiness for her could exist 33 only in the master's cabin of an Outreacher spaceship captained by a certain Katmandou Vee. That 'gram was Seera's first inkling that she was not the only titled lady to visit the handsome Outie's private quarters. The gilt-tongued devil! Ah Holy Lady, the scandal! Seerava was not in truth all that bloody interested in recovering her errant daughter. She was more interested in confronting Captain Kat Vee! It would also be nice to have the jewels back. Now, some time later, she thought that it would be nicer still to get out of this hole of a hold. The man who shared the cabin was big enough to replace two cargo-haulers-the machines, not stevedores-and he possessed the same conversational talents. The ship was warm because she had mandated it that way. He exerted himself again and again and some days had elapsed since he had bathed. Now more days had elapsed. And he was so close. He is loyal,

isn't he? Now the giant raised his head from his hands. Moving with the grace of a grounded hovercar, he rose to his extra-large feet and tried the door. The hatch. He had tried it hourly for three days. Now and again he tested his weight and strength against it. Once he had tried his shoulder. Seera would not have been surprised to discover that the impact had knocked the ship off course. This time he only checked. Satisfied that it was still locked, he sat back down on the bunk that was so painfully near. Seera lay holding her breath. She wondered what thoughts lay beneath the stolid surface of the man-mountain, if thoughts indeed lurked there. Boroboodhi was still young. Younger than she, anyhow. Didn't he ever . . . ? Both the boarding of Starqueen and the division of 34 spoils worked out, which made Manjanungo feel embarrassment and renewed identity problems. Had he been cowardly in sending Kenyo to board the liner along with Sibanda? He must put that out of his mind. Better still, convince himself that he had been only an intelligent commander. He had sent a less important unit into danger, that was all. Still, Sibanda departed the scene with only one brief communication, and she did not await an answer: "Ramesh Jageshwar would be happy to count you friend, Manjanungo." And spaceship Serendip was gone. Would, she had said, not will. The message was clear to Manjanungo of Jorinne. "... would ... if you should choose to keep your nose clean and out of our way. And take the blame." For Manjanungo had no doubt that on Starqueen he had been given full "credit" for the attack and the massive theft so deftly handled by Sibanda/R. Jageshwar's cybernetic units. In a way, that appealed to Manjanungo's ego. The second biggest liner in space, with a renowned captain -and the best-armed! Of course the witch-employee of Ramesh Jageshwar had surprised him still again, by splitting the loot evenly. She magnified the crime by taking her agreed-upon additional twenty per cent in the form of live booty. Walking cargo. People. Ramesh Jageshwar was not, after all, known as a pirate. Throughout the Galaxy, he was called King of the Slavers. Ah well. Manjanungo had been in and was in that business, too. As well be sought for one as the other. His fleet was abuilding, and what fine prices his corseted, well-trained girls would bring, on some out-backworld. (And his prisoner, too!) As well be sought 35 for piracy as slavery. Everyone knew that TGO was not really interested in stopping either; TGO existed to prevent war and in that it had long been supremely effective. Never mind that TGO used trickery and blackmail and intimidation and assassination, that nice name for murder (of potential war-causers). The Gray Organization's philosophy was in one regard the same as Man-janungo's: the end justified the means. Yet why then had that giant of a woman taken him into custody on Ghanj, after the death of his (admittedly sadistic murderer of a) Jarp first mate? Only to see that I paid one hell of a fine, as she maintains? Man-janungo wondered. Perhaps-but no matter. He had paid nothing other than a bit of pride. It was she who had paid. Would pay. Was paying. Ah, that reminded him. "Intaglio! Get our guest out of shipdoc and bathe her. An injection first, mind! Then . . . oh, arrange her, interestingly." "My lord," she said with that slow nod that was a deferential bow, and she departed the con-cabin. Rather than watch the skintight fit of her white garment over her buttocks, so carefully stitched so as not only to cling but to dip into her rearward cleavage, Manjanungo looked up at the screen. It showed his ship and Kenyo's, along with the coordinates Kenyo had given him. SIPACUM estimated another twenty-seven hours to intercept. How lovely! Kenyo had spotted a spacer, apparently merely bumbling along on course to nowhere and as if without anyone in control. It was worth another sixty or so hours. Let Lortice and his prize wait! All this loot, and the yacht soon to be his, and now merely to run out and pluck from space an apparently derelict spacer! No matter what sort of shape it was in, it would be one 36 more addition to his growing fleet . . . and what he already dared envision as a pirate empire. Besides, there might be people onboard. Doubtless they would be most grateful to be ... rescued. They'd better be. "I'll go offplanet," Seera had promised the Sonde-layne. "It's time I visited Suzi." "Of course it is, Seerava! Your family ..." He trailed off with an eloquent gesture in which she saw some of his relief. My family, she thought

with a sinking feeling. At that instant she knew that merely going off to Suzi for awhile would not be enough. Not time enough. No, Seera decided. Her best course was to seek fun, not to go home to who-knew-what. She would leave Jorinne on an extended tour of several planets. First she'd get this silly cargo delivered to Franjistation, and pop down for some extensive shopping in its capital, Velynda. Once she had a few dozen new outfits and perhaps a new hair-color (and did she want to retain the "mask" of dye that marked her as a Sondelayne Clanner?), she could move on with confidence to her old homeworld. The younger generation would not know her, but any daughter of Sarik Arslan Sarik would have doors opened for her in Suzite society. Unless I get sidetracked along the way, she thought, almost able to smile, or decide to get sidetracked! Still, foremost in her thoughts was the more than cheerful prospect of the coming tri-family reunion. The thirtieth decade since the founding of the Sariks and two allied families was an event that would last for weeks. During that long long and festive Shambanafest, every scion of Suzite wealth would receive points; points based upon the number of older women he successfully 37 trysted, i.e. made love to, i.e. sliced with, i.e. screwed. It was a charming custom. Seerava intended to support it. She intended that no young man should be disappointed. She would try to help them all to win. Were there extra points for doubles, twice-overs with the same woman? Well, whatever the case, as a member of the moneyed and dominating class, she must respond to the sacred call of Duty. Meanwhile . . . here she was a prisoner on her own ship, and her prison contained no shower, soni-, water-, or otherwise. There was the sink. Was there any way she could induce good old Boroboodhi to bathe? He had not so much as disarranged his clothing, much less washed his hands and face. Seera had no inhibitions about using the limited facilities for an all-over bath, and she had done so more than once. Boroboodhi presumably had such inhibitions, and so had not emulated her. Maybe if I gave firm instructions, even guided* him, and then turned my face to the wall. . . Ah, Lady Vike and other gods, it was all just so unjust! Just when she had been really about to kick up her rounded heels at last, just when she had escaped the stiflement of Jorinne and the damned uptight clans . . . And the most outrageous part of the whole misadventure was that with all this lawlessness, this capture and imprisonment. . . I haven't even been raped! Ordered, as in "The Government issued new guidelines today . . ." 3 Karmal Pak was of the opinion that the only possible way to rape Lady Seerava would be in her sleep. He remembered Captain Lortice's query the day Pak had signed on as steward of this loony ship: "Y'understand that if yer accept the berth there will be demands above and beyond the call of duty?" Pak had heard about his prospective employer's reputation, although he knew next to nothing about Shipmaster Lortice. He had stored up several months' worth of rut in durance vile (mining corundum for emeralds and rubies that he would never see) after having been nipped up at Jorinne's orbiting space station. He even knew that the female nipper who'd got him had been promoted to boss of Station Soljer Security. "I understand," he had told Lortice. "Be a nice change. How long will I have to keep it up?" "Most of the time," the captain said, giving him a look that made Karmal realize he should have chosen a different phrase. But Captain Lortice went on with the information he had sought: "Depends on how he comes out in the Race* and if he makes the first rendezvous point." See SPACE WAYS #18, Race Across the Stars 38 39 "Uh. And if not?" "You'll just have to keep on slicing 'er until he gives us the signal, cobber." "Uh." Karmal Pak, who could have been described as willowy had he been female, tried to find out who this "he" was. The desire to know was so strong that he almost asked. He was either a pirate or a slaver, that was for sure. He had more than one spacer; either he had a fleet or was putting one together. Karmal Pak saw opportunity in that. Lortice had let it slip that he had recently lost a good ship's first-a mate he had been considering elevating to captain's status. That meant at least one other ship aside from this one and the one they would rendezvous with. Meanwhile . . . lost that first mate? Whether to the superspooks of TransGalactic Order/TransGalactic

Watch-TGO/TGW-or to lesser policers such as TAI or locals . . . that was not explained. Obviously that was not for Karmal Pak to know, at least yet. Lortice was in his employ* and he was occupied elsewhere, participating in the great Five-Year Race of spacecraft across a large chunk of the Galaxy, and Lortice and Pak were to take over a whole flaining yacht in space. A yacht! Not to mention its owner, a Most Noble Lady Roundheels whom Pak was also to keep happy in bed. Along with Lortice, though not simultaneously. Soon he would show up and lay claim to yacht and owner. Lortice would be installed as master of another spacer in his growing fleet. And I, presumably, will be in charge of this lovely yacht, as master! Pak mused, dreaming. Under him, of course. And Karmal Pak smiled. Not bad for a minor smuggler who had just put in a few strength-building months of rockbusting in the 40 Joser boonies!-while burning his olive skin black except for a bandit-like-or clan-like!-trace of pallor where his filtration mask had remained in place all day, every day. And Lady Vike have mercy if a man forgot to change the filter and air-bottle and breathed in that awful dust. It was only the stuff that emery boards were made of! Going to be nice, playing pirate captain, Pak mused. Lie down and spread your legs, me hearties! Actually he had never aspired so high. . . . Strangely, he was soon tired of his duties to the Most Noble Lady Roundheels Sondelayne with her dyed Son-delayne "mask" of golden yellow. Once this was over . . . just give me a ten-min breather and a microgram of hormone helper in my Heaven High and grant that the next captive is younger, squeakier, less pillow-chested, and a lot less willing; that's the way to add spice to the slice! That was Karmal Pak's problem arid his new punishment. Assigned to see to the sexual needs of a woman of about sixty with an apparent-age thirty body that wouldn't quit and a yen to match and enthusiastic expertise as well, he was not happy. Seera Sondelayne was the sexual dream of millions and maybe billions of men. Pak wasn't one of them. To begin with, he wasn't an Akima Mars fan. He liked 'em on the willowy side. Too, the sort of sexual partner he wanted and cherished was not a more-than-willing expert. Karmal Pak's great dream was a sexual victim. At least the illusion of unwillingness and resistance, he thought unhappily. Nevertheless he did her damned good stud service, and managed not to smother in breastworks. Captain Lortice sat alone in his cabin, thinking about 41 his situation and his Most Noble captive while he sipped a drink. Alone, very alone. The trouble was that all he could do was wait, wait for his employer-also noble. Once the man found himself another ship's mate or dragooned one, his spacer would rendezvous with Lewuvul, somewhere up ahead. Somewhere. Sometime, Lortice thought, and sipped, and thought about his employer. Neither tall nor short, neither homely nor handsome, the man had been born to wealth and considerable influence on Jorinne. He had no need to do anything at all for money. He did; he had other needs. He had things to prove, and he proved them. Until the policers and those meddlers calling themselves the Satana Coalition had sapped the drive of his operation and who had been "collecting" and selling so many of his fellow Josers, as well as visitors to his native Jorinne. He was a nephew of the renowned physician/biochemist Caldera Mehdhi-daktari, who was brother to the Jacalder of Caldera and cousin to the Jasondelayne of Sondelayne. Tight, those clans. Nevertheless, the son of Manjarik, Jacath of Jacath, had become a big, a truly major criminal: Jacath Manjanungo. Now he employed Lortice and quite a few others. He had broken his father's heart and scandalized all the Twelve Clans. Family connections would be of little value to a young man who had been snatching and selling his fellow Josers into offplanet bondage. Manjanungo had escaped Jorinne and justice in his superb space-yacht about two mins ahead of the law. Since then he had gone pirate. He had prospered, too. Using an alias for both himself and his ship, he had even dared enter the Great Race. Now Lortice knew that he had not won, though he 42 should have done-some flainin' little creep had tried to crowd Manjanungo into one of the collapstars named Karybdis and Skylla. True, the flaining little creep had got himself nicely, spectacularly killed. That had not enabled Manjanungo-as-Don Arcibo to win

the Race. He had even raised hell about the mysterious shipmaster who had won-and couldn't be bothered to show up and collect the prize. Shortly after that, Manjanungo had got into trouble down on Ghanj. He survived that, too. His Jarp mate did not. Eyes narrowed, Lortice sipped his drink and recalled their last contact. "I've checked out the ship," he had told Manjanungo, once he had unscrambled and had the man on-comm. No picture; Manjanungo was far, far away and trying to get a picture would merely drag out the contract. "The best non-VIC SIPACUM. Enough weaponry to take on most local policer ships-wonder why? And it all works. With an excellent tachyon converter. Fine ship." "And the other business?" Manjanungo's voice queried from the commbox. "She found me irresistible." "You and everything else with balls," the commbox said. "Anyhow, I'm hired. We should break orbit in five or six days." "Not enough. I'm being delayed. Head for the second rendezvous point. Sub-light all the way. Clear?" "Pos. Understood. Firm." "What about crew?" "A little trouble, but I have the three Jarps, assuming I can clear their papers. Found a cake with good mate's papers. Knowing anything about a homely young one 43 named (Code Two) EAANDRJN? And are yer familiar with a (Code Three) FTRJTL-O-STK?" He paused while Manjanungo's puter decoded their simple system. No need for more complicated ones. He knew Manjanungo's screen was displaying the two nonsenses he had enunciated and under them supplying the translations: NAJENDRA. KARMAL PAK. "I know neither. I have mate trouble also. Hire at your own judgment. The other is-?" "Just out of the locker. He's my steward. Apart from the Jarps, that's it." "Did you promise him anything?" "Only the moon and both suns." "Fine. Promise 'em anything and give 'em setting Three. Unless he seems good material for us, of course. No unkindness to your guest, remember. That's enough. I shall see yer, Lortice. Eventually." On that, without another word, Manjanungo had terminated communication. After that Lortice had run into a little trouble. He worked and sweated down on Jorinne. He had to double-check Najendra. Had to get all Lady Seerava's gear cleared and onboard-enough for nine of her! He pestered burok to get the Jarps cleared. All three had been slaves, of course, and the papers of one of them were questionable. That worked out, slowly. Jorinne was a rich and a busy planet. Freighters were constantly pulling away from Solijer or out of parking orbit, loaded with exports that were far from being all jewels and jewelry. There were lots of concentrates for smelters on other worlds-mostly other worlds' satellites. Jorinne had no smelters. The Josers could afford clean air. They exported raw and imported finished products. Why suffer a night sky tinged with the corona of 44 sublimated pollution that surrounded every metallurgical satellite and eventually snowed down onto a planet's surface? Too, the damned clan-chiefs insisted that yachts must pay their ways, but Lady Seerava would not hear of exterior cargo, and no one wanted to bother with the smallish load Lortice could carry, and Lady S. was bitching, and damned if Lortice's mistress didn't catch on about Seera, and leave him, and a burok hand wanted more greasing . . . Eventually he had his ship's mate, steward, and three-Jarp crew, along with his passenger and her asteroid-sized companion. And his cargo. The latter, neatly consigned, was the perfect window dressing. Everyone assumed and would keep right on assuming that spacer Lewuvul was on its way to Franji. It wasn't. It was on its way to rendezvous with the rising new pirate who meant to challenge Ramesh Jagesh-war for the dubious title of King of the Slavers. It was the ship that Manjanungo wanted, not a hostage or kidnap-for-ransom victim. Nevertheless, his orders were explicit and repeated on that last comm-across-space: Lady Roundheels was not to be harmed. (Lortice assumed that Manjanungo knew all about Artisune Muzuni, who had not had any trouble with the superspooks until he had amassed a dangerously large fleet. Then TGO had wiped him out. The difference was that Manjanungo was more than ruthless and clever: he was smart. He also had a hostage on his ship, though presumably no one knew about that yet. If TGW/TGO did not challenge him, no one ever would.) At last the time had come. "Prepare to break orbit," Lortice said, and the reply was onscreen before he had pronounced the last word: READY. DESTINATION CHIP INSLOTTED? 45 "Negatory.

Just plot course to the next nexus. Sub-light all the way." FIRM. ACCELERATION IN FIVE SECS. FOUR. THREE- More days passed. Little else did, of interest, except for Seera. She was interesting-at first. Then Lortice's interest waned. It was a dreadful shame, to tire of a truly sensuous woman; to feel used by her. Lortice did, and then Pak did. After that it was just labor. Mechanical. A real shame. Now she was locked up as no Most Noble Lady should be, and Lortice felt less than good about it and damn oh damn it all, all they could do was continue to wait! He decided that he could handle another drink. At least, he thought as he slid the glass under the nozzle, he's a great and rich employer, and we're waiting while he does something of really extraordinary importance! Manjanungo entered his cabin with its warm Moroccan hangings and made sure the door was secure. With him locked inside, it would open only to his voice-code. He rustled out of his long black coat and worked his shoulders in the full and full-sleeved white blouse, decorated and edged with lace. Grandee style, he called it, without being any more certain of that ancient word than he was of the "Santa Maria!" or just "Santa" he had taken up as expletive, when he remembered. Gleaming black tights and jackboots he retained, and the broad belt with the pistole thrust piratically into the belt, brass handle turned to his right hand. Only after he had stored away the coat did he turn and deign to take note of his guest. With his brows assuming their supercilious lift, he moved closer. He surveyed her with pleasure. 46 My guest. My toy! She cut quite a figure in any posture, and particularly this way, standing so erect. The position made the most of her inspiring 186 sems* of height, which to some was probably more daunting than inspirational. He had caused her mass of blue-black hair to be curled girlishly: "Make it cute," he had directed. Darling curls spilled down onto her forehead above arched, jet brows. They were oiled shiny because he liked them that way. He had mandated the dye for her eyelids, too: a deep, blue-tinged green. At once girlish and a whore, he had said, and so he had made her, his captive. Unusually for a woman so tall-taller than her captor by five sems-she was a flowing in-and-out line of fascinating, entirely female curves. Every sem of her unusual length was taut with youth and well-toned musculature. A sensual and extraordinarily sexy woman. She was also a clever and dangerous stalker, spy, investigator, and killer with a brain. A competent one, with many successes to her credit. That made his glow all the warmer at having taken her, back on Ghanj, and adorning her as he did. His toy. My sexy, overgrown girl of a toy! Intaglio had "clothed" her and arranged her nicely for him. A rigidly erect, elegant line, motionless as a statue save for her breathing. And her eyes. Tall, sheer, chocolate-hued nose climbed and hugged those extraordinarily long legs almost to their apex. There each was circled by a visibly tight, slightly too tight, char-brown ribbon. Each was tied in a bow whose long ends dangled down the sides of her shining thighs. So taut he could see their fine musculature under the 186 centimeters: six/ee/, one inch. Old Style 47 hose, those thighs. Her frilly little mockery of a skirt began just below her navel and ended just above the tops of the stockings, just at the base of her vulvar bulge. The frivolous skirt was an insult to such a woman, of course. That was deliberate, of course. Because delicate pink was a girlish mockery to such womanly magnificence, her halter was a delicate pink edged with dainty white lace. Two circular cut-outs allowed half of each large breast to thrust through as if arrogantly, aggressively flaunting swollen, deep-red-dyed tips stabbing from their chocolate-dyed haloes. Red unto mauve, those nipples, since Intaglio had seen fit to bind each tightly with a loop of thin cord. Its color was not apparent to Manjanungo because the swelling and darkening of her tied-off nipples quite obscured it. Were they as sore as the very large boils they resembled, he wondered idly; or numb, tied off with all the circulation stopped? A great deal of something had been stuffed into her mouth under the broad strap of leather that obscured it, judging by the exaggeratedly lengthened jawline. Her hands were dragged tautly behind her. And behind the brass pole, thick as his thigh, that Manjanungo had caused to be installed here in the master's cabin of his spacegoing yacht. (For just this purpose,

though this woman was not the first to be bound to it.) She stood so erect because of the strap under her chin, across her neck, and secured to a ring behind the pole. She stared at him from those marvelous, incredibly olive-hued eyes. In them he saw only a hint of their former flash and combative fire. It was not that he had broken her. Not her! She knew that she was drugged past resistance. She knew that he had done it. He had kept her drugged this way, now, for almost a month (if she had any concept of time. Probably not). She knew all the acts she had performed on him and his men and girls and even Intaglio. She knew all the places her mouth had been; knew all the organs and things that had plied her three available orifices as well as the cleavage of her breasts. She was aware too that she had not been physically forced; the drug had made her softly willing, if not overly enthusiastic. She knew all the acts performed on her, too, by him, and by Jenk and Javad, and by those he called girls, of his spacegoing harem. When she had crawled and wagged her tail-and the flowing tail on the end of the rod her body had been forced to contain-she had been aware of it, and she would remember now. She was aware, somewhere in the back of her once-good mind, of her own degradation and use; everything she had done and everything done to her. The dark hose covered the whip-marks on her thighs. Behind her, her fingernails had been clipped and sanded so short that she would have both difficulty and pain in trying to pick up anything. Silent, staring, her captor drew his pistol and used its barrel to lift her tiny, girlishly frilly microminiskirt. He let her see his smile at what he revealed. She was plugged and ginger-strapped so that her hairless vulva bulged as fat and obscenely as Intaglio had been able to make it. Very good. Intaglio has a reward coming. He would give it to her. She would receive her reward orally. First from himself, and then from a pottle. Once she had mouthed him and taken him deep, and swallowed, he would allow Intaglio to get as thoroughly falling down drunk as she wished, as she always wished. And without the corset, as well. A fine reward, for such as Intaglio! The time might well come when this one would welcome such a reward, too. 49 In the meanwhile . . . He returned his cap-and-ball replica to his belt. Smiling only a little, using only his fingers on tied-off, blood-filled nipples, Manjanungo began again to torment Valustriana See, agent Prime of TGO. 4 "D'you think you could give her a bit more attention, Karm?" Pak rolled his eyes at his captain. He wanted to say, She wearing you down, old-timer? and he didn't dare. "Ahm, well..." Lortice sighed and made a helpless gesture. "I've just got to run the ship and monitor comm-all communications." "Uh. Damn. And I never thought I could get too much of a good thing. Maybe we could get the mate to do her share?" "Lady Seerava only likes men-or boys," Lortice amended, and added, "our mate cannot qualify, Karm." As a matter of fact I'm not sure that Najendra qualifies as a female either . . . I think she must have been fissioned, rather than born. Meanwhile he saw Pak roll his eyes, and the captain said, "Holy Vike, lad, it isn't as if she isn't a luxuriously desirable woman!" "And a voraciously desiring one who makes a man feel used and damned near raped," Karmal said, giving his captain a dead-eyed stare. He had an idea that he had probably just named the reason why Lortice needed to monitor the comm so badly that he'd no longer have 50 51 time for the ever-ready Seera. And only three days out from Jorinne, at that! "Look here, Cap'm. We have three charming Jarps on this ship and they're pining away for the dear lady. Can't we try that? A sort of relief unit?" Lortice had looked at him, and looked some more, contemplatively, and sighed. That night Lady Round-heels made it with her first Jarp, despite what her brother-in-law had thought. And her second. The captain saved back Vermillion, just in case. It came Ver-millions's turn the follow afternoon. Lady Seera was crazy about "him" too. (She called all three of the aliens "he" and "him." Technically speaking, the hermaphrodites from planet Jarpi were its. Each was overequipped with two breasts, one testicle, one ovary, and one each smallish penis and vagina. Also bright, bright red hair above violently orange skin and coltish legs.) The three Jarps also took to Seerava like-well, like Jarps to any sexual partner. Jarps were like that. (Lady Roundheels, Karmal Pak mused, should have been a

Jarp!) And now . . . Now three more days had passed with her imprisoned, along with her monumental "guardian," and Pak was actually considering making some sort of pass at Ship's Mate Najendra. And the three Jarps were making unhappy noises. Lortice, Karmal, and Najendra held a Meeting. "The trouble is that I don't really want to deny either milady or my Jarp crewmembers," Captain Lortice said, crossing his legs and trying to look comfortably relaxed. "Simple," the input came. "Get her out of that hole of a hold." 52

"It's just that I can't see how we can remove her from that hole we never should have put her in to begin with, and into a cabin-without having to fight off the Juggernaut. That may well get us a hysterical Lady Seera or worse. He's been in the family for ages." "I've been in mine for quite awhile," Pak said, "and I don't fancy the thought of that man-mountain slinging me right through the nearest section of hull." The quite-short Najendra crossed one baggily-draped leg over the other. Karmal blinked at the bulge of her calf. He shook his head. No, no-he was blinking at the way the orange pants worked against her bright green tunic! Did the idiot always have to choose articles of clothing that hated each other and her? "Why not drug the next meal we pass in to her and the Juggernaut," she said. "When they're both horizontal, we go in and remove her. Put her in a cabin and let one of the Jarps be there to console her when she wakes. We might even give what's-his-name-" "Boroboodhi," Pak said, dragging it out sarcastically. She nodded. "We might even give the Juggernaut a bit of a wiping off and a change of clothing while we're at it. I smelled him on the tray when Vampy brought it back today." "Hey, good idea!" Karmal Pak said, with the most enthusiasm he'd shown for days. "You're really quick, Najendra. Extra bright!" She gave him a brief sideward glance from those weird pale eyes that let him know she knew he was working to get on her good side and that she wasn't at all interested. Lortice meanwhile sighed and gave his handsomely graying head a brief shake. "We are plotters, mutineers, pirates, and kidnap- 53 pers," he said. "Unfortunately, we do not have a sign of a drug onboard this ship!" Karmal would have laughed aloud except that the statement was a negative. There went Najendra's plan. "Pardon me, Captain," she said, leaning a little forward. "But we do have drugs onboard. Every ship does. Aside from the Heaven High I smell on Pak now and again, Lewuvul has a superb shipdoc. Any shipdoc is well equipped with various drugs. Surely a powerful sedative is among them. And tranqs." "Just how do we get 'em out of a self-contained automatic daktari unit," Pak almost blurted, anxious to be off the subject of the quality filter-tipped marijane sticks he smoked only in private. Damn the woman! And she just would not call him "Karmal," either, but always maintained that distance by referring to him only as "Pak"-and sometimes as "steward." "We ask SIPACUM!" Lortice did blurt, and with a merry smile he swung to the puter-link in his cabin. Despite the luxuriousness of Lewuvul's equipment and appointments, its Ship's Inboard Processing And Computing Unit (Modular) was not the vocally interactive kind. The captain had to key in his queries. He did, while Pak and Najendra waited almost breathlessly. Eventually SIPACUM "decided" that the need was great. It actuated the cybernetic medical unit-ship's daktari or shipdoc-to yield up some of its treasure. The trio hurried to the smallish cabin in which rested the self-sealing cylinder that formed a sort of coffin-like hospital/doctor/nurse for any patient laid in it. They found that it had already obligingly decanted an unnecessarily large quantity of non-addictive somnoquik. Ten mins later the excited trio was excitedly relaying the plan and new regime to the excited trio of Jarps. Six- 54 teen mins later the mutineers, in their great kindness, slid a couple of plasses of strong drink in to the prisoners. The strong drink was Assinibasca, the excellent Joser corn-based whiskey, and this time it was a lot stronger than that. While berbun-and-water was not Seera's drink of choice, she needed a drink. Here was a drink. Seera drank. So did Boroboodhi, though damned if the behemoth didn't wait for her gracious permission! Three mins later he was bent anxiously over his longtime employer's widow, who had passed out. He lasted an incredible min and a half longer, obviously fighting the drug and setting medical history for

resistance. Then Boroboodhi crashed to the deck like a toppled gantry. Within three mins the totally limp Seera was out of the makeshift holding tank. In it, Vampy and Serendip swiftly stripped and bathed the giant, all the while tootling and tweetling to each other while they worried about how fast he might regain consciousness. A Jarp's long thin tongue in its little round mouth in a long thin jaw gave it a language of whistles and trills rather than words. All three on Lewuvul understood Erts, the language of humans—who called themselves the Galactic race, Galactics. All three possessed translation helmets that enabled them to be understood, in Erts. No one liked it much when they switched off those transla-helms, naturally. Captain Lortice thought it best not to object, within limits. The rule was that the Jarps kept the system of straps and studs on their heads when on duty and/or in the presence of the three Galactics. Having seen to the lock and taken other security precautions, Vermillion and Najendra stretched Seera on her own bed in her own luxuriously appointed cabin. Then they gathered those things she might use as effective weapons. 55 "We should bathe her," Vermillion suggested, looking hopeful. "Negatory," the hardly attractive ship's mate said, with a shake of that whacked-off hair. "After three days in that dreadful tank, think how much she'll enjoy bathing herself, Vermillion—and don't tell me how much you would enjoy doing it for her." Her wink surprised the Jarp, who had been a slave not so long ago and had been befriended by few Galactics. Maybe this homely Galactic was horny, Vermillion thought, although it detected no pheromonal output. Well, if she continued to be so nice, the sacrifice could be made. "However—you will be here when she wakes, Vermillion, and maybe she'd love for you to join her in the shower." "Lovely thought," its translahelm said. "It is hard to imagine how I can contain myself until then, Ship's First!" "Call me Mate, Spacefarer Vermillion—and do contain yourself. The elixir of pleasure, when deferred, is twice as sweet as that gulped hurriedly." It put that long, pointy-chinned, round-mouthed face on one side. "An old saying among Galactics?" "Among some of us, pos. And it's true, too." "Shall I remain here to watch over her?" Again she smiled. "Not right here—not necessary. Unfortunately we had no idea which of them would drink from which plass, so both were loaded with enough of the drug to put Boroboodhi away." She checked the chron sewn into the cuff of her grass-green tunic's long, severe sleeve. "She will not awake for at least eight hours. Sorry, Vermillion. I do need you at the con, though." Vermillion cast a round-eyed glance at the woman 56 they had neatly covered with a battened-down sheet. Vla, the bumps, curves, and mountains under that pale lavender sheet! "Good," the Jarp said. "If I had to stay here with her this way for eight hours I'd go stark screamin' fobbo!" "So might she, when she wakes," Najendra said, "if she's alone. We'll loud-monitor the cabin for sound. In any case, you'll come back here in—let's say seven hours." She held the door open for the Jarp. "All right?" "Firm, Mate." It watched her secure the cabin door and test the new lock on its outside. "Firm," she echoed. "Will I need to come with you to keep you from—" "Neg, Mate. We Jarps are not as rapacious as Galactics say. I'll bet you don't, though. I like you, Mate Najendra. You're a nice Galactic. You a Sunflower?" Her little chuckle and nod admitted that Najendra did indeed fit that bigots' term for Jarp-lover—usually meaning merely Jarp-tolerator. They headed along the tunnel to the con-cabin, the Galactic in her blousy baggies and the Jarp two dozen centimeters taller, in cerise halter and trunks. Once again Captain Lortice sat asprawl in his own cabin. He felt better about the captive. A Most Noble Lady should be treated as such, even when she was kidnapped, and never mind her sexually predatory predilections. She'd had no business being locked up in that hole with her witling guardian. Him I'd be happy to keep sedated, as insurance . . . or kill, Lortice thought, sipping an (undoctored) Assinibasca and carbonated water. He knew about Intaglio, and the girls on Man- 57 janungo's yacht. He also knew that on Ghanj, Manjanungo had been taken by a TGO agent. A woman. One of Manjanungo's people had been killed in breaking that up—another woman—but now the agent of The Gray Organization was Manjanungo's

