

SURFACING

WALTER JON WILLIAMS

Walter Jon Williams was born in Minnesota and now lives in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Regarded as one of the hottest new talents in science fiction, Williams has sold stories to *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*, *Omni*, *Far Frontiers*, *Wild Cards*, and *Tie Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*. His novels include *Ambassador of Progress*, *Knight Moves*, *Hardwired*, *The Crown Jewels*, and *Voice of the Whirlwind*. His most recent novels are *House of Shards* and *Angel Station* (out soon). His story "Side Effects" was in our Third Annual Collection; his story "Video Star" was in our Fourth Annual Collection; and "Dinosaurs" was in our Fifth Annual Collection.

Here he takes us sailing on mysterious alien seas on distant alien worlds, in search of elusive and dangerous prey.

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There was an alien on the surface of the planet. A Kyklops had teleported into Overlook Station, and then flown down on the shuttle. Since, unlike humans, it could teleport without apparatus, presumably it took the shuttle for the ride. The Kyklops wore a human body, controlled through an n-dimensional interface, and took its pleasures in the human fashion.

The Kyklops expressed an interest in Anthony's work, but Anthony avoided it: he stayed at sea and listened to aliens of another kind.

Anthony wasn't interested in meeting aliens who knew more than he did.

The boat drifted in a cold current and listened to the cries of the sea. A tall grey swell was rolling in from the southwest, crossing with a wind-driven easterly chop. The boat tossed, caught in the confusion of wave patterns.

It was a sloppy ocean, somehow unsatisfactory. Marking a sloppy day.

Anthony felt a thing twist in his mind. Something that, in its own time, would lead to anger.

The boat had been out here, both in the warm current and then in the cold, for three days. Each more unsatisfactory than the last.

The growing swell was being driven toward land by a storm that was breaking up fifty miles out to sea: the remnants of the storm itself would arrive by midnight and make things even more unpleasant. Spray feathered across the tops of the waves. The day was growing cold.

Spindrift pattered across Anthony's shoulders. He ignored it, concentrated instead on the long, grating harmonic moan picked up by the microphones his boat dangled into the chill current. The moan ended on a series of clicks and trailed off. Anthony tapped his computer deck. A resolution appeared on the

screen. Anthony shaded his eyes from the pale sun and looked at it.

Anthony gazed stonily at the translation tree. "I am rising toward and thinking hungrily about the slippery-tasting coordinates" actually made the most objective sense, but the righthand branch of the tree was the most literal and most of what Anthony suspected was context had been lost. "I and the oily current are in a state of motion toward one another" was perhaps more literal, but "We (the oily deep and I) are in a cold state of mind" was perhaps equally valid.

The boat gave a corkscrew lurch, dropped down the face of a swell, came to an abrupt halt at the end of its drogue. Water slapped against the stern. A mounting screw, come loose from a bracket on the bridge, fell and danced brightly across the deck.

The screw and the deck are in a state of relative motion, Anthony thought. The screw and the deck are in a motion state of mind.

Wrong, he thought, there is no Other in the Dwellers' speech.

We, I and the screw and the deck, are feeling cold.

We, I and the Dweller below, are in a state of mutual incomprehension.

A bad day, Anthony thought.

Inchoate anger burned deep inside him.

Anthony saved the translation and got up from his seat. He went to the bridge and told the boat to retrieve the drogue and head for Cabo Santa Pola at flank speed. He then went below and found a bottle of bourbon that had three good swallows left.

The trailing microphones continued to record the sonorous moans from below, the sound now mingled with the thrash of the boat's screws.

The screw danced on the deck as the engines built up speed. Its state of mind was not recorded.

The video news, displayed above the bar, showed the Kyklops making his tour of the planet. The Kyklops' human body, male, was tall and blue-eyed and elegant. He made witty conversation and showed off his naked chest as if he were proud of it. His name was Telamon.

His real body, Anthony knew, was a tenuous uncorporeal mass somewhere in n-dimensional space. The human body had been grown for it to wear, to move like a puppet. The nth dimension was interesting only to a mathematician: its inhabitants preferred wearing flesh.

Anthony asked the bartender to turn off the vid. The yacht club bar was called the Leviathan, and Anthony hated the name. His creatures were too important, too much themselves, to be awarded a name that stank of human myth, of human resonance that had nothing to do with the creatures themselves. Anthony never called them Leviathans himself. They were Deep Dwellers.

There was a picture of a presumed Leviathan above the bar. Sometimes bits of matter were washed up on shore, thin tenuous membranes, long tentacles, bits of phosphorescence, all encrusted with the local equivalent of barnacles and infested with parasites. It was assumed the stuff had broken loose from the larger Dweller, or were bits of one that had died. The artist had done his best and painted something that

looked like a whale covered with tentacles and seaweed.

The place had fake-nautical decor, nets, harpoons, flashing rods, and knick-knacks made from driftwood, and the bar was regularly infected by tourists: that made it even worse. But the regular bartender and the divemaster and the steward were real sailors, and that made the yacht club bearable, gave him some company. His mail was delivered here as well.

Tonight the bartender was a substitute named Christopher: he was married to the owner's daughter and got his job that way. He was a fleshy, sullen man and no company.

We, thought Anthony, the world and I, are drinking alone. Anger burned in him, anger at the quality of the day and the opacity of the Dwellers and the storm that beat brainlessly at the windows.

"Got the bastard!" A man was pounding the bar. "Drinks on me." He was talking loudly, and he wore gold rings on his fingers. Raindrops sparkled in his hair. He wore a flashing harness, just in case anyone missed why he was here. Hatred settled in Anthony like poison in his belly.

"Got a thirty-foot flasher," the man said. He pounded the bar again. "Me and Nick got it hung up outside. Four hours. A four-hour fight!" "Why have a fight with something you can't eat?" Anthony said.

The man looked at him. He looked maybe twenty, but Anthony could tell he was old, centuries old maybe. Old and vain and stupid, stupid as a boy. "It's a game fish," the man said.

Anthony looked into the fisherman's eyes and saw a reflection of his own contempt. "You wanna fight," he said, "you wanna have a *game*, fight something *smart*. Not a dumb animal that you can outsmart, that once you catch it will only rot and stink."

That was the start.

Once it began, it didn't take long. The man's rings cut Anthony's face, and Anthony was smaller and lighter, but the man telegraphed every move and kept leading with his right. When it was over, Anthony left him on the floor and stepped out into the downpour, stood alone in the hammering rain and let the water wash the blood from his face. The whiskey and the rage were a flame that licked his nerves and made them sing.

He began walking down the street. Heading for another bar.

GRACE(2) meant grace in the sense of physical grace, dexterity, harmony of motion, as opposed to spiritual grace, which was GRACE(1). The Dweller that Anthony was listening to was engaged in a dialogue with another, possibly the same known to the computer as 41, who might be named "Upwelling Reflection," but Deep Dweller naming systems seemed inconsistent, depending largely on a context that was as yet opaque, and "upwelling reflection" might have to do with something else entirely.

Anthony suspected the Dweller had just said hello.

Salt water smarted on the cuts on Anthony's face. His swollen knuckles

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pained him as he tapped the keys of his computer deck. He never suffered from hangover, and his mind seemed filled with an exemplary clarity; he worked rapidly, with burning efficiency. His body felt energized.

He was out of the cold KIRST Current today, in a warm, calm subtropical sea on the other side of the Las Madres archipelago. The difference of forty nautical miles was astonishing.

The sun warmed his back. Sweat prickled on his scalp. The sea sparkled under a violet sky.

The other Dweller answered.

Through his bare feet, Anthony could feel the subsonic overtones vibrating through the boat. Something in the cabin rattled. The microphones recorded the sounds, raised the subsonics to an audible level, played it back. The computer made its attempt.

A9140 was a phrase that, as yet, had no translation.

The Dweller language, Anthony had discovered, had no separation of subject and object; it was a trait in common with the Earth cetaceans whose languages Anthony had first learned. "I swim toward the island" was not a grammatical possibility: "I and the island are in a condition of swimming toward one another" was the nearest possible approximation.

The Dwellers lived in darkness, and, like Earth's cetaceans, in a liquid medium. Perhaps they were psychologically unable to separate themselves from their environment, from their fluid surroundings. Never approaching the surface—it was presumed they could not survive in a non-pressurized environment—they had no idea of the upper limit of their world.

They were surrounded by a liquid three-dimensional wholeness, not an air-earth-sky environment from which they could consider themselves separate.

A high-pitched whooping came over the speakers, and Anthony smiled as he listened. The singer was one of the humpbacks that he had imported to this planet, a male called The One with Two Notches on His Starboard Fluke.

Two Notches was one of the brighter whales, and also the most playful. Anthony ordered his computer to translate the humpback speech.

ANTHONY, I AND A PLACE OF BAD SMELLS HAVE FOUND ONE ANOTHER, BUT THIS HAS NOT DETERRED OUR HUNGER.

The computer played back the message as it displayed the translation, and Anthony could understand more context from the sound of the original speech: that Two Notches was floating in a cold layer beneath the bad smell, and that the bad smell was methane or something like it—humans couldn't smell methane, but whales could. The over-literal translation was an aid only, to remind Anthony of idioms he might have forgotten.

Anthony's name in humpback was actually He Who Has Brought Us to the Sea of Rich Strangeness, but the computer translated it simply. Anthony tapped his reply.

What is it that stinks, Two Notches?

SOME KIND OF HORRID JELLYFISH. WERE THEY-AND-I FEEDING, THEY-AND-I WOULD SPIT ONE ANOTHER OUT. 1/ THEY WILL GIVE THEM/ME A NAME: THEY/ME ARE THE JELLYFISH THAT SMELL LIKE INDIGESTION.

That is a good name, Two Notches.

I AND A SMALL BOAT DISCOVERED EACH OTHER EARLIER TODAY. WE ITCHED, SO WE SCRATCHED OUR BACK ON THE BOAT. THE HUMANS AND I WERE STARTLED. WE HAD A GOOD LAUGH TOGETHER IN SPITE OF OUR HUNGER.

Meaning that Two Notches had risen under the boat, scratched his back on it, and terrified the passengers witless. Anthony remembered the first time this had happened to him back on Earth, a vast female humpback rising up without warning, one long scalloped fin breaking the water to port, the rest of the whale to starboard, thrashing in cetacean delight as it rubbed itself against a boat half its length. Anthony had clung to the gunwale, horrified by what the whale could do to his boat, but still exhilarated, delighted at the sight of the creature and its glorious joy.

Still, Two Notches ought not to play too many pranks on the tourists.

We should be careful, Two Notches. Not all humans possess our sense of humor, especially if they are hungry.

WE WERE BORED, ANTHONY. MATING IS OVER, FEEDING HAS NOT BEGUN. ALSO, IT WAS NICK'S BOAT THAT GOT SCRATCHED. IN OUR OPINION NICK AND I ENJOYED OURSELVES, EVEN THOUGH WE WERE HUNGRY, .:

Hunger and food seemed to be the humpback subtheme of the day. Humpback songs, like the human, were made up of text and chorus, the chorus repeating itself, with variations, through the message.

/ and Nick will ash each other and find out, as we feed.

Anthony tried to participate in the chorus/response about food, but he found himself continually frustrated at his clumsy phrasing. Fortunately the whales were tolerant of his efforts.

HAVE WE LEARNED ANYTHING ABOUT THE ONES THAT SWIM DEEP AND DO NOT BREATHE AND FEED ON OBSCURE THINGS?

Not yet, Two Notches. Something has interrupted us in our hungry quest

A CONDITION OF MISFORTUNE EXISTS, LIKE UNTO HUNGER. WE MUST LEARN TO BE QUICKER.

We will try, Two Notches. After we eat.

WE WOULD LIKE TO SPEAK TO THE DEEP DWELLERS NOW, AND FEED WITH THEM, BUT WE MUST BREATHE.

We will speak to ourselves another time, after feeding.

WE ARE IN A CONDITION OF HUNGER, ANTHONY. WE MUST EAT SOON.

We will remember our hunger and make plans.

The mating and calving season for the humpbacks was over. Most of the whales were already heading north to their summer feeding grounds, where they would do little but eat for six months. Two Notches and one of the other males had remained in the vicinity of Las Madres as a favor to Anthony, who used them to assist in locating the Deep Dwellers, but soon—in a matter of days—the pair would have to head north. They hadn't eaten anything for nearly half a year; Anthony didn't want to starve them.

But when the whales left, Anthony would be alone—again—with the Deep Dwellers. He didn't want to think about that.

The system's second sun winked across the waves, rising now. It was a white dwarf and emitted dangerous amounts of X-rays. The boat's falkner generator, triggered by the computer, snapped on a field that surrounded the boat and guarded it from energetic radiation. Anthony felt the warmth on his shoulders decrease. He turned his attention back to the Deep Dwellers.

A blaze of delight rose in Anthony. The Dwellers, he realized, had overheard his conversation with Two Notches, and were commenting on it. Furthermore, he knew, A9140 probably was a verb form having to do with hearing—the Dwellers had a lot of them. "I/You hear the shrill sounds from above" might do as a working translation, and although he had no idea how to translate C22, he suspected it was a comment on the sounds. In a fever, Anthony began to work. As he bent over his keys he heard, through water and bone, the sound of Two Notches singing.

