

## BLACK DESTROYER

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ON AND ON COEURL PROWLED! The black, moonless, almost starless night yielded red and grim reddish dawn that crept up from his left. A vague, dull light it was, that gave no sense of warmth, no comfort, nothing but a cold, diffuse light-ness, slowly revealing a nightmare landscape.

Black, jagged rock and black, unliving plain took form around him, as a pale-red sun peered over a grotesque horizon. It was then Coeurl recognized suddenly that he was on familiar ground.

He stopped short. Tension flamed along his nerves. His muscles pressed with sudden, unyielding force against his bones. His great forelegs—twice as long as his hindlegs—twitched with a shuddering arch, every razor-sharp claw. The thick tentacles that sprouted from his shoulders ceased their undulation, and grew taut with anxious alertness.

Utterly appalled, he twisted his great cat head from side to side, while the little hairlike tentacles on each ear vibrated frantically, testing every vagrant breeze, every throb in the ether.

But there was no response, no swift tingling along his intricate nervous system, not the faintest anywhere of the presence of the all-necessary Id. Hopelessly, Coeurl crouched, an enormous silhouette against the dim reddish skyline, like a distorted etching of a black tiger resting on a shadow world.

He had known this day would come. Through all the centuries of restless search, this day had been nearer, blacker, more frightening—this inevitable hour when he must return to the point where his systematic hunt in a world almost depleted of id-creatures.

The truth struck in waves like an endless, rhythmic ache at the seat of his ego. When he had searched for a few id-creatures in every hundred square miles, to be mercilessly rooted out. Only too late in this ultimate hour that he had missed none. There were no id-creatures left to eat. In all the thousands of square miles that he had made his own by right of ruthless conquest—until no one dared to question his sovereignty—there was no Id to feed the otherwise immortal engine that was his.

Square foot by square foot he had gone over it. And now—he recognized the knoll of rock that formed the black rock bridge that formed a queer, curling tunnel to his right. It was in that tunnel he had been waiting for the simple-minded, snakelike id-creature to come forth from its hole in the rock. The sun—his first kill after he had realized the absolute necessity of organized extermination.

He licked his lips in brief gloating memory of the moment his slavering jaws tore the victim into toothsome bits. But the dark fear of an idless universe swept the sweet remembrance from his mind, leaving only certainty of death.

He snarled audibly, a defiant, devilish sound that quavered on the air, echoed and re-echoed and shuddered back along his nerves—instinctive and hellish expression of his will to live.

And then—abruptly—it came.

He saw it emerge out of the distance on a long downward slant, a tiny glowing spot that grew larger as it came, a metal ball. The great shining globe hissed by above Coeurl, slowing visibly in quick deceleration. A black line of hills to the right, hovered almost motionless for a second, then sank down out of sight.

Coeurl exploded from his startled immobility. With tiger speed, he flowed down among the rocks. His black eyes burned with the horrible desire that was an agony within him. His ear tendrils vibrated in such tremendous quantities that his body felt sick with the pangs of his abnormal hunger.

The little red sun was a crimson ball in the purple-black heavens when he crept up from behind the rocks and gazed from its shadows at the crumbling, gigantic ruins of the city that sprawled below.

globe, in spite of its great size, looked strangely inconspicuous against that vast, fairylike realm. About it was a leashed aliveness, a dynamic quiescence that, after a moment, made it stand out in the foreground. A massive, rock-crushing thing of metal, it rested on a cradle made by its own weight on a resisting plain which began abruptly at the outskirts of the dead metropolis.

Coeurl gazed at the strange, two-legged creatures who stood in little groups near the brilliantly lit structures that yawned at the base of the ship. His throat thickened with the immediacy of his need; and his mind, with the first wild impulse to burst forth in furious charge and smash these flimsy, helpless-living things whose bodies emitted the id-vibrations.

Mists of memory stopped that mad rush when it was still only electricity surging through his mind. Memory that brought fear in an acid stream of weakness, pouring along his nerves, poisoning his strength. He had time to see that the creatures wore things over their real bodies, shimmering material that glittered in strange, burning flashes in the rays of the sun.

Other memories came suddenly. Of dim days when the city that spread below was the living center of an age of glory that dissolved in a single century before flaming guns whose wielders knew no survivors there would be an ever-narrowing supply of id.