captive. Unless he's deep-spaced her by now, Lortice thought. Who'd want to keep one of their agents around, female or not? What the vug sort of fun could a man have with one of them? And why in the name of anything at all would he want to keep a TGO agent on his ship, anyhow? The dinning sound was not loud, but in the silence of his cabin and his thoughts, Lortice jerked. He pounced to the commbox and swiftly set it to the special frequency. Out went his coded signal, automatically tracking back on the incoming one that had tripped the alarm. Very soon Lortice was smiling. He felt like cheering. The two-only modulations that had come in meant: "Manjanungo here. Not in position but coming. Towing new ship. All's well. Proceed without haste." Reason enough to have another drink, a celebratory one! He'd tell the others later. By now a clean Juggernaut/Boroboodhi was again locked alone in the small hold, and Najendra was oncon with the Jarp she had chosen for the duty. Another would be awaiting Seerava's awakening and would . . . console her. And Manjanungo was coming, towing a ship, a new acquisition. Onboard News Service had already carried the word that the "legendary" Captain Manjanungo had accomplished the impossible: he had attacked, taken, and sacked the liner Starqueen! He'll be all full of himself, Lortice thought, worrying his lip with his teeth. She is his cousin . . . I hope he 58 doesn 't decide to be angry about my locking her in the hold-hole that way. I should have left her alone, damn it. He hadn't been thinking clearly when he sent Karmal Pak to tap on her cabin door and invite her down the cargo tunnel, to a surprise. That was a mistake. I fouled it. Should have left her in her own cabin, with the lock shifted outside the way it is now. Who'd have guessed that drudge Najendra would be so resourceful? Damn. I've got to fight this- got to improve. Manjanungo's competent and he's harsh. I've got to do better! You can do it, Lortice! You can be valuable to him. Do! Just work on the old thinking, Lortice. Decisions aren't that hard, and Man-janungo isn 't known for patience with foul-its! 5 Vampy, Vermillion, and Serendip made no complaint about the extending of their shipboard duties to include serving Lady Seerava. As a matter of fact none of the three tall and very lean hermaphrodites considered it duty. Nor did the Most Noble Lady complain. Neither did Karmal Pak-but after eight ship-days-eleven since Seera had been made prisoner-Pak realized that Najendra was starting to look appealing, which was appalling. He realized that he had been celibate long enough, and he was not about to wait until the mate looked even better. After grooming himself and struggling into his tightest shimmer-pants, he went to visit the prisoner. He was sure that she would be happy to have human company after a steady diet of those orange leano-weirdos. She did not stop screaming and throwing things until he had vacated the cabin and Captain Lortice put it off-limits to the steward. Since the cabin contained little that could be thrown save the lady's clothing, she must have occupied herself for the next half-hour just picking up hurled garments. Pak did his best to maintain a low image after that, knowing that the captain was not happy with him and worse, that the mate and all three Jarps must be snickering at him behind his back. 59 60 A day later, while Najendra had the con duty, he expressed interest in the console. Soon he was behind her chair, leaning over her with an arm on either side. She spoke so quietly that for a moment he froze, unable to believe he'd really heard what she said: "Listen, you whore with your glued-on pants, touch me and I'll dismember you." After a moment he registered all that, and straightened. He stood Behind her, blinking, staring down at the top of her head. "Now what?" she said, still quietly and without turning. "Shall I take the words out of your mouth? 'Na-jen-drahh ... I merely thought that anyone so frumpy as you would welcome the attentions of an ex-con smuggler and whore with glued-on pants.'" Again he was silent, staring, while once more he assimilated words that shocked and astounded him. From her! At last he got himself together enough to try the rather obvious expostulatory explanation: "I assure you, Ship's Mate, I was merely interested in-" "Ri-i-ight," she said, dragging it out. Still quietly, and as if addressing the console. It occurred to him that she might well be seeing his reflection on the blank simulation screen. He

stepped back a pace. "You rotten cold frumpy bitch! I ought to knock your ass off-if you have one, in those baggy do-" He broke off because she came out of the mate's chair faster than he'd have thought anyone could, and furthermore turned as she did. Her eyes fixed their pale stare on him and she stood ready, not quite in a combative crouch. It was all Pak could do not to back another pace or two. "I suppose that since I called you a nasty name, I 61 shouldn't object to your calling me one," she said, even more quietly now that she faced him. "But what an unimaginative one! Bitch, bitch, bitch," she said, pronouncing the word dully. "Just about any woman has heard that at one time or another, especially from a man whose sense of manhood she has put in jeopardy. Why not call me 'baggy-pantsed grat's ass,' Pak? Or 'mop-topped Sister Shapeless,' maybe. That's what you see, and you know as well as I do that you wouldn't have developed an interest in the console if you weren't feeling horny and Lady Seerava weren't justifiably . . . perturbed at you." They stared at each other long enough to hear the tiny snik of the console chon as it flipped up a new number. Then she astounded him still again: the corners of her mouth edged up a little in an unmistakable, however restrained, smile. "I apologize for calling you that name, Ship's Steward." Another one! The succession of surprises was very nearly too much for Karmal Pak (smuggler, ex-con, and spray-pantsed whore). He wrestled with the newest shock. He considered her words, their situation on Lewuvul and the length of time they might have to remain together-waiting, waiting-and the tiny seedling of a smile she showed him. Abruptly he let himself chuckle. " 'Baggy-pantsed grat's ass,' isn't bad," he said, and abruptly his chuckle was as real as hers. He even saw sparkle in those eyes she had dyed too pale. Eyes about the color of the chlorinated water in a planetside swimming pool. " 'Mop-top,' maybe," he went on. "But 'Sister Shapeless'-hahaha, I'd never have thought of that one! Besides-it may not be true. Who knows, with you 62 in those baggy-ass pants and tunics with clashing colors that hurt the eyes! No one can be sure whether you're shapeless or not." She was smiling openly now, and it looked good on her. "Makes you wonder, doesn't it?" she said, and he said "Not really," and she broke up. Then she looked down at herself-opnge tunic, medium blue baggy-pants; not too ghastly, this time. "What colors am I wearing?" she asked. "Ever hear of the chromatically disadvantaged?" And it was his turn to break up. At last he was able to settle himself down enough to say, "But you're just joccin' me about that-color blindness is just something in books about ancient people. It was genengineered out of all of us longer ago than the tendency to baldness or hair on women's faces." No longer in her pre-crouch, she sighed and made a small gesture of helpless resignation. "Genetic engineering or not, I have a problem. Never felt I had enough cred to have it fixed. Maybe it's the eyes-almost colorless eyes maybe can't see colors?" Now he was sure she was putting him on, because he was sure that she had had her eyes cosmetically chro-madyed; no one had eyes like those. Well-Glyans did, but any experienced spacefarer or planetbound slaveholder knew that Glyans were pale all over, with hair almost-white, too. "Blond," it was called. "I saw a Gyan with eyes like yours once. A slave," he told her, not even noticing that he was leaning comfortable against the third chair, having his first real conversation with Najendra and not at all unhappy about it. "I don't think he was color-blind, though." "Maybe not blind but just disadvantaged, color-disrupted?" she suggested, smiling, her head a little on 63 one side to make it obvious that she was teasing. "A Gyan-oh! You mean Aglayan, from that Protected world?-Aglaya?" "Right. Aglayan. Anyhow, uh . . . " She lifted her right hand in a swearing gesture. He noticed that she merely bent it up at the elbow, without stretching either her arm or the cloth of her tunic. He was never going to know, he decided, whether she had anything womanly in there or not. Why would a woman remain so, he wondered, a man to whom appearances were so important. She could so easily have herself reshaped, implanted, even genengineered. He had often thought that if he were a woman he'd make sure he had the trimmest little waist and the most outthrustingly firm, stiff cones of breasts any cover artist had ever dreamed of. She was

saying, "I do solemnly swear, Steward Pak, to cease wearing mismatched clothing. If not forever, then for the duration of this voyage at least." Then she looked down at herself again. "Would a green tunic be better with these pants?" Again he laughed aloud. "Eminently!" "Nice word. And green and orange, you think, shouldn't be worn together?" "Never. Emphatically never." "Hmmm." She met his black-eyed gaze again. "I sure wish you'd make a vow in return. That you'll quit wearing those skintight-butted pants, Pak. Makes a poor girl have horny thoughts, you know." Then, as if suffering an attack of shyness, she swung back into her chair before the console. A few taps at the keys and she brought up onscreen the nearest spatial phenomenon: a glaring binary star. "Look at that! Beautiful! A green star and an orange!" 64 Karmal Pak looked at the flaming yellow-white and its runty, ruddy companion sun, and broke up all over again. Now that he knew her better she seemed more attractive and he was considering putting the moves on her -when the commbox winked and said ping. The captain advised from his cabin that he had just taken a communication from their employer, "the Admiral." At last! Rendezvous in just under five hours! All crew were directed to clean up and dress up. He also asked Pak to come to his cabin. Karmal left Najendra, thinking Damn, with a little sense of loss. That feeling was not shared by spaceship Lewuvul's mate. Her feelings were excitement and anticipation only-and that had nothing to do with the steward. Four hours later, her baggy pants were topped by a blousy-as-usual tunic, except that this one matched the pants: manganese blue. And she was wearing a belt, as if to prove that she had a waist. Clipped to it was a neat little black rectangular pouch. "Very nice, Mate," Captain Lortice said, rather striking himself in crisp and spotless whites. "What's in the pouch?" "A comb and a lip-glosser, Captain." "My God." Valustriana See was absolutely miserable and still on her knees. Once she had mouthed Manjanungo to orgasm and swallowed the results in sobbing gulps, she expected that the awful cutting wires would be removed from her calves and swollen stomach. Far more importantly despite the pain of the constricting little bands, she expected that the plug would be removed from her anus. The copious enema of too-warm soapy water had 65 been churning in her guts for forty-seven minutes and every one of the two thousand, eight hundred and twenty seconds had been an hour-long hell. She was wrong in her hopes and expectations. She was not yet to be granted relief, but must suffer more while demeaning herself still further. In a cold voice, Manjanungo ordered her to crawl over and perform a similar service on the overly voluptuous Althis, one of the three persons he had taken off the crippled spacer he had claimed as salvage. (Its captain, a pirate of small renown, had not agreed. Accordingly he was now locked in a dark small-hold, alone. He'd doubtless welcome the solitude, Manjanungo told him, after several months with two women in an uncontrollably drifting spacer. Captain Vettering had not agreed with that, either.) Writhing as her insides grumbled and bubbled, seeming to send hot needles through her belly and all along her intestinal tract, Valustriana began carrying out Manjanungo's latest command. He watched, amused. After a while he signed to the stiffly waiting Intaglio, who nodded. He left the cabin. Just in case, he saw to it that the door was locked after him, on this latest of torments, inflicted on the TGO agent who had dared capture him. He paced smiling along the ship's tunnel to another cabin. There, two of his girls had been long enough at the business of obeying him: they were wallowing in lesbian embrace with the third of the trio he had taken off with Vettering and Althis. Vettering had bragged of how she had been a TGW officer who had become positively insatiable during their months of helpless plowing through space. He had kept her in skimpy briefs only. That became her, Manjanungo thought, but had ordered Lhari bathed and corseted at once. Now she 66 would service him as she had so often served Vettering; as Valustriana had just served Manjanungo. If she disagreed, she would be bent double, bound, and whipped. If she agreed, she would learn that she could not be successful with a man who had just climaxed. In that case of course she would have to be punished. . . . 6 The two spacecraft approached, communicated, adjusted thrust and aim, linked puters, matched velocity,

communicated some more and approached still closer, and linked physically. Each fired a magnetized line to the other. They hung in space, millions of stells' worth of handsome, ornate, and superbly equipped yachts. Captain and crew of Lewuvul would meet their employer on his boarding; ship's mate naturally had the con. The pirate Shieda styled himself "admiral," sometimes, though he hardly commanded a fleet. Najendra had heard Captain Lortice address Manjanungo as "Admiral," oncomm, and had heard no objection from the pirate who had indeed swiftly patched together a small fleet. As "the Admiral" prepared to come onboard Lewuvul, Najendra sat in the mate's chair at the con, watching SIPACUM mind the ship. She wore a little smile, picturing them: Captain Lortice, just inside the airlock, all scrubbed and groomed and handsomely attired in those snug whites; Serendip, Vermillion, and Vampy of Jarpi lined up in matched poses along with matching white blouses and burgundy tights; and Karmal Pak, in a satinshine white tunic and jet pants not quite so tight. 67 68 From the con-cabin she heard the excitement, and learned only later that it was a disappointment: everyone got ready only to have the Admiral first send over his man Javad. After him came one of the girls, and more excited sounds and tootle-wheets greeted the removal of her spacesuit. And then the third spacesuited figure was cycled through the airlock, and she heard less clamor. A duly respectful silence, she thought, and soon heard his commanding voice with its Joser accent. "A very good job indeed, Lortice! A beautiful craft, and I do know and appreciate how long yer've all waited. Well, you've doubtless heard from ONS about Starqueen. What you did not I am sure hear is that it was a joint Manjanungo/Ramesh Jageshwar venture! And now I have another ship, partially in tow. This one we just . . . found. Contained a bedraggled and beaten outlaw named Vettering and his woman, Althis, and their . . . pet. Even more bedraggled, and not a stitch on her. Former TGW officer, can yer imagine? Now devoted to Captain Vettering, poor stupid thing. Name's Lhari . . . something.* The ship is ours, taken as salvage. Wants a bit of working and refitting, is all. As to the others . . . we'll see, won't we! This bit of fluff, Lortice, it pleases me to call Amethyst. Named for the color I chose for her hair, yes. A well-trained girl. Very nearly eighteen, aren't you Amethyst, hmmm? You will please this man Captain Lortice, Amethyst! It occurred to me that yer've waited long and doubtless celibately, Gap-tain Lortice, and so Amethyst is for your cabin. She will do precisely what she is told, and do it well. If she does more or less, she expects to be punished just as she ex- * Suffragan Captain Lhari Haddad's fate was decided in SPACEWAYS #12, Star Slaver, the story of Vettering and Althis. 69 pects to remain in the snug embrace of that lovely satin corset. Do not disappoint her, Lortice. Beautiful ship, beautiful! Well then, who's oncon?" "First Mate Najendra 7240ltRE, Admiral." "Ah, a Reshi, hmmm? Well, well, let's see this lovely craft's con then, and then I shall want to . . . interview your most noble guest. She is in good health?" His voice was moving toward the con; so was Lor-tice's: "Better than good health, Admiral." "Ah-huh. Goodi And keeping all crew save Mate Najendra lean and a bit tired, hmmm?" Manjanungo laughed, and Najendra heard the falseness of it. Playing the admiral, this ruthless and born-wealthy man of 28. She sat on a con until she heard them entering behind her, and looked around and nodded, then turned back to make an obvious check of her console. Only then did she rise and turn to face them. Her face was open, showing none of the excitement she felt; only the friendliness of a competent ship's officer. She saw the flicker of the self-consciously weirdly clad young man's eyes when he caught sight of her attractiveness. The captain said, "Admiral Manjanungo: ship's mate Najendra." She met Manjanungo's eyes briefly before lowering her head in an obvious above-the-shoulders bow. "Admiral." "Mate, I am impressed. A handsome con, sparkling and first-rate in every regard," the black-taffeta'd man said, as if he really were a reviewing admiral. "I am impressed, too, with the fact that even my entry did not prevent your making a double-checking final scan of the console before turning from it. I am most pleased. You could do well with me, Najendra." She didn't bother to correct him. "Thank you, Admiral." 70 He glanced about with

proprietary pleasure. "Ah, beautiful, beautiful." He did not quite rub his hands together. "A good ship, Mate?" "An absolutely superb ship, Admiral." "Excellent, excellent. Ah-do call up a picture of Starwolf. She nodded, turned to give that order to SIPACUM, without mentioning the obvious: the picture would not be much, with the other ship so close. The . . . flagship of the admiral. It wasn't. The blue-and-white yacht beside Lewuvul was of a different make, obviously a bit larger and a sort of rounded rectangular shape. Manjanungo beamed at what he saw of it anyhow. "Well!" he said, obviously much enjoying himself and quite full of himself. "We shall celebrate our mutual successes. First, however, I would interview the Most Noble Lady Seerava. Is she in your cabin, Lor-tice?" Seemingly proud rather than at all affronted at being addressed by name instead of title before his crew, Lor-tice said, "In her own cabin, Admiral. I fear that we have . . . discommoded the Most Noble Lady to the extent of removing those objects she might rashly have tried to employ as weapons-and we reversed the lock." Manjanungo smiled, nodded, and Najendra watched the bob of his bow-tied pigtail. Queue, rather. "Good! I am glad you have not had to discommode her to any greater extent. She is, after all, my kin by marriage. Hers. Hmmm. Captain, why do we not ask you to take the con while I go to interview the Most Noble Lady? The presence of another woman might make her feel less uncomfortable. Less . . . distracted," he said, letting them see that he wanted to smile 71 satirically but was resisting the impulse. "Mate Najendra, I am also impressed that I miscalled your name and you did not correct me. The complete professional, I should say, hmmm? Would you accompany me to interview the lady, please?" She glanced at her captain before saying "Of course, Admiral," to let him know how professional and what a superb subordinate she was. "Oh, Admiral, Captain . . . we did not apprise the Lady Seerava of the Admiral's arrival. She may be in . . . deshabelle. Should I go first, sirs?" "Well, well," Manjanungo said with a wave of a gleaming blue-black arm-a gesture that made the odd fabric rustle susurrantly-"I am after all her cousin, and she is after all much older. Let us assume that there can be no impropriety, and should be no embarrassment. Will you lead the way, please. Oh, Captain; the lock.. .?" Lortice looked pleased. "It now responds to the spoken word 'Starqueen,' Admiral, in any voice." This time Manjanungo's laughter was genuine. He swung to the door and gestured in manner lordly. "Ship's Mate?" Najendra preceded him and was soon glad once again that she wore garb that was far from tight-fitting. She could feel his stare, all the way along the ship's tunnels to the door of Seera's cabin. Behind her he muttered, "Starqueen, eh?" and chuckled. They reached the handsomely decorated, oak-veneered door. She turned. "In here, Admiral. Would you like to-" "Stargqueen," he said with obvious relish, and chuckled at the sound of the latch clicking. Then he said, 72 "Follow," and thrust open the door. He strode into the cabin of his cousin (by marriage, as he had been at pains to point out). "Hello, Lady Cousin!" he said at once. "No no- close your mouth, please-I need to talk for a few mins. A monolog, rather than a conversation. Nor shall I call yer 'cousin' again; you look no older than I now, and good for yer!" In her capacious bed, the Lady Seera sat up to stare wide-eyed, and the sheets slipped down to prove that she was not naked. One of the Jarps must have slipped in and prepared Seera-and her bed-for the visitor, Najendra surmised. Of course the Jarps had no more notion than Pak as to who was coming, and of course no one on Lewuvul knew that Najendra had known all along. The melon-colored bedsheets were freshly changed, and lovely, smooth. The Most Noble Lady had contained her bosomy abundance in a lacy halter of the exact same color and hue. Lewuvul's mate had no doubt that whatever Seera wore below was also that beautiful soft melon color. A negligee, ecru trimming its melon shade, lay atop the oversheet beside Seera. Entering behind "Admiral" Jacath Manjanungo, Najendra moved over to his left, midway between him and the bed and off to the side, before the built-in closet and drawers. Like the door and walls, it was faced in a lovely fruitwood veneer, the panels separated by dark strips that might have been mahogany. Three paces to his left but in

advance of him so that he could easily see her at a glance or peripherally, Najendra willed herself to be motionless and invisible. She succeeded in the first, and very nearly in the second. Naturally more than apprehensive but not knowing ⁷³ the identity of the employer of her kidnappers, Lady Seera had spent time arranging her hair, choosing a dully glowing moonstone on a serpentine chain of gold, and to get herself up fetchingly. She did indeed look only a year or three older than Manjanungo, who was just under half her age. Najendra realized that the woman had made a conscious effort to look soft, vulnerable, and sexually appealing to the unknown chieftain of her captors. How surprised, perplexed, and almost dizzy she must be to be greeted by her outlaw cousin, who strode in and began lecturing her with the only preamble being to bid her, with a semblance of politeness, to be silent and let him monologize her. She was, and he did. "Among all the pretentious people of the Twelve Clans, Seera, you and I are the mavericks. It is I who am the true accomplisher among them all-I now have five ships under my command and am rightly called Admiral. True, one of those five spacers I only happened upon. It was lumbering along with no one in control, really. A crippled ship with only three people onboard. Victims, but. He was a smuggler and a pirate, pathetic poseur. He did have a fleet of his own, this Captain Vet-tering. Now he joins me, or will. He has no choice, you see. His ship was salvage. Now it is mine, and it will not long remain crippled! He was so incompetent as to allow himself to be taken over and sent off on an unchangeable course by a mere boy-the same one who dared tangle with me in the Great Race! This Vettering and his woman Althis-a common enough blowze, dear Lady Seera-had a pet. A slave with them, whom they kept naked. A former TGW officer, he says. Now she too is mine-as is the TGO agent Prime who sought to take me, on Ghanj. Me!" ⁷⁴ Najendra well remembered Althis, and was just starting to call up an image of that woman she had met a year or so ago, when he mentioned the agent Prime of TGO. She blinked, and said nothing. In an instant her face showed nothing. At any rate Manjanungo had not glanced her way; he had paused to bark a scornful little laugh. "A high TGO operative, Seera-mine! Aha, high in two ways, this Valustriana See, my guest. She is a shade taller than I. She resists being broken. I will break her, for I am Manjanungo." Sitting erect in her outsized bed, outstretched legs covered and lightly molded by the sheet that lay in folds about her broad hips, Seera continued to stare large-eyed at him. "Why are yer telling me all this dangerous wickedness, cousin?" "Why indeed! To let yer know that I take, and have taken four ships and various people, Seera." He stressed the name a bit, since she had called him "cousin" despite his opening statement. "I have five ships, as I said. Three I have taken; captured. And another has fallen to me-the very liner Starqueen herself, Seera, though I left her adrift and all hands and passengers free and safe." Except for those taken by Sibanda, to be sold. . . . "Because-" "You aren't by chance a little crazy are yer, Jacath Manjanungo?" Najendra tensed when she saw Manjanungo tense. He stared at Seerava, trembling a little as he worked to control himself. Hardly a wise thing to say to a man with Manjanungo's obvious needs and identity problems, Lewuvul's first mate thought, and kept her face open and bland. Both women saw him regain control, firm and ⁷⁵ straighten himself to his height that was somehow added to by the supercilious arch of his brows, and resume his air of supreme, superior self-confidence. The next conqueror of the universe. The perfect half-mad villain for an Akima Mars holomeller movie. "Lady Vike preserve, Seera, what a thing to say! Think of what yer've done! Ask yerself the same question. Are you a bit fobbo, Seerava?" He jerked up his head and laughed his affected laugh. "O'course not! Not I! Not you! We may be the only thoroughly sane pair among the Twelve Clans! We merely choose to live out on the edge-where it is truly living! The pirate Vet-tering who is now mine tried it, but he is without class or genius. Your steward tried it, though only with a bit of smuggling, and look at him! A steward, and without class or genius! The agent of The Gray Organization, Valustriana See, tried it. She has class and some genius and competence, true, but she was outclassed and not competent

enough and short of intellect. She misjudged me. She was up against superior class and competence and intellect, Seera-me. As yer must know, Lortice is my man. Mine! The Jarps of this crew are mine. Lewuvul is mine, Seera." She regarded him, sitting upright in bed in a lovely soft halter and with her legs sheet-covered. "And you think that I am yours now, Manjanungo, is that it?" This woman has several times the. . . pluck I dreamed she might have, Najendra thought. She noted that the eyes of the man in the long coat of midnight taffetas were bright, full of vision. "We! Think of it that way, Seera! I rule here in space, and I rule more than a clan of bloodless aristocrats. Yet I was born to that aristocracy, and I tire of classless people. You know how I was raised, how I lived. To be served by peasants, not to consort with them! No no, 76 Seera. I went to a great deal of trouble to kidnap not just anyone, but another soul of Jorinne, another soul of class and breeding, of culture and education! And, Sondelayne* Seerava, another rebel. Another who chooses to live. I need such a person, just to talk with, rather than to! You, supremely sensuous Seera, you can see that! You know all about it. Surrounded by peasants ... I want you to join me!" Seera was silent for a long while, staring at him, his clothing so out of time and yet so at home in this warmly paneled cabin. She glanced over at the drab mate, who miraculously had got her colors together this ship-day. Seera studied her features. He's right, Seera thought. Look at her: the great stone face. He's right! We're surrounded by loutish peasants without imagination or any sense of what living means. She is too ignorant and declasse even to understand what he is saying-about her! Those were unusual thoughts for Seerava, and she paused to examine herself and her thinking. And of course her situation. Of a sudden she remembered where she was, how she was, and dropped her chin to look down into her lace-bordered cleavage. Bloody good cleavage, she mused. Let him look! I'll be bloody damned if I'll cover up now! And she lifted her head, putting back her shoulders a bit, to meet the waiting gaze of those bright, almost fever-bright eyes. "Manjanungo," she said at last. "Jacath Manjan-ungo . . . you are twenty-nine, isn't it? And yer know that I am ... that I am old enough to be ... to be ..." He laughed. He clapped his hands in pleasure. "You cannot say it! I can say what you were about to: old enough to be my mother! Ho, that dull, dull woman, my mother. Compared to my father's wife you are as the sun to a candle! Besides, look at yer, as you 77 must enjoy doing. You do not look sixty or even fifty, Seera. You look thirty or so, as nearly everyone does in our Galactic society of perfect health and rejuvenation and long, long life. And you do prefer younger men. We both know that, don't we?" Again he laughed, less loudly this time. Najendra was sure that they had forgotten her presence. Both think I'm too ignorant and classless to understand what they're saying, much less be offended-certainly he thinks that, at any rate! Suddenly he extended an arm to point dramatically at Seera. With snowy lace at his wrist. "Neither of your husbands came even close to me, and we both know it. Join me, Seera. Here, here is the excitement you seek!" he cried, striking his chest, again in a tres dramatique manner. "Here is the life yer want to live-and always have!" Blinking, she stared at him. Both he and Najendra, who might as well have been meat or a piece of furniture, gazed steadily at Lady Seerava. Waiting. Barely able to breathe, awaiting the answer of the apparently-thirtyish woman on the bed. "I am . . . astonished, Manjanungo. Yet one thing . . . one thing lingers in my mind. How can I help it? It nags and disturbs me, Manjanungo. Just speaking philosophically, you with your intellect understand, just wondering . . . what if I should start screaming 'No!' -or even say so quietly? I am a prisoner here, with no one on my side and no one to take my part if I were to consider refusing. That is not refusal, Manjanungo; I am pointing out the reality of my position. Everyone else on this ship is in your employ. Can yer see that I have no options, no choices?" Najendra blinked. This woman was hardly the ever-in-oestrus dolt they had assumed her to be! (Of course, 78 Seera doubtless assumed Najendra to be both dolt and enemy. . . .) Again Manjanungo laughed aloud, a high-voiced bark of the laughter of true delight. Boyishly he spun half-around

in his excitement, then back to face his relative-by-marriage, who looked no older than he. A meter from the end of the melon-sheeted bed where she sat with the topsheet molding her outstretched legs and emphasizing them. His black-taffetaed sleeves whispered when he extended both hands to her as if in supplication. "I knew it, I knew it!" he cried, and his voice carried that same boyish excitement. "You see? You are as I thought, as I knew. Who else would dare ask such a question, even hypothetically-rhetorically? Haha!" Again that not-quite-real laugh burst from him, and he seemed ready to dance a jig. In an instant, eerily, all trace of smile left his face and eyes so swiftly that it was shaking to see. Both women blinked and stared at this new evidence of this very dangerous man's mercurially changing moods. It was frightening. "And of course you see why I cannot answer, Seera," he said in a quiet voice with nothing of the boy in it. "If I say 'Why, nothing happens if yer refuse, save that I'll run yer right on out to Franji,' you would only wonder if I was lying. Yet if I say other things-the dreadful but true promises-not-threats I'd make to anyone else in your situation-why, then you would feel intimidated and know that the only course would be to agree. And then how could / ever know that you were sincere, and really with me willingly-as I really do want yer to be, clever, lovely Lady Seera!" Najendra, looking at him as he spoke, swung her gaze 79 to the woman on the bed when he had finished. The Lady Seerava in her natural habitat. The Scandal of Sondelayne. Of all the Twelve Clans, as he was. She sat slumped a bit, looking small. Abruptly she straightened. Her face seemed to glow, though her eyes did not have the gleam of his. The zealot's glow ... or a manic gleam? Both she and Na-jendra wondered now which it was that lit this man's eyes. "Oh well then. I have but one course to follow then, Manjanungo; only one answer to give. It may be disaster for me if I disagree and refuse. You see? Your listing of choices works both ways. I have no choice. Only a fool would say no to yer, Manjanungo. So-pos! Pos, I say: I join you. Let us live out on the edge-truly live as yer say!" Najendra looked at once to the pirate whose attire matched that of sea-captains of centuries and centuries ago, on the oceans of Homeworld. It was no surprise to Lewuvul's mate that Seera's words brought no barking boyish (psychotic? she wondered) laugh from him. Not even a smile touched his face. Seera's intelligent reasoning and her daringly stated preface had robbed him of that exultation of exaltation. He could only stare, looking petulant. "But. . . then how can I... I cannot be sure!" Seera heaved a sigh that set her bosom amove in its halter. Of course she was entirely aware of that effect of her sighing. "Neither can I, Manjanungo, magnificent pirate. Neither can I. It's you who holds the power and the weapons." She pointed briefly, almost negligently to the curved prass grip thrusting from his belt. "Reason and decision collapse without power in the face of drawn weapons." 80 "My weapons are not drawn!" Beaming as if he had made an important point, he held his empty hands well out from himself. Now, Najendra thought, and tensed all over for movement . . . and relaxed herself. She did not move. No. This confrontation was high drama, and high drama had a right of its own: to be allowed to play out. Seera said, "No, but the guns are there, Manjanungo. I have none." She spread her bare arms wide in imitation of him. "I have nothing." You have superb pectorals, Najendra thought, but glanced to Manjanungo still again, for his reaction and response. Abruptly he laughed. "Madam, you do underestimate yourself and amaze me!" Just as abruptly, with a jerky movement, he tugged the replica of an ancient pistol out of the broad belt under his long shining black coat. Both women tensed-alid swiftly Manjanungo reversed the weapon. "My pistole-my stopper, Seera, which is ever set on Three. Death by disintegration ray. Haha-a disintegrator ray-gun!" Taking two jackbooted steps forward, he extended the weapon to Seera, who shrank from it. "Here! Now you too are armed, Lady Seerava. Careful now! Don't use it on me, dear Seera!" And he chuckled. She took it gingerly. Hefted it, examined it, squeezed it exploratorially. With her fingers wrapped around the downcurving arc of the grip, she aimed at a chair close to neither Manjanungo nor Najendra, and squeezed. Nothing happened. "Hmp." She looked