The Milky Way was a dim watercolor wash overhead. An odd twilight hung over Las Madres, a near-darkness that marked the hours when only the dwarf star was in the sky, providing little visible light but still pouring out X-rays. Cabo Santa Pola lay in a bright glowing crescent across the boat's path. Music drifted from a waterfront tavern, providing a counterpoint to the Deep Dweller speech that still rang in Anthony's head. A familiar figure waited on the dock, standing beneath the yellow lamp that marked Anthony's slip. Anthony waved and throttled the boat back.

A good day. Even after the yellow sun had set, Anthony still felt in a sunny mood. A9140 had been codified as "listen(H)," meaning listen solely in the sense of listening to a sound that originated from far outside the Dwellers' normal sphere—from outside their entire universe, in fact, which spoke volumes for the way the Dwellers saw themselves in relation to their world. They knew something else was up there, and their speech could make careful distinction between the world they knew and could perceive directly and the one they didn't. C22 was a descriptive term involving patterning: the Dwellers realized that the cetacean speech they'd been hearing wasn't simply random. Which spoke rather well for their cognition.

Anthony turned the boat and backed into the slip. Nick Kanellopoulos, whom the humpbacks called The One Who Chases Bad-Tasting Fish, took the sternline that Anthony threw him and tied it expertly to a cleat. Anthony shut off the engines, took a bowline, and hopped *to* the dock. He bent over the cleat and made his knot.

"You've gotta stop beating up my customers, Anthony," Nick said.

Anthony said nothing.

"You even send your damn whales to harass me."

Anthony jumped back into the boat and stepped into the cabin for a small canvas bag that held his gear and the data cubes containing the Dweller's conversation. When he stepped back out of the cabin, he saw Nick standing on one foot, the other poised to step into the boat. Anthony gave Nick a look and Nick pulled his foot back. Anthony smiled. He didn't like people on his boat.

"Dinner?" he asked.

Nick gazed at him. A muscle moved in the man's cheek. He was dapper, olive-skinned, about a century old, the second-youngest human on the planet. He looked in his late teens. He wore a personal falkner generator on his belt that protected him from the dwarf's X-rays.

“Dinner. Fine.” His brown eyes were concerned. “You look like hell, Anthony.”

Anthony rubbed the stubble on his cheeks. “I feel on top of the world,” he said.

“Half the time you don’t even talk to me. I don’t know why I’m eating supper with you.”

“Let me clean up. Then we can go to the Mary Villa.”

Nick shook his head. “Okay,” he said. “But you’re buying. You cost me a customer last night.”

Anthony slapped him on the shoulder. “Least I can do, I guess.”

A good day.

Near midnight. Winds beat at the island’s old volcanic cone, pushed down the crowns of trees. A shuttle, black against the darkness of the sky, rose in absolute silence from the port on the other side of the island, heading toward the bright fixed star that was Overlook Station. The alien, Telamon, was aboard, or so the newscasts reported.

Deep Dwellers still sang in Anthony’s head. Mail in hand, he let himself in through the marina gate and walked toward his slip. The smell of the sea rose around him. He stretched, yawned. Belched up a bit of the tequila he’d been drinking with Nick. He intended to get an early start and head back to sea before dawn.

Anthony paused beneath a light and opened the large envelope, pulled out page proofs that had been mailed, at a high cost, from the offices of the *Xenobiology Review* on Kemps. Discontent scratched at his nerves. He frowned as he glanced through the pages. He’d written the article over a year before, at the end of the first spring he’d spent here, and just glancing through it he now found the article over-tentative, over-formal, and, worse, almost pleading in its attempt to justify his decision to move himself and the whales here. The palpable defensiveness made him want to squirm.

Disgust filled him. His fingers clutched at the pages, then tore the proofs across. His body spun full circle as he scaled the proofs out to the sea. The wind scattered thick chunks of paper across the dark waters of the marina.

He stalked toward his boat. Bile rose in his throat. He wished he had a bottle of tequila with him. He almost went back for one before he realized the liquor stores were closed.

“Anthony Maldalena?”

She was a little gawky, and her skin was pale. Dark hair in a single long braid, deep eyes, a bit of an overbite. She was waiting for him at the end of his slip, under the light. She had a bag over one shoulder.

Anthony stopped. Dull anger flickered in his belly. He didn’t want anyone taking notice of the bruises and cuts on his face. He turned his head away as he stepped into his boat, dropped his bag on a seat.

“Mr. Maldalena. My name is Philana Telander. I came here to see you.”

“How’d you get in?”

She gestured to the boat two slips down, a tall FPS-powered yacht shaped like a flat oval with a tall flybridge jutting from its center so that the pilot could see over wavetops. It would fly from place to place, but she could put it down in the water if she wanted. No doubt she’d bought a temporary

membership at the yacht club.

“Nice boat,” said Anthony. It would have cost her a fair bit to have it gated here. He opened the hatch to his forward cabin, tossed his bag onto the long couch inside.

“I meant,” she said, “I came to this *planet* to see you.”

Anthony didn't say anything, just straightened from his stoop by the hatch and looked at her. She shifted from one foot to another. Her skin was yellow in the light of the lamp. She reached into her bag and fumbled with something.

Anthony waited.

The clicks and sobs of whales sounded from the recorder in her hand.

“I wanted to show you what I've been able to do with your work. I have some articles coming up in *Cetology Journal* but they won't be out for a while.”

“You've done very well,” said Anthony. Tequila swirled in his head. He was having a hard time concentrating on a subject as difficult as whale speech.

Philana had specialized in communication with female humpbacks. It was harder to talk with the females: although they were curious and playful, they weren't vocal like the bulls; their language was deeper, briefer, more personal. They made no songs. It was almost as if, solely in the realm of speech, the cows were autistic. Their psychology was different and complicated, and Anthony had had little success in establishing any lasting communication. The cows, he had realized, were speaking a second tongue: the humpbacks were essentially bilingual, and Anthony had only learned one of their languages.

Philana had succeeded where Anthony had found only frustration. She had built from his work, established a structure and basis for communication. She still wasn't as easy in her speech with the cows as Anthony was with a bull like Two Notches, but she was far closer than Anthony had ever been.

Steam rose from the coffee cup in Philana's hand as she poured from Anthony's vacuum flask. She and Anthony sat on the cushioned benches in the stern of Anthony's boat. Tequila still buzzed in Anthony's head. Conflicting urges warred in him. He didn't want anyone else here, on his boat, this close to his work; but Philana's discoveries were too interesting to shut her out entirely. He swallowed more coffee.

“Listen to this,” Philana said. “It's fascinating. A cow teaching her calf about life.” She touched the recorder, and muttering filled the air. Anthony had difficulty understanding: the cow's idiom was complex, and bore none of the poetic repetition that made the males' language easier to follow. Finally he shook his head.

“Go ahead and turn it off,” he said. “I'm picking up only one phrase in five. I can't follow it.”

Philana seemed startled. “Oh. I'm sorry. I thought—”

Anthony twisted uncomfortably in his seat. “I don't know every goddamn thing about whales,” he said.

The recorder fell silent. Wind rattled the canvas awning over the flybridge. Savage discontent settled into Anthony's mind. Suddenly he needed to get rid of this woman, get her off his boat and head to sea right now, away from all the things on land that could trip him up.

He thought of his father upside-down in the smokehouse. Not moving, arms dangling.

He should apologize, he realized. We are, he thought, in a condition of permanent apology.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “I’m just... not used to dealing with people.”

“Sometimes I wonder,” she said. “I’m only twenty-one, and...”

“Yes?” Blurted suddenly, the tequila talking. Anthony felt disgust at his own awkwardness.

Philana looked at the planks. “Yes. Truly. I’m twenty-one, and sometimes people get impatient with me for reasons I don’t understand.”

Anthony’s voice was quiet. “I’m twenty-six.”

Philana was surprised. “But. I thought.” She thought for a long moment. “It seems I’ve been reading your papers for...”

“I was first published at twenty,” he said. “The finback article.”

Philana shook her head. “I’d never have guessed. Particularly after what I saw in your new *XR* paper.”

Anthony’s reaction was instant. “You saw that?” Another spasm of disgust touched him. Tequila burned in his veins. His stomach turned over. For some reason his arms were trembling.

“A friend on Kemps sent me an advance copy, I thought it was brilliant. The way you were able to codify your conceptions about a race of which you could really know nothing, and have it all pan out when you began to understand them. That’s an incredible achievement.”

“It’s a piece of crap.” Anthony wanted more tequila badly. His body was shaking. He tossed the remains of his coffee over his shoulder into the sea. “I’ve learned so much since. I’ve given up even trying to publish it. The delays are too long. Even if I put it on the nets, I’d still have to take the time to write it, and I’d rather spend my time working.”

“I’d like to see it.”

He turned away from her. “I don’t show my work till it’s finished.”

“I... didn’t mean to intrude.”

Apology. He could feel a knife twisting in his belly. He spoke quickly. “I’m sorry, Miss Telander. It’s late, and I’m not used to company. I’m not entirely well.” He stood, took her arm. Ignoring her surprise, he almost pulled her to her feet. “Maybe tomorrow. We’ll talk again.”

She blinked up at him. “Yes. I’d like that.”

“Good night.” He rushed her off the boat and stepped below to the head. He didn’t want her to hear what was going to happen next. Acid rose in his throat. He clutched his middle and bent over the small toilet and let the spasms take him. The convulsions wracked him long after he was dry. After it was over he stood shakily, staggered to the sink, washed his face. His sinus burned and brought tears to his eyes. He threw himself on the couch.

In the morning, before dawn, he cast off and motored out into the quiet sea.

The other male, The One Who Sings of Others, found a pair of Dwellers engaged in a long conversation and hovered above them. His transponder led Anthony to the place, fifty miles south into the bottomless tropical ocean. The Dwellers' conversation was dense. Anthony understood perhaps one word-phrase in ten. Sings of Others interrupted from time to time to tell Anthony how hungry he was.

The recordings would require days of work before Anthony could even begin to make sense of them. He wanted to stay on the site, but the Dwellers fell silent, neither Anthony nor Sings of Others could find another conversation, and Anthony was near out of supplies. He'd been working so intently he'd never got around to buying food.

The white dwarf had set by the time Anthony motored into harbor. Dweller mutterings did a chaotic dance in his mind. He felt a twist of annoyance at the sight of Philana Telander jumping from her big air yacht to the pier. She had obviously been waiting for him.

He threw her the bowline and she made fast. As he stepped onto the dock and fastened the sternline, he noticed sunburn reddening her cheeks. She'd spent the day on the ocean.

"Sorry I left so early," he said. "One of the humpbacks found some Dwellers, and their conversation sounded interesting."

She looked from Anthony to his boat and back. "That's all right," she said. "I shouldn't have talked to you last night. Not when you were ill."

Anger flickered in his mind. She'd heard him being sick, then.

"Too much to drink," he said. He jumped back into the boat and got his gear.

"Have you eaten?" she asked. "Somebody told me about a place called the Villa Mary."

He threw his bag over one shoulder. Dinner would be his penance. "I'll show you," he said.

"Mary was a woman who died," Anthony said. "One of the original Knight's Move people. She chose to die, refused the treatments. She didn't believe in living forever." He looked up at the arched ceiling, the moldings on walls and ceiling, the initials ML worked into the decoration. "Brian McGivern built this place in her memory," Anthony said. "He's built a lot of places like this, on different worlds."

Philana was looking at her plate. She nudged a ichthyoid exomembrane with her fork. "I know," she said. "I've been in a few of them."

Anthony reached for his glass, took a drink, then stopped himself from taking a second swallow. He realized that he'd drunk most of a bottle of wine. He didn't want a repetition of last night.

With an effort he put the glass down.

"She's someone I think about, sometimes," Philana said. "About the choice she made."

"Yes?" Anthony shook his head. "Not me. I don't want to spend a hundred years dying. If I ever decide to die, I'll do it quick."

"That's what people say. But they never do it. They just get older and older. Stranger and stranger." She raised her hands, made a gesture that took in the room, the decorations, the entire white building on its cliff overlooking the sea. "Get old enough, you start doing things like building Villa Marys all over the

galaxy. McGivern's an oldest-generation immortal, you know. Maybe the wealthiest human anywhere, and he spends his time immortalizing someone who didn't want immortality of any kind."

Anthony laughed. "Sounds like you're thinking of becoming a Diehard."

She looked at him steadily. "Yes."

Anthony's laughter froze abruptly. A cool shock passed through him. He had never spoken to a Diehard before: the only ones he'd met were people who mumbled at him on streetcorners and passed out incoherent religious tracts.

Philana looked at her plate. "I'm sorry," she said.

"Why sorry?"

"I shouldn't have brought it up."

Anthony reached for his wine glass, stopped himself, put his hand down. "I'm curious."

She gave a little, apologetic laugh. "I may not go through with it."

"Why even think about it?"

Philana thought a long time before answering. "I've seen how the whales accept death. So graceful about it, so matter-of-fact—and they don't even have the myth of an afterlife to comfort them. If they get sick, they just beach themselves; and their friends try to keep them company. And when I try to give myself a reason for living beyond my natural span, I can't think of any. All I can think of is the whales."

Anthony saw the smokehouse in his mind, his father with his arms hanging, the fingers touching the dusty floor. "Death isn't nice."

Philana gave him a skeletal grin and took a quick drink of wine. "With any luck," she said, "death isn't anything at all."