questioningly at him, brows lofty. 81 He laughed. "True, with an ordinary stopper one does squeeze the grip. Thus." He drew a normal stopper, a simple-looking blue-black cylinder, carefully changed its setting, and without warning swung it at Najendra and squeezed. Ship's Mate Najendra stiffened, quivering tightly all over. She looked shocked, surprised, without motor control, and ridiculous. "Setting number One, you see. Merely Freeze, as it is called. Wouldn't really want to hurt her-can't go about disintegrating Captain Lortice's first mate!" With an amiable chuckle he lowered the weapon. Najendra staggered at the abrupt release from the awful nerve-jangling grip of the beam. Her quaking ceased, but she looked drained. "My apologies, my dear First. Only a demonstration-a little Freeze will never hurt you and I was of course too considerate to use setting Two-the Dance setting." He smiled engagingly. "That pistole," he went on, looking back at Seera, "has a trigger. The little arced item depending just in front of the grip. Right, that's it. It actuates the stopper barrels built into the pistole." Seera continued gazing at Najendra, her face drawn into an expression of concern. "You-you beamed her- made her helpless, just to ..." He flipped his fingers in a manual shrug. "It is nothing, the first setting. Only as a demonstration for yer, dear Seera. She is fine. Aren't yer, First Mate?" "P...OS." "This grows tiresome," Seerava said, in a Most Noble Lady tone of voice. "What shall I disintegrate, then?" She shot a worried glance back at Najendra. "Why must yer disintegrate anything, Seera?" 82 "To prove that you have not given me a harmless 'weapon' as a trick. We are proving trust, remember?" "Ah. Well, it disintegrates only living matter- organic matter," he advised. "Ah-zoological matter, that is. People, animals. So long as they are . . . warm. Yet you can test it, for though I could find that insulting, in truth I would have yer know that my gesture is more than a gesture, and no trick. I gave yer a deadly weapon to prove that I am not threatening yer, but genuinely want yer to join me. You can direct it at something metal, though, as a test of my sincerity. Anything. Ah-here." He took a folding knife from his pocket and tossed it carefully onto the bed before her, between the sheet-draped legs necessarily parted by her sitting position. "Beam that," he said. He and Najendra watched while Seera did. They could see the beam only faintly. Only just visible, that beam of the most horrid of personal weapons. And yet the neatest ever devised, for a disintegrator did after all clean up after itself. Nothing happened to the knife. Nothing visible. "Cease your pressure on the trigger," the pirate Man-janungo said. "Now extend your other hand to the knife's blade. Don't touch it! Can yer feel anything? Please do not say what." "Yes!" "Ship's Mate-we are working on trust, here. Can you briefly explain stopper setting Three to a Most Noble and beautiful lady with no knowledge of such dreadful things?" Najendra spoke in a low, dull voice. "Setting Three affects only animal life-forms as he-as the Admiral said. It disintegrates them utterly, painlessly. It otherwise affects only metal, really. Oh, I suppose that over a 83 long period of time the ray directed at something such as wood might perhaps shiver it, sonically?-disrupt the molecules? I am not sure. Its effect on metal is to heat it. The first two settings affect living beings, only. If that is indeed a stopper and it is indeed set on Three, Poof, the knifeblade should have warmed. Hold the beam on metal long enough and it becomes hot, truly hot." "It is quite warm," Seera said, and raised the pistol in a seemingly instinctive two-handed grip, aiming briefly, and squeezed the trigger. Her target had time only for the beginning of a horrified outcry. Then he seemed to shimmer, to turn opalescent, and then . . . and then he vanished, to become only motes of dust and less than dust, adrift in the cabin. Pirate Admiral Manjanungo's career was at an end. Manjanungo had been disintegrated, in every component. "Damn," Najendra whispered. At the sound of her voice, Seera swung the pistol to cover her. The lady's finger still lay on the trigger, but without pressure. "You . . . will pardon me, Lady Seera, if I am badly shaken. Astonished, rather than commiserating with him or grieving for him. You have made your choice and I presume you saw that he was insane, as I did. Politely put, 'dangerously psychotic,' with garnish. Nor have you

done wrong-my purpose here was to take him. I am on this ship as a spy, and of course have been all along. Just now I had the opportunity but did not because . . . well, my reason is unworthy. I was fascinated. I saw your shock and sympathy for me. I wanted to see what you would do." "Ever a distasteful boy, and now gone quite fobby- psychotic, as yer say. I knew what I must do when he 84 demonstrated that dreadful weapon on yer because you happened to be here . . . a 'peasant' and inconsequential, to him. Then I realized that I could not merely take the weapon and aim and shoot-I had to be sure that it really functioned, else he'd have known what I intended. He is quite capable of killing, isn't he, Najen-dra?" "Was. Pos, quite capable," the first mate of Lewuvul said, nodding. "Firm. He has killed a fair number of innocents, and enslaved many, many. I am not named Na-jendra, Lady Seerava. This is neither my true color nor the true color of my hair-though my eyes are natural. I am an agent of TransGalactic Order-The Gray Organization, TGO, pos-and my name is Janja-Janjaglaya Wye." Lady Seera considered one more in a series of surprising revelations, one of which was that she had had the will to kill Jacath Manjanuago. After a moment she lifted her wrists so that the pistol she still held in both hands was pointed at the ceiling. "Well, Janja, I am not in disguise. I am Seera and I may be about to faint. Vomit, perhaps. I'll try not to, though-am trying. I have never had occasion to sho-shoot anyone . . . uh, that monster has two men and three Jarps loyal to him on this ship, and his own ship is just . . . right out there," she said in a weakly declining voice accompanied by a vague gesture. "Uh . . . firm. I wish that I could have let you know who I am, that I was and am on your side, because now we are in trouble. We'd have been better off to take him alive, but of co-oh." Janja broke off, for Lady Seera had jerked and jerked again, and made a gagging noise, and she began throwing up. 7 "A sunflower and a TGO agent?" Vermillion said, rolling oversized round eyes. "Via, Najendra-I mean Janja-you are something. What . . . what's going to happen to me, TGO agent?" "You're pardoned." "Here and now?" "Here and now, Vermillion." Vermillion stared at her, hardly able to believe. "Like that? No strings?" Janja shook her head. "You're pardoned, Spacefarer Vermillion, for having been party to mutiny. Since this is Lady Seerava's ship and she was not taken off it, I don't see any kidnap. She won't bring any charges, either." "You are something," Vermillion said, shaking its head so that the metal on its translation helmet flashed. "I'd like to have your help, Vermillion. But the pardon isn't contingent on it. Incidentally, I was taken off Aglaya as a slave and freed myself, uh, bloodily, and I've been a pirate, too. I freed myself of that, too. The best friend I've ever had is named Cinnabar. We changed its name from Raunchy. And I don't lie much." Vermillion put its head cautiously on one side. "Did 85 86 you just say 'Some of my best friends are Jarps'?" "Neg. I said that my one best friend is a person named Cinnabar. It is also a Jarp." "I believe you, and that isn't con-that big word you said. I'm with you, Janja. What do you want me to do?" Janja nodded, looking gingerly at the Jarp who was here in Seera's cabin because Janja had advised that Manjanungo required its presence. It was a step, the first step toward the impossible goal of trying to seize two ships and their crew, as well as the prisoners on Starwolf. She had felt very alone. She still did, but here was a step. She was going to trust Vermillion. She pretty much had to. (Seera was in the cabin's private sitter, getting herself together. Her efforts and her cleansing were audible. Hurriedly, Janja had told Vermillion all that had taken place here.) "I want you to sound out Vampy and Serendip, and either convert them-one by one-or let me know if we'll have to treat them as enemies. That's after we've released Boroboodhi." "Rel-via! How are we going to do that?" "We go to that little chamber and open the door and explain, to stop that behemoth from bursting out on a rampage." They did that. Despite Janja's anxiety and Vermil-lion's fearfulness, it was easy. Janja escorted Seera at stopper-point to her former prison. That proved unnecessary; no one saw them. Seera opened the feeding-panel and said a few words to Boroboodhi. They opened the door and she said a few more. Out came the man-mountain, Seera's man and ready for

anything. Hoping we have a fight, Janja thought. Since they still saw no one and had not been seen, Janja changed the plan, substituting a new Step Three. 87 After a quick explanation, the three of them headed for the con-cabin. No one saw them; they saw no one. The first mate of Lewuvul entered Lewuvul's con-cabin to find Pak and Serendip. After both glanced around at her, she motioned the negligee'd Seera in and drew her stopper. From behind the pair minding the con, she introduced herself, "Oh shit," Karmal Pak said. He glanced around again, faced the con again, elevated both hands, and rose from the first chair. He turned slowly to face the leveled stoppers of Lady Seerava and Janjaglaya Wye, TGO. Serendip was less intelligent. It rose and tried turning, fast, with stopper in six-fingered hand. Janja's ability to cherm, to "hear" emotions and intents mentally, had already warned her. Serendip turned and Janja squeezed the grip of her stopper. Serendip Danced. At her order, Pak gingerly knocked the weapon from the Jarp's hand. Janja ceased squeezing the weapon she had kept tucked inside her tunic until Manjanungo's timely demise, told Serendip it was a dumb fobber, and gestured. The two moved past her. They showed surprise at the pistole in Seera's fist, and more than surprise at seeing Boroboodhi. He showed just how much he would love to rearrange various parts of their anatomies. "Vermillion and Vampy to the con, please," Janja was saying into the inship commsender, as the four departed for Boroboodhi's former quarters. Now it would be Serendip's and Karmal Pak's. Janja would wait. Before Vampy and Vermillion arrived, Captain Lor-tice did. "What the bloody vug's going on on my ship, Mate?" 88 Janja spun in the captain's chair. "To be truthful, Captain, I'm not sure, " she lied, noting his deshabelle and knowing that he had lost no time in disporting himself with Manjanungo's gift, Topaz. "First Manjan-ungo sent me up here to send him Pak and Serendip, and I did. Next he comms just now that he wants me back in Lady S's cabin." She shrugged. "So, I called for V and V, to mind the store." In an instant she was looking into the bore of a stopper. "You're lying, Mate. I've been monitoring calls from my cabin on captain's override. Nothing from Seera's cabin, since you called for Vermillion, in the Admiral's name. Mate . . . where is the Admiral!" Janja'blinked. "Why . . . in Lady Seera's cabin, Captain. She said something that made him go all to pieces, and-" He twitched the stopper. "Something is going on, on my ship. Comm him, NajendraP' "Cap-tain . . . disturb the Admiral!" "Yes, by-uhl" The final non-word erupted from Lortice's throat as a result of the stopper thrust into the center of his back. He went quite erect and quite wide of eye. "Your stopper wouldn't be on Three, Captain, and mine isn't either. Pass yours back and I won't squeeze this one." "How'd you get a-Serendip?" "Neg. Vermillion. But all us Jarps look and sound just alike, right? I got this stopper from the mate, who got it from Manjanungo. Pass yours back." "This-this is mutiny!" Janja chuckled. "Hardly, mutineer. We heroes are merely returning this ship to its rightful owner. Your ship's mate is TGO, Captain Lortice, and you are in 89 trouble. Pass your stopper back to agent Vermillion." Lortice did, and was taken. "Shall I give his stopper to Vampy, Janja?" "What makes you think we can trust Vampy with it?" Beside Vermillion, Vampy stared at her. "Are you blind, TGO agent? I love Vermillion." "Oh. Vermillion-give Vampy its stopper." As that was done, Seera had Boroboodhi returned. Janja apologized to the juggernaut for not affording him the opportunity to break a head or two. He looked sullen, and at Seera. She looked astonishingly piratic now, and even competent, in green spacefarer's baggies with the prass-handled pistole thrust into her belt- white leather, from her next-to-best dress. Once he had heard the fate of his late admiralish employer, Lortice went very weak in both knees and resolve. He agreed to try to save a portion of his ass by comming Janja's instructions to Manjanungo's ship: "The Admiral is sending over my mate and one crew-member, Able Spacefarer Vermillion. He wishes Jenk to assist them in transferring his special guest to this ship, along with the man he recently picked out of space. Says his name is Vettering?" "Why isn 't the Admiral telling me himself, Lortice?" "Captain," Janja said from the mate's chair, "may I?" Naturally Lortice acquiesced, and she leaned forward to the outship

comm. "I am First Mate of Lewuvul. I did not choose to question the orders of the Admiral. Shall I comm him and tell him you did?" After a rather tense period of time, the voice of Starwolfs mate came back: "Come ahead, First Mate 90 and crewmember of Lewuvul." Janja off-commed. "Well done, Lortice. Come along now to durance vile." "No one seems to be calling him 'captain' anymore," Vermillion said. "And no one will," Lortice said morosely, knowing that his Master's papers were forfeit, among other things. He went into the small hold-hole with Serendip and Pak. "Vampy, mind the con, please. Lady Seera-would you go to Lortice's cabin and learn the feelings of that girl Manjanungo gave him? She's called Topaz. Very young. Withhold information until you learn how she feels-she may love Manjanungo, somehow! Perhaps let her know you're a prisoner too, and have been mistreated." "I understand, Janja. Chances are she only fears him, and Lortice, but needs taking care of. Maybe she has a functioning mind, maybe not." Janja shrugged. Lewuvul secured, she and Vermillion went over to Starwolf. The first thing they noticed was Skive, Manjanungo's first mate. The second was crewmember Jenk. The third was that Starwolf was no less luxuriously and opulently appointed than Lewuvul. Ah, the clans of Jorinne! Jenk was a genuinely ugly swine with eyes that would have looked a lot better behind a blindfold. First Mate Skive, Manjanungo's third in a month, was genuinely handsome. "Wonder why he wants those two over on Lewuvul," he said, while Jenk stared openly at Janja, and at Vermillion's breasts, and at Janja. . . . Her hair was now a medium brown, on its way to its natural very pale blond; she had popped a capsule to negate the dye, but that took awhile. 91 "Didn't ask," she said. "I can tell you though, I think-the former owner of that yacht is his cousin, the Lady Seerava. He wants to show off his acquisitions. Where are they?" "This way, Mate." "Right behind you, Mate," Janja said, and considered taking him and Jenk here and now. There were others onboard. Best to handle this slowly and with great care. That had worked on Lewuvul. One step at a time. Vettering came out of the hold-cubicle ready to fight, but not against leveled stoppers. He did not recognize Janja, although once they and several others had spent some hours together in a bar in Thebanis's capital, and he had lusted after her. She had been Corundum's woman then, but getting over it. It seemed wise to restrain Vettering. They did, linking his wrists behind his back. Jenk was more than happy to do that, and Janja hoped that Vett's hands would survive the nasty tightness of those bonds. Valustriana See was another matter. Janja pressed her eyes closed, and swallowed. She stared at the very tall woman with the strange olive eyes "Damn," Janja murmured. "I'd always thought it was a myth, that a person's elbows could actually be forced together behind her. Without dislocating her shoulders, I mean." "Sure swells the warheads, don't it," Jenk said, copping a feel of one of Valustriana's large warhead-shaped breasts. "This one's supple. She can take about anything. We're real proud of her." "Urn," Janja said, her jaw tightening. She surveyed the big woman's dull eyes. "Does she have any idea of what's going on? I mean, I can see that she's drugged up to here." Then she was staring at the other TGO agent's 92 crotch, which was cruelly stuffed by a dildo tied in place. "Oh yes. Just drugged to the eyebrows. To the hairline! She knows what's going on. She just can't do anything about it. AH right, stash, walk. We're going to take you to see your favorite person." Valustriana See moved dully, carefully, awkwardly. The very tall, slim heels of her clearplass sandals didn't help her gait. Janja, Vermillion, and Jenk escorted the pair over to Lewuvul. As they left Starwolf they saw an apparition, and on their way through the S-tunnel linking the ships, they asked Jenk about it. He explained the woman called Intaglio. And the girls. There were still three of those on Starwolf, Janja learned, even with one now on Lewuvul. Jenk soon joined the captain, steward, and crewmember of that ship in an increasingly smaller cabin. Jenk showed outrage, which was almost amusing to Janja; Vermillion tweet-laughed openly at the incongruity. With Jenk securely locked in with his new companion, Janja and Vermillion checked the con, gave Vampy a swift report, and ushered the zombie that had been Valustriana See to Lortice's cabin. Seera and the naked Topaz sat on the

rumpled bed. Topaz was softly weeping; Seera had an arm around her. Her reaction to the others' entry was one of delight, indicating that it was not she who had assisted in the mussing of the bed, or in the denuding of the teenager. "She hates him, poor girl," Seera said, cuddling the yellow-blond. "Fears him-no, more than that. She's scared half to death of him-and of a woman named or at least called Intaglio. Topaz isn't her real name of course, but she does like it, and the color he dyed her hair. She's from Resh, originally-entered slavery vol- 93 untarilly, at thirteen. Not quite five years-standard ago. Look at her waist, these marks. He's kept her in a stringently-laced corset ever since he acquired her-he did buy her, by the way. I mean kept her laced up just short of strangulation day and night. There are three others on his ship, with that Intaglio in charge of them. She is his slave, too." "We saw her," Janja said. "Topaz. Look at me. I am Janjaglaya Wye. I am with TransGalactic Order." Seeing no reaction in the girl's eyes, she added, "TGO," and saw the flare of recognition. "This is that lady's ship-Seerava's. Manjanungo tried to steal it, and her -his own cousin. We have just come from his ship, Topaz. We will be going back. Topaz: Manjanungo is dead. Dead." Janja saw the joy in the girl's eyes just before she broke down in hysterical sobbing. Janja assumed that it was relief. "Vermillion?" The Jarp ushered in Valustriana and Vettering. Seera stared. "Seera, this one needs you-and Topaz," she said, suddenly realizing that Topaz would be a lot better off with something to do, someone else to feel sorry for and help. "She is Valustriana See, an Outie and a good agent of TGO." "She is magnificent!" Seera said. "What has that monster done to her?" "Most everything he could think of, I think. Right now she's drugged. Please be slow about easing off her bonds-their removal will be painful, surely, with her elbows touching behind her back this way. And . . . you will get this . . . plug out of her?" Tears showed in Seera's eyes. "Oh yes. Come on, Topaz-shape up, dear. You're all right now-better than 94 you've ever been. Now you start to live-you'll see, dear. But this poor woman needs our help." As they approached the towering zombie, both much shorter even if Val See were not perched upon her tall skinny heels, a voice came from behind Janja. "All right. What about me?" Janja turned to Vettering, leaving Valustriana to Seera and Topaz and putting them all three out of her mind for now. "Captain Vettering. You and Althis have fallen on hard times since I spent time with you in the Loophole Bar in Raunch, on Thebanis," Janja said, staring serenely into his eyes. "I was very blond then, and with Corundum. Hellfire was calling me Cloud-Top, then. Name's Janja. From Aglaya. Back then I was just with Corundum. I wasn't with TGO, then."* "Holy Boodha'sassino!" "Forget it. We aren't after you, Vettering. I was assigned to Manjanungo, because he took a TGO agent and had ideas too big for us all. He's dead. Dead, Vett. We've re-taken this ship. You just behave and I'll get you and Althis to some planet's space station and set you both free." He studied her for quite a while. "Janja, hmm? I remember. You're the slave who freed herself on Resh and wanted Jonuta's ass. TGO! Boodha's-listen, TGO Janja. You take my ship and give me Manjy-nungo's and I'll do whatever you and TGO say anytime you say it, TGO Janja." "Still working the angles, hmm?" She smiled. "Vettering, Vettering! You're incorrigible. Give you Man-janungo's multimillion-stell yacht! As a matter of fact it will be TGO property. As a matter of fact the hyper- * In SPACEWAYS #2, Corundum's Woman 95 wealthy clans of Jorinne were short in their last payment to TGO's upkeep." "So you steal the ship?" "The word is confiscation, Vettering-it's you pirates and slavers who steal, remember?" "Sounds the same to me," he said. "Stealing's stealing, whether it's by pickpockets or pirates or policers or governments." "Well, that's the business of policers and governments, isn't it? They afford the citizens protection and steal from them. Both history and experience have taught me that about you Galactics, Vett. Anyhow- you're just thinking about Manjanungo's toys on that ship, right? His girls. How many females can one male handle? How about the TGW woman? Lord, Vettering, what about Althis?" The big blowzy frowze, Janja added mentally but did not say. She remembered Vetter-ing's overblown woman. "Her

name is Lhari, and she was shoved into that ship with us. We did not take her, Janja. That was another, and may he and a certain Ulf rot slowly forever! Lhari is mine and Althis's, Janja-she loves it, loves us! And me-hell, I love Althis. What's that got to do with other sex-with some fun and games with Manjy's sexy corseted toys?" Janja forced herself not to smile.

"We-" "Hey-what do you mean, 'you Galactics'? What do you call yourself?" "I'm an Aglayan from Aglaya, Vett. We're not Homeworld stock-we're native to that planet. A different race, Vettering. We're Aglayans, not Galactics." "Huh! That's not possible. Oh, you've got those funny pale eyes, and skin and hair, and no canine teeth, but-" "Huh! There are other differences, too, and who 96 cares what your Great Thinkers called impossible? It happened. Besides, you've never seen an Aglayan navel." "Love to." "We have to take Starwolf, Vettering. Manjanungo's dead but there's his ship, and his mate and a couple more, and his toys. Want to help? A few extra points withTGO?" He gave her a sideward look, eyes narrowing. "You really are?" "I really am. The year or so since I met you has been a very, very busy one, Vett. I can't go back to Aglaya-I know too much, now. I'd never fit in again. On the other hand I believe in Right, and I have morals. So-TGO. I really am." "You'd be crazy to trust me with a weapon." "You'd be crazy to use it on anyone other than Manjanungo's people, Vett. They're there, and they're ruthless, and both Lhari and Althis are with them." Vettering nodded. "I can't help you with my hands tied behind me. As it is I'll need to flex my fingers for two or three mins just to be sure that I've got my circulation back. After that-I am good with knife and stopper and hands and I would love to take Manjanungo's people apart." After a moment he added, "I'd rather take him apart, but you beat me to it. Well? Do you have a plan? Listen ..."

8 Kill the varmints! Eat the varmints! -Fenton Morris "You and I will go over to Starwolf, Vermillion," Janja said. "We'll be escorting Vettering, who will have his hands behind him, supposedly bound. You'll have a stopper in your waistband in back, Vett. Your hands will cover its grip." "I'd better have the belt that bastard took away from me," Vettering said, rather sullenly. His suggestion had been that they try to get one more crewmember from Starwolf over onto Lewuvul. Preferably Javad, Vett said; Javad was the real punk tough Manjanungo had taken onboard. Janja had considered that, but had shaken her head. "Consider. I get on the comm and try that. But suppose Skive comes up with the balls to demand confirmation from Manjanungo, and decides to take the consequences if the 'Admiral' is angry. We can't produce. That way we'll have lost ground, see. When we go over as we'd have to do then, they'll be waiting, and they'll be suspicious. So. We don't try that. We get our own balls together and go over, ready to fight. They'll be waiting, of course, or one of them will, but with no need to be suspicious. So. We go, and we be very, very careful. I've considered asking Seera-see, we could 97 98 "escort" her over, to be incarcerated with Althis and/or Lhari, if those two aren't together on Starwolf. Seera would have two stoppers, concealed in her clothing. But -I don't like that. We really have no justification for putting her into danger, and I won't do it. She's the one who Poofed Manjanungo, after all. So ..."

Janja bit her lip as she motioned Vettering to follow her to the con. Vermillion followed the pirate, whom they had untied but not armed. "Skive," Janja told Starwolf's mate, "things are getting a little, uh, fobby over here. Now I'm ordered to bring Vetterman over and pop him in with Lhara somebody. Help!" "Crap. That's Vettering and Lhari, by the way. What's the Admiral doing?" "Visiting with his cousin. Behind closed cabin door, too. She owns, I mean, owned this yacht. Semi-sane gal of apparent-age thirty or so who's really sixty but also sexy enough to ignite a bucket of water. I think he, uh, wants her. We don't dare tell him how fobby she is. You ever dare tell him anything?" "I understand," Skive said, not quite committing himself. "So-Red Rover, Najendra." "Coming over, Skive." Once they'd got a belt around Vettering and the stopper tucked into his pants behind, they draped a couple of loops over his wrists back there. "Just don't forget and move your hands at the wrong time," Janja said, and he gave her a look, and the three of them

went over to the other ship. Manjanungo's yacht-turned-pirate-flagship. Skive was at the airlock when Vettering appeared, hands apparently linked uncomfortably behind him. Janja and Vermillion of Jarpi followed, Vermillion with 99 drawn stopper. Janja thought it clever to keep her own holstered at her thigh. "Welcome home," Skive said with exaggerated dryness. "Push it right up your nostril," Vettering said conversationally. "Ha," Skive pronounced exaggeratedly, "ha." His eyes shifted to gaze past the captive pirate at Janja. "Should I be worried about my captain, Najendra?" Janja sighed. "Skive . . . what would we dare do or say if we were?" "Not a flainin' thing! Come along this way. Oh- keep that stopper on this creep, uh . . ." "Vermillion," Vermillion's translation helmet said. "Be nice, Captain Vettering." "Captain," Skive sneered, as he preceded them along an incredibly mural-decorated ship's tunnel. They followed him to a door, which he opened merely by turning the handle. Janja heard the double click and knew that it had been firmly locked on the other side. Stepping back, Skive made a sweeping gesture to Vettering. Janja swallowed; the overdone action reminded her of Trafalgar Cuw. Vettering stepped into the doorway and looked into the cabin. "Vett!" Janja fancied that she recognized the voice of his woman, Althis, but said, "Is that Lhari?" "Neg-his piggy woman," First Mate Skive said. "They're together in there, the whole fobbin' menagerie. Althis, Lhari, and the Admiral's three gurlz." Janja grinned and made a gesture. "Lord, lord," she said, quoting someone she knew, or had known. "How do you control yourself, Mate?" "Mate, it ain't easy!" 100 Janja returned his grin, then looked around. They were alone in the ship's tunnel. "Let's go inside," she said. "I must see this." She stepped into an ancient hareem-chamber, pushing Vettering before her. A fine woven carpet covered the floor and was in turn strewn with cushions in a rainbow of hues. Janja wondered idly if they were battened down against freefall. A divan in the style of old Turkey; another, with purple fringes dripping to the carpet; ancient-looking wrought tables, definitely battened. All that was missing was a water pipe. Yes, even the keyhole windows were present. Holograms, she presumed, since one hardly added windows to a spaceship-and these showed a lovely blue-skyed vista. And here were Manjanungo's odalisques. The three girls were incredible, and incredibly shaped, fetchingly almost attired in nothing much and yet distinctly non-Persian, non-Turkish in their taut-drawn corsets. Althis was here, and she was still blowzy Althis in transparent, very full purple blouse and belly-dancer's sirwal or full trousers, in rose pink. Lhari Had-dad, formerly Suffragen Captain, TGW, was entirely naked save for two bracelets and a pair of openwork shoes on stilt heels. She resembled a starlet trying to look sexy and succeeding in looking whorish. Althis was as fullblown as Janja remembered her and the girls were not. Not a one of them was as old as nineteen and all were blessed with willowy, leggy figures that were believable only because Janja had to believe: she was looking at them. One wore a filmy yellow bandeau and a strip-"skirt"-a hip-slung strap in cloth-of-gold with a strip of cloth dangling to the floor before and behind, patterned in lavender and green and blue. Her hair was a rippling fall of deep Prussian blue to her waist. Another was similarly dressed, save that the colors were 101 different and her hair fell to mid-back in waves of pure honey. The third was heavily bejeweled though bare of breast, and wore the usual corset plus a real skirt to the ankles. Somehow its modesty emphasized the nudity of her upper body with its taut cones of warheads. Her hair was fairer than Janja's was in its real color, meaning the girl's was dyed quite white and yet glossily soft and beautiful. The overall effect was of languid indulgence and opulent sensuality. All awaiting the return of their lord and master, who would never return. Janja turned to Skive and in a moment he no longer gazed upon the women of the Admiral's harem. Skive was looking into the bores of three leveled stoppers. He snarled one word: "Damn." "Vett!" Althis said again, this time in an enthusiastic I-just-knew-it tone. "What's happening?" one of the nymphets murmured lazily, and Janja was both jolted and revulsed by the vacuousness of lovely face and sweet voice. The trio was drugged, surely. Not

sweet-voiced was Lhari Haddad, nor languid either: "Poof the bastard!" Astonishingly, Vettering did. Since his stopper was set on Two rather than Three, Starwolfs first mate lurched into a mindless nerveless shuffle. He had Danced thus for ten or eleven seconds before Janja reached for Vettering's arm. Just then Skive's eyes rolled up. He ceased shuffling, went limp, and passed out. He hit the ornately carpeted floor hard. "Tie him up, Althis," Vettering said. "What's happening?" another of Manjanungo's girls said. "That wasn't in our agreement, Vett. Totally un- 102 necessary. We had him. You-" He turned. "Don't crowd me, Janja. This swine has treated me like dirt and before that it was Zo and Ulf. I'm up to here with being done to and not being able to do. Crowd me now and your Jarp is going to have to use its stopper on me. Skive isn't harmed, but he's no longer a problem. I doubt these idiot sexpots are either, but with his stopper in Althis's hand this whole cabin is secured. That leaves Paridon, and Intaglio the Weirdo, and the real hardcase, Javad. We can argue or discuss what we should or shouldn't do, or we can get started getting them." "Oh," Janja said, exaggeratedly batting her eyes, "Veh-yutt! You're so force-ful!" "He's also right," Althis said, cheerfully peeling a strap-titser off the blue-tressed girl to bind Skive's arms together behind him-tightly. "Amber-give me the skimpy briefs I know you're wearing under all that skirt, so we can gag this swine. Hurry girl, hoist it and whip 'em off! Janja, Janja. Don't I know that name?" "Right," Janja said. "Vermillion, make sure your stopper's on Two, and turn right out of here. Take the first left turn and head for the con. Vett-let's go. We go left and turn right, to head for the con. Vermy, please be alert. Remember: we stopper anything we see, and yell!" "Firm." "You know this ship?" Vettering asked. "Althis, you take Skive's stopper. Just-" "I already have, thanks." "Just hold everyone here and no communications! Vett-pos, I know this ship. TGO has a simulation, and I memorized it." "TGO!" Althis and Lhari simultaneously exclaimed, as Vettering and Janja followed the Jarp out of the 103 cabin. Janja thoughtfully made sure the door was locked. "Janja," Vettering said, as they moved cautiously along the luxuriously paneled tunnel. "Name's Najendra, Captain Vettering." "Oh, pos. Firm. I just thought I'd tell you that your hair has paled out to a sort of beery amber, on its way back to whi-well, I remember it as white." "Oh. Thanks. It's called platinum blond, I've learned. Found that in a very old edutape. Here comes our turn to the right. That tunnel leads all the way to the con-cabin. You don't by chance have two straws, do you?" "No," Vettering said, "but I'll go first," and that was how he ran into the ravening bolt from a pulsar beamer, and died fierily, horribly, with a scream-and yet he died quickly. Janja was still in the side-tunnel. Just beyond the main corridor from whence the pirate's death had come, Janja fell flat. She lay there with her stopper out in both hands, covering the intersection. Vettering wasn't moving or making a sound, now, while flames ate his clothing. As she waited Janja considered her prejudice against killing; against the Three-setting. She came from a planet called Light. She was pale, in a universe of dark skin, dark eyes, and black hair except when dye was used. Less than a standard year and a half ago she had been innocent; Aristoteleanly white. With each passing month she had adapted more to their environment; adopted more of their ways; the ways of the Galactics she called Thingmakers, and them. More and more she had become one of them-in Aristotelean terms, mingling more and more black with the white to form what Aristotle and Rand had mistakenly thought could not 104 exist: gray. She had become gray, then grayer. She had joined, not quite voluntarily and yet in the end consciously and by choice, TGO-The Gray Organization. Gray because it was shadowy and gray because it did bad in the name of good, to achieve good. She still did not like it but she knew now that it was good. In the universe they had created and called civilization, there had to be what Ratan Yao, her recruiter and prime trainer-indoctrinator, had called James Bonds. TGO could and did at least interfere, and hold down the victimization of the innocent. Naturally it still went on, and on. Yet there had been no war-the ultimate victimization of the innocent by their leaders' personal