Wind chilled the night, pouring upon the town through a slot in the island's volcanic cone. Anthony watched a streamlined head as it moved in the dark windwashed water of the marina. The head belonged to a coldblooded amphibian that lived in the warm surf of the Las Madres; the creature was known misleadingly as a Las Madres seal. They had little fear of humanity and were curious about the new arrivals. Anthony stamped a foot on the slip. Planks boomed. The seal's head disappeared with a soft splash. Ripples spread in starlight, and Anthony smiled.

Philana had stepped into her yacht for a sweater. She returned, cast a glance at the water, saw nothing.

"Can I listen to the Dwellers?" she asked. "I'd like to hear them."

Despite his resentment at her imposition, Anthony appreciated her being careful with the term: she hadn't called them Leviathans once. He thought about her request, could think of no reason to refuse save his own stubborn reluctance. The Dweller sounds were just background noise, meaningless to her. He stepped onto his boat, took a cube from his pocket, put it in the trapdoor, pressed the PLAY button. Dweller murmurings filled the cockpit. Philana stepped from the dock to the boat. She shivered in the wind. Her eyes were pools of dark wonder.

"So different."

“Are you surprised?”

“I suppose not.”

“This isn’t really what they sound like. What you’re hearing is a computer-generated metaphor for the real thing. Much of their communication is subsonic, and the computer raises the sound to levels we can hear, and also speeds it up. Sometimes the Dwellers take three or four minutes to speak what seems to be a simple sentence.”

“We would never have noticed them except for an accident,” Philana said. “That’s how alien they are.”

“Yes.”

Humanity wouldn’t know of the Dwellers’ existence at all if it weren’t for the subsonics confusing some automated sonar buoys, followed by an idiot computer assuming the sounds were deliberate interference and initiating an ET scan. Any human would have looked at the data, concluded it was some kind of seismic interference, and programmed the buoys to ignore it.

“They’ve noticed *us*,” Anthony said. “The other day I heard them discussing a conversation I had with one of the humpbacks.”

Philana straightened. Excitement was plain in her voice. “They can conceptualize something alien to them.”

“Yes.”

Her response was instant, stepping on the last sibilant of his answer. “And theorize about our existence.”

Anthony smiled at her eagerness. “I . . . don’t think they’ve got around to that yet.”

“But they are intelligent.”

“Yes.”

“Maybe more intelligent than the whales. From what you say, they seem quicker to conceptualize.”

“Intelligent in certain ways, perhaps. There’s still very little I understand about them.”

“Can you teach me to talk to them?”

The wind blew chill between them. “I don’t,” he said, “talk to them.”

She seemed not to notice his change of mood, stepped closer. “You haven’t tried that yet? That would seem to be reasonable, considering they’ve already noticed us.”

He could feel his hackles rising, mental defenses sliding into place. “I’m not proficient enough,” he said.

“If you could attract their attention, they could teach you.” Reasonably.

“No. Not yet.” Rage exploded in Anthony’s mind. He wanted her off his boat, away from his work, his existence. He wanted to be alone again with his creatures, solitary witness to the lonely and wonderful interplay of alien minds.

“I never told you,” Philana said, “why I’m here.”

“No. You didn’t.”

“I want to do some work with the humpback cows.”

“Why?”

Her eyes widened slightly. She had detected the hostility in his tone. “I want to chart any linguistic changes that may occur as a result of their move to another environment.”

Through clouds of blinding resentment Anthony considered her plan. He couldn’t stop her, he knew: anyone could talk to the whales if they knew how to do it. It might keep her away from the Dwellers. “Fine,” he said. “Do it.”

Her look was challenging. “I don’t need your permission.”

“I know that.”

“You don’t own them.”

“I know that, too.”

There was a splash far out in the marina. The Las Madres seal chasing a fish. Philana was still staring at him. He looked back.

“Why are you afraid of my getting close to the Dwellers?” she asked.

“You’ve been here two days. You don’t know them. You’re making all manner of assumptions about what they’re like, and all you’ve read is one obsolete article.”

“You’re the expert. But if my assumptions are wrong, you’re free to tell me.”

“Humans interacted with whales for centuries before they learned to speak with them, and even now the speech is limited and often confused. I’ve only been here two and a half years.”

“Perhaps,” she said, “you could use some help. Write those papers of yours. Publish the data.”

He turned away. “I’m doing fine,” he said.

“Glad to hear it.” She took a long breath. “What did I *do*, Anthony? Tell me.”

“Nothing,” he said. Anthony watched the marina waters, saw the amphibian surface, its head pulled back to help slide a fish down its gullet. Philana was just standing there. We, thought Anthony, are in a condition of non-resolution.

“I work alone,” he said. “I immerse myself in their speech, in their environment, for months at a time. Talking to a human breaks my concentration. I don’t know *how* to talk to a person right now. After the Dwellers, you seem perfectly...”

“Alien?” she said. Anthony didn’t answer. The amphibian slid through the water, its head leaving a short,

silver wake.

The boat rocked as Philana stepped from it to the dock: “Maybe we can talk later,” she said. “Exchange data or something.”

“Yes,” Anthony said. “We’ll do that.” His eyes were still on the seal. Later, before he went to bed, he told the computer to play Dweller speech all night long.

Lying in his bunk the next morning, Anthony heard Philana cast off her yacht. He felt a compulsion to talk to her, apologize again, but in the end he stayed in his rack, tried to concentrate on Dweller sounds. I/We remain in a condition of solitude, he thought, the Dweller phrases coming easily to his mind. There was a brief shadow cast on the port beside him as the big flying boat rose into the sky, then nothing but sunlight and the slap of water on the pier supports. Anthony climbed out of his sleeping bag and went into town, provisioned the boat for a week. He had been too close to land for too long: a trip into the sea, surrounded by nothing but whales and Dweller speech, should cure him of his unease.

Two Notches had switched on his transponder: Anthony followed the beacon north, the boat rising easily over deep blue rollers. Desiring sun, Anthony climbed to the flybridge and lowered the canvas cover. Fifty miles north of Cabo Santa Pola there was a clear dividing line in the water, a line as clear as a meridian on a chart, beyond which the sea was a deeper, purer blue. The line marked the boundary of the cold Kirt current that had journeyed, wreathed in mist from contact with the warmer air, a full three thousand nautical miles from the region of the South Pole. Anthony crossed the line and rolled down his sleeves as the temperature of the air fell.

He heard the first whale speech through his microphones as he entered the cold current: the sound hadn’t carried across the turbulent frontier of warm water and cold. The whales were unclear, distant and mixed with the sound of the screws, but he could tell from the rhythm that he was overhearing a dialogue. Apparently Sings of Others had joined Two Notches north of Las Madres. It was a long journey to make overnight, but not impossible.

The cooler air was invigorating. The boat plowed a straight, efficient wake through the deep blue sea. Anthony’s spirits rose. This was where he belonged, away from the clutter and complication of humanity. Doing what he did best.

He heard something odd in the rhythm of the whalespeech; he frowned and listened more closely. One of the whales was Two Notches: Anthony recognized his speech patterns easily after all this time; but the other wasn’t Sings of Others. There was a clumsiness in its pattern of chorus and response.

The other was a human. Annoyance hummed in Anthony’s nerves. Back on Earth, tourists or eager amateur explorers sometimes bought cheap translation programs and tried to talk to the whales, but this was no tourist program: it was too eloquent, too knowing. Philana, of course. She’d followed the transponder signal and was busy gathering data about the humpback females. Anthony cut his engines and let the boat drift slowly to put its bow into the wind; he deployed the microphones from their wells in the hull and listened. The song was bouncing off a colder layer below, and it echoed confusingly.

DEEP SWIMMER AND HER CALF, CALLED THE ONE THAT NUDGES, ARE POSSESSED OF ONE ANOTHER. I AND THAT ONE AM THE FATHER. WE HUNGER FOR ONE ANOTHER’S PRESENCE.

Apparently hunger was once again the subtheme of the day. The context told Anthony that Two Notches was swimming in cool water beneath a boat. Anthony turned the volume up:

WE HUNGER TO HEAR OF DEEP SWIMMER AND OUR CALF.

That was the human response: limited in its phrasing and context, direct and to the point.

I AND DEEP SWIMMER ARE SHY. WE WILL NOT PLAY WITH HUMANS. INSTEAD WE WILL PRETEND WE ARE HUNGRY AND VANISH INTO DEEP WATERS.

The boat lurched as a swell caught it at an awkward angle. Water splashed over the bow. Anthony deployed the drogue and dropped from the flybridge to the cockpit. He tapped a message into the computer and relayed it.

/ and Two Notches are pleased to greet ourselves. I and Two Notches hope we are not too hungry.

The whale's reply was shaded with delight. HUNGRILY I AND ANTHONY GREET OURSELVES. WE AND ANTHONY'S FRIEND, AIR HUMAN, HAVE BEEN IN A CONDITION OF CONVERSATION.

Air Human, from the flying yacht. Two Notches went on.

WE HAD FOUND OURSELVES SOME DEEP DWELLERS, BUT SOME MOMENTS AGO WE AND THEY MOVED BENEATH A COLD LAYER AND OUR CONVERSATION IS LOST. I STARVE FOR ITS RETURN.

The words echoed off the cold layer that stood like a wall between Anthony and the Dwellers. The humpback inflections were steeped in annoyance.

Our hunger is unabated, Anthony typed. But we will wait for the non-breathers ' return.

WE CANNOT WAIT LONG. TONIGHT WE AND THE NORTH MUST BEGIN THE JOURNEY TO OUR FEEDING TIME.

The voice of Air Human rumbled through the water. It sounded like a distant, throbbing engine. OUR FINEST GREETINGS, ANTHONY. I AND TWO NOTCHES WILL TRAVEL NORTH TOGETHER. THEN WE AND THE OTHERS WILL FEED.

Annoyance slammed into Anthony. Philana had abducted his whale. Clenching his teeth, he typed a civil reply:

Phase give our kindest greetings to our hungry brothers and sisters in the north.

By the time he transmitted his speech his anger had faded. Two Notches' departure was inevitable in the next few days, and he'd known that. Still, a residue of jealousy burned in him. Philana would have the whale's company on *its* journey north: he would be stuck here by Las Madres without the keen whale ears that helped him find the Dwellers.

Two Notches' reply came simultaneously with a programmed reply from Philana. Lyrics about greetings, hunger, feeding, calves, and joy whined through the water, bounced from the cold layer. Anthony looked at the hash his computer made of the translation and laughed. He decided he might as well enjoy Two Notches' company while it lasted.

That was a strange message to hear from our friend, Two Mouths, he typed. "Notch" and "mouth" were almost the same phrase: Anthony had just made a pun.

Whale amusement bubbled through the water. TWO MOUTHS AND I BELONG TO THE MOST

UNUSUAL FAMILY BETWEEN SURFACE AND COLD WATER. WE-ALL AND AIR
BREATHE EACH OTHER, BUT SOME OF US HAVE THE BAD FORTUNE TO LIVE IN IT.

The sun warmed Anthony's shoulders in spite of the cool air. He decided to leave off the pursuit of the Dwellers and spend the day with his humpback.

He kicked off his shoes, then stepped down to his cooler and made himself a sandwich.

The Dwellers never came out from beneath the cold layer. Anthony spent the afternoon listening to Two Notches tell stories about his family. Now that the issue of hunger was resolved by the whale's decision to migrate, the cold layer beneath them became the new topic of conversation, and Two Notches amused himself by harmonizing with his own echo. Sings of Others arrived in late afternoon and announced he had already begun his journey: he and Two Notches decided to travel in company.

NORTHWARD HOMING! COLD WATERING! REUNION JOYOUS! The phrases dopplered closer to Anthony's boat, and then Two Notches broke the water thirty feet off the port beam, salt water pouring like Niagara from his black jaw, his scalloped fins spread like wings eager to take the air... Anthony's breath went out of him in surprise. He turned in his chair and leaned away from the sight, half in fear and half in awe... Even though he was used to the whales, the sight never failed to stun him, thrill him, freeze him in his tracks.

Two Notches toppled over backwards, One clear brown eye fixed on Anthony. Anthony raised an arm and waved, and he thought he saw amusement in Two Notches' glance, perhaps the beginning of an answering wave in the gesture of a fin. A living creature the size of a bus, the whale struck the water not with a smack, but with a roar, a sustained outpour of thunder. Anthony braced himself for what was coming. Salt water flung itself over the gunwale, struck him like a blow. The cold was shocking: his heart lurched. The boat was flung high on the wave, dropped down its face with a jarring thud. Two Notches' flukes tossed high and Anthony could see the mottled pattern, grey and white, on the underside, distinctive as a fingerprint... and then the flukes were gone, leaving behind a rolling boat and a boiling sea.

Anthony wiped the ocean from his face, then from his computer. The boat's auto-baling mechanism began to throb. Two Notches surfaced a hundred yards off, spouted a round cloud of steam, submerged again. The whale's amusement stung the water. Anthony's surprise turned to joy, and he echoed the sound of laughter.