needs—since the inception of TGO. Now, thoughtfully, thinking sensibly, Janja took her left hand off the stopper's grip and changed its setting. She moved it up to Three. Thus the second barrel within the slim cylinder was made active. The disintegrator beam; the Poof or kill beam. And she lay flat in the corridor of an enemy spaceship, and waited. Hours seemed to pass, and she leaked sweat. She heard nothing, but that ability to cherm, that extra sense that set her race apart from the Galactics who did not know about Aglayan women and their abilities, told her that nemesis lay around the corner. He had not left after killing Vettering. He was waiting, or advancing. Her stopper remained trained on the corner. What remained of Vettering stank, because it was burned dead meat. At last, at last his killer appeared. The ruthless murderer Javad, his pulsar beamer ready for another enemy, its powerpak strapped to his leg and the awful barrel and nozzle gripped in both hands. He came carefully, slowly, a killer and a pro at killing, seeking another enemy . . . But he did not expect another enemy to be prone and 105 silent and motionless on the floor of the spacer's tunnel. He turned the corner, saw nothing. His eyes started to widen as his lower peripheral vision picked up his danger, and he started to look down at the same time as he lowered the beamer's nozzle. Janja was intelligently already squeezing her stopper, and the killer Javad was killed. He went spectacularly and yet in seconds, as his latest employer had died. Nothing remained of him but the pulsar beamer that rattle-clanked to the floor and rolled a little. Janja ignored it, pacing through the molecular dust that had been Javad. She squatted beside Vettering. The pirate who would also have been an admiral, and who had fallen on hard times and then worse. Too bad his needs would not allow him to let a woman go first. And it was not Vettering beside whom or rather which she squatted; the corpse that had been Captain Vettering was hideous. "Sorry, Vett, pirate. I hope there is an afterlife, and a Loophole Bar. I'd have gone first." 9 My Mission is that I want Jonuta. That is my purpose and my life. Since he destroyed my life on Aglaya, he provides its purpose. -Janjaheriohir of Aglaya Janja rose and went up the tunnel toward Starwolves con-cabin. Her caution was unnecessary; she met no one. Quietly she approached the open door to the control cabin and looked in at the backs of the chairs before the console. Third chair, set behind the others, was empty. So was the captain's chair. Just above the high back of the mate's chair she could see a curly-haired head. "Knock knock," she said, and entered. The chair spun as if kicked and a harried-looking man stared at her with dilated eyes. Very long, very lean, tightly chiseled face. He wore drab tans. "Najendra, mate of Lewuvul," Janja identified herself. "I just returned that failed pirate, Vetter-some-thing. Javad's putting him away. I don't know you either..." "Paridon, Spacefarer First and DS man, Mate Najendra. Is Javad coming? You see Skive? I can't raise him on inship comm." "Skive's over on Lewuvul, where the Admiral is. 106 107 Javad won't be here right away, no. What's the problem, Paridon? You look shaken." Paridon's face changed. He had found what he sought. The harried look became the relieved expression of a man about to transfer a heavy problem to someone with more responsibility. This woman was in the organization, after all: Manjanungo's. Paridon blurted, spinning in his chair to gesture at the console with its multicolored gauges, scan-winkers, keys, telits, alerters. "I've been trying to conta—I just took an incoming comm. It's TGW! A Captin R.O. Farz, mighty grim and stiff-lipped type. Says he's boarding us, right away. Routine, he says. Probably already started over! Two yachts hove to in space naturally attracted attention, he says. That's trouble! And the Admiral's over there, and Skive's over there too, and Javad's not here ner even Jenk and I don't know what to do!" "Easy, Spacefarer Paridon. What did you tell this Captain Farz?" Do I know the name? No. Do I know all TGW captains' names? Of course not. Lhari Had-dad, sure—because she disappeared. R. O. Farz, hmmm? Well, fine! A lucky happenstance. / can use some TGW strength to help with these ships and all these people. "I told him the captain was over on the ship we're coupled to and I couldn't raise the mate on onship comm. He said that was 'regrettable'

and he understood my anxiety, he said, but he's coming right over and onboard, he said." "Ummm. The airlock's coupled with Lewuvul's by an S-tunnel. How's he going to board? Ah-emergency airlock!" "Right, right! What do we do, Mate? This is-1 shouldn't even be-I don't know how to cope with this!" 108 "We're going to have to let him board. It's either that or put you to work on DS, but only fools blow away TGW ships-or try. I have a crewmember off Lewuvul with me, Paridon. We'll send it back to apprise the Admiral." Paridon gestured at the commsender suspended in front of his face. "We can just-" "The TGW ship will be monitoring our comms, of course." "Oh." "I'm here, Najendra," a new voice said, and both Paridon and Janja swung to find Vermillion gazing at them from big round Jarp eyes. "Mighty empty ship's tunnels around here," it said, to let Janja know it had met no one. "This is Vermillion, Paridon. I can't say I like doing it," Janja said slowly, as if both pondering and reluctant, "but I'm here and that TGW jacko is Red Rover-ing. So-I'll meet him. Vermillion, why don't you and Paridon both go on over to Lewuvul and tell the Admiral. He'll want it direct from you, Spacefarer Paridon, right? Go ahead; I'll take care of this Captain Farz until Manjanungo comes over to settle the matter." Paridon shot her a glance. "I shouldn't leave my sh- I should be at DS ... no, I guess not... I guess that- he'll be here any sec and the Admiral's got to know . . . Thank you, Mate Najendra!" Paridon scurried with Vermillion right behind. The Jarp paused to give Janja a significant look, then hurried after the other spacefarer. Janja swung to the console and flipped on the outship comm. She assumed it was still set on the tightest link with the TransGalactic Watch ship. "TGW ship of Captain Farz! This is Starwolf. I am First Mate Najendra, of Lewuvul, and at present I am 109 the only ranking officer on this ship." Or even crew-member, she thought, unless we count a tied-up Skive, prisoner of five women! "Captain Farz? You have spoken only with a Spacefarer First-a DSer. Respond, please." No reply came, and time stretched. She noticed how pale her hand was, and realized that the dye was about gone. Her skin was almost back to its natural tanned pink and her hair must be approaching its light ash-blond. She heard another minute snick off the console chronometer and looked at it for no reason at all. She shifted her glance back to the outship commlink, and glowered at it. Just as she was about to try again, the comm came alive. "This is TGW ship four six-six Tee, under command of R.O. Farz, Captain. I am Engineer Sakyo. My captain is at your secondary airlock, with a Security aide. What is the problem, Starwolf? Is Captain Farz being met?" "Only if I run," Janja said, and slapped off the commlink. She ran. She nearly ran into an apparition she assumed was Intaglio. The woman had been poured and shrunk into a body-hugging suit of pure white that gleamed like satin, and a waist that Janja thought must be about as big around as her thigh proved that this living male dream phantasy was corseted just as the girls were. "I'm Najendra, Mate of Lewuvul," Janja snapped in passing. "We're being boarded-Starwolf is! Hurry to the cabin where the women are being held!" She ran on without waiting for reply or to see how Intaglio reacted. Well, Janja thought, soon Intaglio would be free-and then what would Manjanungo's weirdest slave do? Starwolf was large and the auxiliary airlock 110 far. Janja easily called up the ship's layout in her mind, and easily raced in the right direction. Right around this bend, she thought, and dead ahead. Then all I have to do is identify myself and gain Farz's aid, and we've done it. Dead ahead . . . She whirled around the corner into the short side-tunnel and was face to face with the handsome, space-suited man entering the ship from airlock. For some reason he had removed the helmet of his miss or spacesuit, and she recognized him. He and she stood as if frozen, each with leveled stopper. Whether Captain Farz existed was not important; Starwolfs boarder was not with TransGalactic Watch, although he was a ship's captain. He was captain of spacer Coronet. A slaver. He was from Qalara and he was the man who had enslaved Janja and whom she had killed, twice. His name was Kislar Jonuta. "Jonuta!" The single word was propelled from her as if someone had punched her in the small of the back. After a long moment in which tension closed in like thick fog, the

spacesuited man holstered his stopper in a slow and very deliberate, obvious manner. Only then did his deep voice come rumbling up. "Janja. It really is Janja. Put up your stopper, Kenny." The spacesuit just behind him was helmeted. Its suit-mike said, "But-" "Do it. Janja will not use her stopper on you, unless you force her. Don't force her, Kenny. You were a friend to her." As he spoke, Jonuta's gaze never left Janja's eyes. "Well, Janja. I won't pretend this isn't an enormous surprise-you don't resemble Manjanungo in the least. Going to Poof me again?" "You-you're the cool one, slaver!" "I'm a good actor, Janja, that's all. And never l11 cautious enough, hmm? How could I be other than scared wet-pantsed? This time I saw two fabulous yachts just hanging in space, airlocks linked, and I saw a marvelous opportunity for profit. TGO stole a lot from me, you know, because it or they thought I attacked and blew away a TGW spacer-" "We know now that it was Corundum," Janja heard herself say. She felt strangely chilly, tingly in every nerve and had the ridiculous feeling that this couldn't be real. "We. So I thought. At any rate, TGO knows I didn't do it, but hasn't contacted me to repay the millions- millions, yes!-it stole from me as punishment for murders Corundum committed. So-" "Where is Captain Farz?" "Inside my head, Janja. There is no Captain Farz. As a matter of fact I should have retired that one already. I-" "Didn't that idiot Paridon even request visual comm?" Jonuta nodded. "Of course. He saw a grim, tight-assed man with thin tight lips; a man in the gray and red of TGW." "Holoprojection," she murmured, remembering, realizing. She had worn one that first time she killed Jonuta-except that she had "killed" a holoprojection. "Farz was merely my means of entry. I saw opportunity for big-cred profit plus ridding the spaceways of a burden none of us likes, on any side of the law-Manja-nungo. Obviously TGO had the same thought, hmm Mate Najendra?" "Sakyo! I remember that name, now-so he told you of our conversation through your helmet's commlink." "Uh," Jonuta said; the sound served him for "pos" or "yes." "Now I admit that I very much wish that I'd l12 gone my way and not succumbed to greed. All in all, I'd rather be on Bleak. . . . You've taken both ships? Surely not single-handedly-not even you?" The suited and helmeted figure behind him said, "Jone-" . "Try to be easy, Kenny. Might as well un-helmet. Janja, you'll remember Kenowa." "I remember Jonuta," Janja said, noticing that her heartbeat was up and that she'd gone all prickly, and that for once she was unable to do anything about it. She still had her stopper in hand; he did not. "Oh, I remember Jonuta. The slaver who stole me off Aglaya, who murdered my Promised, my lifemate to be." "We both know that it was Arel who killed that lad on Aglaya, Janja, and we both know that he paid in kind. You used Corundum's stopper on him, didn't you? As to you-pos. I ordered you taken. Just think of what you've accomplished, and what I robbed you of. A short life as an ignorant little hut-wife on an early steel-age planet where the sun is invisible-as invisible as the billions of us who travel between all the suns." He gazed steadily at her. "Pos, I stole that from you, Janja. I stole your ignorance, and you became a person. And-you swore vengeance. Took it, too. You killed me, Janja, up there above Aglaya." Her face tightened; her stopper quivered as her hand began tightening on its grip. Poof him, Poof him, something inside her urged, and another aspect of her self reminded: That's murder. It isn't TGO business that he be killed. Do it now and it's murder. And she heard the sneering voice of Ratran Yao: You're a moralist, Janja . . . "Monster!" the female voice screeched from behind her. "Evil murdering monster! I know about you! Turn l13 now and face death-I know what you've done and you're going to die! I love Manjanungo, you ugly fat-legged little swine! You lied to him, tricked him! What man was ever so magnificent, so lordly, so deserving of obedience and the adoration of a woman?" Janja stood stiffly, holding her breath, staring straight ahead at Jonuta while her back crawled and she awaited death from behind. More sickness-she was sure the manic screeching came from Intaglio. "Me," Jonuta said, and sidestepped as he drew his stopper. He leveled and squeezed it in the same motion. At the new cry from behind her, Janja whirled. She was looking at the tall, white-clad and strenuously

corseted Intaglio, who held Javad's pulsar beamer in one hand and the power pak in the other. The slave who had loved Manjanungo stood rigid, so rigid that she trembled. Her bulging eyes were fixed and glassy. Sunmother hide Your face-Jonuta just saved my life! Janja glanced around at him. "You-you've had your stopper set on One! Only on One!" He did not look at her, but kept his black-eyed gaze on the woman he held in the Freeze beam of his weapon's first setting. "I really don't like killing, Janja. It really isn't the cautious man's way of doing things. Oh, I've killed. But I don't care for it unless it's absolutely necessary. She's no danger to us now, but she's alive. We'd be only a little safer from her if I had Poofed her. If you would just keep left, out of my beam, while you approach her, Janja ... we could synchronize actions. I cut the beam long enough for you to get that really nasty plasmer out of her hands while she's still disconcerted. We could drop her-unconscious, I mean. Kenowa's carrying an outworld stopper set on Two." 114 Too overwhelmed to think, Janja inanely said, "They're illegal." Jonuta! All he had to do was let her kill me, then stopper her! "Oh," said the slaver who was wanted throughout the Galaxy and on many of its planets. Janja was already walking to the immobilized Intaglio. Her back was to the man she had sworn to kill-and had, not knowing about his secret clone (clones?)-without a thought that she was TGO and he was a slaver and stood behind her with his woman and two stoppers. The thought hit her only after she had reached Intaglio and said, "Ready." Then she realized. Immediately a few thousand ants seemed to go running playfully up her back, which turned to something resembling ice with an itch. "Now," his deep basso said. Janja saw Intaglio sag limply, still standing, and knew the beam was off. In a few seconds Intaglio would presumably recover use of her mind and body. Swiftly Janja plucked the plasma-hurling beamer from the woman, then twisted the power-pak out of her other quivering hand. Janja took a pace past Intaglio, edging behind her. She turned just as the wasp-waisted woman staggered on her tall, tall heels and caught herself with a hand on the wall. Plasmer and power-pak in her hands, Janja faced Jonuta. He stood where he had been, his stopper leveled. When he looked into the bore of the plasmer she held, he crooked his arm so that his weapon pointed straight up. "TGO," he said quietly, "is in charge." They stood exchanging a look for a few seconds that seemed thousands. In an abrupt movement, Kenowa stepped out and tried to place herself in front of Jonuta; between Jonuta 115 and the leveled beamer. He swept her easily aside and held her away. Janja was more than surprised by the big woman's act; she was more than touched. She felt an emotional jolt at knowledge that Kenowa had sought to protect her man by exposing herself. In the same quiet voice as before, he asked, "What now, Janja?" Janja tossed the beamer and its power-pak aside. They made a frightful noise in falling, and Intaglio jerked, half-whirled, and started to bend for the device not invented as a weapon. Without emotion, Janja took a half-step and gave her a TGO punch to the back of the neck, wondering once again who or what "Rabbit" had been; the deviser of that blow. Intaglio fell down and lay still, napping. "I have various helpers," Janja said, "and I have these two ships secured. I don't seem to want to kill you anymore, Captain Cautious." "Uh. That's never what I've wanted to do with you, either. But as a TGO agent to a ... an independent businessman, Janja . . . ?" "I suggest that you return to your ship, break off, and disappear." Jonuta gazed at her for a time. He nodded. Then he looked down at the slumped body in its skintight whites, a fantastically sexy bundle on the floor. His face went speculative. "Jone," Kenowa said, "if you even think about bringing that wasp-waisted sexpot onto Coronet, I'm going to start begging Janja to take you in for trial." 10 "Good sense" means enlightened self-interest, the ability to learn, and acting on both. -Kislar Jonuta "At last I've found real purpose-something to do with my life. Those poor dear girls of his 'hareem' know nothing! Poor sexy youngsters, they're almost children and forced by my wicked, wicked cousin into a life of bondage and stilt heels, corsets and sexual use ... by one man! Slaves to one man! Lady Vike Victorious, what a slimy grunjok he was!" This from the Lady Seerava,

seated in her yacht's mate's chair in snowy, blousy blouse and snug midnight pants. Janja was beside her in the first chair, staring at the con. It was done. She had stopped Manjanungo, rescued Lady S, and several others. She had Manjanun-go's ship and several prisoners. With the aid of the Jarps, entirely her allies, and of a subdued, reflective Valustriana See, TransGalactic Order agent Janja now moved both luxury spacecraft toward the nearest planet. That happened to be, weirdly, Qalara. Home planet of Jonuta-free once more on the spaceways, and presumably not headed for home. Once he was the only purpose I had in living, Janja 116 117 thought, staring at the con and seeing nothing. Aglii's Light-what a gray, gray universe it is! "True purpose, firm!" Seera bubbled on. "I'll take care of those dear sweet girls he cruelly tore from their families and planets. Poor things! I'll find a way to put purpose into their lives. I'll find a way to give them purpose and an honest livelihood. Do you know that they go to pieces just at mention of divesting them of those terrible corsets? Not a muscle left in their tummies, young as they are! They like the stilt heels he made them wear, the monster. They need direction, orders, or they might well stay in one place and starve to death! Fully conditioned, like animals. What a trainer my swine-cousin and that freaky martinet Intaglio were! They- oh. Will she be imprisoned, Janja?" Janja only glanced at the woman beside her, and returned to her face-forward posture in the captain's chair. "I can't say, Lady Seerava. She was conditioned too, of course. His creature enough to love him or think she did, and to try to kill me. My job now is just to take her in, with the others. Others will decide what to do with all of them. Maybe she can be changed, psychologically. I don't even know whether she belongs in prison or not." "After she tried to kill you?" "You were just talking about conditioning, Lady Seerava. Intaglio is Manjanungo's victim, too." "You certainly are an unusual woman, Janja. You just can't be typical of TGO. Certainly not what we all think TGO and its agents are, anyhow. You certainly are unusual." I'm that, all right. Janja gazed straight ahead. Spaceship Lewuvul hurtled straight ahead, impalpably and almost soundlessly. Telits and gauges, screen and mini-screens reported constantly, silently. Janja was looking 118 at them without seeing them, that assortment of pastel lights designed to attract attention without diverting it, and to be easy on the eyes of spacefarers. "Oh, and call me Seera, won't you? Think of those poor girls! All for the whimsy of one man-Manjanun-go. My co-my late husband's cousin." Seerava shook her head. "Awful. Pitiful and piteous." For a time she fell silent, before she seemed to remember Janja's presence again as other than a pair of ears. Seerava looked at her. "And what about you, my dear, dear Janja?" Janja did not glance at her. She continued to stare at the spacer's console as the ship plunged toward Qalara -accompanied by Starwolf with a restored Valustriana See at the con. Janja hoped she was restored, at least. That ship, Manjanungo's ship, was the property of TGO. So were its prisoners, and the prisoners in Lewu-vul's hold. Lewuvul remained the property of the Most Noble Lady Seerava. Janja had the authority, and was happy with Seera's enthusiastic request to be allowed to care for Manjanungo's girls. It was just that Lady S's enthusiasm was so damned noisy. "I am an agent of TGO, Seera. I already have another assignment." "Another? I didn't even know you had communicated . . . Holy Lady Vike protect us! You've just been through all this danger and nearly killed-don't you TGO people get vacations!" Janja kept her gaze on the console. It didn't matter. The ship monitored itself and guided and ran itself-or SIPACUM did. And Janja had no need to monitor SIPACUM. It reported to her constantly, quietly, and would do so noisily should any emergency arise or even look imminently possible. Barring the accident that was one chance in a ridiculous number of millions, Lewuvul 119 and its SIPACUM were perfectly capable of taking themselves to the Galileo star-system and right on in to Qalarastation for docking. It did not matter who sat in the mate's chair. As a matter of fact no captain was needed. Just now Janja and Seerava were equally extraneous to high technology. "We have vacations, Lady Seerava. I just don't need one right now." She wasn't sure that she deserved one, either. She had seen no reason to talk of the

encounter with Jonuta, and several reasons not to mention it. She had watched him and Kenowa right back out the airlock and along the S-tunnel into spacer Coronet. He had departed without incident or further communication. "There is . . . there is an awful lot to do." "Well, I suppose so. It's a wicked, wicked Galaxy." "True," Janja said, sounding tired. Staring at the con; staring at nothing. Purpose, Lady Seerava said. And love, Intaglio said. Could she actually love such a man as Manjanungo? Someone to love . . . My purpose is TGO. This time I've been face to face with Jonuta, and off he's gone. As to love . . . a man to love . . . whatever I feel for Rat isn't that. No, not love. Before her, lights pulsed in several colors, pale orange and yellow, pink and turquoise, while gauges continuously changed their readings. Numbers winked in ever-changing measurements and recordings. Everything normal. Dull. Space travel could be dull, after so many centuries and so much technology. This flit had become dull. Yet after all the tension and rushing activity, Janja didn't mind. She was trying to think of a woman named Daura, and a man named Ramesh Jageshwar. Daura's brother. Another man kept intruding into her thoughts. His name was Ratran Yao. Janja either loved him or hated him, and was not sure which. 120 Both, she mused. It's true hate, too, but not true love. Biology and animal magnetism. That's what it is, Sun-mother for/end. I hate or rather abhor or despise him, my recruiter and trainer and "lover," but I am sexually drawn to him . . . I love fucking with him. Admit it, Janjaheriohir. (I am not Janjaheriohir. She is gone forever. I am Janjaglaya Wye, TGO.) Admit it, Jan-jaglaya. He's a good lay. And to him-you are. What else is there? After all this time, after slavery and burnout, after killing Jonuta and standing talking with him now, months afterward . . . after he who enslaved you has now saved your life and you've "let him go"-what else is there? Love? The word was a sneer in her mind. Love! She'd had that. As Janjaheriohir, a primitive "savage" on "barbarian" Aglaya, she had known love. He was dead and love was dead. Janja was not even sure that she was capable of love, man-woman love, any more. I am a bloody flainin' good TGO agent, though! "All my life I've heard that the purpose of TGO, the real purpose, was to prevent war," Seera said. "We've all learned what war is but we've never experienced it: nations or even planets testing their weapons while trimming their population and establishing the power of the rulers. The old people in government proving their manhood and ego by sending the young out to fight for it. Your assignment was my cousin. Manjanungo, poor sick Manjanungo . . . was he a war threat, Janja?" Janja looked at her, and Janja's face fell just short of showing no emotion at all. "We learn that the primary purpose of war was to divert the people's attention from internal problems and give them something to fear and hate. As to Manjanungo and your question . . . maybe, eventually. He was very, very ambitious. But no, I came after him because he was too arrogant, Seera. He made 121 a mistake. He kidnapped and enslaved a TGO operative. That can't be allowed." Seera gazed at the younger woman for a time before she nodded. "Pos, I can see that. The members of the peacekeeping force must be inviolate, hmm? We all think that TGO is mysterious and superior; that nothing is impossible for TGO. Above all and everything, but without dictating or even trying to rule. I learned that TGO is the law itself; I admit that I haven't given that much thought. I haven't had to. Now I see what you've said, and why you came for him. TGO has to keep proving those things we all believe about it, doesn't it?" Janja nodded, "But TGO isn't an it, Seera. I'm Jan-ja. The big woman is Val, Val See. We are TransGalac-tic Order." And some others. Rat ran Yao, for one. An extremely competent man and a habitual liar who may or may not be afflicted with a heart. Lady Seerava was watching the rippling tightening of the muscles of the pale, pale woman's jaw muscles. "Well, governments and police forces are always its. And we don't even know who is the-Janja? Do you know who is the head of TGO?" "Neg." Unless it's Rat Yao. A sort of Haroun al-Raschid, who does indeed go about among the people, seeing how they live and hearing their complaints . . . and killing some of them, blackmailing others. "I... really shouldn't care to be in TGO," Seera said in a quiet voice. Me, either, Janja thought. Staring at a gauge without

registering what she saw, she said, "You don't want me to say 'Someone has to do it-someone had better,' do you?" Seera considered, and shrugged. "Some cliches get to be cliches because they're true, don't they! Shots don't 'ring out'-ding dong!-and people don't really turn on 122 their heels, but . . . pos. I can see that in a lot of cases . . . 'someone has to do it.' Someone had better!" Janja nodded, half hearing. The ship plunged through the twilight of space here near Galaxy center, at an incomprehensible speed that neither woman felt. She was hearing, somewhere inside her head, the words of Rat-ran Yao during her training: "Can I trust you?" she had asked, and he had looked at her with those dark, dark eyes and said blandly and baldly, "I can't think of any reason you should. I offer you no promises, Janja. Just purpose. I mean purpose after Jonuta, Janja." And: "Some offenses are almost impossible to prevent, Janja. Those that affect a few are not worth trying to prevent. Really trying to stop drug-dealing, for instance. What a way for governments and policers to waste millions of stells and people-hours! How silly! There are piracy and slavery and drug-dealing and gracious-me pornography, too. TGO drew a line and those things are below the line. I'll tell you what's above the line TGO drew, Janja. There are no wars in the Galaxy. The job is to maintain a balance along the spaceways. We stop wars before they start. That prevents the deaths of millions-or billions. We don't protect individuals, Janja-we protect societies. Make that Society." She remembered Aristotle, and had quoted him to Rat Yao: "Gray and white color do not belong to the same thing at the same time; therefore their components are opposed. . . . It is impossible that contrary attributes should belong at the same time to the same object." Ratran Yao had yawned elaborately. "Ah, philosophy. An ignorant ancient who spoke for the teensy little part of the little world he lived on. Pure black and pure white just can't exist, in Aristotelean terms." And he had mentioned the Director of TransGalactic Order. 123 Rat had said it was he: "I am the Director." He had hinted that it might be a woman. He had said that it was the pirate Shieda, and Janja had thought what could be more fitting; more gray for The Gray Organization. A pirate chief of the policers! More gray! She was sure that the Director of TGO was not Rat, and that he was not Shieda, and she felt that if it were a woman, TGO would be even less direct than it was; even more inscrutable and . . . gray. It didn't matter any more. Janja was TGO. The Man-janungo matter was over, and she had another assignment. She had been prepared. The woman beside her on spacer Lewuvul had no idea that Janja had been changed; nearly as much as Seerava, she had been changed both mentally and physically. If Januta had noticed, he had chosen to say nothing. The chances were that he had not. The changes were more subtle. Despite what artists would probably imaginatively depict if ever she was written of, Janja was smallish of bosom, not-quite white of hair, thick of thigh and large of calf. Her native Aglaya's air was rich in oxygen and breathing was no problem; it was the gravity that was high, so that Aglayans tended toward shortness and needed sturdy legs to stand up and walk on a planet that tried to press or pull them down. Janja grew up in the twilight of a world whose cloud cover blotted its sun; in the dragging pull of a gravity 30 per cent greater than standard. She had no idea that she was fighting that pull, of course, or that the people of other worlds did not develop such legs-she and her people of Aglaya had no idea that there were other worlds, much less other peoples. Ratran Yao had had her changed because she was going after the man called King of the Slavers. Not because he wore a crown or sat enthroned; he was the biggest and most successful there was. Slavery was legal 124 I on plenty of planets. A person could choose to enslave itself, and some did. Not Janjaheriohir of Aglaya. She had been stolen off that world, mistreated, sold, and mistreated a lot worse on Resh by the owners and slave-master she eventually killed. She was more than delighted to be going after the King of the Slavers. RAMESH JAGESHWAR. OFTEN CALLS SELF RAMESH KSHATRIYA. THE CONCEPT APPEALS TO HIM: THE DRAMA OF IT. FOND OF DRAMA AND THE DRAMATIC. WEALTH INESTIMABLE. NO KNOWN LIKENESSES. ASSUMED TO HAVE HOLDINGS ON MANY PLANETS BUT CAN BE LINKED TO FEW. T.M.S.M.Co. CONNECTION? CONGCORP CONNECTION? "Very

wealthy, yes. Incredibly rich, Janja. After all -the most successful slaver in the universe. He swallows up most competition-or they vanish. No way around it ... the man is incredibly competent. Either Jonuta works for him or they have an arrangement or-" Ratran Yao paused to make an open gesture with both hands. "Or 'Kshatriya' just thinks Jonuta isn't big enough to consider competition and to bother with." Janja had nodded without speaking. Good! She had a Mission again. She liked it. It would feel far more than good, getting Ramesh "Kshatriya" Jageshwar. "He is next to insatiable," Rat Yao told her. "Sexually, I mean." "Oh, wonderful," Janja said, and had a flash of another dramatic man in bright, bright colors and great big hat; him and his flourishing bows and gestures and his satirical use of "Oh, wonderful." Trafalgar Cuw. Was he with TGO? Rat wouldn't tell her. 125 Rat flipped his fingers. "Listening is easier when you aren't making comments, Janje. Also, he likes only slender women with skin and hair as pale as possible . . . like his sister. She was his partner until she disappeared. Neither he nor she is married but we are just short of certain that both have been. They are close in age, Ramesh Jageshwar and his sister-if she is his sister. Their partnership is not confined to business. Was not, I mean." "Before your people snatched her on Lanatia." "Our people, Janja, our people. He's beside himself searching for her, bet on it. We have some evidence and infer that already he has gone through a string of pale-skinned girls whose hair was subcutaned into paleness. They don't last. It's his sister he's trying to replace, of course, and they can't measure up." "Poor dear Ramesh and Daura! I was kidnapped in the name of evil: slavery. A while later she was kidnapped in the name of law-by you, from her slaver brother. How . . . interesting." "Delicious, even," Rat said. "So. I am pale of skin and hair. So you have her locked up tight and . . . you want me to pose as her?-as his sister?" "Oh no. We wouldn't dare try that. We will just make you look a bit more like her. We teach you her ways. We stuff you with her knowledge. I think that will be enough." "Uh. Then what? You going to ship me to him, express?" "Afraid not. The plan is to put you in his way, make sure you attract his attention." "What? Then what? You mean you intend to arrange for me to be out there and assume-what? That I'll be kidnapped?" 126 "Probably." "Bloody hell, Rat! That's . . . you-" "You're, ah, blither-blurting, Janja." "Everything is just so damned flaining gray! We kidnap her. We make me as like her as we can. We set me up, hoping that he'll kidnap me." "Right." His bland expression did not change. Janja heaved a big sigh and sat back in an accepting attitude. "Right. Is it going to hurt, this making me look like his sister?" "Naahh." Some of it did hurt, of course. Janja was sure that some of Rat's lying was just to keep his hand in. Just as he went out on mission-"diplomishes," meaning he was going to kill someone or someones, in the name of Galactic order. He kept in shape; he kept his skills sharp, whether for making instant decisions or killing or bribing or hand-fighting or lying. She received knowledge by implant and by remifica-tion and hypnolearning. She received physical implants and transplants, too. Her eyes were changed a little, and her teeth. Her thighs were slimmed a little-a result she did not at all mind and that she could never think of as anything but incredible; the things these Thingmakers could do! Her breasts were puffed up a bit. That was easy and understandable. So was the subcutaning that turned her nipples almost red, after they too were puffed up a little, turning the aureoles into shiny-swollen hemispheres. She was questioned and drilled by men and women monotonously dressed in gray or white. Sometimes she was nude, as test of her self-consciousness, of her compunctions. Sometimes she wore bodypaint and skindye, in accord with orders, and 127 sometimes it was obscene. That was more conditioning, more testing, she realized. Janja endured. It was interesting. And she did like the goal, if the damned learning and training and conditioning ever ended! They drilled her in Daura, which was the name of the woman they had captured so neatly on Lanatia, incidentally wiping out four of her bodyguards.* Presumably they had been among Ramesh Jageshwar's best. Daura they kept well locked up. They observed her at all

times. They "let" Janja watch edited films of Daura, and hear her voice, her startling vocabulary. They tapped Daura's brain with machinery and with hypnorb drugs and others that put her in orbit. That way they could observe and listen to and record her responses, her reactions, and words while she was high. "Many a masquerade has failed because the imposter was drugged or was gotten drunk," Janja was told. "Uh," Janja said, without bothering to say that she was not supposed to be an imposter. From time to time she did try to tell them that making her too much like Daura was surely a mistake; wouldn't Ramesh Jagesh-war suspect such an almost-simulacrum and never trust her-or worse? The answer was the standard of the imperiously self-certain: "Let us worry about that." Janja let them worry about that. Meanwhile the distillation of the information stolen from the slaver-sister blond they fed into the TGO blond with machinery and hypnotic drugs and vocal drill, drill. She went to bed and awoke with more knowledge: the process of remification imparted learning during normal sleep, rather than in hypnosis or under drugs. * Detailed in the prolog to Jonuta Rising!, SPACE WAYS #13 128 "All right Janje, you are not Daura but you are almost exactly like her, and he is making love to you. React." "That's silly, Rat. Can't do it, just do it sitting here. Want to appoint someone good-looking for me to tryst with?" "Bitch. See you later, brat." He did, and she was able to remember and react in Daura fashion when he entered her: she moaned and screamed, acting out what she had learned, for Daura's reactions during lovemaking, particularly while slicing, were extreme. She was Janja, responding to Ratran Yao's slicer going into her where she wanted it, damn him, but she responded as Daura would have done, in a squeaky throaty voice: "Oh slice me, slice me, jam it deep, shove it up me till I can taste it ... unhh unhh unhh ... oh what a lovely big slicer get it in (this is ridiculous she's an idiot) get it in deeper, farther ungh unhh cram me with that big thing, you slicer, you corker, you fucker, you bullish sister-slicer!" He did that, digging in his toes and thrusting hard and bullishly. Her moans and screams were not simulated. They were Janja and Daura; Daurajanja. "Not bad," he murmured later, lying in post-coital sprawl with his hand on her newly puffed-up breast. "I hope you can duplicate that with him in you." "All that hollering and urging is ... ridiculous!" "Uh-huh. Well he is built big, Janja; we got that from Daura. And he loves 'dirty talk' from the woman he's trysting with." In a teeny silly little voice she said, "Oh oh oh hump it to me big boy," and they broke up. Then he began squeezing and palpating her breasts with force, and 129 twisting her nipples; Ramesh the Warrior, Rat assured her, also loved playing rough. "Oh, wonderful." "Where'd you get that phrase, anyhow?" "Ow! Who knows. All right, isn't that enough practice? Suppose he likes it both ways?-suppose he can take if, too?" "Naahh, we big strong men are the agresOW!" and "No no no. First you pick it up like this, Janja, and then you raise it, just so high, and then you inhale from the cup, this way-and then you inhale again. Remember! Twice! Only after that do you sip-sip-and you set the cup down at once. Not with a bang-set it down, I said, and I said sip, not guzzle. Drink kerala that way and he will consider you a slumguzzler and you'll be out of it in ten minutes besides." "Damn it, you sisterslicing grat's ass, I'm thirstyl" "Not bad, not bad. You're starting to sound like her. But drink something else then, dammit, because we are going through this and over this until you do it right if we have to take time out long enough to pump your stomach!" "Get that finger pointed elsewhere before I bite it off, twitch!" "You're so full of hostility I'll bet you could do it, too. I'd rather you didn't. Can we ease off the belligerence and get back to drinking kerala again?" "I'd like to drink your flaining blood!" "I'll come see you tonight and give you something to drink all right, damn you and your damned belligerence! I'll stuff your mouth until you can't breathe and give you a deep protein injection directly in the stomach!" 130 Who cares-it won't do a thing for me since you 're not an Aglayan, she thought. But she chermmed his genuine anger with that extra Aglayan sense he didn't even know about, and she returned to the kerala ritual. and "You not only lied to me again and again, you kidnapped Daura right off a space station and the plan is to stop