I'm going to run my boat up your backside, Anthony promised; he splashed to the controls in his bare feet, withdrew the drogue and threw his engines into gear. Props thrashed the sea into foam. Anthony drew the microphones up into their wells, heard them thud along the hull as the boat gained way. Humpbacks usually took breath in a series of three: Anthony aimed ahead for Two Notches' second rising. Two Notches rose just ahead, spouted, and dove before Anthony could catch him. A cold wind cut through Anthony's wet shirt, raised bumps on his flesh. The boat increased speed, tossing its head on the face of a wave, and Anthony raced ahead, aiming for where Two Notches would rise for the third time.

The whale knew where the boat was and was able to avoid him easily; there was no danger in the game. Anthony won the race: Two Notches surfaced just aft of the boat, and Anthony grinned as he gunned his propellers and wrenched the rudder from side to side while the boat spewed foam into the whale's face. Two Notches gave a grunt of disappointment and sounded, tossing his flukes high. Unless he chose to rise early, Two Notches would be down for five minutes or more. Anthony raced the boat in circles,

waiting. Two Notches' taunts rose in the cool water. The wind was cutting Anthony to the quick. He reached into the cabin for a sweater, pulled it on, ran up to the flybridge just in time to see Two Notches leap again half a mile away, the vast dark body silhouetted for a moment against the setting sun before it fell again into the welcoming sea.

GOODBYE, GOODBYE. I AND ANTHONY SEND FRAGRANT FAREWELLS TO ONE ANOTHER.

White foam surrounded the slick, still place where Two Notches had fallen into the water. Suddenly the flybridge was very cold. Anthony's heart sank. He cut speed and put the wheel amidships. The boat slowed reluctantly, as if it, too, had been enjoying the game. Anthony dropped down the ladder to his computer.

Through the spattered windscreen, Anthony could see Two Notches leaping again, his long wings beating air, his silhouette refracted through seawater and rainbows. Anthony tried to share the whale's exuberance, his joy, but the thought of another long summer alone on his boat, beating his head against the enigma of the Dwellers, turned his mind to ice.

He ordered an infinite repeat of Two Notches' last phrase and stepped below to change into dry clothes. The cold layer echoed his farewells. He bent almost double and began pulling the sweater over his head.

Suddenly he straightened. An idea was chattering at him. He yanked the sweater back down over his trunk, rushed to his computer, tapped another message.

Our farewells need not be said just yet. You and I can follow one another for a few days before I must return. Perhaps you and the non-breathers can find one another for conversation.

ANTHONY IS IN A CONDITION OF MIGRATION. WELCOME, WELCOME. Two Notches' reply was jubilant.

For a few days, Anthony qualified. Before too long he would have to return to port for supplies. Annoyed at himself, he realized he could as easily have victualed for weeks.

Another voice called through the water, sounded faintly through the speakers. *Air Human and Anthony are in a state of tastiest welcome.*

In the middle of Anthony's reply, his fingers paused at the keys. Surprise rose quietly to the surface of his mind.

After the long day of talking in humpback speech, he had forgotten that Air Human was not a humpback. That she was, in fact, another human being sitting on a boat just over the horizon.

Anthony continued his message. His fingers were clumsy now, and he had to go back twice to correct mistakes. He wondered why it was harder to talk to Philana, now that he remembered she wasn't an alien.

He asked Two Notches to turn on his transponder, and, all through the deep shadow twilight when the white dwarf was in the sky, the boat followed the whale at a half-mile's distance. The current was cooperative, but in a few days a new set of northwest trade winds would push the current off on a curve toward the equator and the whales would lose its assistance.

Anthony didn't see Philana's boat that first day: just before dawn, Sings of Others heard a distant

Dweller conversation to starboard. Anthony told his boat to strike off in that direction and spent most of the day listening. When the Dwellers fell silent, he headed for the whales' transponders again. There was a lively conversation in progress between Air Human and the whales, but Anthony's mind was still on Dwellers. He put on headphones and worked far into the night.

The next morning was filled with chill mist. Anthony awoke to the whooping cries of the humpbacks. He looked at his computer to see if it had recorded any announcement of Dwellers, and there was none. The whales' interrogation by Air Human continued. Anthony's toes curled on the cold, damp planks as he stepped on deck and saw Philana's yacht two hundred yards to port, floating three feet over the tallest swells. Cables trailed from the stern, pulling hydrophones and speakers on a subaquatic sled. Anthony grinned at the sight of the elaborate store bought rig. He suspected that he got better acoustics with his homebuilt equipment, the translation software he'd programmed himself, and his hopelessly old-fashioned boat that couldn't even rise out of the water, but that he'd equipped with the latest-generation silent propellers.

He turned on his speakers. Sure enough, he got more audio interference from Philana's sled than he received from his entire boat.

While making coffee and an omelette of mossmoon eggs Anthony listened to the whales gurgle about their grandparents. He put on a down jacket and stepped onto the boat's stern and ate breakfast, watching the humpbacks as they occasionally broke surface, puffed out clouds of spray, sounded again with a careless, vast toss of their flukes. Their bodies were smooth and black: the barnacles that pebbled their skin on Earth had been removed before they gated to their new home.

Their song could be heard clearly even without the amplifiers. That was one change the contact with humans had brought: the males were a lot more vocal than once they had been, as if they were responding to human encouragement to talk—or perhaps they now had more worth talking about. Their speech was also more terse than before, less overtly poetic; the humans' directness and compactness of speech, caused mainly by their lack of fluency, had influenced the whales to a degree.

The whales were adapting to communication with humans more easily than the humans were adapting to them. It was important to chart that change, be able to say how the whales had evolved, accommodated. They were on an entire new planet now, explorers, and the change was going to come fast. The whales were good at remembering, but artificial intelligences were better. Anthony was suddenly glad that Philana was here, doing her work.

As if on cue she appeared on deck, one hand pressed to her head, holding an earphone: she was listening intently to whalesong. She was bundled up against the chill, and gave a brief wave as she noticed him. Anthony waved back. She paused, beating time with one hand to the rhythm of whalespeech, then waved again and stepped back to her work.

Anthony finished breakfast and cleaned the dishes. He decided to say good morning to the whales, then work on some of the Dweller speech he'd recorded the day before. He turned on his computer, sat down at the console, typed his greetings. He waited for a pause in the conversation, then transmitted. The answer came back sounding like a distant buzzsaw.

WE AND ANTHONY WISH ONE ANOTHER A PASSAGE FILLED WITH SPLENDID ODORS. WE AND AIR HUMAN HAVE BEEN SCENTING ONE ANOTHER'S FAMILIES THIS MORNING.

We wish each other the joy of converse, Anthony typed.

WE HAVE BEEN WONDERING, Two Notches said, IF WE CAN SCENT WHETHER WE AND

ANTHONY AND AIR HUMAN ARE IN A CONDITION OF RUT.

Anthony gave a laugh. Humpbacks enjoyed trying to figure out human relationships: they were promiscuous themselves, and intrigued by ways different from their own.

Anthony wondered, sitting in his cockpit, if Philana was looking at him.

Air Human and I smell of aloneness, unpairness, he typed, and he transmitted the message at the same time that Philana entered the even more direct, WE ARE NOT.

THE STATE IS NOT RUT, APARTNESS IS THE SMELL, Two Notches agreed readily—it was all one to him—and the lyrics echoed each other for a long moment, *aloneness, not, unpairness, not. Not*. Anthony felt a chill.

I and the Dwellers' speech are going to try to scent one another's natures, he typed hastily, and turned off the speakers. He opened his case and took out one of the cubes he'd recorded the day before.

Work went slowly.

By noon the mist had burned off the water. His head buzzing with Dweller sounds, Anthony stepped below for a sandwich. The message light was blinking on his telephone. He turned to it, pressed the play button.

“May I speak with you briefly?” Philana’s voice. “I’d like to get some data, at your convenience.” Her tone shifted to one of amusement. “The condition,” she added, “is not that of rut.”

Anthony grinned. Philana had been considerate enough not to interrupt him, just to leave the message for whenever he wanted it. He picked up the telephone, connected directory assistance in Cabo Santa Pola, and asked it to route a call to the phone on Philana’s yacht. She answered.

“Message received,” he said. “Would you join me for lunch?”

“In an hour or so,” she said. Her voice was abstracted. “I’m in the middle of something.”

“When you’re ready. Bye.” He rang off, decided to make a fish chowder instead of sandwiches, and drank a beer while preparing it. He began to feel buoyant, cheerful. Siren wailing sounded through the water.

Philana’s yacht maneuvered over to his boat just as Anthony finished his second beer. Philana stood on the gunwale, wearing a pale sweater with brown zigzags on it. Her braid was undone, and her brown hair fell around her shoulders. She jumped easily from her gunwale to the flybridge, then came down the ladder. The yacht moved away as soon as it felt her weight leave. She smiled uncertainly as she stepped to the deck.

“I’m sorry to have to bother you,” she said.

He offered a grin. “That’s okay. I’m between projects right now.”

She looked toward the cabin. “Lunch smells good.” Perhaps, he thought, food equalled apology.

“Fish chowder. Would you like a beer? Coffee?”

“Beer. Thanks.”

They stepped below and Anthony served lunch on the small foldout table. He opened another beer and put it by her place.

“Delicious. I never really learned to cook.”

“Cooking was something I learned young.”

Her eyes were curious. “Where was that?”

“Lees.” Shortly. He put a spoonful of chowder in his mouth so that his terseness would be more understandable.

“I never heard the name.”

“It’s a planet.” Mumbling through chowder. “Pretty obscure.” He didn’t want to talk about it.

“I’m from Earth.”

He looked at her. “Really? Originally? Not just a habitat in the Sol system?”

“Yes. Truly. One of the few. The one and only Earth.”

“Is that what got you interested in whales?”

“I’ve *always* been interested in whales. As far back as I can remember. Long before I ever saw one.”

“It was the same with me. I grew up near an ocean, built a boat when I was a boy and went exploring. I’ve never felt more at home than when I’m on the ocean.”

“Some people live on the sea all the time.”

“In floating habitats. That’s just moving a city out onto the ocean. The worst of both worlds, if you ask me.”

He realized the beer was making him expansive, that he was declaiming and waving his free hand. He pulled his hand in.

“I’m sorry,” he said, “about the last time we talked.”

She looked away. “My fault,” she said. “I shouldn’t have—”

“You didn’t do anything wrong.” He realized he had almost shouted that, and could feel himself flushing. He lowered his voice. “Once I got out here I realized...” This was really hopeless. He plunged on. “I’m not used to dealing with people. There were just a few people on Lees and they were all... eccentric. And everyone I’ve met since I left seems at least five hundred years old. Their attitudes are so...” He shrugged.

“Alien.” She was grinning.

“Yes.”

“I feel the same way. Everyone’s so much older, so much more... sophisticated, I suppose.” She thought about it for a moment. “I *guess* it’s sophistication.”

“They like to think so.”

“I can feel their pity sometimes.” She toyed with her spoon, looked down at her bowl.

“And condescension.” Bitterness striped Anthony’s tongue. “The attitude of, oh, we went through that once, poor darling, but now we know better.”

“Yes.” Tiredly. “I know what you mean. Like we’re not really people yet.”

“At least my father wasn’t like that. He was crazy, but he let me be a person. He—”

His tongue stumbled. He was not drunk (enough to tell this story, and he didn’t think he wanted to anyway.

“Go ahead,” said Philana. She was collecting data, Anthony remembered, on families.

He pushed back from the table, went to the fridge for another beer. “Maybe later,” he said. “It’s a long story.”

Philana’s look was steady. “You’re not the only one who knows about crazy fathers.”

Then you tell me about yours, he wanted to say. Anthony opened the beer, took a deep swallow. The liquid rose again, acid in his throat, and he forced it down. Memories rose with the fire in Anthony’s throat, burning him. His father’s fine madness whirled in his mind like leaves in a hurricane. We are, he thought, in a condition of mutual trust and permanent antagonism. Something therefore must be done.

“All right.” He put the beer on the top of the fridge and returned to his seat. He spoke rapidly, just letting the story come. His throat burned. “My father started life with money. He became a psychologist and then a fundamentalist Catholic lay preacher, kind of an unlicensed messiah. He ended up a psychotic. Dad concluded that civilization was too stupid and corrupt to survive, and he decided to start over. He initiated an unauthorized planetary scan through a transporter gate, found a world that he liked, and moved his family there. There were just four of us at the time, dad and my mother, my little brother, and me. My mother was—is—she’s not really her own person. There’s a vacancy there. If you’re around psychotics a lot, and you don’t have a strong sense of self, you can get submerged in their delusions. My mother didn’t have a chance of standing up to a full-blooded lunatic like my dad, and I doubt she tried. She just let him run things.

“I was six when we moved to Lees, and my brother was two. We were—” Anthony waved an arm in the general direction of the invisible Milky Way overhead. “—we were half the galaxy away. Clean on the other side of the hub. We didn’t take a gate with us, or even instructions and equipment for building one. My father cut us off entirely from everything he hated.”

Anthony looked at Philana’s shocked face and laughed. “It wasn’t so bad. We had everything but a way off the planet. Cube readers, building supplies, preserved food, tools, medical gear, wind and solar generators—Dad thought falkner generators were the cause of the rot, so he didn’t bring any with him. My mother pretty much stayed pregnant for the next decade, but luckily the planet was benign. We settled down in a protected bay where there was a lot of food, both on land and in the water. We had a smokehouse to preserve the meat. My father and mother educated me pretty well. I grew up an aquatic animal. Built a sailboat, learned how to navigate. By the time I was fifteen I had charted two thousand miles of coast. I spent more than half my time at sea, the last few years. Trying to get away from my dad, mostly. He kept getting stranger. He promised me in marriage to my oldest sister after my eighteenth birthday.” Memory swelled in Anthony like a tide, calm green water rising over the flat, soon to whiten and boil.