Ramesh by extralegal means and trickery and . . . what then, murder?" " 'Murder' and 'assassination' are both loaded words, Janja. Euphemisms. The one is used to make killing sound worse and the other makes it sound almost nice. It's all killing. And it can't be 'extralegal means,' Janja. We are the law. We keep the peace. We try to maintain order. Can I see that walk again? Think: Daura. Arrogant. Queen of the world 'cause brother's the biggest there is." "How was that?" "Looked good. Or like Daura's walk, anyhow. Oops -negatory. Daura never flips her fingers. She shrugs with the shoulders-she's aware of what it does to her warheads." "But I'm not supposed to be Daura." "Arguing for the sake of argumentation, Janja. Tsk! You are, though, supposed to be aware of what a shrug does to your tits." "Arrgh." and, two days later, maddeningly: "Hmm. Maybe you should go back to the standard finger-flip, Janje, and just throw in an occasional shoulder-shrug." "Arrgh!" and "But-Rat! It's the second time I've been promised some time-only a couple of hours, Rat-to myself, for 131 myself, and you've snatched it away at the last min." "Sorry, Janja. This is mighty important business here. We can't just stop and let you play-" "You slime! You rat, Rat! You blueballed grayguttred no-nuttred sisterslicing Shirashloving Jarpsucking marinated calcinated masturbating furbagging gimp-brained SLIME!" All that in one yelled-out breath, in the newfound wealth of slanguage given her from the astounding vocabulary of the captive languishing in a leaden cell far below Ratran Yao's office. He sat back nodding and smiling. "All right! Beats the vug out of a mere girlish 'argh'! That's good, Janja. You sound just like Daura. I was beginning to think I was never going to be able to get you to blow up. You've got your time; let's make this all for the day." For that she had no answer at all. She sat staring at him, mouth open. The son of a grickhead tricked me again! As she rose in silence and started for the door, he said, "Like some company later?" "Neg-a-tory! I'd rather masturbate, thanks." And now-now she was heading in toward Qalara on spaceyacht Lewuvul, with Lady Seerava beside her at the con, still mouth-dribbling about how she felt so good about helping those poor girls of Manjanungo's and how it was going to make her feel so good, important at last, a new lease on life, and Janja wanted to gag her with a boot. They made it without incident, Lewuvul and Star-wolf. The first person Janja saw, right there at the berth on Qalarastation, was an extremely handsome stevedore who walked with a lurch. The handsome face came off and the lurch disappeared, once they had privacy. Ratran Yao wanted to confer, and he did love his disguises. 11 Good is "that which we certainly know is useful to us." -Spinoza Bad is what the other guy does. -Trafalgar Cuw "Good job with Manjanungo, Janje. And pos, those corseted weirdos are cleared and confirmed: into the care of Lady Seerava." "How much time off do I get for bad behavior?" "Bed behavior? Anyhow, I'll tell you this and then you tell me how much time you want off: You're ready to go undercover, and after the big one." "Monster!-you do know me. I'm ready. Skip the time off. What do I do when?-and where?" "As I've told you before, you'll command your own ship-as a slaver, this time-and go after him by encroaching in territory he thinks of as his." "Why?" "Because he has to come to you. We can't go after him. You just have to be there, Janja. Be available. Don't bother asking-this is the way we do it." Her hand twitched as if to flip its fingers; instead she nodded beside him, and shoulder-shrugged. Her hand continued its idle fondling of him."And what if this 132 133 nice warrior gentleman decides to blast my ship out of space?" "He might." She clutched his scrotum and he grunted, then reached over to pinch her nipple, hard. She jerked, grunted, and let go. "Oh I do hate you, despicable gray Rat!" "Sure. I hate you too, darling Janja." He kissed the unnaturally dark nipple he had pinched. "Where do I do my preparing? Become a slaver, I mean." "Rahman. That's where we're headed, remember? You leave this ship and go down onplanet in disguise, clinging lovingly to me like a real nothing. You-" "Want to hear some genuine Daura slanguage?" "Listening is easier when you aren't making comments. Ouch! We don't stay in Ramadan, but go cross-planet to Alisse. We check into a caravansery-not an overly nice one, you understand. There you get

rid of the disguise and into the clothing that'll be awaiting you there. You leave. A while later I do, with the woman who'll be waiting there." "I'm going to resemble her when we go down onto Rahman, right?" He saw no need to answer the obvious ones. "Your ship is already on Rahman. One temporary crewmember will be onboard. You will then make an illegal liftoff and you'll be pursued with alarms and attendant publicity." "Infamous right from the start, hmm? All right. I'm about to have a new name, I'll bet." "Good bet. You're about to become the piratical slaver Jansanerima Dee. You're not as accustomed to answering to other names as I am, so I made it easy. Do, 134 however, start thinking 'Jansa' and 'Jansa Dee'." "Poor Outreach is about to spawn a slaver, hmmm?" she said, since the name was obviously an Outie one, just as her assumed "Janjaglaya Wye" was. Somehow Trafalgar Cuw had even got that one into the TGO memory banks. She reflected on the names she knew this man had used (this man whose name she was not even certain was Ratran Yao): Sinchung Sin and Sin Yanshin, Humayun RE4435d and Tabash-and-some-numbers, Hacema and Cougar, the name by which she had first known him. No no, second; he had come on as Sinchung Sin, policer from Resh. She wondered how many other names he had used, and she saw his point. Far easier to remember "Jansa" something and answer to it than to try to be Popocatapetl Tee or somesuch. She said, "Where will I recruit my crew?" "Up to you, Jansanerima." "All right. My, uh, old friends on Sunmother would volunteer if I could find-" "That's out." His interruption in that flat voice was one she knew better than to argue with. She had expected it, anyhow. And the three Jarps off Lewuvul knew she was with TGO. She sighed. All right. She'd recruit her own crew. That shouldn't be difficult. "All right. Where will I do my encroaching on Warrior's territory?" "Aglaya." That brought her up in the bed, naked and with rage in her eyes. "Aglaya! You Shirash-slicing sistersucker, you really expect me to-" "I do. To save thousands of Aglayans, Jansanerima, I expect you to go to Aglaya as a slaver. To save other lovers, meeting apart from their villages to plan their 135 Lifemating as you and Tarkij did. To save other Tar-kijes, other little Janjabarians, once-sliced and anxious for more, only to be snatched and hauled through space and sold, sold." Bastard! Nice sentence, she thought, hardly knowing that he had written it out onscreen, shaped and polished it, and memorized it for just this occasion. - She sank back. "What more do I need to know?" "How to conduct yourself as a slaver-captain." "Piece of cake," Janja said, twisting her mouth. "I've known several." That gave her another thought. So long, Vettering. You were almost one of the good guys. She remembered something else: "Oh. Think I know how to conduct myself in bed with-him?" "I do, and so do you. Remember that he likes to be called . . . you know," he said, for they had not said "Ramesh Jageshwar" or "Kshatriya" even on this surely-secure spacer. "I think you've conquered that one, Jansa." "-nerima Dee. Really? Perfect? Me in bed?" Her voice carried the sound of her pleasure, and was also teasing. "Perfect, you say. Oh, well now. How could a barbarian from Aglaya ever be perfect at slicing in civilized surroundings with civilized men?" She bent and bit his nipple. He grasped a very firm buttock in one powerful hand and a breast in the other, and dragged-flung her off the bed. He followed, fast, and they hurtled into violent lovemaking, fast. HReenee would love it, Janja thought, gnawing nipple while hers was gnawed and three fingers moved within her. Then he was sliding onto her, into her, pinning her arms with his weight on her, acting as her rapist in violent hard surges that drove both of them swiftly past arousal into an aching panting need to flash; need for release. There 136 was an additional excitement, for it was as if a new woman had come alive under him: Daurajanja, jerking as he drove in and in, listening to her cries and curses and thinking, insofar as he was capable of thinking, that what she had said was wrong: it wasn't ridiculous at all, all her noise. And then she was keening out formless cries, and he smiled with male pride, knowing that the two of them had slammed and thrust her right into orgasm. Only then, grinning and gasping, did he release the wrists he had held pinned to the smallish spaceship bed. Only then did he take his weight off her, supporting himself

not on his elbows or forearms but on his hands, so that their bodies touched only at crotch and, when he came down in that series of sexual push-ups, belly. A heavy shudder hit him. She enwrapped him with both arms as he began to stiffen and quiver, dragging him back down onto her and thrusting up her knees to deepen his penetration of her, to feel the violent spurts that accompanied his grunting groans and spasmodic shudders. "Oh Rat, you rat, my Rat," she breathed, when they had soared and flashed and glided down. "I hate you too, sexpot," he muttered weakly, and went to sleep. 12 We call "just" those acts that tend to produce, and preserve happiness and its components for the political society. -Aristotle God damn it, slavery in the spacefaring age is simply good economics! -the economist Sarcon (born free, died free) She had shoulder-length hair the color of sunshine in July on Resh and eyes blue-gray as new steel, the captain of the already infamous spacer Hornet. She was en-sheathed in an insulated body-stocking that would turn any form of electrifire or stopper yet devised, over a slender body with a stout chest and conical breasts and an almost non-existent belly and shortish, muscular legs; almost heavy legs. The skin was white. The laced vest and bucket boots and gauntlets and belt supporting the holster of her stopper were gleaming black leather. Real leather, yes. She had left the caravansery or hotel in Alisse in baggies and dark temporary skindye and a hooded brown cloak that was dull as an economics lecture. With her was this outfit she and Rat had decided on, together. It was feminine, and it was dangerous-looking, befitting the captain of a ship named Hornet. He had not needed 137 138 to explain why when dealing with a man as brilliant as Ramesh Jageshwar the little spacer should not be called Tarkij, or even Revenge. Rat had also decided to help her put together the crew. They were five, a woman and four men. The woman was a gutter-rat from Ramadan; the men, all save one, from the crew of a Shankari privateer whose captain and mate had been personally Diplomatic Missioned by Ratran Yao. The other man was wanted on Resh, for murder. That was fine with his new captain. She had been wanted for murder on Resh for a long time now. The woman had been enslaved once, as Janja had. Unlike Janja, she was perfectly willing to enslave others to keep herself living. She had accepted employment and her "captain happily; there had been no incident. With one of the men there had. His questioning the captain's authority and his sneers were unwise; how was he to know that she was TGO-trained? She beat the very arrogance out of him, along with a bit of blood. They didn't understand why or how they had become so infamous so swiftly, but it didn't bother them much. On the contrary, all but one of the men off the privateer were proud of it. It was the first renown of their lives, the negative publicity Ratran Yao had carefully orchestrated. Above the seventh planet of the star Thales they practiced at this and that, including gunnery. The two off privateer Jumper proved good DS men. Captain Jan-sanerima and SIPACUM took Hornet on in toward another planet of Thales, well in toward the sun. The planet was called Aglaya. By then the crew were strutting, doing sexual things with each other (but never never with the captain) and looking upon Cap'm Jansa much as a far earlier crew might have looked upon 139 Cap'm Harry Morgan, later Sir Henry. They swooped down from space and into the cloud-pearled skies of Aglaya, and the captain bit her lip as they scudded above rain-forests and came to the misty mountains that, long ago, she had seen in the distance. A lifetime ago, when I was only a little girl, really, walking hand in hand with Tarkij my love, discussing a tomorrow that never came. Back then I wondered about the mountains that were sometimes purple and sometimes an ugly gray; wondered how anything as ugly as ash-gray could exist in such a beautiful world . . . the only world I knew, then. A lifetime ago, that innocence and naivete, and yet not quite a year and a half, Galactic standard measurement. And how long had it been on Aglaya, she wondered. She programmed the manual computer at her side. The ship's main 'puter-a really superb new SIPACUM, for The Gray Organization did not scrimp when it came to things-was busy, bringing them in. The lighted screen gave her the answer, and she stared at the outer viewscreen that showed Aglaya. What would I have been like, if I had spent these nineteen

Aglayan months on Aglaya? No screen gave her the answer: her mind did. I'd be a loving mother, and perfectly happy. And I'd be able to chancel. //, she thought with a growing feeling of sadness, or resignation to the inevitability of her alienation from her own world and her own people, if I were still alive. In that case I'd probably be pregnant again, by now. And looking three years older than I do, or maybe five . . . now, in the cabin of a small spaceship easing down into the Purple Mountains in search of a hiding-place that would not hide it too well from the air. A barbarian, she reminded herself. That's what I was 140 and still would be. A know-nothing. How is it possible? All there is out there, planets and suns and more planets and billions of people, and all the technology—all the Things the Galactics have made. And here is Aglaya, living ages in the past. I'd have been like some half-civilized-no, not even half-woman from Ratran Yao's distant past. From the distant past of his people . . . his race, since it's different from mine. And I'd have been happy, she thought, and her face was grim and yet a bit whimsical; a bit wistful. Living, she mused without satire, on love. My belt and boots should be gray, gray, and the skinnTite too. Gray. All gray. And me, too. Janja-graya. But I am happy! Are you? Is it possible to be happy, living on love rather than hate, making ecstatic, animal, shrieking love with a man because of a bond of burn-out and hate? "Black is black, and white is white," she murmured, but the Purple Mountains are really gray when one comes down into them, rather than standing off looking at them from the ignorance of distance. And the end justifies the means. "All right, let's get this thing on the ground." The crew did not know her problems and did not know that they had not really come here to take slaves. They thought she was a bit fobby, their pale captain in her dark garb. Trouble reared again, and she tried to handle it. That proved not possible with the man from Samanna, and she had to duck and then to shoot him. She reduced him to ash and molecules just as a similar weapon had reduced to nothing a man called Tarkij here, over a year ago one day when he was out walking with his Promised, Janjaheriohir. 141 After that the others were sullen, but they obeyed. They did at least see that their captain was no happy woman. As sullen as they, perhaps. They waited, on Aglaya. They saw Aglayans. Once Janja-now-Jansa sat for hours, watching a young couple. She watched them laugh at the passage of a Leapfoot that had startled them and perhaps momentarily frightened them. She watched them cavort and touch and pick flowers to decorate each other, and lie on their backs in the tall grass to gaze at the pearl-hued sky and at the mountain they thought was purple. And they fondled, happy in the warmth and tall grass of Aglaya. Janja sighed and was not happy. She assumed that something similar though more athletic was taking place among her crew, or between two members at least. Nothing had interfered with the few duties she required of them while they were grounded here, and Captain Jansa chose to say nothing about their sexual doings. It was hardly unnatural. She was not available to them and the woman from Ramadan on Rahman, Kimry, was. Janja had not noticed any specific pair-bonding that could lead to tension and worse. As a matter of fact she noticed the opposite. Their furtive sexual doings onboard and in the Aglayan bushes were definitely relievers of tension, among slave-taking spacefarers who were not happy with their just being here, doing nothing. At last Janja's hand moved angrily to slash off the long-viewer. It was that or start weeping; she couldn't bear to stare at the happy couple any more and she couldn't turn off her moping thoughts. In her black and white garb she went to tell her crew that no, they were not going to snatch that couple. 142 They were waiting for a larger group of what they called "Glyans," she told them. (She knew they were making an effort to say "Aglayans," now, since their captain was a native of this planet.) The Aglayans always came out en masse at this time of year, she told them, and added that it was part of the local religion. Sunmother forgive me these lies! Her four crewmembers nodded in silence, looking sullen, when she turned and strode so sexily away on tight-sheathed legs with their typical Aglayan calves. Then they began muttering. This Captain Ice was the coldest and worst monster in the Galaxy,

surely! Coming back here to prey on the people of her own lovely world (even if they were all just barbarians) and actually using her knowledge as a native against them; actually waiting patiently for a larger group. Barbarians? Of course Glyans were barbarians-look at her, at Captain Ice and what she's planning! "She may be waitin' patiently," Chan said, "but I be grat-gnawed if I'm patient with all this waitin'!" They were not, any of them. Yet they made it, Janja made them make it, for five days. They needed badly to do something by then, or for something to happen. Something did. They detected the other spaceship and were seasoned enough to know that it had detected them. "Who the purple blazing hell are you?" the voice demanded from space. "We're here-who are you?" Hornet asked coyly, and the other ship came down, and at last dispatched a spaceboat to investigate. The crew of the newcomer had no reason to be apprehensive. Hornet was small, and grounded. Hornet was a child compared to the size and experience of the 143 other ship and its complement. Each naturally suspected the other, since both avoided identifying themselves. The lander swooped down into Aglaya's atmosphere, and down. Janja's DS men made excited noises, jittering in their fire-seats. Ready to say the word to voice-actuated fire-control systemry. Janja twisted a focuser to read the name on the side of the spaceboat lander. Her weapons were not tracking it; they were aimed at the mother ship. "Fire," she said. Spaceship Kirin, unsuspecting that such a little craft might have mounted in its missile tubes a weapon that was so old it was nigh-forgotten, died. The depro bolt simply sucked forth all Kirin's protons, liberating the electrons with their strong aversion to each other; electrons that had been held together in an uneasy truce by the protons. The electrons parted at speed, to rush off in all directions. Kirin became a bright flash just at the outer reaches of Aglaya's atmospheric sheet. (The depro guns had not lasted long, a few centuries ago. Defense was too simple. So was turning the bolts back on their senders. After less than a century the weapon was all but forgotten. The ever-progressing members of the Galactic race had long since ceased bothering to rig the simple defense. Ratran Yao had used a crossbow more than once, he had told Janja, and once he had taken out a ranting speechifying menace to the Tri-System Accord . . . with a slingshot and a ball bearing.) Kirin died, with all hands. Kirin's spaceboat was just landing. It dared not try to rush away, now. Whoever was onboard knew he would never make it, not against this murderous little ship. Perhaps a conference, some trickery . . . 144 "The same weapon that just destroyed your stinking slaving ship, Captain Shieda, is now trained on your boat. Come out." "Who are you?" the pirate and slaver wanted to know; Janja turned up the volume because his voice was poorly amplified from his portable talker. Unfortunately someone on the lander with him went a bit fraggy and starting swinging a gun to bear on Hornet. Surely Shieda would never have ordered such an act under the circumstances. "Captain!" That was Kemahtejas, at Hornet's forward DS. "Fire, Kemah," Captain Jansanerima said, and with a swift nod and a little smile Kemah said "Fire," and his DS-puter took care of the rest. Spacer Kirin's lander went to pieces, spectacularly. "About as it should be," Janja said quietly. Her heart was pounding so hard that she could scarcely breathe. She had killed Jonuta, and he was back. Why bother to kill him again-and besides he had saved her life, which remained an unpleasant fact to live with. Shieda, pirate and slaver, user of females and males, murderer, became a perfect substitute for the woman who needed one. The spaceways were better for Shieda's departure, and yet he had died as much as a Jonuta substitute-simulacrum, for Janja's peace of mind, as Shieda. "Impersonal," Janja muttered, staring at the screen. "Undramatic. The touch of a button. Sorry I failed to tell him who I was." She sighed, going limp but forgetting to smile as she might have expected to do. "All hands assemble." They gathered in the con, glancing at her and at each other. Spacefarer and Dser Kemah was visibly excited. "Better than good job, Kemah!" his captain told 145 him. "Twice! We have just relieved the spaceways of the burden of Captain Shieda, and if any of you hasn't heard of him, don't admit it. All of you were on the ship that did it. I can't think of any tight friends he had; people who might

hold his death against you. I'd say it's a plus for you, should you be looking for berths in future. We-" "Happy to be on spacer Hornet, Captain Jansa! What do we do next-fill the cargo holds?" "Thanks, Chan," Janja said, and allowed herself to look away as if in embarrassment. Chanthawan's words tended to support her assumption that right now her popularity rating with her crew was higher than ever, after its sagging while they remained here on Aglaya, doing nothing. She hoped she was right; she had a bomb to drop on them. She also had to do some acting and some lying. She had begun. "I-I can't do it. I'm sorry. I apologize for what you may see as weakness. All right, I am a sentimental ass. I came here for slaves, and I've been dithering. Shieda's appearance made me realize that I just can't do it. I can't be a Shieda-it was Shieda who-you all know that I am an Aglayan. It was Shieda who stole and sold me. I can't do that to any other Jansas." "You sure overcame being a slave, Captain!" "I know. I did. I also know that most don't. I ask you to forgive your captain its sentimentality, and support me in leaving here. You will all be paid-I did well enough on the last. . . transaction." Eyes sent nervous glances this way and that, until DSer Kemahtejas spoke forcefully into the silence: "I'm slicin' proud to've shipped with the captain as didn't give Shieda a chance to destroy us all. I was on DS, Captain, but you give the orders." His face changed just a little in the slightest of smiles. "I reckon 146 I'm not too unhappy that my captain's sentimental about her own people-especially since right now I'm one of her people! So are the rest of you!" "Hey, you're right, Kemah." "Firm. I'm with you, Cap'm Sentimental!" Two more nods and a few enthusiastic words made it unanimous. Janja nodded, with a grateful look to Kemah. She had two excellent reasons to be grateful to him, now. "I thank all of you. Let's hit it for Terasaki!" They did that cheerfully, and maybe two Aglayan lovers saw a bright flash in the sky. Maybe they took cover and maybe they didn't; lightning and thunder they were familiar with, but everyone had been warned about the sky-demons who sometimes came down and carried people off. Not this time. Having sent the others elsewhere about their duties, ensconced Kemah in the mate's chair beside her, and made sure the commsender was off, Janja watched Hornet's SIPACUM set them on course. She glanced over at Kemah. "I congratulated and thanked you in front of the others, Spacefarer Kemahtejas. Now I want to thank you privately, Kemah. I was nervous about crew's reaction to my . . . weakness, and I really appreciate your speaking up. You got the job done for me." "Meant it," he said, hardly able to glance at her. "And don't you go calling sentiment 'weakness,' Captain. We know you're not. We've talked about the strength of a woman who freed herself from slavery and has a ship of her own. We're with you." Janja wished she could tell him more, and knew she couldn't. "Thanks still again, Kemah. I'll print out a recommendation and sign it for you. That way if we 147 should ever fall out, you'll have it just the same." "Fall out? Us?" Janja flipped her fingers. She couldn't tell him that some day she would be leaving all four of them, somewhere. Tell him who and what she was now and at worst he'd change his mind completely and she'd be dead; at best he and the others would blow her cover anywhere they went. "It's just that I'm grateful, Kemah. Ask just about anything of me, and you've got it." His voice took on a new note; that of a man speaking to an attractive woman. "Anything, Captain?" Janja heard him and his tone, and knew what he'd said. She turned to him with a small smile. "No, Kemah." He looked away, glanced back at her, grinned. He rapped his knuckles against the rounded edge of the console. "Shit," he said, and both of them chuckled. "All right, Captain Jansanerima. "You got no problem with me." "All right, Spacefarer Kemahtejas, we're going to do fine!" Adjusting course slightly so as to avoid the settled planet Luhra's fat bright star, Sipacum sent Hornet toward the Hubble-Durga system, and Terasaki. 13 Never, never back a rat into a corner. Not unless you're wearing armor. -Ratran Yao The second challenge came out among the stars, and this time it was not from a slaver-pirate. SIPACUM sounded its proximity-and-closing alarm and was instantly the entire, focus of attention on spacer Hornet. This time Chanthawan was oncon with Captain Jan-sanerima, and it was he who swung to the

scanner and made hasty adjustments. "Tao's eyes!" The Saipese banged a fist on the console's padded edge. "We do not deserve this!" "What? What is it?" "See for yourself, Cap'm. I don't even want to say it." He keyed the pointer to the new light blip flashing across the screen and asked SIPACUM for an ID. "Ion signature says that's a Luhran patrol ship. They sure aren't out here to see the sights-and they're heading straight for us, too." Kimry was just entering the con-cabin, a few mins early for duty. She was adjusting her clothing, a brief-skirted yellow wrap-tunic over nothing at all. She also looked flushed from . . . whatever she had been doing. With whomever. 148 149 "But we haven't done anything," she blurted. "We're absolutely clean!" Chan gave her a stare. "So what? That spook's SIPACUM just analyzed our ship's signature and recognized us as the ship that illegally blew off the surface of Rahman and fled all pursuit. So we didn't do anything on Aglaya 'cept take out that fatass Shieda -so we're already fugitives, remember?" "Oh." "Ready DS, Captain?" "Neg." Janja was flipping switches and depressing keys in the manner of a woman possessed. She also actuated the speakers, flipping a finger over to direct a quick scan of all frequencies. The live one locked on: "Spaceship Hornet. Spaceship Hornet. This is Luhran Space Watch patrol cruiser Goshawk, Captain Khyrkh commanding, You are guided to off-power and receive a boarding party. You are in Luhran space and this is an order of Luhran SpaceWatch. You are the subject of a Sector Seven star-search . . ." Damn, Janja thought, oh damn, damn it-and I can't identify myself to them in front of my crew! And if I sent them out of the con-cabin and next thing they knew we're free to go our way, they'll be worse than suspicious. Oh Rat-it wasn't such a great idea, making me instantly infamous! She heard Chan's explosion of sarcasm for her benefit. "Oh sure, pos, of course! Heave to and welcome 'em onboard. Make it easy for the vaporizer teams, the fugitives' friends, hmm? They solve all problems and end all worries. Atoms to atoms, dust to-" "Ease it, Chan," Janja said. She half-turned to address Kimry, at the same time easing down the toggle to close commlink sender. "Computrician! Call up the 150 star-charts, quick! We can't outrun these spooks in open space and we sure don't want to fight 'em, not policers if we can help it! But if we can find a broken field in time, we may be able to play a little tag with 'em. We are fast, you know-but they're too fast for freefall dodge-em, bet on it." "Can't fight!" Chan echoed, on a rising note. "What else can we-" "I said ease it, Spacefarer. Zip it!" Kimry was already spinning the scanner on the computerized, richly detailed galactic charts that were every navigator's sacred screeds. Janja was opening the inship comm that would carry her voice throughout Hornet. The craft was small as spaceships went, but hardly so small as to crowd her and the four crewmembers. She assumed that Kimry had just left either Kemahtejas or Swayn, but she didn't know which, or where. "We're challenged by a Luhran policer. Good ship. They want to board. We do not wish to be boarded. We also don't want to tangle with 'em. // we succeeded in crippling them or worse, we'd have half the spooks in the Galaxy after us. Forget DS. Just . . . stand by. Kimry?" "We're in sector XT88M, quadrant 4D. Technically Luhran space, firm, but mostly clear arcs. Here's a patch of asteroids at coordinates X7B . . ." "No good," Chan said, before Janja had a chance to speak. "Asteroids are worthless. That flaining policer could crowd us in on one so tight we'd crash-graze it, at least." "Just as bad," Janja said. "Headquarters would give him a commendation for saving Luhra the expense of sending us back to Rahman-or save TGW the expense 151 of taking us in for trial." Again she issued swift instructions to SIPACUM. The puter dropped the little spacer sidewise, then sent it zipping off in a new direction. "Is that all, Kimry? Nothing but asteroids?" "That's all. . . ." Kimry's voice thrummed, taut with frustration. "The only other thing is what the index shows as a CongCorp communications relay station." "CongCorp!" Chan snorted. "Huh-heard about the holomeller that hotcha blond and the purple jacko from Eilon're making? CongCorp's in deep tr-" Once again Janja cut in on him. "A comm-relay station? Where is it?" Kimry checked the coordinates and read them off, just as Swayn came into the con-cabin. "Captain!" "Just a min, Swayn."