“There were some whale-sized fish on Lees, but they weren’t intelligent. I’d seen recordings of whales, heard the sounds they made. On my long trips I’d imagine I was seeing whales, imagine myself talking to them.”

“How did you get away?”

Anthony barked a laugh. “My dad wasn’t the only one who could initiate a planetary scan. Seven or eight years after we landed some resort developers found our planet and put up a hotel about two hundred miles to the south of our settlement.” Anthony shook his head. “Hell of a coincidence. The odds against it must have been incredible. My father frothed at the mouth when we started seeing their flyers and boats. My father decided our little settlement was too exposed and we moved farther inland to a place where we could hide better. Everything was camouflaged. He’d hold drills in which we were all supposed to grab necessary supplies and run off into the forest.”

“They never found you?”

“If they saw us, they thought we were people on holiday.”

“Did you approach them?”

Anthony shook his head. “No. I don’t really know why.”

“Well. Your father.”

“I didn’t care much about his opinions by that point. It was so *obvious* he was cracked. I think, by then, I had all I wanted just living on my boat. I didn’t see any reason to change it.” He thought for a moment. “If he actually tried to marry me off to my sister, maybe I would have run for it.”

“But they found you anyway.”

“No. Something else happened. The water supply for the new settlement was unreliable, so we decided to build a viaduct from a spring nearby. We had to get our hollow-log pipe over a little chasm, and my father got careless and had an accident. The viaduct fell on him. Really smashed him up, caused all sorts of internal injuries. It was very obvious that if he didn’t get help, he’d die. My mother and I took my boat and sailed for the resort.”

The words dried up. This was where things got ugly. Anthony decided he really couldn’t trust Philana with it, and that he wanted his beer after all. He got up and took the bottle and drank.

“Did your father live?”

“No.” He’d keep this as brief as he could. “When my mother and I got back, we found that he’d died two days before. My brothers and sisters gutted him and hung him upside-down in the smokehouse.” He stared dully into Philana’s horrified face. “It’s what they did to any large animal. My mother and I were the only ones who remembered what to do with a dead person, and we weren’t there.”

“My God. Anthony.” Her hands clasped below her face.

“And then—” He waved his hands, taking in everything, the boat’s comforts, Overlook, life over the horizon. “Civilization. I was the only one of the children who could remember anything but Lees. I got off the planet and got into marine biology. That’s been my life ever since. I was amazed to discover that I and the family were rich—my dad didn’t tell me he’d left tons of investments behind. The rest of the family’s still on Lees, still living in the old settlement. It’s all they know.” He shrugged. “They’re rich, too, of course, which helps. So they’re all right.”

He leaned back on the fridge and took another long drink. The ocean swell tilted the boat and rolled the liquid down his throat. Whale harmonics made the bottle cap dance on the smooth alloy surface of the refrigerator.

Philana stood. Her words seemed small after the long silence. "Can I have some coffee? I'll make it."

"I'll do it."

They both went for the coffee and banged heads. Reeling back, the expression on Philana's face was wide-eyed, startled, faunlike, as if he'd caught her at something she should be ashamed of. Anthony tried to laugh out an apology, but just then the white dwarf came up above the horizon and the quality of light changed as the screens went up, and with the light her look somehow changed. Anthony gazed at her for a moment and fire began to lap at his nerves. In his head the whales seemed to urge him to make his move.

He put his beer down and grabbed her with an intensity that was made ferocious largely by Anthony's fear that this was entirely the wrong thing, that he was committing an outrage that would compel her shortly to clout him over the head with the coffee pot and drop him in his tracks. Whalesong rang frantic chimes in his head. She gave a strangled cry as he tried to kiss her and thereby confirmed his own worst suspicions about this behavior.

Philana tried to push him away. He let go of her and stepped back, standing stupidly with his hands at his sides. A raging pain in his chest prevented him from saying a word. Philana surprised him by stepping forward and putting her hands on his shoulders.

"Easy," she said. "It's all right, just take it easy."

Anthony kissed her once more, and was somehow able to restrain himself from grabbing her again out of sheer panic and desperation. By and by, as the kiss continued, his anxiety level decreased. I/You, he thought, are rising in warmness, in happy tendrils.

He and Philana began to take their clothes off. He realized this was the first time he had made love to anyone under two hundred years of age.

Dweller sounds murmured in Anthony's mind. He descended into Philana as if she were a midnight ocean, something that on first contact with his flesh shocked him into wakefulness, then relaxed around him, became a taste of brine, a sting in the eyes, a fluid vagueness. Her hair brushed against his skin like seagrass. She surrounded him, buoyed him up. Her cries came up to him as over a great distance, like the faraway moans of a lonely whale in love. He wanted to call out in answer. Eventually he did.

Grace(1), he thought hopefully. Grace(1).

Anthony had an attack of giddiness after Philana returned to her flying yacht and her work. His mad father gibbered in his memory, mocked him and offered dire warnings. He washed the dishes and cleaned the rattling bottlecap off the fridge, then he listened to recordings of Dwellers and eventually the panic went away. He had not, it seemed, lost anything.

He went to the double bed in the forepeak, which was piled high with boxes of food, a spool of cable, a couple spare microphones, and a pair of rusting - Danforth anchors. He stowed the food in the hold, put the electronics in the compartment under the mattress, jammed the Danforths farther into the peak on top of the anchor chain where they belonged. He wiped the grime and rust off the mattress and realized he

had neither sheets nor a second pillow. He would need to purchase supplies on the next trip to town.

The peak didn't smell good. He opened the forehatch and tried to air the place out. Slowly he became aware that the whales were trying to talk to him. ODD SCENTINGS, they said, THINGS THAT STAND IN WATER. Anthony knew what they meant. He went up on the flybridge and scanned the horizon. He saw nothing.

The taste is distant, he wrote. But we must be careful in our movement. After that he scanned the horizon every half hour.

He cooked supper during the white dwarf's odd half-twilight and resisted the urge to drink both the bottles of bourbon that were waiting in their rack. Philana dropped onto the flybridge with a small rucksack. She kissed him hastily, as if to get it over with.

"I'm scared," she said.

"So am I."

"I don't know why."

He kissed her again. "I do," he said. She laid her cheek against his woolen shoulder. Blind with terror, Anthony held onto her, unable to see the future.

After midnight Anthony stood unclothed on the flybridge as he scanned the horizon one more time. Seeing nothing, he nevertheless reduced speed to three knots and rejoined Philana in the forepeak. She was already asleep with his open sleeping bag thrown over her like a blanket. He raised a corner of the sleeping bag and slipped beneath it. Philana turned away from him and pillowed her cheek on her fist. Whale music echoed from a cold layer beneath. He slept.

Movement elsewhere in the boat woke him. Anthony found himself alone in the peak, frigid air drifting over him from the forward hatch. He stepped into the cabin and saw Philana's bare legs ascending the companion to the flybridge. He followed. He shivered in the cold wind.

Philana stood before the controls, looking at them with a peculiar intensity, as though she were trying to figure out which switch to throw. Her hands flexed as if to take the wheel. There was gooseflesh on her shoulders and the wind tore her hair around her face like a fluttering curtain. She looked at him. Her eyes were hard, her voice disdainful.

"Are we lovers?" she asked. "Is that what's going on here?" His skin prickled at her tone.

Her stiff-spined stance challenged him. He was afraid to touch her.

"The condition is that of rut," he said, and tried to laugh.

Her posture, one leg cocked out front, reminded him of a haughty water bird. She looked at the controls again, then looked aft, lifting up on her toes to gaze at the horizon. Her nostrils flared, tasted the wind. Clouds scudded across the sky. She looked at him again. The white dwarf gleamed off her pebble eyes.

"Very well," she said, as if this was news. "Acceptable." She took his hand and led him below. Anthony's hackles rose. On her way to the forepeak Philana saw one of the bottles of bourbon in its rack and reached for it. She raised the bottle to her lips and drank from the neck. Whiskey coursed down her throat. She lowered the bottle and wiped her mouth with the back of her hand. She looked at

him as if he were something worthy of dissection.

“Let’s make love,” she said.

Anthony was afraid not to. He went with her to the forepeak. Her skin was cold. Lying next to him on the mattress she touched his chest as if she were unused to the feel of male bodies. “What’s your name?” she asked. He told her. “Acceptable,” she said again, and with a sudden taut grin raked his chest with her nails. He knocked her hands away. She laughed and came after him with the bottle. He parried the blow in time and they wrestled for possession, bourbon splashing everywhere. Anthony was surprised at her strength. She fastened teeth in his arm. He hit her in the face with a closed fist. She gave the bottle up and laughed in a cold metallic way and put her arms around him. Anthony threw the bottle through the door into the cabin. It thudded somewhere but didn’t break. Philana drew him on top of her, her laugh brittle, her legs opening around him.

Her dead eyes were like stones.

In the morning Anthony found the bottle lying in the main cabin. Red clawmarks covered his body, and the reek of liquor caught at the back of his throat. The scend of the ocean had distributed the bourbon puddle evenly over the teak deck. There was still about a third of the whiskey left in the bottle. Anthony rescued it and swabbed the deck. His mind was full of cotton wool, cushioning any bruises. He was working hard at not feeling anything at all.

He put on clothes and began to work. After a while Philana unsteadily groped her way from the forepeak, the sleeping bag draped around her shoulders. There was a stunned look on her face and a livid bruise on one cheek. Anthony could feel his body tautening, ready to repel assault.

“Was I odd last night?” she asked.

He looked at her. Her face crumbled. “Oh no.” She passed a hand over her eyes and turned away, leaning on the side of the hatchway. “You shouldn’t let me drink,” she said.

“You hadn’t made that fact clear.”

“I don’t remember any of it,” she said. “I’m sick.” She pressed her stomach with her hands and bent over. Anthony narrowly watched her pale buttocks as she groped her way to the head. The door shut behind her.

Anthony decided to make coffee. As the scent of the coffee began to fill the boat, he heard the sounds of her weeping. The long keening sounds, desperate throat-tearing noises, sounded like a pinioned whale writhing helplessly on the gaff.

A vast flock of birds wheeled on the cold horizon, marking a colony of drift creatures. Anthony informed the whales of the creatures’ presence, but the humpbacks already knew and were staying well clear. The drift colony was what they had been smelling for hours.

While Anthony talked with the whales, Philana left the head and drew on her clothes. Her movements were tentative. She approached him with a cup of coffee in her hand. Her eyes and nostrils were rimmed with red.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “Sometimes that happens.”

He looked at his computer console. “Jesus, Philana.”

“It’s something wrong with me. I can’t control it.” She raised a hand to her bruised cheek. The hand came away wet.

“There’s medication for that sort of thing,” Anthony said. He remembered she had a mad father, or thought she did.

“Not for this. It’s something different.”

“I don’t know what to do.”

“I need your help.”

Anthony recalled his father’s body twisting on the end of its rope, fingertips trailing in the dust. Words came reluctantly to his throat.

“I’ll give what help I can.” The words were hollow: any real resolution had long since gone. He had no clear notion to whom he was giving this message, the Philana of the previous night or this Philana or his father or himself.

Philana hugged him, kissed his cheek. She was excited.

“Shall we go see the drifters?” she asked. “We can take my boat.”

Anthony envisioned himself and Philana tumbling through space. He had jumped off a precipice, just now. The two children of mad fathers were spinning in the updraft, waiting for the impact.

He said yes. He ordered his boat to circle while she summoned her yacht. She held his hand while they waited for the flying yacht to drift toward them. Philana kept laughing, touching him, stropping her cheek on his shoulder like a cat. They jumped from the flybridge to her yacht and rose smoothly into the sky. Bright sun warmed Anthony’s shoulders. He took off his sweater and felt warning pain from the marks of her nails.

The drifters were colony creatures that looked like miniature mountains twenty feet or so high, complete with a white snowcap of guano. They were highly organized but unintelligent, their underwater parts sifting the ocean for nutrients or reaching out to capture prey—the longest of their gossamer stinging tentacles was up to two miles in length, and though they couldn’t kill or capture a humpback, they were hard for the whale to detect and could cause a lot of stinging wounds before the whale noticed them and made its escape. Perhaps they were unintelligent, distant relatives of the Deep Dwellers, whose tenuous character they resembled. Many different species of sea birds lived in permanent colonies atop the floating islands, thousands of them, and the drifters processed their guano and other waste. Above the water, the drifters’ bodies were shaped like a convex lens set on edge, an aerodynamic shape, and they could clumsily tack into the wind if they needed to. For the most part, however, they drifted on the currents, a giant circular circumnavigation of the ocean that could take centuries.

Screaming sea birds rose in clouds as Philana’s yacht moved silently toward their homes. Philana cocked her head back, laughed into the open sky, and flew closer. Birds hurtled around them in an overwhelming roar of wings. Whistlelike cries issued from peg-toothed beaks. Anthony watched in awe at the profusion of colors, the chromatic brilliance of the evolved featherlike scales.

The flying boat passed slowly through the drifter colony. Birds roared and whistled, some of them landing on the boat in apparent hopes of taking up lodging. Feathers drifted down; birdshit spattered the windscreen. Philana ran below for a camera and used up several data cubes taking pictures. A trickle of

optimism began to ease into Anthony at the sight of Philana in the bright morning sun, a broad smile gracing her face as she worked the camera and took picture after picture. He put an arm around Philana's waist and kissed her ear. She smiled and took his hand in her own. In the bright daylight the personality she'd acquired the previous night seemed to gather unto itself the tenebrous, unreal quality of a nightmare. The current Philana seemed far more tangible.

Philana returned to the controls; the yacht banked and increased speed. Birds issued startled cries as they got out of the way. Wind tugged at Philana's hair. Anthony decided not to let Philana near his liquor again.

After breakfast, Anthony found both whales had set their transponders. He had to detour around the drifters—their insubstantial, featherlike tentacles could foul his state-of-the-art silent props—but when he neared the whales and slowed, he could hear the deep murmurings of Dwellers rising from beneath the cold current. There were half a dozen of them engaged in conversation, and Anthony worked the day and far into the night, transcribing, making hesitant attempts at translation. The Dweller speech was more opaque than usual, depending on a context that was unstated and elusive. Comprehension eluded Anthony; but he had the feeling that the key was within his reach.

Philana waited for the Dwellers to end their converse before she brought her yacht near him. She had heated some prepared dinners and carried them to the flybridge in an insulated pouch. Her grin was broad. She put her pouch down and embraced him. Abstracted Dweller subsonics rolled away from Anthony's mind. He was surprised at how glad he was to see her.

With dinner they drank coffee. Philana chattered bravely throughout the meal. While Anthony cleaned the dishes, she embraced him from behind. A memory of the other Philana flickered in his mind, disdainful, contemptuous, cold. Her father was crazy, he remembered again.

He buried the memory deliberately and turned to her. He kissed her and thought, I/We deny the Other. The Other, he decided, would cease to exist by a common act of will.

It seemed to work. At night his dreams filled with Dwellers crying in joy, his father warning darkly, the touch of Philana's flesh, breath, hands. He awoke hungry to get to work.

The next two days a furious blaze of concentration burned in Anthony's mind. Things fell into place. He found a word that, in its context, could mean nothing but light, as opposed to fluorescence—he was excited to find out the Dwellers knew about the sun. He also found new words for darkness, for emotions that seemed to have no human equivalents, but which he seemed nevertheless to comprehend. One afternoon a squall dumped a gallon of cold water down his collar and he looked up in surprise: he hadn't been aware of its slow approach. He moved his computer deck to the cabin and kept working. When not at the controls he moved dazedly over the boat, drinking coffee, eating what was at hand without tasting it. Philana was amused and tolerant; she buried herself in her own work.

On preparing breakfast the morning of the third day, Anthony realized he was running out of food. He was farther from the archipelago than he'd planned on going, and he had about two days' supply left; he'd have to return at flank speed, buy provisions, and then run out again. A sudden hot fury gripped him. He clenched his fists. He could have provisioned for two or three months—why hadn't he done it when he had the chance?

Philana tolerantly sipped her coffee. "Tonight I'll fly you into Cabo Santa Pola. We can buy a ton of provisions, have dinner at Villa Mary, and be back by midnight."

Anthony's anger floundered uselessly, looking for a target, then gave up. "Fine," he said.

She looked at him. “Are you ever going to talk to them? You must have built your speakers to handle it.”

Now the anger had finally found a home. “Not yet,” he said.

In late afternoon, Anthony set out his drogue and a homing transponder, then boarded Philana’s yacht. He watched while she hauled up her aquasled and programmed the navigation computer. The world dimmed as the falkner field increased in strength. The transition to full speed was almost instantaneous. Waves blurred silently past, providing the only sensation of motion—the field cut out both wind and inertia. The green-walled volcanic islands of the Las Madres archipelago rolled over the horizon in minutes. Traffic over Cabo Santa Pola complicated the approach somewhat; it was all of six minutes before Philana could set the machine down in her slip.

A bright, hot sun brightened the white-and-turquoiSe waterfront. From a cold KIRST current to the tropics in less than half an hour.

Anthony felt vaguely resentful at this blinding efficiency. He could have easily equipped his own boat with flight capability, but he hadn’t cared about speed when he’d set out, only the opportunity to be alone on the ocean with his whales and the Dwellers. Now the very tempo of his existence had changed. He was moving at unaccustomed velocity, and the destination was still unclear.

After giving him her spare key, Philana went to do laundry—when one lived on small boats, laundry was done whenever the opportunity arose. Anthony bought supplies. He filled the yacht’s forecabin with crates of food, then changed clothes and walked to the Villa Mary.

Anthony got a table for two and ordered a drink. The first drink went quickly and he ordered a second. Philana didn’t appear. Anthony didn’t like the way the waiter was looking at him. He heard his father’s mocking laugh as he munched the last bread stick. He waited for three hours before he paid and left.

There was no sign of Philana at the laundry or on the yacht. He left a note on the computer expressing what he considered a contained disappointment, then headed into town. A brilliant sign that featured aquatic motifs called him to a cool, dark bar filled with bright green aquaria. Native fish gaped at him blindly while he drank something tall and cool. He decided he didn’t like the way the fish looked at him and left.

He found Philana in his third bar of the evening. She was with two men, one of whom Anthony knew slightly as a charter boat skipper whom he didn’t much like. He had his hand on her knee; the other man’s arm was around her. Empty drinks and forsaken hors d’oeuvres lay on a table in front of them.

Anthony realized, as he approached, that his own arrival could only make things worse. Her eyes turned to him as he approached; her neck arched in a peculiar, balletic way that he had seen only once before. He recognized the quick, carnivorous smile, and a wash of fear turned his skin cold. The stranger whispered into her ear.

“What’s your name again?” she asked.

Anthony wondered what to do with his hands. “We were supposed to meet.”

Her eyes glittered as her head cocked, considering him. Perhaps what frightened him most of all was the fact there was no hostility in her look, nothing but calculation. There was a cigaret in her hand; he hadn’t seen her smoke before.

“Do we have business?”

Anthony thought about this. He had jumped into space with this woman, and now he suspected he’d just

hit the ground. "I guess not," he said, and turned.

"Que paso, hombre?"

"Nada."

Pablo, the Leviathan's regular bartender, was one of the planet's original Latino inhabitants, a group rapidly being submerged by newcomers. Pablo took Anthony's order for a double bourbon and also brought him his mail, which consisted of an inquiry from *Xenobiology Review* wondering what had become of their galley proofs. Anthony crumpled the note and left it in an ashtray.

A party of drunken fishermen staggered in, still in their flashing harnesses. Triumphant whoops assaulted Anthony's ears. His fingers tightened on his glass.

"Careful, Anthony," said Pablo. He poured another double bourbon. "On the house," he said.

One of the fishermen stepped to the bar, put a heavy hand on Anthony's shoulder. "Drinks on me," he said. "Caught a twelve-meter flasher today." Anthony threw the bourbon in his face.

He got in a few good licks, but in the end the pack of fishermen beat him severely and threw him through the front window. Lying breathless on broken glass, Anthony brooded on the injustice of his position and decided to rectify matters. He lurched back into the bar and knocked down the first person he saw.

Small consolation. This time they went after him with the flashing poles that were hanging on the walls, beating him senseless and once more heaving him out the window. When Anthony recovered consciousness he staggered to his feet, intending to have another go, but the pole butts had hit him in the face too many times and his eyes were swollen shut. He staggered down the street, ran face-first into a building, and sat down.

"You finished there, cowboy?" It was Nick's voice.

Anthony spat blood. "Hi, Nick," he said. "Bring them here one at a time, will you? I can't lose one-on-one."

"Jesus, Anthony. You're such an asshole."

Anthony found himself in an inexplicably cheerful mood. "You're lucky you're a sailor. Only a sailor can call me an asshole."

"Can you stand? Let's get to the marina before the cops show up."

"My boat's hundreds of miles away. I'll have to swim."

"I'll take you to my place, then."

With Nick's assistance Anthony managed to stand. He was still too drunk to feel pain, and ambled through the streets in a contented mood. "How did you happen to be at the Leviathan, Nick?"

There was weariness in Nick's voice. "They always call me, Anthony, when you fuck up."

Drunken melancholy poured into Anthony like a sudden cold squall of rain. "I'm sorry," he said.

Nick's answer was almost cheerful. "You'll be sorrier in the morning."

Anthony reflected that this was very likely true.

Nick gave him some pills that, by morning, reduced the swelling. When Anthony awoke he was able to see. Agony flared in his body as he staggered out of bed. It was still twilight. Anthony pulled on his bloody clothes and wrote an incoherent note of thanks on Nick's computer.

Fishing boats were floating out of harbor into the bright dawn. Probably Nick's was among them. The volcano above the town was a contrast in black stone and green vegetation. Pain beat at Anthony's bones like a rain of fists.

Philana's boat was still in its slip. Apprehension tautened Anthony's nerves as he put a tentative foot on the gunwale. The hatch to the cabin was still locked. Philana wasn't aboard. Anthony opened the hatch and went into the cabin just to be sure. It was empty.

He programmed the computer to pursue the transponder signal on Anthony's boat, then as the yacht rose into the sky and arched over the ocean, Anthony went into Philana's cabin and fell asleep on a pillow that smelled of her hair.

He awoke around noon to find the yacht patiently circling his boat. He dropped the yacht into the water, tied the two craft together, and spent half the afternoon transferring his supplies to his own boat. He programmed the yacht to return to Las Madres and orbit the volcanic spire until it was summoned by its owner or the police.

I and the sea greet one another, he tapped into his console, and as the call wailed out from his boat he hauled in the drogue and set off after the humpbacks. Apartness is the smell, he thought, aloneness is the condition. Spray shot aboard and splattered Anthony, and salt pain flickered from the cuts on his face. He climbed to the flybridge and hoped for healing from the sun and the glittering sea.

The whales left the cold current and suddenly the world was filled with tropic sunshine and bright water. Anthony made light conversation with the humpbacks and spent the rest of his time working on Dweller speech. Despite hours of concentrated endeavor he made little progress. The sensation was akin to that of smashing his head against a stone wall over and over, an act that was, on consideration, not unlike the rest of his life.

After his third day at sea his boat's computer began signaling him that he was receiving messages. He ignored this and concentrated on work.

Two days later he was cruising north with a whale on either beam when a shadow moved across his boat. Anthony looked up from his console and saw without surprise that Philana's yacht was eclipsing the sun. Philana, dark glasses over her deep eyes and a floppy hat over her hair, was peering down from the starboard bow.

"We have to talk," she said.

JOYOUSLY WE GREET AIR HUMAN, whooped Sings of Others.

I AND AIR HUMAN ARE PLEASED TO DETECT ONE ANOTHER'S PRESENCE, called Two Notches.

Anthony went to the controls and throttled up. Microphones slammed at the bottom of his boat. Two

Notches poked one large brown eye above the waves to see what was happening, then cheerfully set off in pursuit.

ANTHONY AND AIR HUMAN ARE IN A STATE OF EXCITEMENT, he chattered. I/WE ARE PLEASED TO JOIN OUR RACE.

The flying yacht hung off Anthony's stern. Philana shouted through cupped hands. "Talk to me, Anthony!"

Anthony remained silent and twisted the wheel into a fast left turn. His wake foamed over Two Notches' face and the humpback burred a protest. The air yacht seemed to have little trouble following the turn. Anthony was beginning to have the sense of that stone wall coming up again, but he tried a few more maneuvers just in case one of them worked. Nothing succeeded. Finally he cut the throttle and let the boat slow on the long blue swells.

The trade winds had taken Philana's hat and carried it away. She ignored it and looked down at him. Her face was pale and beneath the dark glasses she looked drawn and ill.

"I'm not human, Anthony," she said. "I'm a Kyklops. That's what's really wrong with me."

Anthony looked at her. Anger danced in his veins. "You really are full of surprises."

"I'm Telamon's other body," she said. "Sometimes he inhabits me."

Whalesong rolled up from the sea. WE AND AIR HUMAN SEND ONE ANOTHER CHEERFUL SALUTATIONS AND EXPRESSIONS OF GOOD WILL.

"Talk to the whales first," said Anthony.

"Telamon's a scientist," Philana said. "He's impatient, that's his problem."

The boat heaved on an ocean swell. The trade wind moaned through the flybridge. "He's got a few more problems than that," Anthony said.

"He wanted me for a purpose but sometimes he forgets." A tremor of pain crossed Philana's face. She was deeply hung over. Her voice was ragged: Telamon had been smoking like a chimney and Philana wasn't used to it.

"He wanted to do an experiment on human psychology. He wanted to arrange a method of recording a person's memories, then transferring them to his own... sphere. He got my parents to agree to having the appropriate devices implanted, but the only apparatus that existed for the connection of human and Kyklops was the one the Kyklopes use to manipulate the human bodies that they wear when they want to enjoy the pleasures of the flesh. And Telamon is..." She waved a dismissive arm. "He's a decadent, the way a lot of the Kyklopes turn once they discover how much fun it is to be a human and that their real self doesn't get hurt no matter what they do to their clone bodies. Telamon likes his pleasures, and he likes to interfere. Sometimes, when he dumped my memory into the nth dimension and had a look at it, he couldn't resist the temptation to take over my body and rectify what he considered my errors. And occasionally, when he's in the middle of one of his binges, and his other body gives out on him, he takes me over and starts a party wherever I am."