Janja had fed the coordinates into SIPACUM. "We head for SwineCorp's relay station-we'll go in on a double ellipse. Hang on, m'dears!" Her voice sounded almost ready to chuckle in an unaccountable rush of delight. "Just what I was going to suggest, Captain!" Swayn said happily. The man who claimed both Rahman and far Suzi as home planet moved in behind Chan's chair. "What's to be gained?" Kimry wanted to know. "Tell 'em then, Swayn," Janja snapped. "I'm busy!" Swayn laughed aloud and spread large hands at the end of long arms, the wrists thick slabs of bone emerging from the sleeves of his jumpsuit-its color was what Kemah had referred to as "grunje-brown." "Don't you see? It's just what we need. No policer's going to do any shooting with a CC relay station around! They're fixed pseudo-satellites that handle all message traffic to and from CongCorp headquarters, 152 for one thing. True, CC's in a lot of trouble over that planet Eilong thing,* but they're mighty big taxpayers on Luhra, I remember that. The relay stations are indispensable. They also cost too much! All that equipment-grabbles, they're well equipped, believe it. Even a direct link to CC's data banks." "Uh-huh," Chan put in in a grumbly voice, "that's why they set the things up like forts in space. What we should be doing is getting ourselves ready to welcome a boarding party-'n then we'd have hostages!" "You're not thinking, Chan," his captain told him. "We aren't bent on attacking that 'fort in space.' We merely put ourselves between it and the Luhra pa-troller." "Huh," Swayn said, beaming at his captain. "Let anyone attack a comm-relay station, maybe damage one-Sheol!-CongCorp wouldn't waste time on complaints or trials. They'd just turn it over to their ruf-fos." He startled Chanthawan by reaching down and drawing a finger across the yellow-bronze throat of the seated man. "If you weren't dead when those apes got through with you, you'd wish you were!" "Hey, hands off," the Saipese said, twisting in the mate's chair. "I give up," Kimry said. "So why are we heading straight for it, then?" Janja was smiling. "Because-" "Spacer Hornet! We are holding fire, but-you really aren't going to be so stupid as to make a run for it, are you?" Janja buttoned the ship-to-ship commsender. "Goshawk, if I had known this ship was wanted when I SPACEWAYS#16, The Planet Murderer 153 closed the deal for it three days ago on Terasaki, I wouldn't! We're innocent of any wrongdoing and I'm sure your scanners read absolutely no action in our DS area." She buttoned off. "There-that might keep 'em thinking and conferring for a half-min, and we don't need much more. It's this way, Kimry: check your chart again. The coordinates you gave me for the relay station are mere kilometers outside Luhra's official defense area. We head straight for the station with them following, but daring not fire. We zip around it and are outside their jurisdiction. We also keep right on going-fast. Stand by for acceleration!" "Aha!" Chan cried, and Kimry made a similar exultant noise. SIPACUM cut in just then, in response to its instructions. Hornet was immediately accelerating at a rate that had Swayn clinging to the back of Chan's chair and rammed Kimry back against the wall-and tied knots in every belly onboard. On the console's microscreen, light-dots blurred. Someone from Goshawk was babbling at them, but the comm came through all garbled. Then, "Damn. One problem, Cap'm," Chan said. "They're just as fast as we are." "Faster," Swayn said, staring at the telits and screen with what they all knew was a damned good eye. He'd been at this business a long, long time. "They're coming up on us." "Spaceship Hornet," the outship comm said. "This is Major T.J. Vreel, TransGalactic Watch. I'm very glad that I happened to be on Goshawk today, strictly as observer-instructor. I've just authorized Captain Khyrkh to pursue you outside Luhra space and fire if you force us. You 'd best forget your cute plan of dodging around that station and laughing while this ship has 154 to veer off. Give it up, or we fire the moment it's safe." "Oh," Kimry said, with a barely perceptive tremor in her voice, and Swayn sounded as if he were completing a sentence: "Shit." "Actually we have decided to suicide in the relay station, Major," Janja told her commsender, and keyed off again. Damn! Her mission and her ID were so secret that Rattran Yao, TGO, hadn't even let it out to the uniformed branch, TGW. And now. . . . She stared at her console while her crew stared at her. "Cap-tainn. "Of course

not. Forget it. We're in it, now. I just said that to worry him. Maybe he will guideline' us to go our way, to save the station." "Oh." "Not likely," Swayn murmured, his forehead furrowed as if in deep thought. "True," Janja said. And isn't Rat going to be just delighted that I got myself caught by TGW on a local po-licer ship! It's either that or fire on them now, though -and I just can't do that. Janja, Janja-you may have a mutiny the instant you mention surrendering, too! But what else is there? Oh T.J. Vreel, are you ever going to be in trouble! The trouble was that wasn't going to help her now, or her crew. On the microscreen, sec by sec and min by min, the geodesic sphere that was the CongCorp comm-relayer grew ever larger. Now it filled the screen and Janja stared at its pincushion appearance. That was the station's DS: spike-like proximity firing units. Janja wondered about the triggering range of that gunnery. Hardly satisfying, the ironic implications: if Hornet, after all this mad race with the pursuing local spooks, 155 ended up being blasted to atoms by the station's fully automated defense system! Beside her, Chan was begging to be allowed to man Hornet's DS. Behind her, Kimry actually sounded as if she was praying. And behind them all, Goshawk continued coming up fast. Suddenly Swayn squatted beside the master's chair and uncharacteristically put a hand on Janja's arm- lightly. "Captain! Please! Let me have the con. The sta-tion'll start firing any moment, and I've got more experience at dodging than anyone onboard." One last chance before I have to surrender and accept boarders? Janja sighed. Abruptly she unbuckled and thrust herself up out of the master's chair, and to the side. She had said nothing; neither did Swayn, as he slid into the swivel chair. The spidering of his long bony fingers over the control keys was a thing of beauty. Unfortunately, Janja wasn't in the mood for esthetic appreciation just now. "Captain! Hang on!" "Uh." Janja pounced back to the little cabin's third chair, grasped a squeaking Kimry and forced her down onto her lap. Hurriedly she buckled them into the chair, an instant before Hornet went wild. Next instant it was as if the ship had struck a double-layered cyprium wall. For some fraction of a second, the universe winked out; went utterly black. By the time Janja's brain considered clearing, her stomach hurt from the pressure of Kimry's body and the woman was moaning. So was Chan. Fleetingly Janja hoped that Kemah had got himself strapped down back there, wherever he was. Otherwise he was probably smeared all over a wall or two. Swayn's face wore a warped, distorted look, as if too 156 many Gs of pressure had stretched the skin and it hadn't yet had time to return to normal. Even the simulacrum had gone mad, and in color. Many colors writhed in a formless rushing swirl. Simultaneously, and before she had oriented herself fully, a sensation of plummeting down through space struck Janja. It hit so fast that her stomach seemed to be exploding through the roof of her mouth. She couldn't decide whether to die or vomit. From the sounds Kimry made, she would choose the former. Neither she nor Janja did either, simply because their reflexes couldn't catch up with what was happening. "Boodha's slicin' b-" Chan began, but shut up because he had to bite back vomit. Hornet was executing a hard "rightward" swerve-and then dropping, jerking "leftward" . . . Aglii's light, Janja thought, and I thought Quindy was wild at the con! By pure reflex, in spite of it all, her eyes sought the microscanner. The picture had changed, again. Now only the lower arc of the relay station was visible against the ever-twinkling starscape of deep space. Janja blinked. In other words, she realized, the dropping sensation had not been imagination. Somehow, Swayn had sent them plunging "down," to pass "under" the relay station. Clearly, too, it was a maneuver the LS patrol cruiser could not duplicate. The craft was passing above them, lancing straight at the station. Then it was wrenching wildly, beginning a big sweeping arc to avoid it. Again Swayn looked back at them, his face a picture of lunacy alive and breathing. "Hang on!" he yelled. And again Hornet seemed to ram an irresistible wall, and vectored onto a new course. This time it raced "up" and forward, straight "up" at the patrol ship. Crushed 157 into third chair and barely able to breathe because the same force was crushing Kimry down onto her, Janja clung to consciousness. With glazed eyes she stared

at the scanner screen. Now she knew that she should never have agreed to let this manic Swayn take the con. He was going to slam them into the other ship in just seconds and she could only endure the nightmare. Naturally Goshawk's captain saw the same onrushing doom. He warped into an insane parabolic curve barely in time to avoid being rammed. At that, he made a mistake. He arced the wrong way. The maneuver threw him back on a crash course with the relay station. Thus he learned the distance allowed by the station's purely cybernetic proximity-firing units; he entered the perimeter programmed into them. Auto-gunnery sent molecular beams lancing out from the area perceived as threatened. The Luhran ship rocked under their impact. Yet its mass was too great and its velocity too high for the blasts to stop the hurtling ship. At just under the speed of light, Goshawk smashed through the beams and the firing units' spikes, straight into the sphere that was the communications relay station. Briefly, it blazed dazzling bright as a cosmic fireball, then imploded upon itself in a crumpling and disintegrating mass of metal-along with flesh and bone. Swayn let out a triumphant yell even while his hands leaped here and there, zig-zagging over Hornet's console like the fingers of a maniacal synchordist. He was cutting thrust and swinging the spacer in a long arc about the area of devastation. Chan cheered. A moment later Kimry shouted her jubilation, in a shaky voice. Janja was silent, stricken with a writhing belly and a great lump in her throat. It was horrible-and just as awful was her knowledge that she could only thank and 158 congratulate her expert ship-handler of a crewmember. For the murder of a policer ship and its entire complement! Act otherwise and she was worse than suspect as a slaver and outlaw captain . . . and trapped on a ship with four outlaws become her enemies. She thanked and congratulated the grinning Swayn. "Let's hit that wrecked station! Boodha knows what we can snatch up-that's fine equipment, and a lot of it must have survived!" "You're not thinking," Janja said (when what she wanted to say was "You callous fobby idiot!"). "It also has to have automatic alarms, and that ship must have been in contact with its base on Luhra, too. Or other ships or both. Oh no-what we do is get the flainin' hell out of here!" "Oh shit, Cap'm- yer right. Sorry." A few minutes later they found the other casualty. Uncertain as to whether Kemah had internal injuries in addition to three broken limbs and the gash, they put him in shipdoc while Hornet found a safe entry point and converted to tachyons. And again. Janja wanted to be a long, long way from Luhra. 14 While her crew enjoyed planetside pleasures with their new pay, "Captain Jansanerima Dee" filed a report. Without naming her crew, she stated that she had been accosted by a ship called Kirin and was forced to destroy it. The Meccan representatives of officialdom laughed (all but the man over in the corner, who Janja assumed was a TGO agent or TGW officer out of uniform), when she told them of the weapon that had destroyed Kirin. "You ought to get a medal," a wide-eyed woman said, swinging from her puterscreen. "That's-that was Shieda's ship!" "Damn," someone said. The Chief of Bureau affected not to be impressed. "That's about the silliest thing I ever heard of," he said, after his laughter had slid down to become a grin. "That weapon was about as useful as a slingshot! What ever possessed you to find one of those relics-and mount it in your ship?" Janja stared at him with cold eyes. "Captain slaver-pirate Shieda, if that's who it was," she said, "doesn't think it was so silly-he doesn't think anything, anymore." That wiped the smirk off his face and, almost instantly for they were a dutiful lot of buroks, off the faces of his underlings. "As to the slingshot comparison . . . have you ever heard of David and Goliath?" 159 160 He had not, for few of these Galactics had applied themselves to study of their culture as she had; the outsider Aglayan "barbarian" their culture had enslaved. He was still frowning when the little sexpot in her tight black-and-white outfit swaggered out. Her stopper's holster flap slapped against her well-molded hip. She contacted Rat, gave him a report on both Shieda and the horror of the Luhran ship/relay station destruction, and listened to his recriminations. For a while. Then she interrupted with a nasal "Sorry, your time is up, Mouth," and keyed off the comm. Kemahtejas had to put

in some time in hospital. Janja secretly used her TGO code to cover whatever bill his care incurred, and made sure that he was not slighted. Then, because she was told he had babbled something about a CongCorp relay station while he lay doped up, she hurried to round up the other three and get the hell off Meccah. Word got around, of course. A few days later she was in the Gotohell Bar with Kimry when a tall thin man slid into the booth's seat across from her. He grinned. Kimry smiled uncertainly, glancing at Janja. She gave him a Cap'm Jansa look. "Don't believe I know you, Smiley. Do I look like an easy tryst?" "You look like Captain Jansanerima Dee, who tangled with Shieda and sent him off to his doubtless honor-free ancestors and . . . who did something else we won't mention. And you talk the way I'd expected, too-Captain Jansa's got to be a real bitch." Kimry took offense and showed it; Janja laid a hand on her arm, and laughed. "You talk like a man who keeps his nose buried in newsviewers and other people's business," she said, wrapping her fingers around a plass that contained Bose. 161 He shook his head. "Just ONS, on my ship. I'm Captain Uday Gopal. Call me Redhand, Captain Jansa. I wanted to meet you-share a drink. Got a crewmember over there who'd love to buy one for your crew here, too." He gave Kimry a friendly nod. Again, she looked at Janja for direction. She continued indecisive, except in the matter of her hair. Janja hadn't got around to telling her yet that the Jarpskin-orange dye job looked even worse than her matching Thebanian strap-titser. Janja said, "Why?" He sat back, grinning and shaking his head. "Are you real, Captain Jansa? Did you really blast Kirin out of space, Shiedaand all?" This was a hard man not to like. Janja even liked his midnight blue Nehru shirt. And his smile. "Not exactly," she said, and turned to Kimry. "Are you at all interested in joining Cap'm Redhand's crew-member, over there?" "Spacefarer First," Redhand said. "Computrician and the very hell with repairing anything. Anything." "Sure," Kimry said, and departed. Janja watched her cross over and pause at the table Redhand had indicated. The man there actually stood, smiling. Janja smiled, nodded, and looked at Captain Uday Redhand Gopal. "What we blasted Kirin out of was upper atmosphere. Shieda was in his lander when someone with him did something stupid with its gun. We turned the lander into a bomb." He shook his head with a whimsical smile of approval to show that he was impressed. "Why do you say 'someone with him'?" "Shieda wasn't that stupid. If that gun hadn't started swiveling our way I'd never have given the order to fire." 162 "Uh. Guess you're right. He got away with a lot, that one. Oh-have a fizzler?" "Come on, Redhand, don't insult me. I'll join you in a Terasaki Rain, though." "Sorry," he said, smiling and nodding. He placed the order, giving his name and hers. The two glasses-rather than plass because glass was a local industry-were brought by a cowed-looking girl or very young woman with a great deal of stringy hair, scarlet, and a single garment on her hips. It resembled a loose diaper. Probably a slave, rather than an employee. Less expensive than cyberservers, this far out from what they were pleased to call civilization, Janja thought. She set one drink before Janja and the other in front of Gopal, who immediately seized it and lifted it to Janja. "To you, scourge of CongCorp!" he said, and drained the glass. He pinched the girl, too. She winced without a sound. "I was thirsty," he laughed, boisterously. "Bring me another, and shake that fat tail!" He slapped her half-bare and definitely non-fatty buttock when she whirled to return for a second glass. She didn't even skip a step. Grunjok, Janja thought Jorinnely. Scum. Scum, like all us pirates and slavers, and she lifted her glass. Within nineteen seconds both she and Kimry were paralyzed from the eyes up, automatons. Kimry Captain Redhand's crewmember took away easily, for use. The automaton that had been Janja Captain Redhand ordered to leave with him. It did. It accompanied him to the taxi, to the port station, up to Allahstation One. He ordered it to climb that ramp, go into that cabin, and strip, and then he raped it before redshifting the station to convey her to his master. 15 A false argument depends on the first false statement in it. -Aristotle, Prior Analytics Captain Jansa died six times in the psychoid chamber. Worse, Janja died, horribly, six times in that obscene device. The first time it was under

the lash. After the first twenty or so whistling, cracking strokes onto the writhing victim straining against her bonds, each one brought bright red droplets. Soon they were stringy claret-colored streamers, and then gobbets of flesh. She began to shriek. She continued to tear the awful cries from her throat until she was hoarse and then too weak. After that her movements and her outcries ceased and she hung limp while the nasty slapping sounds of leather against broken flesh went on and on. At last, numbed beyond pain, she died to return to life and consciousness unmarked and unharmed . . . but facing some sort of deep purple jungle cat with an unbelievably huge head all agleam with long tearing teeth through which issued its over-poweringly bad breath. Its slaver dripped between shining canines long as her forefingers. Its claws were nearly as long. She fought. The beast chewed her arm useless 163 164 and bloody and yet she could not lose consciousness or even go into shock as it went for a softer target. It ate her left breast and then her arm, beginning with the fingers so that she must listen to the crunching and popping of bones in the animal's mouth. At some point between elbow and shoulder she died from blood loss. The third time an enormous serpent squeezed her to death. It was in no hurry about it. She was nearly dead when it began to swallow her. The fourth she had to lie there and watch the spiked ceiling descend. And then to feel the spikes enter her, one at a time and with unbearable slowness. Seconds seemed to stretch into hours until her lungs and heart and liver were pierced and she died. Next Quindy and Trafalgar Cuw jettisoned her from a ship into space. She noted that the ship was named Vettering. She wore no spacesuit; she wore nothing at all. Her last thought in the airlock was to wonder what really happened in such situations: would she explode or implode or neither? (She never found out. Whichever it was, it happened in a stretched moment of exquisite agony. / am dead, she forced into her mind. I am dead. I can not be killed again. Not again!) So she woke to be killed again. That sixth time she was carved, slowly, by a totally bald man whose face of consummate evil was enhanced by his obvious pleasure as he wielded that shining surgical knife--and his single eye behind the gleaming monocle. After her first cry when she felt the icy sting and looked down to see that the scalpel had drawn a red line that opened slowly to lay her open from sternum to nipple, she was silent save for her whimpers. Staring down at herself, watching the blood ooze and well and trickle or spurt, she was aware of her incongruous marveling that the pain began after 165 the cuts were made. The actual incisions were no more than sharp stings. Eventually she bled to death. Again. Each time, she heard their questions and told them who she was and all she could think of about herself. The torture went on anyhow. She awoke standing against a wall. Metal bracelets clamped about her wrists were snapped to metal plates. Her arms were forced out from her at right angles, technologically shackled to the wall. Standing before her was a man. He was only about 170 sems* tall, with skin the color of rich mahogany. His eyes were so dark a brown as to appear black; as if they were all pupil, without irises. Black, wavy hair grew straight across his forehead, rather low; strange for a man with such intelligent eyes. Also strange was the fact that his hair was sprinkled and occasionally streaked with gray. Sideburns fanned out on a line with the bases of his lobeless ears and were clipped, like the rest of his hair, quite close to his head. Rather thick lips covered intensely white teeth in a smallish mouth. The incisors were pronounced, crowding canines that were accordingly diminutive, unpointed. A deep, nearly round dimple holed his aggressive chin. He wore neither moustache nor beard, and did not need them--the eyes were his feature, and he was very, very male. "You are strong, very strong," he said. His voice was a deep baritone in which she recognized no accent. "Shockingly courageous. Either your pain threshold is abnormally low--and our sensors show that to be false --or you have unbelievable control. You have taken much and screamed impressively little." * 170 centimeters: about 5 feet, 7 inches, Old Style 166 She decided neither to comment nor to accuse or call names. Instead, she merely nodded. "Who are you?" He looked surprised. "You don't know?" "I try not to waste breath on unnecessary

questions," she told him, and she added, "I'd rather save it for screaming." He smiled. And brought up a gloved hand to strike her in the mouth-watching closely, obviously studying her reaction. She felt her upper lip double back under her teeth. She tasted salt. "You are also impossibly arrogant," he said. "Consider my fingers flipped," she said between swelling lips. "Why not? What can you do to me that you haven't already?" "For one thing, we can really kill you. Slowly." With a little pushing, she let him hear a throaty chuckle. "Each time I have died here it was real, for me. How can real reality be worse than perfectly simulated reality? How can I prove this isn't another mental experience?" He turned away, shaking his head. A wrap-front robe enveloped his broad body past the knees. It moved with iridescent glimmers, in a dark green velvon or velvet. He had girded it with a broad black belt rather than a sash, she noticed, and his legs were powerful. A large, broad, and thick man; a powerfully built man who was unusually un-tall. "Unbelievable. Un-be-lievable! And the face . . . the body . . . unbelievable." He swung back to face her and she felt pierced by those eyes, impaled on those black eyes. "What do you remember? Before the whipping, I mean?" "Was the whipping first?" He shook his head with the tiniest of closed-mouth smiles. The shake was in wonder, not negation. He said, "Pos." She strained her neck to look down at herself. She was naked-and unmarked. Whole, so far as she could see. With swollen, red-brown aureoles. "I'll have to sort it out," she said. "Oh, that grat's-ass bar. Captain . . . I don't remember. Gupta? Red-hand, he said-a bit melodramatic, that. Ah! The wine -drugged, wasn't it! Drugged either by the bartender or the apparent slave who brought the drinks. Umm. You are his torturer then, is that it? What's he want? I actually believed he wanted to discuss a merger.'" He shook his head with a whimsical little smile. "What a fool! Unbelievable stoic bravery and fortitude-and utterly a fool. I am Ramesh Jageshwar." Well, Janja thought, it worked. I'm here. In the hands of Ramesh Jageshwar called Kshatriya: Warrior. Also called King of the Slavers. He took in over a billion stells a year, according to estimates, but no one could compute or guess at his expenses, his payroll. He was the ultimate villain of the Akima Mars mellerdrammers. Preposterously rich and enormously powerful, he could have anything and probably had nearly everything. Her quest was completed. She was a prisoner, according to plan. She wondered how long she had been here, how long she had been tortured. She wondered what she had said, what all she had told them. Ratran Yao had assured her that she could not say or be made to say that she was with TGO, and that the information could not be taken from her mind. He must also have known or expected that she would be tortured. Probably, she mused. Goodole Rat. Since no one knew for certain the location of Ramesh 168 Jageshwar's lair, she also wondered where she was. "I'm impressed," she told Ramesh Jageshwar. "I suppose I should be frightened, too, though . . . I've never met anyone who has seen you or has any idea what you look like. That indicates that those who do know do not leave here, alive. Wherever here is . . ." She paused for just a moment, for a couple of beats, but he showed no sign of speaking. He was beyond such tiny ploys then, she assumed, and went right on. "Wait, I see it. Don't tell me-Shieda was your creature, and perhaps Vettering too, and . . . could Jonuta be? And Gupta of course is your man-ah, and you probably own that bar. The Gotohell Bar. I went there and went to hell. Really put my toes in it, didn't I? I killed Shieda and incurred the wrath of God, or the next worse thing. Why am I alive?" "You cannot guess?" "Because killing me is such fun that you plan to do it again and again for the next several years?" "Believe it or not, I am not sadistic." She paused to look down at herself again. "Alive, after all that dying. And apparently intact, too." She lifted her head to meet his gaze. "Why?" "I cannot believe that you cannot guess.'" "Somehow I had the notion that the mighty and nigh-legendary Kshatriya would not be so prone to cryptics -a phrase I use only to avoid the uncomplimentary 'children's guessing games,' which would not be properly respectful to the King of the Slavers. Oh-oh, I angered you again! Going to slap me again? Is it more fun with me shackled

helpless?" His hand had begun to rise, sinister in the glove; it dropped. Smiling, he shook his head. "If I release you, will you give your word not to try anything . . . rash?" 169 "Oh come, Kshatriya, what's the word of a slaver worth?" He laughed. "Touche!" "I'm considering, Kshatriya. Might I get something to drink? A stik?" "You would bargain, woman?" "I'd try!" He stared at her bright smile, and again he shook his head in wonder. Impressed wonder. "I'd try. Guarantee me a drink and a tranqstik and I will guarantee . . . umm. Four hours of non-violence. Guaranteed!" His eyes twinkled and the unlikely crow's feet crinkled at their corners. Surely he was older than his apparent-age 35 or so! He said, "After which . . ." ". . . to be discussed," she said. He jerked his head down in a single brief nod; a Janja-like nod, oddly enough. "Done." He walked away across a floor carpeted deeply in something furry and golden-green, rather like unusually plush moss. He was broad, and she was sure that there was musculature rather than excess meat under the robe. A long divan of dull russet faced her; between it and the chair set at right angles to it stood a closed table. The arm of the couch was equipped with a console, which he finger-tapped as he sat. To Janja's right, a nine- or ten-meter wall went transparent. She gazed, squinting, at a vertiginous view of pinky-blue sky and of mountains in black and gray and purple. She felt that she was not looking at a holographic projection. This room, wherever it was, was very, very high. He tapped again and her arms were released. When they dropped to her sides she grunted at the impact of 170 the manacles on her thighs. She had not been prepared for his releasing her from across the room. The wall-plates were electromagnetic, then, as she had thought; she just had not thought of a switch across the big room. She stood still, leaning back against the wall, enduring the terrible prickling tingle from shoulders to fingertips while circulation returned to her arms and seemed trying to make up for lost time. She raised her hands and massaged each with the other. The carpet was yielding and soft and not at all prickly under her bare feet as she crossed to the seated man. She was aware of the unsteadiness of her gait. She worked at walking not as flauntingly as Daura might have done and yet as would a woman aware of her body and its sensuality. "Nudity does not seem to bother you," he observed. She shrugged-with her shoulder, not her hand, watching his eyes; Matching him watch the tightening and jump of her breast. She sat in the chair, which was padded and brown and which surprised her by yielding only a little. "It doesn't," she said. "It isn't my fault." He laughed. "Delightful! But nudity becomes you." "Nudity becomes no one," she told him. "We can all use a bit of decoration. Especially in the presence of someone else who is clothed." "I am not often contradicted.'" After regarding him for a brief moment she slid from the chair onto her knees, lowering head and forearms sinuously to the floor. "Pardon, O Master, for treading upon your vaunted and vaulting ego. Shall one speak only when spoken to, and then softly and only in agreement?" His laugh was deep, from his belly. It seemed the 171 genuine, hearty sound of a man fond of laughing who perhaps had too little genuine opportunity. "No," he said, "be yourself. Yourself is delightful." Which was interesting, Janja thought, inasmuch as she was not herself. At least whoever/whatever he thought her self was. She rose as sinuously and slid her bare backside into the chair in a fluidly supple movement. She studied the manacles that gleamed bluely on her wrists. "My lord was pleased to give me bracelets." "They ill become you. Tell me about you." "What? Surely I have told all, during all that torture and dying in your clever-evil psychoid chamber! And under an injection or three, too, I've no doubt. And hypnosis as well?" "Tell me one more time, then. Consciously, voluntarily." "Drink and stik?" "Rain and Heaven High?" She nodded and he dialed. They waited, regarding each other in a reflective silence, until the table delivered up their drinks. And a packet of Heaven High. She sipped the Terasaki Rain, nodded with pleasure, scratched a HevHi stik alight and inhaled it. "Terasaki emjay," she said in a strained voice because she was holding, "will never replace the Home-world original." "Homeworlder grape juice," he said, "will never replace Terasaki wine." "I've no argument. All right: I am

Jansa. My Outie name is a lie. I was born on Aglaya, where we used only one name. 'Daughter of would form the rest. One day three years ago my Promised and I were alone on the savannah, without cover. A spaceship's lander appeared. We did not even know what it was. They killed 172 Tarkij. I'd never seen a stopper before, either. They returned me to Kirin, Shieda commanding. When he learned that I was not virgin, he used me. He sold me in Sopur. I was bought by a longhauler-an IP ship, and sold on Hawking, out near Homeworld. I had a decent enough life there, but it lasted all too short a while. My owner died and I was taken to Resh. I was bought by Si-cuan for his son Chulucan-" "The part hardest to believe," Ramesh Jageshwar said. Good, the mused, you've accepted the false part, then! "Huh! You ain't heard nothing yet." "I've heard it all, several times," he reminded her. "It's the next part that is so hard. "Go on." "I wish I had specified two drinks: I could do with stronger." (The soporific effect of the Heaven High, un-offset by the gentle wine of ungentle Terasaki, had muted the brightness of the sky beyond the transparent wall, mauved the mountains, made his face even younger, and alerted her senses to the fibers of the carpet.) Seeing him dial another drink, she went on: "They'd done something to me-they can do a lot of things, on Hawking 'way out near Homeworld-so that I appeared nearly virginal, for whatever that's worth. It didn't matter to Chulucan. He had no use for my stash anyhow. That slimeskunger liked women only for the entry we have in common with you men-and our warheads." A sudden flash of Daura hit her, and Janja slapped her breast idly. Both of them watched its tremulous dance. "I was there seven months. Believe me, the sisterslicer who designed your psychoid chamber could have taken lessons from that gentle priest and his son. I'd call 'em two-legged felines, but I've met 173 one of those and the HRal aren't nearly as cruel. Not nearly." She accepted the drink that popped up on the table-top. It was strong, and she made a face. She sipped twice. "Why-this's from out there-Hawking or Home-world! This's Scotch!" "Very good," he said, nodding. His eyes seemed hooded. A test, she thought, and affected not to be aware of it. She had passed. "My opportunity came. They were going to kill me that night. Once I learned that, I killed the old man and his son-" "Details?" Janja provided them, including the way she had thrust the slavetube into that orifice she had in common with Chulucan of Resh. He asked about the missing genitals. Janja explained about Aglayan rites. He nodded, then asked about Shieda's genitals. She expressed regret that she had not got that close to him. She told of the Jarp she had left locked up, about her being grabbed in the narcohead alley in Grim on Resh because she was too ignorant to stay out of such a place; she told him about her fellow Aglayan Whitey, and about her being befriended by the hust Kitsko, about her being taken in and housed at Kitsko's. Because of Whitey, whom they called Flash. She told him of the spaceflight off Resh, disguised, accompanying Whitey/Flash to Franji.* "WhyFranji?" "Have I failed to say? I had vowed to kill Shieda," she told him with a little shrug. "I've been en route to * All these events are detailed in SPACEWAYS #1, Of Alien Bondage. 174 our meeting for three years, in a manner of speaking." "And you found him on Resh." "On Aglaya. On my own planet." Another test? Damn. What did he know, this man with the eyes that seemed to see right into her and right out the other side? "Oh yes. And you killed Shieda then, back where he had found you. There's a lot of poetic justice in that." "I suppose. Was Shieda your man?" "Neg. Shieda was an independent. I can't think of anyone who will miss him." He flipped his fingers. "Anyhow-you got to Franji, and ..." "On Franji I met a man in a bar called Hari's and robbed him. Then I set about learning some things. I studied a lot. I met a spaceman named-never mind. I'll tell you if you demand it. I became his mistress-not by choice. Also his fellow crewmembers, all except for the Jarp. I like Jarps. Despite their reputation they aren't nearly the rapists you Ga-pardon me. Not nearly the rapists Galactics are." Again he shrugged with his fingers. "All right. We are. It is an ancient tradition among us humans, rape. It's sanctioned in the same ancient holy books that forbid it. So then what? I don't care about his name, by the way." "Well, he's

dead. I'm afraid I had to kill them. With their money and ship I outfitted a better ship-Hornet. I even recruited a few of his crew. They thought we were simply going aslaving, by the way, and had no idea that I went to my own planet to trap Shieda. I couldn't enslave Aglayans." "Really. Why's that?" She gave him a steady look. "I can't enslave my own. I'm a sentimental ass." He smiled. "I can stand that. I know about sentiment, believe it or not. Why Aglaya?" 175 She shrugged. "Home. My original home. It seemed fitting." "What did you hit Shieda's ship with?" "We were on the ground, a small ship, and they were up in parking orbit. They didn't think to fear us. Got 'em with a deprotonizer. Poof!" She smiled at him. It was a tight smile, in which the eyes failed to cooperate, and he studied it. "Why a depro gun?" "My secret." He leaned a little forward. "No, it isn't." Firmness and strength rode his voice. The man radiated great strength, great firmness, intense purpose. "All right then. It was all I could afford, that ancient and I understand short-lived weapon. Effective, wasn't it." "Shieda thought so, if he had time to think." Leaning forward from the divan, he opened the table and took out a small cube of clear plas. He looked into it. Ramesh Jageshwar smiled. "This still says you're still telling the truth." "You've already heard it, haven't you? Haven't you checked? By the way, do I ever get any clothing?" "Sometime, probably. We checked you partially, pos; back to Resh. Hawking takes longer, of course. I'll send the query by tachyon next month and we'll have the answer tomorrow. Have you ever used the name Yanya?" She chuckled. "No, but some people have called me that. Why is 'Jansa' so hard to pronounce?" "Don't look at me, Jansa. People are stupid, and especially about words that sound or look unusual." "Doesn't sound unusual to me." "All right. Think your story will check out on Hawking?" 176 This time she flipped her fingers. "If your sources are accurate, it will." She was right; there were records of her on Hawking, by now, 'way out there in the outermost of the Outer Worlds, because Rat Yao would have planted them. If he had asked about the privateer she had killed-and his mates-well, that was Raon, whom Yao had slain on Shankar-along with both his mates. By now records would show that she had purchased the depro gun on Shankar and installed it on Rahman, in secret. "I can't understand why the truth, my history, is so necessary, Ramesh Kshatriya." He leaned back on the couch and stared at her with the tiniest of enigmatic smiles. "Can't you? Even I don't know how many people want me, Jansa. Various people are extensions of me, in a way, and you've indicated that you thought Shieda was. You could have been-could be-part of an elaborate plot to placidate me. Too, there's another Reason." She waited, looking at him expectantly but otherwise letting the provocative statement hang there without the question he must expect. Ramesh Jageshwar rose, extending a hand. Naked, she took it and went with him. Down a corridor and into a big room done all in red and silver with a laserstrobe ceiling that was not quite this side of eerie. He opened a broad, tall maroon drape to reveal a huge three-dimensional picture; a holopainting. Full-length, and naked. A woman, with shoulder-length hair that was very light, ash-blond, and a slender, nicely curved body. She wore only a belt, deep purple and stark against her pale flesh. Buckled in silver, it hung aslant across her hips to support an empty holster. The stopper was in her hand, leveled at the viewer. "My sister, Daura." 177 "Odd sort of family pose, but she's lovely. She looks familiar, although I don't think I know her." He did not smile, much less chuckle. "You might better recognize a mirror image of her, since that's what you are accustomed to seeing. You are more like her," he said quietly, staring at the tall painting, "than anyone I have ever seen or hoped to see." "I beg your pardon?" He turned to look at her. "You are very much like my sister Daura," he said, and something shifted in Janja's mind. As he spoke that key phrase (one of seven possible variations prepared for her), the mental shackles that had protected her throughout interrogation and torture slid from the mind of Janja-not-Jansa. At once she remembered it all; who and what and why she really was, and why she was here. Now, if she were again questioned under drugs or surveillance of a liar's cube, she would immediately betray herself,