"Some scientist," Anthony said.

“The Kyklopes are used to experimenting on pieces of themselves,” Philana said. “Their own beings are tenuous and rather... detachable. Their ethics aren’t against it. And he doesn’t do it very often. He must be bored wherever he is—he’s taken me over twice in a week.” She raised her fist to her face and began to cough, a real smoker’s hack. Anthony fidgeted and wondered whether to offer her a glass of water. Philana bent double and the coughs turned to cries of pain. A tear pattered on the teak.

A knot twisted in Anthony’s throat. He left his chair and held Philana in his arms. “I’ve never told anyone,” she said.

Anthony realized to his transient alarm that once again he’d jumped off a cliff without looking. He had no more idea of where he would land than last time.

Philana, Anthony was given to understand, was Greek for “lover of humanity.” The Kyklopes, after being saddled with a mythological name by the first humans who had contacted them, had gone in for classical allusion in a big way. Telamon, Anthony learned, meant (among other things) “the supporter.” After learning this, Anthony referred to the alien as Jockstrap.

“We should do something about him,” Anthony said. It was late—the white dwarf had just set—but neither of them had any desire to sleep. He and Philana were standing on the flybridge. The falkner shield was off and above their heads the uninhibited stars seemed almost within reach of their questing fingertips. Overlook Station, fixed almost overhead, was bright as a burning brand.

Philana shook her head. “He’s got access to my memory. Any plans we make, he can know in an instant.” She thought for a moment. “If he bothers to look. He doesn’t always.”

“I’ll make the plans without telling you what they are.”

“It will take forever. I’ve thought about it. You’re talking court case. He can sue me for breach of contract.”

“It’s your parents who signed the contract, not you. You’re an adult now.”

She turned away. Anthony looked at her for a long moment, a cold foreboding hand around his throat. “I hope,” he said, “you’re going to tell me that you signed that contract while Jockstrap was riding you.”

Philana shook her head silently. Anthony looked up into the Milky Way and imagined the stone wall falling from the void, aimed right between his eyes, spinning slightly as it grew ever larger in his vision. Smashing him again.

“All we have to do is get the thing out of your head,” Anthony said. “After that, let him sue you. You’ll be free, whatever happens.” His tone reflected a resolve that was absent entirely from his heart.

“He’ll sue you, too, if you have any part of this.” She turned to face him again. Her face pale and taut in the starlight. “All my money comes from him—how else do you think I could afford the yacht? I owe everything to him.”

Bitterness sped through Anthony’s veins. He could feel his voice turning harsh. “Do you want to get rid of him or not? Yes or no.”

“He’s not entirely evil.”

“Yes or no, Philana.”

“It’ll take years before he’s done with you. And he could kill you. Just transport you to deep space somewhere and let you drift. Or he could simply teleport me away from you.”

The bright stars poured down rage. Anthony knew himself seconds away from violence. There were two people on this boat and one of them was about to get hurt. “*Yes or no*” he shouted.

Philana’s face contorted. She put her hands over her ears. Hair fell across her face. “Don’t shout,” she said.

Anthony turned and smashed his forehead against the control panel of the flybridge. Philana gave a cry of surprise and fear. Anthony drove himself against the panel again. Philana’s fingers clutched at his shoulders. Anthony could feel blood running from his scalp. The pain drained his anger, brought a cold, brilliant clarity to his mind. He smashed himself a third time. Philana cried out. He turned to her. He felt a savage, exemplary satisfaction. If one were going to drive oneself against stone walls, one should at least take a choice of the walls available.

“Ask me,” Anthony panted, “if I care what happens to me.”

Philana’s face was a mask of terror. She said his name.

“I need to know where you stand,” said Anthony. Blood drooled from his scalp, and he suppressed the unwelcome thought that he had just made himself look ridiculous. ?

Her look of fear broadened.

“Am I going to jump off this cliff by myself, or what?” Anthony demanded.

“I want to get rid of him,” she said.

Anthony wished her voice had contained more determination, even if it were patently false. He spat salt and went in search of his first aid kit. We are in a condition of slow movement through deep currents, he thought.

In the morning he got the keys to Philana’s yacht and changed the passwords on the falkner controls and navigation comp. He threw all his liquor overboard. He figured that if Jockstrap appeared and discovered that he couldn’t leave the middle of the ocean, and he couldn’t have a party where he was, he’d get bored and wouldn’t hang around for long.

From Philana’s cabin he called an attorney who informed him that the case was complex but not impossible, and furthermore that it would take a small fortune to resolve. Anthony told him to get to work on it. In the meantime he told the lawyer to start calling neurosurgeons. Unfortunately there were few neurosurgeons capable of implanting, let alone removing, the rider device. The operation wasn’t performed that often.

Days passed. A discouraging list of neurosurgeons either turned him down flat or wanted the legal situation clarified first. Anthony told the lawyer to start calling *rich* neurosurgeons who might be able to ride out a lawsuit.

Philana transferred most of her data to Anthony’s computer and worked with the whales from the smaller boat. Anthony used her yacht and aquasled and cursed the bad sound quality. At least the yacht’s flight capability allowed him to find the Dwellers faster.

As far as the Dwellers went, he had run all at once into a dozen blind alleys. Progress seemed measured in microns.

“What’s B1971?” Philana asked once, looking over his shoulder as he typed in data.

“A taste. Perhaps a taste associated with a particular temperature striation. Perhaps an emotion.” He shrugged. “Maybe just a metaphor.”

“You could ask them.”

His soul hardened. “Not yet.” Which ended the conversation.

Anthony wasn’t sure whether or not he wanted to touch her. He and Jockstrap were at war and Philana seemed not to have entirely made up her mind which side she was on. Anthony slept with Philana on the double mattress in the peak, but they avoided sex. He didn’t know whether he was helping her out of love or something else, and while he figured things out, desire was on hold, waiting.

Anthony’s time with Philana was occupied mainly by his attempt to teach her to cook. Anything else waited for the situation to grow less opaque. Anthony figured Jockstrap would clarify matters fairly soon.

Anthony’s heart lurched as looked up from lunch to see the taut, challenging grin on Philana’s face. Anthony realized he’d been foolish to expect Telamon to show up only at night, as he always had before.

Anthony drew his lips into an answering grin. He was ready, no matter what the hour.

“Do I know you?” Anthony mocked. “Do we have business?”

Philana’s appraisal was cold. “I’ve been called Jockstrap before,” Telamon said.

“With good reason, I’m sure.”

Telamon lurched to his feet and walked aft. He seemed not to have his sea legs yet. Anthony followed, his nerves dancing. Telamon looked out at the sea and curled Philana’s lip as if to say that the water held nothing of interest.

“I want to talk about Philana,” Telamon said. “You’re keeping her prisoner here.”

“She can leave me anytime she wants. Which is more than she can say about you.”

“I want the codes to the yacht.”

Anthony stepped up to Telamon, held Philana’s cold gaze. “You’re hurting her,” he said.

Telamon stared at him with eyes like obsidian chips. He pushed Philana’s long hair out of his face with an unaccustomed gesture. “I’m not the only one, Maldalena. I’ve got access to her mind, remember.”

“Then look in her mind and see what she thinks of you.”

A contemptuous smile played about Philana’s lips. “I know very well what she thinks of me, and it’s probably not what she’s told you. Philana is a very sad and complex person, and she is not always truthful.”

“She’s what you made her.”

“Precisely my next point.” He waved his arm stiffly, unnaturally. The gesture brought him off-balance, and Philana’s body swayed for a moment as Telamon adjusted to the tossing of the boat. “I gave her money, education, knowledge of the world. I have corrected her errors, taught her much. She is, in many ways, my creation. Her feelings toward me are ambiguous, as any child’s feelings would be toward her father.”

“Daddy Jockstrap.” Anthony laughed. “Do we have business, Daddy? Or are you going to take your daughter’s body to a party first?”

Anthony jumped backwards, arms flailing, as Philana disappeared, her place taken by a young man with curly dark hair and bright blue eyes. The stranger was dressed in a white cotton shirt unbuttoned to the navel and a pair of navy blue swimming trunks. He had seen the man before on vid, showing off his chest hairs. The grin stayed the same from one body to the next.

“She’s gone, Maldalena. I teleported her to someplace safe.” He laughed. “I’ll buy her a new boat. Do what you like with the old one.”

Anthony’s heart hammered. He had forgotten the Kyklopes could do that, just teleport without the apparatus required by humans. And teleport other things as well.

He wondered how many centuries old the Kyklops’ body was. He knew the mind’s age was measured in eons.

“This doesn’t end it,” Anthony said.

Telamon’s tone was mild. “Perhaps I’ll find a nice planet for you somewhere, Maldalena. Let you play Robinson Crusoe, just as you did when you were young.”

“That will only get you in trouble. Too many people know about this situation by now. And it won’t be much fun holding Philana wherever you’ve got her.”

Telamon stepped toward the stern, sat on the taffrail. His movements were fluid, far more confident than they had been when he was wearing the other, unaccustomed body. For a moment Anthony considered kicking Telamon into the drink, then decided against it. The possible repercussions had a cosmic dimension that Anthony preferred not to contemplate.

“I don’t dislike you, Maldalena,” the alien said. “I truly don’t. You’re an alcoholic, violent lout, but at least you have proven intelligence, perhaps a kind of genius.”

“Call the kettle black again. I liked that part.”

Two Notches’ smooth body rose a cable’s length to starboard. He exhaled with an audible hiss, mist drifting over his back. Telamon gave the whale a disinterested look, then turned back to Anthony.

“Being the nearest thing to a parent on the planet,” he said. “I must say that I disapprove of you as a partner for Philana. However—” He gave a shrug. “Parents must know when to compromise in these matters.” He looked up at Anthony with his blue eyes. “I propose we share her, Anthony. Formalize the arrangement we already seem to possess. I’ll only occupy a little of her time, and for all the rest, the two of you can live out your lives with whatever sad domestic bliss you can summon. Till she gets tired of you, anyway.”

Two Notches rolled under the waves. A cetacean murmur echoed off the boat’s bottom. Anthony’s mind flailed for an answer. He felt sweat prickling his scalp. He shook his head in feigned disbelief.

“Listen to yourself, Telamon. Is this supposed to be a scientist talking? A researcher?” . . .;

“You don’t want to share?” The young man’s face curled in disdain. “You want everything for yourself—the whole planet, I suppose, like your father.”

“Don’t be ridiculous.”

“I know what Philana knows about you, and I’ve done some checking on my own. You brought the humpbacks here because you needed them. Away from *their* home, *their* kind. You *asked* them, I’m sure; but there’s no way they could make an informed decision about this planet, about what they were doing. You needed them for your Dweller study, so you took them.”

As if on cue, Two Notches rose from the water to take a breath. Telamon favored the whale with his taut smile. Anthony floundered for an answer while the alien spoke on.

“You’ve got data galore on the Dwellers, but do you publish? Do you share it with anybody, even with Philana? You hoard it all for yourself, all your specialized knowledge. You don’t even talk to the Dwellers!” Telamon gave a scornful laugh. “You don’t even want the *Dwellers* to know what Anthony knows!”

Anger poured through Anthony’s veins like a scalding fire. He clenched his fists, considered launching himself at Telamon. Something held him back.

The alien stood, walked to Anthony, looked him up and down. “We’re not so different,” he said. “We both want what’s ours. But *I’m* willing to share. Philana can be our common pool of data, if you like. Think about it.”

Anthony swung, and in that instant Philana was back, horror in her eyes. Anthony’s fist, aimed for the taller Telamon’s chin, clipped Philana’s temple and she fell back, flailing. Anthony caught her.

“It just happened, didn’t it?” Her voice was woeful.

“You don’t remember?”

Philana’s face crumpled. She swayed and touched her temple. “I never do. The times when he’s running me are just blank spots.”

Anthony seated her on the port bench. He was feeling queasy at having hit her. She put her face in her hands. “I hate when that happens in front of people I know,” she said.

“He’s using you to hide behind. He was here in person, the son of a bitch.” He took her hands in his own and kissed her. Purest desire flamed through him. He wanted to commit an act of defiance, make a statement of the nature of things. He put his arms around her and kissed her nape. She smelled faintly of pine, and there were needles in her hair. Telamon had put her on Earth, then, in a forest somewhere.

She strained against his tight embrace. “I don’t know if this is a good idea,” she said.

“I want to send a message to Telamon,” Anthony said.

They made love under the sun, lying on the deck in Anthony’s cockpit. Clear as a bell, Anthony heard Dweller sounds rumbling up the boat. Somewhere in the boat a metal mounting bracket rang to the subsonics. Philana clutched at him. There was desperation in her look, a search for affirmation, despair at finding none. The teak punished Anthony’s palms. He wondered if Telamon had ever possessed her thus, took over her mind so that he could fuck her in his own body, commit incest with himself. He found the idea exciting.

His orgasm poured out, stunning him with its intensity. He kissed the moist juncture of Philana’s neck and

shoulder, and rose on his hands to stare down into Telamon's brittle grin and cold, knowing eyes.

"Message received, Anthony." Philana's throat convulsed in laughter. "You're taking possession. Showing everyone who's boss."

Horror galvanized Anthony. He jumped to his feet and backed away, heart pounding. He took a deep breath and mastered himself, strove for words of denial and could not find them. "You're sad, Telamon," he said.

Telamon threw Philana's arms over her head, parted her legs. "Let's do it again, Anthony." Taunting. "You're so masterful."

Anthony turned away. "Piss off, Telamon, you sick fuck." Bile rose in his throat.

"What happened?" Anthony knew Philana was back. He turned and saw her face crumple. "We were making love!" she wailed.

"A cheap trick. He's getting desperate." He squatted by her and tried to take her in his arms. She turned away from him.

"Let me alone for a while," she said. Bright tears filled her eyes.

Misplaced adrenaline ran charges through Anthony's body—no one to fight, no place to run. He picked up his clothes and went below to the main cabin. He drew on his clothing and sat on one of the berths, hands helpless on the seat beside him. He wanted to get blind drunk.

Half an hour later Philana entered the cabin. She'd braided her hair, drawn it back so tight from her temples it must have been painful. Her movements were slow, as if suddenly she'd lost her sea legs. She sat down at the little kitchen table, pushed away her half-eaten lunch.

"We can't win," she said.

"There's got to be some way," Anthony said tonelessly. He was clean out of ideas.

Philana looked at Anthony from reddened eyes. "We can give him what he wants," she said.

"No."

Her voice turned to a shout. "It's not *you* he does this to! It's not you who winks out of existence in the middle of doing laundry or making love, and wakes up somewhere else." Her knuckles were white as they gripped the table edge. "I don't know how long I can take this."

"All your life," said Anthony, "if you give him what he wants."

"At least then he wouldn't use it as a *weapon*." Her voice was a shout. She turned away.

Anthony looked at her, wondered if he should go to her. He decided not to. He was out of comfort for the present.

"You see," Philana said, her head still turned away, "why I don't want to live forever."

"Don't let him beat you."

"It's not that. I'm afraid..." Her voice trembled. "I'm afraid that if I got old I'd *become* him. The *Kyklopes* are the oldest living things ever discovered. And a lot of the oldest immortals are a lot like

them. Getting crazier, getting..." She shook her head. "Getting less human all the time."

Anthony saw a body swaying in the smokehouse. Philana's body, her fingernails trailing in the dust. Pain throbbed in his chest. He stood up, swayed as he was caught by a slow wave of vertigo. Somewhere his father was laughing, telling him he should have stayed on Lees for a life of pastoral incest.

"I want to think," he said. He stepped past her on the way to his computer. He didn't reach out to touch her as he passed. She didn't reach for him, either.

He put on the headphones and listened to the Dwellers. Their speech rolled up from the deep. Anthony sat unable to comprehend, his mind frozen. He was helpless as Philana. Whose was the next move? he wondered. His? Philana's?

Whoever made the next move, Anthony knew, the game was Telamon's.

At dinnertime Philana made a pair of sandwiches for Anthony, then returned to the cabin and ate nothing herself. Anthony ate one sandwich without tasting it, gave the second to the fish. The Dweller speech had faded out. He left his computer and stepped into the cabin. Philana was stretched out on one of the side berths, her eyes closed. One arm was thrown over her forehead.

Her body, Anthony decided, was too tense for this to be sleep. He sat on the berth opposite.

"He said you haven't told the truth," Anthony said.

Anthony could see Philana's eyes moving under translucent lids as she evaluated this statement, scanning for meaning. "About what," she said.

"About your relationship to him."

Her lips drew back, revealing teeth. Perhaps it was a smile.

"I've known him all my life. I gave you the condensed version."

"Is there more I should know?"

There was another pause. "He saved my life."

"Good for him."

"I got involved with this man. Three or four hundred years old, one of my professors in school. He was going through a crisis—he was a mess, really. I thought I could do him some good. Telamon disagreed, said the relationship was sick." Philana licked her lips. "He was right," she said.

Anthony didn't know if he really wanted to hear about this.

"The guy started making demands. Wanted to get married, leave Earth, start over again."

"What did you want?"

Philana shrugged. "I don't know. I hadn't made up my mind. But Telamon went into my head and confronted the guy and told him to get lost. Then he just took me out of there. My body was half the galaxy away, all alone on an undeveloped world. There were supplies, but no gates out."

Anthony gnawed his lip. This was how Telamon operated.

“Telamon kept me there for a couple weeks till I calmed down. He took me back to Earth. The professor had taken up with someone else, another one of his students. He married her, and six weeks later she walked out on him. He killed her, then killed himself.”

Philana sighed, drew her hand over her forehead. She opened her eyes and sat up, swinging her legs off the berth. “So,” she said. “That’s one Telamon story. I’ve got more.”

“When did this happen?”

“I’d just turned eighteen.” She shook her head. “That’s when I signed the contract that keeps him in my head. I decided that I couldn’t trust my judgment about people. And Telamon’s judgment of people is, well, quite good.”

Resentment flamed in Anthony at this notion. Telamon had made his judgment of Anthony clear, and Anthony didn’t want it to become a subject for debate. “You’re older now,” he said. “He can’t have a veto on your life forever.”

Philana drew up her legs and circled her knees with her arms. “You’re violent, Anthony.”

Anthony looked at her for a long moment of cold anger. “I hit you by accident. I was aiming at *him*, damn it.”

Philana’s jaw worked as she returned his stare. “How long before you aim at *me*?”

“I wouldn’t.”

“That’s what my old professor said.”

Anthony turned away, fury running through him like chill fire. Philana looked at him levelly for a moment, then dropped her forehead to her knees. She sighed. “I don’t know, Anthony. I don’t know anymore. If I ever did.”

Anthony stared fixedly at the distant white dwarf, just arrived above the horizon and visible through the hatch. We are, he thought, in a condition of permanent bafflement. “What do you want, Philana?” he asked.

Her head came up, looked at him. “I want not to be a tennis ball in your game with Telamon, Anthony. I want to know I’m not just the prize given the winner.”

“I wanted you before I ever met Telamon, Philana.”

“Telamon changed a few things.” Her voice was cold. “Before you met him, you didn’t use my body to send messages to people.”

Anthony’s fists clenched. He forced them to relax.

Philana’s voice was bitter. “Seems to me, Anthony, that’s one of Telamon’s habits you’re all too eager to adopt.”

Anthony’s chest ached. He didn’t seem able to breathe in enough air. He took a long breath and hoped his tension would ease. It didn’t. “I’m sorry,” he said. “It’s not... a normal situation.”

“For you, maybe.”

Silence hung in the room, broken only by the whale clicks and mutters rising through the boat. Anthony shook his head. "What do we do, then?" he asked. "Surrender?"

"If we have to." She looked at him. "I'm willing to fight Telamon, but not to the point where one of us is destroyed." She leaned toward him, her expression intent. "And if Telamon wins, could you live with it?" she asked. "With surrender? If we had to give him what he wanted?"

"I don't know."

"I *have* to live with it. You don't. That's the difference."

"That's *one* difference." He took a breath, then rose from his place. "I have to think," he said.

He climbed into the cockpit. Red sunset was splattered like blood across the windscreen. He tried to breathe the sea air, clear the heaviness he felt in his chest, but it didn't work. Anthony went up onto the flybridge and stared forward. His eyes burned as the sun went down in flames.

The white dwarf was high overhead when Anthony came down. Philana was lying in the forepeak, covered with a sheet, her eyes staring sightlessly out the open hatch. Anthony took his clothes off and crawled in beside her.

"I'll surrender," he said. "If I have to, I'll surrender." She turned to him and put her arms around him. Hopeless desire burned in his belly.

He made love to Philana, his nerves numb to the possibility that Telamon might reappear. Her hungry mouth drank in his pain. He didn't know whether this was affirmation or not, whether this meant anything other than the fact there was nothing left to do at this point than stagger blindly into one another's embrace...

A Dweller soloed from below, the clearest Anthony had ever heard one. WE CALL TO OURSELVES, the Dweller said, WE SPEAK OF THINGS AS THEY ARE. Anthony rose from bed and set his computer to record. Sings of Others, rising alongside to breathe, called a hello. Anthony tapped his keys, hit TRANSMIT.

Air Human and I are in a condition of rut, he said.

WE CONGRATULATE ANTHONY AND AIR HUMAN ON OUR CONDITION OF RUT, Sings of Others responded. The whooping whale cries layered atop the thundering Dweller noises. WE WISH OURSELVES MANY HAPPY COPULATIONS.

HAPPY COPULATIONS, HAPPY COPULATIONS, echoed Two Notches.

A pointless optimism began to resonate in Anthony's mind. He sat before the computer and listened to the sounds of the Deep Dwellers as they rumbled up his spine.

Philana appeared at the hatch. She was buttoning her shirt. "You told the whales about us?" she said.

"Why not?"

She grinned faintly. "I guess there's no reason not to."

Two Notches wailed a question. ARE ANTHONY AND AIR HUMAN COPULATING NOW?

Not at present, Anthony replied.

WE HOPE YOU WILL COPULATE OFTEN.

Philana, translating the speech on her own, laughed. “Tell them we hope so, too,” she said.

And then she stiffened. Anthony’s nerves poured fire. Philana turned to him and regarded him with Telamon’s eyes.

“I thought you’d see reason,” Telamon said. “*I’ll surrender*. I like that.”

Anthony looked at the possessed woman and groped for a vehicle for his message. Words seemed inadequate, he decided, but would have to do. “You haven’t won yet,” he said.

Philana’s head cocked to one side as Telamon viewed him. “Has it occurred to you,” Telamon said, “that if she’s free of me, she won’t need you at all?”

“You forget something. I’ll be rid of *you* as well.”

“You can be rid of me any time.”

Anthony stared at Telamon for a moment, then suddenly he laughed. He had just realized how to send his message. Telamon looked at him curiously. Anthony turned to his computer deck and flipped to the Dweller translation file.

I/we, he typed, *live in the warm brightness above. I am new to this world, and send good wishes to the Dwellers below.*

Anthony pressed TRANSMIT. Rolling thunder boomed from the boat’s speakers. The grammar was probably awful, Anthony knew, but he was fairly certain of the words, and he thought the meaning would be clear.

Telamon frowned, stepped to gaze over Anthony’s shoulder.

Calls came from below. A translation tree appeared on the screen.

“Trench Dweller” was probably one of the Dwellers’ names. “Bubbleward” was a phrase for “up,” since bubbles rose to the surface. Anthony tapped the keys.

We are from far away, recently arrived. We are small and foreign to the world. We wish to brush the Dwellers with our thoughts. We regret our lack of clarity in diction. ..<•

“I wonder if you’ve thought this through,” Telamon said.

SURFACING

Anthony hit TRANSMIT. Speakers boomed. The subsonics were like a punch in the gut.

“Go jump off a cliff,” Anthony said.

“You’re making a mistake,” said Telamon.

The Dweller’s answer was surprisingly direct.

Anthony's heart crashed in astonishment. Could the Dwellers stand the lack of pressure on the surface? *I/We*, he typed, *Trench Dweller, proceed with consideration for safety. I/We recollect that we are small and weak.* He pressed TRANSMIT and flipped to the whalespeech file.

Deep Dweller rising to surface, he typed. *Run fast northward.*

The whales answered with cries of alarm. Flukes pounded the water. Anthony ran to the cabin and cranked the wheel hard to starboard. He increased speed to separate himself from the humpbacks. Behind him, Telamon stumbled in his unfamiliar body as the boat took the waves at a different angle.

Anthony returned to his computer console. *I/We are in a state of motion*, he reported. *Is living in the home of the light occasion for a condition of damage to us/Trench Dweller?*

"You're mad," said Telamon, and then Philana staggered. "He's done it *again*," she said in a stunned voice. She stepped to the starboard bench and sat down. "What's happening?" she asked.

"I'm talking to the Dwellers. One of them is rising to say hello."

"Now?"

He gave her a skeletal grin. "It's what you wanted, yes?" She stared at him.

I'm going over cliffs, he thought. One after another.

That, Anthony concluded, is the condition of existence.

Subsonics rattled crockery in the kitchen.

Anthony typed, *I/We happily await greeting ourselves* and pressed TRANSMIT, then REPEAT. He would give the Dweller a sound to home in on.

"I don't understand," Philana said. He moved to join her on the bench, put his arm around her. She shrugged him off. "Tell me," she said. He took her hand.

"We're going to win."

"How?"

"I don't know yet."

She was too shaken to argue. "It's going to be a long fight," she said.

"I don't care."

Philana took a breath. "I'm scared."

"So am I," said Anthony.

The boat beat itself against the waves. The flying yacht followed, a silent shadow.

Anthony and Philana waited in silence until the Dweller rose, a green-grey mass that looked as if a grassy reef had just calved. Foam roared from its back as it broke water, half an ocean running down its sides. Anthony's boat danced in the sudden white tide, and then the ocean stilled. Bits of the Dweller were all around, spread over the water for leagues—tentacles, filters, membranes. The Dweller's very mass had

calmed the sea. The Dweller was so big, Anthony saw, it constituted an entire ecosystem. Sea creatures lived among its folds^and tendrils: some had died as they rose, their swim bladders exploding in the release of pressure; others leaped and spun and shrank from the brightness above.

Sunlight shone from the Dweller's form, and the creature pulsed with life.

Terrified, elated, Philana and Anthony rose to say hello.