because she no longer believed the story she had repeatedly told here; the story she had believed was true, the whole time. It had been her "memory." Heretofore only she had been in danger. Now both she and TGO were. Ratran had installed the hypnochemic block and false story for her protection, of course. And for the protection of the far more important TransGalactic Order. 16 No man voluntarily pursues evil, or what he thinks to be evil. To prefer evil over good is not in human nature; when a man is compelled to choose between the two evils, no one will choose the greater when he can have the less. -Socrates He gave her things to wear. Skin-fitting things, oftener in white than in black or anything dark. Garments or "outfits" with interesting cutouts and hardware. Salacious and kinky things. The matching breast-cups and briefs of brass-imitating brass were nicely padded within for her protection. She laughed at them and felt ridiculous, but he told her they were sexier than nudity and part of an ancient space tradition. She wore them, naturally; the reason was simply because he provided them and wanted her to wear them. Another "outfit" consisted only in various long, flowing streamers of cloth, baby blue on one surface and silver on the other. More spacefaring tradition, he told her. On another occasion she was painted here and there, and otherwise wore nothing for an entire morning. Jan-ja really didn't mind. She was of Aglaya, not of them. Ramesh, she learned, was beset by neither guilt nor doubt about his slaving operations. He commanded many ships and derived income from 178 179 the operations of others whose captains were not directly in his employ but whom he backed or had backed when they were beginning their enterprises. (Janja was reminded of the way TGO kept various caught-and-released outlaws on call, for occasional use-or-else.) Interestingly, he was not served by slaves. Indeed he did not, she learned, really approve of slavery! It was merely a most excellent means of accumulating wealth by administering to the needs of rapacious people in power who were too stupid or cruel or uncaring to end slavery; leaders or "leaders" who had the need to be served by human beings whom they owned, body and mind. It was a matter in which Ramesh was not immoral, but un-moral. On the other hand he was beset by both doubt and guilt concerning his sister. The guilt had been with him for thirty years; he was aged forty-four years-standard. The siblings had begun to act as lovers when he was fourteen and she twelve. He was at pains to advise "Jansa" that it was not that either he or Daura had seduced the other, but that instead it was a mutual longing and drifting together that first time. It continued. Janja assumed that he was covering the fact that he had seduced Daura. Janja was wrong. As she came to know him better, she realized that he had chosen the opposite tack from the truth. He was covering for Daura. The just-nubile girl of twelve had initiated the incestuous liaison. To lie so as to cover for her was the way of Ramesh Jageshwar called Kshatriya. Again Janja was compassed about by swirling gray. It was hard not to think of this man as honorable, after over five weeks here with him. He and Daura had married, each to another. Within 180 two years he had been divorced. Since then he had lived unmarried, although that did not mean that he lived either unattached or celibate. His sister's husband had died four years after their marriage. A year later she had joined her brother in what became a permanent partnership, in business and in bed. A year or so after joining him, Daura had told Ramesh directly that she had slain her husband. His guilt heightened, though he had neither had anything to do with the murder nor even known about it. Ramesh Jageshwar, slaver and commander of scores of slavers, stealer and seller of thousands of human beings annually, felt no guilt about his business. His guilt came from his incest and was magnified by the fact that his sister had murdered her husband in order to come here and live with him, as His lover. He admitted to a feeling near relief when she vanished, months ago. At first he had assumed that she had been snatched by a rival. Then, when no threats or attempts at bargaining were made, he suspected something called the Outerworld League. "And when still nothing came, no demands or attempts to blackmail or bargain, I realized that she must be dead or the prisoner of The Gray Organization, which is as good as

dead." Janja, who knew very well that Daura was a prisoner of TGO, continued to hold her silence and let him talk. Since then, he told her easily, he had had many women. All, all of them were pale of skin and hair, slender of body. He had used skindye and even celldye to adjust the hair and skin of some likely candidates. But none of them was the Daura he was helpless not to seek, and he decided that none could take her place. "I thought it was the judgment of the gods," he said, to the ceiling. "I was to be punished by being forced to 181 live without her . . . and never to find with another woman what I found with her." "Which gods?" Janja asked, lying beside him on her back as he was, gazing up at their nude reflections in the mirrored ceiling above the gigantic airbed with its sheets of dark lavender satin. The room was carefully temp-controlled to make such ridiculous cold-conducting sheets pleasant. He waved a hand, letting it drop to her thigh. "Any gods. All of them, or none of them. Is it possible to believe in gods, unless one needs to, in spite of intellect? But all of us believe in some sort of justice, some sort of overriding force and purpose, Purpose with a capital letter, whether we need gods or admit to belief or not. So . . . belief in an overriding Force, a universal Purpose, is a form of belief in God or a god or gods." "Uh. And what had you found with her?" "Peace. Partnership. Joy. Comfort. Happiness, Jansa-with my own sister," he added, for he must torture himself. "In every way. She was the perfect partner -intelligent and ruthless! More ruthless than I. On the other hand I knew that I could trust her. She was the perfect sexual partner for me, too." His fingers tightened in the superlatively firm flesh of Janja's thigh. He stroked and kneaded it. "I just said 'was,' twice," he mused aloud in a wondering voice. "I used the past tense about Daura! Hmm." "And the others?" she asked. "All those substitutes you brought here or had brought here since her disappearance . . . what of them?" "Merely females," he said. "There was one with a brain . . . and unfortunately more avarice than I have ever encountered in anyone, anywhere. Two did possess, umm, inordinate abilities in bed. One of them had 182 no mind whatever. And the other, the Franjese girl with the ability to . . . to squeeze with her vulvar sphincter, like masturbating a man within her body . . . she was merely insipid. And of course false. Painted and dyed, all over hair and body." Janja closed her eyes. His hand had wandered. It was his left, crossing his body to hers as she lay on his right, and his thumb was probing. She moved on it, just a little, by tightening first one buttock beneath her and then the other. His hand made her want to grasp or seize her breast, to worry the nipple, and she forbore. "I asked," she said quietly, "what of them?" "They were returned to whence they came," he said in his often oddly formal way; at times he spoke the Galactic language-Erts-as if it were as new and alien to him as it was to Janja. "Most of them. All are better off than they were; naturally I saw to that. Two are far better off, financed so that they can and are using what abilities I saw that they possessed. Shivita, the avaricious one, is dead." "I won't ask more about them. Will I be returned to the Gotohell Bar? Where is my ship?" "Your ship is here," he said. "Here? On your planet?" "On Janat," he confirmed. He spoke the word, the name he had given this world, as if it meant "home" rather than "Garden of Paradise," its true meaning. Yet it did mean home to Ramesh Jageshwar, in a very real way. Janat was his. Janat was unsettled and otherwise unpopulated. "Garden of Paradise" or no, Janat's air was about as breathable as that of a planet he had studied, called Mars. Oxytanks and -masks were needed, and what need had Galactics to colonize a world whose air required that they cover their faces with such devices? On 183 the other hand, it was perfect for the headquarters of Ramesh Jageshwar. It was not unusual, he had told her, that "Jansa" had never heard of Janat. It was known only by numbers, an unsuitable planet. He had named it. The atmosphere and temperature within his keep were artificial and controlled. Janat's defenses were his. The fantastic defenses ringing this citadel high on its cuesta perch were his; the power systemry that made living here possible-all were his. He and his people had constructed it all, to his design. Below, within Janat, the keep of Ramesh Jageshwar sprawled in the

manner of a good-sized town. That was for the benefit of his employees here. Ramesh Jageshwar was a recluse. Like the barons of ancient Homeworld/Urth, he lived here, high in this aerie that he seldom left. Unlike those ancient nobles, he lorded it over no peasants below, fawning or rebellious or otherwise. Here, guarded from ground and air and space, almost fantastically defended by automatic systemry and cybers and humans as well, he presided over his empire, his business. His domain, which extended from here throughout the Galaxy. Here, in a big technologically-sophisticated-unto-superior command center whose interior Janja had never seen, he was in contact with ships and planets and cities and individuals all over the Galaxy. Reports flowed in constantly. They were taken and compiled and tested and compared by his cybernetic systems and by his secretariat of four, who passed most on to Durga Jhond, who passed them to his employer. (Communications coded URGENT were in the hands of Kshatriya almost instantly.) Ramesh trusted Durga and Durga trusted the secretaries. (They lived extremely well, though they never left Janat. Neither did Durga, and Ramesh almost 184 never did.) Because of their widespread comm-net and various check-lines, the secretaries did not have to trust anyone. They were able to test and compare, compile and report to their employer with certain knowledge that every comm had been sent by one of his people, somewhere. Durga Jhond lived his own way. His personal business, Ramesh said, was no concern of his, and had not been since he had decided he was Sure of the man, nine years ago. Long and lean and austere severe in manner and appearance, Durga kept a harem of nine or ten women and girls, replacing one now and again. Durga Jhond's sadism did not interfere with his work or the mental state of Ramesh or the secretariat. His women were masochists or at least so inclined. Durga Jhond was something that Ramesh could not be: a sadist, yes, but also an administrator, a laborious, pedestrian compiler of information and analyses and shrewd insights included as marginal notes, verbally presented with his reports. And he was wholly dirigible-steerable or manageable-for there had been many brilliant men in the history of the Galaxy who could not have run their own operations and recognized that fact and so became the confidants of kings and popes and entrepreneurs; the executives of executives. And of course Ramesh was what Durga could not be: a genius. A genius who needed the other man with his mandarin moustachioes and pointy black beard-which he wore, he did not hesitate to admit, because of their satanic appearance and connotations. (Janja looked up "Satan." The entry windingly led her to the puterbank entry headed "Fu Manchu.") "I need Jhond because genius is often ingenuous as well as ingenious," Ramesh Jageshwar had told her. 185 Because he had no stomach for the millions of details necessary to the prodigious operation he had created and kept alive, by his own genius and personality. Nor could any sort of computer or puter systemry handle all that Durga Jhond did, as Durga did; a very special human was necessary. Engaged in a business that many would call egregious-with a shudder-Ramesh thus could not afford to be concerned with Jhond's off-duty habits and predilections-which Ram Jageshwar found emphatically and grievously deplorable. Like many geniuses before him, whether they had masterminded the operation of the Roman Empire or the Holy Roman Empire or the British Empire or the PanAsian Accord or TAI-or TGO, perhaps-Ramesh worked for the love and joy of it, and he worked hard, many hours daily. And like those other geniuses, he was possessed of a superabundance of sexual desire and energy. And loneliness. Some things, many things, he could not share with Jhond. A genius-entrepreneur had no peers, Janja knew, any more than had a pope or a king or a president-even semicompetent ones without genius. Those who had shared had generally been mistaken in having done so; weakness led them to lower the barriers and take others into their confidence. Ramesh Jageshwar understood that, as to an unusual degree he understood himself. "Some men like me have taken their wives into their confidence and some have not. Some individuals in each group have been proven wrong in one way or another. But my sister . . . For years, before our marriages and after the dissolution of those unfortunate alliances . . .

and the re-establishment of the alliance of our teens, I was fortunate in having a true confidante, Jansa. I could trust Daura not only to keep my secrets but to discuss and suggest and assist; to share rather than to serve me-as Jhond does. As prime ministers and chancellors so frequently have served, only partially sharing if at all-until and unless they themselves seized or assumed the power of lesser men." "Or overly trusting men," Janja said, and had to add, "and women." "Pos. But they never succeeded in seizing the power of conquerors," he said. "And you are a conqueror, Ram," she said, and knew that she spoke truth. He turned directly to her and stared into her eyes with those piercing ones of his. "So are you a conqueror, Jansa." She looked into those eyes, and met his lips with hers. In the almost six weeks since she had come here, a raped captive sent for and fetched to be questioned, chastised, perhaps killed, Janja had replaced the woman she resembled. Because she was herself, and because of what had been taught her and done to her by Ratran Yao and TGO, she resembled Daura both outwardly and inwardly. No woman, no honest person could fail to respect and admire the perpetually-generating dynamo that was Ramesh. Like other such men, he radiated confidence with his competence; he radiated power. Sent here in disguise, as a trickster to gain his confidence and destroy him, Janja had become as caught up with Ramesh Jageshwar as she knew he was with her. Now she had asked, not quite seriously, what would be done with her and where her ship was; and he had told her that her Hornet was here on Janat. He rose on one elbow to look down at her. "Would you like to see your nice little Hornet!" "I have been a prisoner here for over five weeks," she said. "I welcome the opportunity to go outside, for any reason." He stared down at the supine woman with hurt and sadness in his eyes. "Oh Jansa! Are you a prisoner?" "I don't remember coming here willingly." She smiled a lazy, devilish, sensuous smile, and circled his neck with her arm. "Whether I am a prisoner now is for you to say." He shook his head, and he spoke low and quietly. "You are emphatically not a prisoner, Jan." She pulled him down to her. "I am," she said, "'whether you think so or not.'" After they had kissed, rubbing their bodies together gently so that only the surfaces touched in soft all-body caresses, he spoke again, in that quiet, low voice. "Then you will be free today. I do not think of you as a prisoner." And what did I say I am-a dam' good TGO agent? Again she showed him the lazy smile he loved; a smile that was not Daura's at all. "Ah . . .but I didn't say that I am an unwilling prisoner, my Ram." She drew him down again, and in moments they were panting into each other's mouths and in minutes more she was crying out as once again she received his seed. After a few more minutes he came out of her softly, and then both of them were at her with hands at vulva and nipples, mildly mistreating both, and within a minute more she was screaming anew in a boiling release. Soon they rose and showered and dressed. Janja was delighted to see what was laid out for her: the piratical clothing she had worn when Redhand Gopal had brought her here-the protective white body-stocking, the black vest and belt and gloves. Yet these were not the garments she had worn. The skintight body-stocking was of the newer monofilament metallic weave that was spun out, at tremendous expense and with an ever more transcendent retail price, into fabric softer and thinner and far more beautiful than silver lame had ever been. This garment was deceptively lightweight. She glided into it. The belt was jeweled, and the gems were real. So was the stopper in its holster. It bore his crest on the butt. So did the one he wore, when they met again outside the wonderful large room that was hers, with one entire wall a hologram of Aglayan savannah and forest. He wore a jumpsuit in a chocolate brown that was neither loose nor snug. The pants-legs bloused over his boots. "Damn!" he said with a glad smile, "You look wonderful, madam-good enough to fuck." "You just did," she said, thrusting an elbow at his ribs. "Damn." In the swift, unmarked little flyer he used, its armor and armaments well disguised, they soared out from the great hill surrounded by his citadel. Half around unpopulated Janat they swooped, and down to a mountain, and into that mountain, and into an unassumingly raw-looking

cave-mouth. Inside, it was far from unassuming or raw, but presumptuous and sumptuous. A great well-lighted cavern begun time out of mind by Nature and completed by the money and workers of Ramesh Jageshwar Kshatriya. There lay the sleek charcoal-gray ship with its black trim: Hornet. Inside were the most modern equipment and accommodations. In its hide, ready to slither out and become unequivocally deadly, were the most modern of weapons that Rat Yao had been able to provide with TGO money. Janja saw that the ship was Hornet no longer. On its sleek flanks was painted the new name she had not known about: KSHATRIYA JANSAN. 189 With Janja at the controls—hardly necessary, since ship's puter, housed in a cube a half-meter on a side, took as complete control as it was allowed—they fled out across Janat, a streak of black and deepest gray impatiently ready to take on more speed and rise beyond the clouds, beyond a sky that was yellow and white with a bit of blue. Back they came, Janja laughing and her eyes flashing, to swoop once more within the cavern, Ram pretending fear all the way. The three loyal servicers—guards, all men, were awaiting the emergence of their master and his leman. They waited. And waited, for Janja would not leave the ship without making love within its handsome shell, and Ram would deny her nothing—certainly not that. At last they emerged, the master and his leman. Yet she was not that. She was his mistress, which did not mean leman or doxy or paramour or whore but was merely the feminine form of "master." "Good ship," he commented. "Good ship-handler too," she said, with eyes alight. "And you were scared, weren't you!" "Oh sure. Scared half to death. Biting my nails all the way. Want to go again?" No, and they returned to the aerie he called Citadel Cuesta. They were old words from a dead Homeworlder language, describing a fortress on a hill, one side of which was a sheer drop and the other a long scarp. That did not matter; "Citadel Cuesta" was marvelously exotic. Inside he shifted to the robe he loved, while requesting that she remain in the silver and black that hugged her so lovingly. He liked it; it was sexy. Janja was more than willing to comply. "All that worries me, Jansa, is your own recklessness in a ship like that," he said, lifting his glass—not only 190 was it not a plass made of plas, it was etched crystal and it rang. "You have one dreadful fault. You have more bravery than sense." "Well, you don't have to worry about me in a ship like that one," she said, overdoing the archness. "I'll just stick to that one, not one like it." "Twit me about my grammar and I'll rape you, rotten bitch!" "Twit. . .twit. . .twit. . ." She was grinning and he chuckled. Then she cocked her head, sipping, to show him that she was listening. "Your action regarding Shieda was senseless; your reaction and strutting about after his death, allowing yourself to be taken—that was simply stupid." He smiled to show her that the sting in the word was not his doing; that he was stating a fact, admonishing rather than chastising or attacking. "Wrong," she said in a strong voice, and set down her drink with an air of finality and determination. "I wanted to be taken. I wanted to be brought to you, to be here. I wanted to be sliced by you, and I wanted to be alone with you here this way, right now." He stared at her intense eyes, which were staring. He sat forward sharply. "Wha-why?" Janja told him. She told him all of it this time, naming Ratran Yao and going into detail about Daura's kidnap and Janja's training. He listened, and he repeated his one-word question: "Why?" Before he could move to counter her, she took from its holster the stopper he had given her . . . and just as his eyes flared, she tossed the nasty little cylinder to him. He caught it in a reflex movement unslowed by his shock. Almost at once, he laid it on the divan beside him without looking at it. Both of them knew the stopper 191 was in fine working order. His giving it to her had been a sign of trust. She had tested it, outside, without feeling sorry for the weird orange lizard she Fried. There were nearly as many lizards in the universe as people. Cheap, both of them. He repeated himself still again. "You could have used it," he said. "Then, or on the ship when we were alone, and kept on going. You could have used it and taken me anywhere or killed me. Why didn't you? Why have you told me all this, TGO agent?" Janja shrugged. "You know, Ram. You know my story, and you know

me. All you have to do is get used to calling me Janja rather than Jansa, and that doesn't matter. I don't belong on Aglaya any more, and I don't belong with them-with TGO. You have more honor than Ratran Yao or any of his Gray Organization. I think you are worthy of Aglaya, Ram. I belong with you, Ram. If you don't agree . . . you have the stopper, now." He gazed at her, studying her. She searched his face for pain. He closed his eyes. Trying not to cherm, she chermed no menace. He picked up the stopper and her heartbeat stepped up. He looked at the weapon distastefully, sadly, and leveled it at her. Janja's cherming ability gave no warning, but she held her breath as she waited, just the same. She had gotten around Ratran first, by having the clammup taken out of her mind so that she could talk openly on this mission, once her captor had said one of the releasing phrases. She and Rat had foreseen that she might need to tell Ram who and what she was. Now the next hurdle. She had got past Rat; would she get past Ramesh? He tossed her the stopper. She didn't catch it. Instead she batted it aside with her 192 wrist. It rolled across the carpet and was swiftly joined by two bodies not at all interested in the weapon. The stopper lay forgotten while Ram and Janja hurled themselves into their wildest bout of lovemaking yet. He had denied her what she had started to do, weeks ago, and then had asked for. No. His first act with his sister, he had told her, had been her taking him in her mouth when she was twelve and he fourteen, to suck his seed from him. She had done it frequently, ever after, because she loved it and so did he. He had not allowed that to Janja. He had not been ready to admit that much, to give that much. This time she gave him no opportunity to demur or pull back, knowing as he knew that all prohibitions were at an end between them. While his mouth worried at hers, seeking simultaneously to enter and to enclose it in his fiery enthusiasm, her fingers caressed the inside of his thigh. She stroked and squeezed and caressed until, by unspoken common accord, they separated and sprang to their feet to strip. They lurched as if drunk, and that could have accounted for the glaze in their eyes. Neither was drunk-not on alcohol or any other drug except each other. The seams of her body-stocking ran down both shoulders and over her breasts and down the fronts of her legs. Hurling the belt from her, she touched the tiny depolarizing mechanism in her left armpit. The taut-stretched cloth sprang away like a clipped fence, and fell from her. Her clothing fell to the green-gold carpet with his, and before he could move she dropped to her knees. Her hands shot out. One clutched his haunch, pulling him to her, while the other guided him into her mouth. He grunted at the feel of the humid clasp. She had to do it, had to try, she had to attempt, again and again, to try to become whole. 193 She was an Aglayan woman, and yet she was not on Aglaya and she was not complete, not whole. She wanted to do this and it was more than that. It was necessary to a woman of Aglaya, mandatory; an obligatory act of fellatio. She exerted all the power she possessed in that first sunken-cheeked suction, as if seeking to drag rather than to coax his semen from him in a moment, lest he refuse her. Yet that was impossible, and not truly her goal. She knew his control. She knew his ability to maintain an erection for an hour or longer, putting off and putting off that final helpless flurry of action that was a race to climax. Too, less than three hours had passed since they had sprawled half on and half off the captain's couch of the spacer Kshatriya Jansa, his gift to her. He was not a boy, to spurt again so soon, despite his excitement. She drew back her head to tease him with her hot breath, and he did not withdraw while she teased and squeezed, and poked with her tongue until he shivered and groaned. "Ah god, that's good, you're good," he murmured, quivering, and he remained where he was. She drew him into her mouth again, her lips caressing him and shielding him from her teeth, while he looked down at her with glazing eyes. He watched the sleek blond head that bobbed more and more frenetically. The contrast of that long dark shaft disappearing into the soft paleness of her face was irresistible. It made him hunch and groan and stroke her hair, trying not to grasp it. Her ravenous mouth seemed unable to get enough of him, to do enough to and with and for his beloved slicer, which she was thinking of in Aglayan

terms, insofar as she was capable of thought: lifegiver. His beloved lifegiver. 194 He groaned, again and again, and shudders went through him as wordless exclamations gusted from his mouth—a mouth he could not close. Then, because the urgency came upon him and he had to, now, he took over. He bent a little to seize her head. With her cheeks close-pressed between his hands, he tightened his small taut buttocks still more and thrust, thrust, plunging himself in and out of her face until she moaned with the impalement, the use that, for the first time, she welcomed. And relished. Her hand felt the new tensing of his buttocks as he thrust harder, groaning as he lost control and plunged deeper into her face. She maintained her strong suction when it began and while he spurted and when it had ended, until he was nearly screaming with the exquisite pleasure-pain of his climaxing into the powerfully sucking mouth. Staggering back, he collapsed onto the couch and sprawled weakly, gasping. Janja sank lower, still on her knees, and pillowed her face on his thigh while she swallowed again and again. 17 To the sick man his food appears to be bitter, and to the wealthy man the opposite of bitter. —Plato, Theaetetus

Now do you understand, Janja? The question interrupted and elicited a sleepy groan from Janja. She twisted and sighed and tried to root deeper into the soft caress of the satin sheet. "Mnnmf." "Wake up, Jan!" She obeyed without wanting to. Turning onto her back, feeling him warm there beside her—and feeling his tension. Janja frowned. He repeated it: Now do you understand? She turned her head to find him up on one elbow, gazing at her with a very serious expression. She answered it with a frown. "Now do I understand what?" He gazed at her and she heard his words: / didn't say anything. He said that, and she knew he said that because she heard him. Except that she was looking at him while she heard it, and his mouth was closed and his lips did not move. Janja stared, shaking off the muzziness of sleep. 195 196 Realization and then assimilation took a moment; then. .. "You—" She lurched up into a sitting position. "You —I heard you but—you're Aglayan!" He nodded. I am from Aglaya, he said, but his lips did not move. At the same time the picture entered her mind: Janja "saw" a mental picture of sky and rainforest and Phrillias dragging at their overladen stems. He "said," I was stolen from Aglaya by a slaver when I was eighteen. A picture of that came into her mind, crowding, muddy and yet there. She realized that this was his memory; that she was seeing what he saw behind his eyes. The muddiness was because he did not remember exactly. Thus the picture that entered her mind from his was like an artist's unfinished work: here color and detail, there dimness, achromatism, or plain blankness. At once she saw his face, and she saw his memories, and she "heard" him as well: My sister and I both, of course—she was sixteen. (Yes; Janja saw the young Daura, or whatever her real name was—oh yes, there was her name, and his as well. Their Aglayan names. Pale, both of them. He was a pale and straw-haired Aglayan, her dark, dark Ram!) The pictures kept coming as he told his story, speaking aloud while his memories showed hers the details: "We gained our freedom much the same as you did yours, but much sooner. Our captor was little more than a one-man operation. He had a small ship and a crew of three. We killed all four of them. Daura had the rudiments of the ship's operations from his mind." (Janja saw blood and twisted faces and bodies; his face a twisted, ugly mask of anger and savagery; Daura looking simply vicious, as though enjoying herself while she stabbed the man again and again. And then of course 197 she sliced off his genitals, for she was of Aglaya.) "Daura had a great deal more from his mind, too. We learned computry as we went and of course that ship's SIPACUM helped. We became slavers. We were lucky and smart and of course we had Daura's ability. In two years we had three ships. All her abilities were of tremendous value, in any situation." (Flash of Daura: delightedly killing.) "In five years we dominated the slavers. In seven we were king and queen of the slavers. I was twenty-eight when we discovered this world and made it our headquarters. We hardly had all this installation then! This place was finished only six years ago." Janja heard, and saw, but she had to go back and repeat it to herself and sort it out later. The elation of her new ability was

paramount now, and transcendent; she had sucked and drunk the lifejuice of an Aglayan. Among Aglayans orally ingested semen gave women a great deal more than life. On Aglaya at least seven in ten women were born with the knowing; the ability to cherm, to feel emotions and attitudes of nearby persons. By puberty the factor might have been some 85 per cent of females who could cherm. Yet those women were not whole, with their abilities. Once each drank from a man's loins, the ability to choncel was on her. It was that ability known to the Galactics as passive or receptive telepathy: "mind-reading." That was the reason why the ancient taboo was so strong: fellatio was reserved for wives. It was a way of combating adultery and avoiding a youth-revolt-too much power in the hands or rather minds of those too young and unattached to be trusted to use it properly. A married woman was the "property" of all married persons, any one of whom could take sanctions if she misused her power. Thus lying was impossible, and false 198 testimony, since other women would know instantly. Because she had been born with the cherm power, the knowing, and they had wed, and had drunk from her husband's loins (seldom on the wedding night, though occasionally; no taboo governed that, but there was tradition and her husband's desire to burst into her vagina and expend himself there in response to instinct and the mandates of biplogy and reproduction), she heard the thoughts of others in her mind as if they were spoken words. It was part of that which told Janja that Aglayans were not of the same stock as Galactics and so, technically, not human. Beyond human. Ramesh Jagesh-war, of course, had dyed both his skin and his hair at the cellular level, and changed both his navel and his canine teeth, one way or another. With the technology and command of biochemical science the Galactics possessed, very little was impossible and what was possible had become far from difficult. Janja had sought the ability to choncel from the loins of a Jarp once, in the household of her first owners after Jonuta (oh, she would have to correct that lie to Ram; it was Jonuta who had taken her off Aglaya, not Shieda). Nothing had changed. She had sought it from Whitey/ Fidnij, who would not allow her to perform the act on him. She had sought it from another Jarp, and from Ratran Yao. It had not happened. The catalyst had not been there. Something prompted the catalytic action to change her mind—an enzyme that opened a closed portion of the mind of an Aglayan woman? It was missing, she supposed, from the semen of the men of all planets except Aglaya. That was logical. Naturally Galactic scientists had never sought to seek such an enzyme; they were not even aware of the chonceling ability of those 199 they took as slaves from a planet they hypocritically called "Protected." It was racial. The power was not just something within the woman of Aglaya. It was what was within her when combined with the admixture of some (enzyme?) substance in the semen of a man of her own people. Her own race. The race of Aglaya, as unique in the Galaxy as the race of Jarpi or Croz or Shirash. It had happened. Ram was an Aglayan, and she had given him the Deepkiss. And now she was whole, a superwoman among these people, among the members of this Galaxy-dominating race she thought of as them. 18 He must be of a strange and unusual constitution who can content himself to live in constant disgrace and disrepute within his particular society. . . . This is a burden too heavy for human sufferance. ? -John Locke "It won't work, Ram." He looked up, his eyes questioning, but she did not "hear" his thoughts, by her choice. On Aglaya, for a woman constantly to remain attuned to her man's mind was as "unfair" and dangerous as for a Galactic to hypnotize his wife without her knowledge. The relationship would be jeopardized. In the month since she had drunk that first time from Ram's staff and thus gained the ability to receive thoughts, Janja had learned another reason for learning to damp them out. The power was also a curse. The constant influx into her mind from the minds of others was horrid, brain-shattering. Nor was it only Ram's mind that hers "heard." She had learned to damp them out, at least partially. Although she could not totally block the thoughts emanating from a group of people, or even all of Ram's when he was angry or otherwise emotionally wrought up and unintentionally "broadcasting loudly," Janja had made contact with her self, and changed her

self and her newfound power. She had learned to not-hear as well as to hear. 200 201 She did not listen in, did not choncel Ram (as his sister had not) unless they agreed in advance. He was far more experienced at being choncceled than she was at doing it, and often knew when to make the request. She did not choncel when she told him it would not work and he looked up with a quizzical expression, but of course she heard his spoken query: "What, Jan? What won't work?" She told him, looking at him and liking the way he looked. He had accepted the injection that reversed the cytochromatic change of his hair's color, and of his skin. Though he retained some tan, Ramesh Jageshwar was straw-blond, an Aglayan who looked like an Aglay-an-for her. "I have been thinking about it for weeks," she told him. "It just won't work this way. Me hGOO." He buttoned off the financial reports he had been reviewing onscreen for the past hour. She knew he took in vast sums of money. Despite the luxury of this moun-taintop villa and his business expenditures, she could not imagine what he did with so many stells. After years of experience with Daura he knew how to mask his thoughts to a degree, and she would not probe his brain with hers. "Why?" he asked. "Why won't it work? Isn't it working?" She sighed and crossed the room to look out on the kilometers and kilometers of vista commanded by the windows of his aerie. "They will find out about us, Ram. They will tell your sister. They will find a way to prove it to her, and she will begin talking. In anger, in hurt. She will tell them everything she can, and she will agree to testify. Then you are lost, and . . . so am I." "While I think that no threats or torture would make 202 Daura tell what she did not want to tell, I agree with you. I hadn't thought of it. Yes, in hurt and anger she might. What do you suggest?" He spoke from behind her, and she shook her head, biting her lip as she turned back to face him. He sat half-turned from the big blank screen, an Aglayan who was king of the slavers. Gray, she thought. Both of us. Or perhaps there is no white-for-good left, when an Aglayan is a slaver and furthermore the slaver. Perhaps we are not gray at all, but the absolute darkness of pure evil. "I might be able to get her released . . . back here . . . but if I did that... oh Ram, you and she might take up again, and where am I?" She gazed at him a moment in anguish before adding, "Or ... I could probably kill her. She will be unable to choncel me, I think. We have our ability from the same source, and I think that means we can't choncel each other." "You are telling me that you love me." "Oh darling-of course I love you!" He rose and came to her. His hands rose to her arms and gripped them tightly. His eyes were hard on hers. "Choncel," he said, and she did, and he said, "Jan-ja, Janja-I love you as much as I can love," and she choncceled, and knew that he spoke the truth. She lunged against him. They were silent for a long while, embracing. "And I love you without guilt," he told her. "I knew a lifetime of guilt with her; thirty years of guilt with my vicious sister. It is ridiculous, I know, but . . . its's as strong a prohibition among them as it is on Aglaya, a sexual relationship between brother and sister. Consider their insulting epithet: 'sisterslicer!' Janja ... I don't want Daura back." "Yet you will also feel guilt at leaving her in captivity. If not now, eventually.'" 203 He said nothing, and she knew that he could not deny it. "Then I must see that she is dead," she said, pushing back a little to look into his eyes-blue, blue eyes-and the mind behind them. He shook his head. "No. I cannot ask you or make you or even let you do that, for me. I shall kill her." She looked at him and he nodded, bidding her choncel, that she might know his thoughts. She did, and she choncceled what he could not know: he thought that he would do as he said. He thought that he would slay his sister Daura who had so long been his lover; slay her without passion, without hate or love either, and with little remorse. He would do it for Janja, for himself and Janja, and for himself. She saw with shock that it was in that order, in his mind. She was first: Janja. And then their future together, and then the safety of him and his organization. So much emotion rose up inside her that she thought her knees would give way and she might fall. She did not, clinging to him and staring into his blue Aglayan eyes

while she read his thoughts, and saw what he did not know. He thought, now, that he could kill Daura that way and for those reasons, and Janja saw that he was wrong. He could not. She saw his true thoughts, his underlying thoughts; those that were not conscious. Daura was that ruthless. Ramesh was not. Janja did not tell him. What will happen, will happen. If I must die, at least I have at last found a good reason to live, and . . . and that is also a good reason to die. For him. She nodded. "I am their agent. I can bring her here, Ram. I will." 19 There is nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so. -Shakespeare, Hamlet "Do you know who we are?" the woman asked, the woman who was so much like Janja both in body and in mind, though twice her age. They were in Hornet, its name changed again for this mission, and they were fleeing back to Janat. Janja had deliberately set course that looked as if it would take her out toward Qalara, and then had converted ship and occupants to tachyons and taken the Tachyon Trail, and again, and still again. If Ratran Yao or anyone else were somehow following, Hornet's SIPACUM did not know it. Janja's argument with Ratran had been long and often loud. She had won, primarily because knowing the thoughts of one's opponent was a tremendous advantage. Nor had Ratran Yao any notion of her ability -or of Daura's. He had agreed to the release of Daura to Janja, agent Janja, and they left the TGO base (which was not on Homeworld, as he had told her, or on Resh, as he had told her, or any of the other places he had told her and was not indeed TGO headquarters, she knew now from 204 205 his mind; Ratran did not know where the headquarters of TransGalactic Order was, nor the name of its director. He did want very much to know, and for the first time Janja knew what perhaps only Ratran Yao knew: that he wanted to be Director, TGO. It was indeed a shadow organization, gray, and composed of gray shadow-people). "I know who you are, pos," Janja said. And lest Daura think that she might be lying, or sure in false knowledge; "You are both of Aglaya, as I am. You were both stolen into slavery, as I was. You both freed yourselves, too, as I did. It did take me rather longer." Another long silence followed. They sat together, the two blonds whose resemblance was almost eerie, while the ship conducted itself through space out past Barbro Transfer Station. It did so very nicely without their help or interference. The silence was painful. Onboard News Service broke it, but at once gave Janja something else to think about. It reported the gleeful welcome by many spacefarers (and the uproarious opprobrium of others) of a new phenomenon along the spaceways. At last a replacement had arrived for Ganesa and her hust-ship Be Lively, which had vanished with all hands a year or so ago. The new spacefaring brothel, ONS advised, was called Stay Lively!. It featured some very attractive and superlatively exotic girls. Furthermore the ship was luxury itself. Not just an inspace brothel or a spaceship, but a yacht. It was the personal property of the new proprietor of the Galaxy-serving floating whorehouse. She too served the clients, and her name was Seerava. Janja remembered how excited Lady Seerava had been about taking care of those poor spike-heeled, corseted girls off Manjanungo's ship. How she had babbled of having purpose at last, and of her determination 206 to give purpose to the liberated girls, along with employment. Oh, Seera! I wonder if you had this in mind all along, while you drove me to distraction with your do-gooder babble! I suppose it is what they are best suited for, Jan-ja thought, making a face. And not even they could say whether they are willing whores-what will did Man-janungo leave them? And I made this possible! Gray, gray! O Sunmother and Aglii and Booda and Lord Musla and Too and Lady Vikeand Theba and-and all You other gods or "gods" -what a gray, gray universe You all preside over! Abruptly Daura-short, blond, calfy of leg, small of breast though not so small as Janja had been-snapped off the News. When Janja glanced at her, it was to find the other woman fixing her with an intense gaze from blue-tinged gray eyes just a bit more colorful than Janja's. "Have you Deepkissed him?" Janja nodded without breaking eye contact. Daura made a tiny gasping sound and was silent for another long period; hundreds of thousands of kloms fled past the ship-although a kilometer was hardly a sensible means of measuring distance,

from a spaceship on whose viewscreens suns in all their colors could be seen to have moved without quite being seen in motion; rather like the minute-hand on the archaic watches some people affected. After many millions of kloms--still no sensible measurement--Daura spoke again: "Can you chancel me?" "Neg. And I know you cannot me, or you'd ask no questions." "Because we both drank from the same man." "Apparently it isn't merely legend." "Hmm. And that swine, Ratran Yao? You chancelled him?" 207 "Of course. If I hadn't known what he was thinking, I'd never have got you out, Daura." "You chancelled that he loves you?" Janja shrugged. "He respects me. It isn't love--it's hate. He only believes it is love, because we are both strong and respect that in each other. We hate each other, Daura. We wallowed in the sex embrace and it was good and better than good. But it was an act out of our mutual hatred, not love." "That's nonsense." Daura--like, Janja shrugged. Daura stared at her. "And . . . Kshatriya?" "I do not call him by your name for him," Janja said, hoping to evade the question; hoping her non-answer would be enough, It was not: "Never mind that. Do you love him?" "I will not answer," Janja said, looking at the console. They talked without looking at each other. Two women who were mental superwomen, but not with each other. They might have been pitted against each other as spy and counterspy, in fiction. They were not characters of fiction. Two slender women with pale flesh and hair almost white. Daura's was very long; she had been long incarcerated, and was older besides. Daura, Janja was sure, was older and much wiser than she (and much more ruthless, calculating), and so she would not look at the sister of Ramesh Jageshwar. Queen of the Slavers. "Does he. . . does he . . ." "Ask him." Janja turned to her then; they were side by side in the adjustaseats before the control console of Hornet and the (artificial) window of the main viewscreen. "I have gained you your freedom from The Gray Organization, Daura. You know that I am their agent--or 208 was--and so does Ramesh. We cannot be friends; I understand that. On the other hand we need not be enemies. Surely there is no need for you to be torturing yourself." The older woman glared at her, her face working, eyes bright. "You will not survive this, Janja," she said. "There cannot be three of us. He and I have been lovers since we were--" "-Twelve and fourteen," Janja supplied, and Daura gasped. "Yes," she hissed at last. "Twelve and fourteen. And you are--after all their agent--or began as such." Her smile was not pleasant. "You will not survive." Janja refused to look at her. She kept herself reminded of Daura's ruthlessness and penchant for violence--and apparent enjoyment of killing--however, and was ready for a sudden movement from her right. She stared at the screen. The little multicolored pinpoints of light and particularly the larger circles of brightness had changed, and their configuration was different. The largest white disk had vanished; that sun was "behind" them, now. "You torture yourself," she said, "and now you seek to torture me with words and thoughts. If I believe what you say I should kill you, or return you to TGO and Ratran Yao." "You know you dare not try to return me. You would not survive that attempt, either." "We will arrive together, then. I have no wish to slay you anyhow. But--" Janja turned to face her with a level gaze that showed openness and serenity, rather than malice. "But if my life--reading ends, the ship automatically returns to base. And TGO and Ratran Yao. So, Daura. We are safe from each other." 209 "Until we reach Janat," Daura muttered. Not only was her face full of malice, but Janja could cherm menace from the woman. Cherm, not chancel. "Until we reach Janat," Janja said. Onscreen, the little lights continued to change. Some grew and some shrank while others vanished, passed by. One continued to grow larger and larger. Around it circled, in eternal begirding orbit, four planets. Janat was the second. 20 Everything has by nature as much right as it has power. . . . good and evil indicate nothing positive in things considered in themselves, nor are they anything else than modes of thought. . . . One and the same thing may at the same time be both good and evil or indifferent.... --Spinoza Brother and sister embraced. Ramesh, wearing the little skullcap he and Daura had long ago devised, laughed and told them both that he would not have two women in his mind

simultaneously. "Now we all wear metal," he said, "like the barbarians they think we of Aglaya are. I with my mesh-cap and you with your belt, Daura, and you Janja in that ancient armor." "Simulation," Janja smiled, and her fingerflip was deliberate; she would not mimic Daura's shoulder-shrug. Daura's "belt" was a number of paper-thin strips of gleaming silver metal that began just below her breasts and circled her slender body down to mid-hip; from there a standard side-slit Bleaker skirt swung to caress her insteps, in ice-blue. Janja's twinkling copper-colored tunic was unfitted but clung; it was in imitation of an ancient form of armorshirt called scale-mail. With 210 211 it she wore what she thought of as Quindy pants: red, they were quite snug above but belled below the knees like little skirts. Ramesh's beige-trimmed mauve robe covered him from throat to insteps, though its sleeves were only three-quarter length. He was barefoot. Brother and sister embraced, and he dialed drinks, and they raised three richly-detailed crystal goblets of kerala to one another. Janja still preferred wines, but kerala was Daura's favorite drink. "Much, much better than that swill my captors have fed me, Kshatriya! Will our rescuer pardon us while my brother and I exchange our greetings in private?" "It is the way of Aglii," Janja said, giving the ritual response, for on Aglaya it was the wont of those close to each other to withdraw for a few minutes after a separation. They departed. She stood and stared out the great wall-window at lovely, lonely Janat while she waited, ignoring the kerala she had only tasted but smoking a Heaven High to relax the nerves she told herself (unsuccessfully) were not agitated. They returned, and she turned to face them: Ram, frowning, looking worried and unhappy, Daura wearing a cold smile of triumph. Janja sighed. It is now, then. "Daura has told me of how you made your report to your TGO superiors, under drugs so that you told only truth. And of how you bragged to her on Hornet of how you would now have us together to turn over to The Gray Organization. What do you have to say?" "That it is not true," Janja said quietly. "Ratran Yao mentioned truth-drugging me. I acted indifferent and he forgot it, since I did not appear to care. Naturally I said no such thing to her on our way here. She did tell me as 212 we came, though, that I would not survive once she was back with you again." Daura made a snorting sound. Her cold smile widened a little. Janja was impressed. Ram nodded. Staring at Janja, he drew the stopper from the holster he had not worn when he and Daura left the room. "I am sorry," he said. "Obviously the three of us cannot survive together-and obviously one of you is lying." He was staring at the coppery scintillance of Janja's metallic shirt; she was staring at the dark muzzle of the stopper and wondering if it was set on Fry. She raised her gaze to Daura's. "Goodbye," Janja said. "Fry her!" Daura said intensely. He raised the stopper but did not do as she bade. The weapon was set on Two. Janja Danced. Even as she shuffled and shivered, she was aware of the sound of Daura's laughter. "Let me! Let me, Kshatriya!" Janja staggered as the beam was taken off her, and saw Ramesh hand the stopper to his sister, and step away. Staring at Janja from a face that wore a grin that was a rictus of pure malevolence, Daura deliberately clicked the stopper's setting up a notch. To the Third setting: Fry. At least it is swift, Janja thought, willing her sphincters to hold, willing herself not to try to flee or attack across too many meters of carpet. Wearing that grin, looking abruptly not at all beautiful or even pretty, Daura raised the dark cylinder. "On the count of three," she said, in a low voice that quivered with excitement, "you are molecules! One-" "O Aglii, but you are rotten," Ramesh Jageshwar said. 213 "Two-" "I had to know that you would do it," he said, and drew the stopper out of the pocket of his robe, and leveled it at his sister. Janja saw his knuckles whiten as he squeezed, far harder than necessary to trigger the weapon. She heard the faint beginning of a cry, saw and squinted before the bright flash of light, the wavering image in the air. She caught only the hint of scorched air rather than flesh, and then Daura was dust and less. And then she was nothing, and her stopper thumped to the carpet. He squeezed so hard, Janja thought, starting at last to tremble, for he wanted to do it-he wanted to more than kill her! Ram's stopper made a

similar thud on the green-gold carpet. A moment later he dropped the mind-shielding skullcap beside it with a little clink. He looked at Janja, and his eyes were tortured. "I am sorry I made you Dance-sorry I had to torture you, but I-I had to -to know how evil she was ..." She rushed to him and he grunted at the impact of her body on his. Her mailshirt rustled with faint metallic sounds. She clutched him, and his arms came around her to squeeze just as hard. "I thought you believed her," she said brokenly into his neck. He squeezed harder, then thrust her from him, holding her almost at arm's length while his eyes stared into hers. "Oh Janja-you really did? Oh Janja! There was never any such thought in my mind-never any possibility of believing her over you. I had seen the two of you together. The one-the one I've so long lied to myself about, blinded myself-the one so cold, so calculating and ruthlessly vicious as she has always been; the other 214 warm and loving and strong, brave, a daughter of Aglay and worthy of Aglaya-O Janja! I realized that my sister has always been as nearly pure evil as a human can be. What a long and sick spell of infatuation I've been under! I could not have loved her. It was because we were both so strong and so-so wanting, so ambitious. We found none stronger, and respected each other and sneered at everyone else. I knew only guilt and my blindness about her. I love you, Janja." Her trembling returned and she felt weak in both legs. She tugged from him, turned from him. "I am cold, Ram. Slashed inside. Burned and scarred inside. Ratran Yao told me that some blows kill and some merely injure, leaving scars. He told me truth, Ram-that Jonuta's crewmember's killing Tarkij and stealing me left a scar in my head. He was right, as he was right about my eyes: burned out." She shuddered, starting to mention "ash" and thinking of Daura, who was less than ash. "And I am calculating, and vicious ... I cannot even smile. The perfect TGO agent." He touched her from behind, grasped her from behind, turned her and held her there, facing him. He was shaking his head, and the tightening of his hands on her arms hurt her. She did not mind. "Perhaps you are calculating," he told her, "but you are also direct. To attempt what Daura attempted could never be your way. To go further, to kill as she would have killed you-that is not within you, Janja. Vicious? Perhaps . . . you have killed . . . but do you love it, so that your nipples erect when you kill?" His voice had become more and more intense. "And your eyes-Janja, Janja! Haven't you looked in a mirror in the past month and more? Your eyes are bright, and they sparkle, and I have seen you smile again and again. Not the bitter Daura smile I saw when you first came here. 215 That's not the smile you flash at me, not any more." He smiled. "Choncel!" Janja gazed at him and she frowned, wondering. Was he right? Had it happened without her knowledge? And if it had-his mind told her that it had indeed-then was it because she had achieved her goal of slaying Jonuta, who would not stay dead, but then Shieda as a sort of substitute so that at last she felt freed of that quest for vengeance that she had thought was keeping her alive ... or was it a result of Ramesh Jageshwar. and her weeks here with him? She was silent on the ship, the charcoal-and-black Warrior Jansa as it swept through the vacuum separating Janat from Aglaya. She sat in a frequently-frowning, brain-wrestling silence, and he said little to her; he too was locked with his thoughts. He had slain his sister, his partner and paramour for three decades. Now, symbolically at least, Ramesh was taking Daura home. It was not that he still held the Aglayan belief that she needed to be where Aglii might more easily find her; he no longer believed in Aglii or Sunmother either. Nevertheless he was driven to this act, as Janja had known he would be. He was of Aglaya, and Daura was, and so was Janja who had been Janjaheriohir. The act was even more symbolic because of the fact that nothing remained of Daura save sub-microscopic particles. Yet he had decided that they were in the carpet, and that he would not walk on her, and that she and the carpet together would return to the soil of Aglaya. The re-renamed Hornet bore Janja, and Ramesh, and the great roll of green-gold carpet that so resembled Aglayan moss. The King of the Slavers was wrapped in thoughts of 216 his sister, and of Janja, and surely of himself. Nearby Janja was

thinking, in the main, about Janja. A thousand years ago she had promised Tribemother and her parents, and she and Tarkij had lived a year without enjoying each other's bodies, never giving in to the intensity of their youthful desire. That would have been wicked, and the girl named Janjaheriohir was not wicked. She had shrunk back from Tarkij on that day (a thousand years of experience ago); that day when the Sky-demons came, for she had promised Tribemother, and to have lain with Tarkij would have been to break the Law and to lie, and that would have been evil, doubly evil, lying to Tribemother. A thousand years ago on Jonuta's slaveship, his woman Kenowa had said that Jonuta was both good and bad, for he had saved her life from enslavement to drugs while he had taken Janja's life, stolen it to enslave her. On Aglaya, Janja had said sententiously that day a thousand years ago, where we are not civilized, we always know what is good and what is bad. Jonuta, she said even when she had never heard of Aristotle, was one or he was the other. He could not be good-pure white-with the elements of evil-total black-merged in him. Since he did evil, she had told Kenowa oh so positively, he was evil, and so she had continued to believe. Smugly. She was sold to a man who was priest of his god, and Janja had explained Sicuan's evil to her own youthful, unsophisticated satisfaction by assuming that Gri of Resh was a false god. But was he, or He? Was Aglii? Did either of them exist?-and was Sunmother other than one more star among billions? Because there was evil in Sicuan-and in his son Chulucan, and the slavemaster, too-Janja told herself before ever she had 217 heard of the philosopher Rand; and because gray was only white with black mixed in, it was therefore not white. Q.E.D.: Sicuan and Chulucan and Gri were evil. I have seen two or three Aglayan slaves, Whitey had told her, once she had served the cause of good and of herself by slaying her masters. She asked Whitey who had been Fidnij of Aglaya what he had done and he had said nothing; there was nothing to be done. And she had judged him. Smugly. Aglii was pleased, she told Whitey, with the deaths of the evil men she had slain. Aglii would not have been pleased had she taken their money and so, righteously, she had left that bloody house with nothing of theirs save what she wore. And yet later she had taken the money of a man named Banerjee. And she had been enslaved and brutalized, turned into a thing-for-sex, on Knor* and she had slain her "owner," righteously. And she and her companions had brought away from Knor much loot, so that they were rich. So swiftly were the contradictions moving in to shake her sureness and her righteousness! Yet all her actions had been toward the goal of reaching Qalara, and Jonuta. A goal of white good: the killing of Jonuta. She had felt a sense of great accomplishment when she had slain him. Smugly. A blow for people, and for life and freedom: she had slain a master-slaver! Beside her sat her lover, the master-slaver of the Galaxy. The end, Makiavelly had implied, justified the means, and Janja had discussed and argued that tenet with Rat-ran. She learned that it was the firm belief and motto of TransGalactic Order, TGO: The Gray Organization. By In SPACEWAYS #4, Satana Enslaved 218 illegal means, by immoral means, by "sinful" means, TGO prevented war-and had done so for many years. Ratran Vao killed without compunction. He slew strangers when they were a threat to the balance of Society. It was one of the means of protecting millions and perhaps billions of persons from war and from rapacious men who would dominate and control and even enslave them. Beside her sat the master-slaver of the universe. But he was honest and straightforward, she told herself, even while tears blurred her vision. Ratran Yao was a liar, a congenital and constant liar. He delighted and gloried in lying. He lied and killed and blackmailed and used people . . . people such as Janja. Ramesh was totally honest. He admitted his business of slavery and his sin of incest-for which he had for decades suffered the mind-rot of guilt. (Is Rat capable of guilt? Oh damn, damn these tears!) Ramesh confided in her, left her her ship and even made it a present from him. He loved her and he was honest about it. He, only he and Trafalgar Cuw, have not tried to use me. Surely Rat, laboring for the force of Good, was incapable of love as well as incapable of eliciting it. Even if he were capable of love, could he find the honesty to

admit it? No, Janja mused; Rat would see that as an admission of weakness and a danger to him and his TGO effectiveness. And what does Ramesh do with the billions he takes in? If only I knew that he gave it to thousands or millions of orphans-or returned it to Aglaya! She knew that he did not. She did not know what he did with the enormous wealth he took in and so possessed. He lived well, but not as well as he might. His income was so great that he and four others could spend 219 the rest of their lives as wastrels and never deplete the wealth. She thought of TGO's motto. Those were Ra-mesh's means-but what was the end? She shook her head and, surreptitiously, wiped her eyes. Blinking, she thought: and TGO's motto-is it not mine? Isn't that what I've told myself, while I was adopting any means toward the noble end of Jonuta's death? And now I have lied and tricked and caused another death-never mind that the Galaxy and Ramesh are the better for Daura's death! I hated, and I used any means to get to Jonuta, and I did. I killed him. And he is not only alive, but has saved my life! So has Ramesh. Him I do not hate-and yet I must destroy him, and have lied and tricked him toward that end. Are the means justified? Yet how can I compromise still again? I serve Good: The Gray Organization. And again her eyes blurred, so that she saw dimly, through a film of gray. On the sleek ship speeding in toward the undeveloped planet that was Aglaya (valuable only for its extravagant blue orchids), she directed a mental question at her self, at Aglii, at the universe: Is the whole universe only shades of grayness? Is there then no black and no white, and am I as gray as the rest of them? As enigmatic as it had remained when Stephen Crane advised it that "Sir, I exist!", the universe did not reply. On the viewscreen one of the little lights in the parsec abyss continued to grow and grow larger and larger. Around it, basking in its radiant warmth, circled eight planets. The clouded one was Aglaya. 21 If A is, B must be; if B is, then C must be; therefore if A is, C must be. ... if A is, then A must be.... -Aristotle, Posterior Analytics A cannot be the same as B, and gray cannot be the same as white. This time I shall not compromise. -Janjaglaya Wye, TGO They had just made what remained of Daura part of the gentle winds of the gentle planet of her birth. Janja, standing behind Ram who stood with bowed head, blinked at the glint of wan sunlight on burnished metal. She glanced up. Then she stepped back and drew her stopper. "What-" He swung, looking up. "A ship's lander! Janja, get-" Then he saw the stopper in her hand, leveled at him. He frowned at it, raised his gaze to her eyes. And frowned more deeply. Cold, determined eyes stared back at him. Now they were what she had said they were, Janja's eyes: dead. "Jan!" "Stand still, King of the Slavers," she said. "That will be Ratran Yao. I knew that whether you slew me or Daura, you would return the 'ashes' to Aglaya. Ratran and I arranged this . . . rendezvous." 220 221 He stared speechlessly at her while the gravity-boat slid almost silently down. It settled to the ground a short distance away, with a whoosh. Ratran Yao emerged, with two others. They carried drawn stoppers. "Ramesh Jageshwar called Kshatriya?" Ram glanced at Janja, looked back at Rat. He nodded. "You are under arrest, Ramesh Jageshwar." Again Ram looked at Janja, and back to Rat Yao. He nodded. "All right. But there is nothing illegal on our ship and I really think you can never prove a thing." Rat's eyes shifted from him to Janja, who had hol-stered her stopper and was pulling her coppery "mail-shirt" off over her head. Under it she wore a white garment that had been called a T-shirt for a millennium and more. "Wrong," Rat said, transferring his stopper to his left hand. He raised his right to catch the garment Janja slung to him, twinkling and rustling. He caught it and grinned at Ramesh. "Like the current fashion from Harb? Those barbarians are going through another of their metal phases-you should see the makeup! But this one's special. It takes moving pictures, slaver." "A complete record," Janja said quietly, dully, "of Ramesh Jageshwar in the act of killing his sister." Ratran nodded. "Jageshwar, I arrest you for the murder of your sister. I believe we can prove that-and with this sort of evidence, just what crime we convict you of, with a very great deal of publicity, isn't important, is it?" His smile was broad, delighted, reminding Janja of Daura's, just before her death. "We have you, regardless,

King of the Slavers." "Putting me out of business will be a great mistake, Yao." Ratran laughed. "I don't think so!" 222 Janja had been regarding Ramesh with a little frown. Now, before he could speak, she went to him and kissed his impassive lips. "You are worthy of Aglaya," she told him quietly, with the sparkle of tears in her eyes. He thrust her from him. "You are worthy of a kennel!" "Enough of that, quite enough," Ratran said. "Get away from him, Janja-I'd hate to have him grab you and hide behind you." Because then I'd have to Poof you both, he thought, and the thought was clear in Jan-ja's mind. "Quong, get into the lander so you can cover our guest while he enters. We'll follow." "You'll never get to have your highly publicized trial and conviction, Ratran Yao. I'm going to have to be killed while attempting to escape." "Uh-huh," Rat said, and that was all the attention he gave Ramesh's strange words. "Come along, Janja." Janja shook her head, watching a little breeze bend tall, bluegreen grain-grass like a lovingly caressing hand. "No," she said. "I'm home." They stared at her, all of them. Then, all of them, at Ratran Yao. He was frowning. "You're serious, aren't you, or think you are?" She nodded. "I'm serious." Her stopper hung at the end of her arm. "You can't stay here, Janja-on an undeveloped world! You'd die in no time-every person on this planet will be like a child to you. You belong out there," he said, jerking his head skyward. "In civilization." Janja shrugged. It was all the reply she intended, but she added words: "There is no civilization. And no black and white, either." "Well, you aren't staying here, my dear! No One Leaves TGO, Janja." 223 "Ram? Is he right?" The King of the Slavers looked at her. "Why ask me? Its purpose is to prevent war, partially by stopping overly ambitious men who'll do anything at all for power, isn't it?" She nodded, half-turning to look at the savannah, at the rain forest rising dark and cool and welcoming at its edge. "So it is," she said, still nodding. Her sad gaze swept the mountain range in the distance; from here it looked misty and purple, rather than igneous rock and granite-gray. She turned quickly back. "So it is," she said, and she brought her stopper up fast and shot Ratran Yao, and then the man to his immediate left, and the manner of their demise proved that Janja at last had set her weapon to Fry. The third man, Quong, unfroze and swung up his stopper and stiffened and became a flash and then ash and then nothing, just like the others, as Janja Poofed him, too. She turned to face the King of the Slavers. They stood alone. Janja tossed the stopper over to fall at his feet. "We're home, Ram," she said. He stared at her, and pain had replaced the surprise in his face. He shook his head. "Oh Janja," he said, as she had heard him say before, in the Aglayan way he had not put aside after all these years among the Thingmak-ing Galactics. "I cannot. And I was not making up anything about there being no trial, and his having to kill me. That would have happened." She gave him the wan ghost of a smile, moving slowly toward him. "I know, my love. I knew it when I kissed you. You had just called Rat by name. You knew him because you recognized him. I chonceled a number in your mind, and I know that number-Ratran Yao's TGO number. You are the reason he had never succeeded in trapping 224 Ramesh Kshatriya. You're the reason he at last grew suspicious and created me and sent me to trap you- without reporting any of it to the Director of TGO-I saw this in his mind. He was thinking with great elation and great ambition. You knew that without chonceling -that's why you answered me the way you did. He was elatedly thinking how he'd be promoted for this coup, a very famous and heroic man who had caught the master-slaver of the Galaxy, and then he'd be closer still to the Director of TGO-whose job he wanted, and whom he suspected of being in your pay!" She stood before him now, not touching him, and he stared at her. "Ridiculous for an Aglayan," he said, "and after all our talk ... but I had actually forgotten the choncel!" "You had other things to think about. And Rat died without ever knowing about the choncel, much less that I could see into his 'overly ambitious' mind-the mind of a man who would 'do anything at all for power,' " she said, almost smiling as she quoted him. "I saw something else, and then he said it. No One Leaves TGO. He was going to take me back or leave me here as random molecules. And he had no idea what you

meant when you told him that putting you out of business would be a great mistake!" He was staring at her in silence. The agonized expression on his face had eased, then departed. Now it was becoming the cynical smile she knew. She shook her head. "No, you'd not have gone to prison, or been executed-but what would have become of TGO? Your secret would have been the price-" "-of my life, for I'd have told it to save my life, and then Rat would have found a way to kill me, I assure you. Durga Jhond knows, but he couldn't run the operation without me." 225 "I know. You'd have had to be totally good, white, to have let them kill you or lock you away while TGO died-or fell into Rat's hands. And I've had another breakthrough, Ram. I see now that no one is totally white, and can't be-white isn't a color. It's the absence of color. Black may be the symbol for evil, as we were taught on this pleasant little undeveloped planet, my love, but it isn't white that's the opposite-good. Gray is! White is impossible. Color is always present." His smile broadened. "You are worthy of Aglaya," he said, and at last they embraced, while the gentle breeze rippled the Aglayan grass. "I hope I'm worthy of Ramesh Jageshwar," she said, squeezing him with most of her strength. "I must hope that a man who makes such a vast amount of cred through robbing 'barbarian' planets and then uses all that money to protect civilization by financing The Gray Organization-The Good Organization!-will need a woman to relax with!" "To relax with! To help, Janja! And of course that's what we do-what other man exists who is worthy of you?!" She squeezed him and pressed against him, but she did not laugh. "It must be a hellish life, being at once the Prince of Evil and the Director of TGO." He nodded against her hair. "It is, Jan." "Do both Ramesh Jageshwar and TGO have to be so shadowy, so sinister?" "Absolutely. One is feared and grudgingly respected; the other is respected and very usefully, productively feared." "How far does the annual tax paid in by the planetary governments go to keep TGO going, Ram?" He chuckled against her. "It covers maybe forty per cent of the total cost, at least on printout," he said. "Of 226 course I have certain economy measures-such as using my own slaveships occasionally for TGO purposes. Such as when we rid the Galaxy of Artisune Muzuni and his fleet, who was about two steps away from discovering that he could be a conqueror. And such as my policy of not arresting or plain killing everyone we catch, but using them; putting them on TGO call. It is an economy measure, this enlisting of the forces of evil to the cause of Good!" She chuckled; he kissed her lightly and turned her, his arm still around her. She kept one around his waist, too. It was only a little higher than hers, for the biggest man in the Galaxy was far from tall by Galactic standards. No Aglayan was. "Thank you, Janja. You seem to have saved my life. And I don't mean 'just' today." "It's only fair," Janja said. "You've saved mine, or given me one. Should I be sorry for Rat, who once also gave me purpose-life?" "You should. He was superbly competent and valuable. I knew he was overly ambitious. You've cost me a very good man and two good ships. Hereafter I'm going to keep you safely back on Janat at Citadel Cuesta- and I'm going to keep you busy!" "Good. Two ships?" "Of course, darling. We can't leave that one up there." He raised eyebrows and eyes skyward. "Rat's. And pick up that stopper, and theirs. We can't be teaching the gentle Aglayans civilized methods of destroying each other! Oh-you know who else is both superbly competent and highly ambitious?" "Rhetorical question," she said, picking up weapons and noticing how the grass was slowly straightening in Ratran Yao's last footprints. "I never answer 'em." 227 He laughed. "Valustriana See. I'm going to give her Rat's job." "Uh." "Don't forget that mailshirt of yours, Jan! Now here's what we do. I'll start up with the lander, so they'll know it's coming back, and that way they won't worry when you lift off Kshatriya Jansa. But I'll hump along -grav-boats don't have much speed anyhow-and you just zoom past me and take out Ratran's ship. Then we-oh, that won't be any trouble, will it?" She shook her head. "Necessary to protect your identity and your secret. The end justifies the means." "Only in the gray universe, protected by The Good Organization," he said, and his satirical smile flected over his lips. "Good!

You are worthy of Aglaya and worthy of the spaceways-" "-and worthy of you, Director-sir." "Um. Now once that's done, we've got to-" It is not true to say that everyone must be white or black. . . . it is not true to say that everything that may be good or bad must be either good or bad. These pairs of contraries have intermediates: the intermediates between white and black are gray, sallow, and all the other colors that come between. . . . -Aristotle, Categories

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