It was the remembrance of those guns that held him there, cringing in a wave of terror that blanketed him. He saw himself smashed by balls of metal and burned by searing flame.

Came cunning—understanding of the presence of these creatures. This, Coeurl reasoned for a moment, was a scientific expedition from another star. In the olden days, the coeurls had thought of such a disaster came too swiftly for it ever to be more than a thought.

Scientists meant, investigation, not destruction. Scientists in their way were fools. Bold with him, he emerged into the open. He saw the creatures become aware of him. They turned and stared. One from the group, detached a shining metal rod from a sheath, and held it casually in one hand. Coeurl felt it to his core by the action; but it was too late to turn back.

Commander Hal Morton heard little Gregory Kent, the chemist, laugh with the embarrassed embarrassment which he invariably announced inner uncertainty. He saw Kent fingering the spindly metalite weapon.

Kent said: "I'll take no chances with anything as big as that."

Commander Morton allowed his own deep chuckle to echo along the communicators. "That's it, finally, "is one of the reasons why you're on this expedition, Kent—because you never let chance."

His chuckle trailed off into silence. Instinctively, as he watched the monster approach them across the rock plain, he moved forward until he stood a little in advance of the others, his huge form in his transparent metalite suit. The comments of the men pattered through the radio communicator into his mind.

"I'd hate to meet that baby on a dark night in an alley."

"Don't be silly. This is obviously an intelligent creature. Probably a member of the ruling race."

"It looks like nothing else than a big cat, if you forget those tentacles sticking out from its sides. You must make allowances for those monster forelegs."

"Its physical development," said a voice, which Morton recognized as that of Siedel, the biologist, "presupposes an animal-like adaptation to surroundings, not an intellectual one. On the other hand, to us like this is not the act of an animal but of a creature possessing a mental awareness of our presence. You will notice that its movements are stiff, denoting caution, which suggests fear and conservatism. It has weapons. I'd like to get a good look at the end of its tentacles. If they taper into handlike appendages that really grip objects, then the conclusion would be inescapable that it is a descendant of the inhabitants of this planet. It would be a great help if we could establish communication with it, even though appearances in the past had degenerated into a historyless primitive."

Coeurl stopped when he was still ten feet from the foremost creature. The sense of id was that his brain drifted to the ultimate verge of chaos. He felt as if his limbs were bathed in molten metal. His vision was not quite clear, as the sheer sensuality of his desire thundered through his being.

The men—all except the little one with the shining metal rod in his fingers—came closer. Coeurl was frankly and curiously examining him. Their lips were moving, and their voices beat in a meaningless rhythm on his ear tendrils. At the same time he had the sense of waves of frequency—his own communication level—only it was a machinelike clicking that jarred him. In a distinct effort to appear friendly, he broadcast his name from his ear tendrils, at the same time he moved himself with one curving tentacle.

Gourlay, chief of communications, drawled: "I got a sort of static in my radio when he wigwagged." Morton. Do you think—"

"Looks very much like it," the leader answered the unfinished question. "That means a job for you. If it speaks by means of radio waves, it might not be altogether impossible that you can create a television picture of its vibrations, or teach him the Morse code."

"Ah," said Siedel. "I was right. The tentacles each develop into seven strong fingers. Provided the system is complicated enough, those fingers could, with training, operate any machine."

Morton said: "I think we'd better go in and have some lunch. Afterward, we've got to get busy. The men can set up their machines and start gathering data on the planet's metal possibilities, and so on. We can do a little careful exploring. I'd like some notes on architecture and on the scientific development of the race, and particularly what happened to wreck the civilization. On earth civilization after civilization came and but always a new one sprang up in its dust. Why didn't that happen here? Any questions?"

"Yes. What about pussy? Look, he wants to come in with us."

Commander Morton frowned, an action that emphasized the deep-space pallor of his face. "In some way we could take it in with us, without forcibly capturing it. Kent, what do you think?"

"I think we should first decide whether it's an it or a him, and call it one or the other. I'm in favor of taking him in with us—" The little chemist shook his head decisively. "Impossible. This creature is twenty-eight per cent chlorine. Our oxygen would be pure dynamite to his lungs."

The commander chuckled. "He doesn't believe that, apparently." He watched the catlike man and the first two men through the great door. The men kept an anxious distance from him, then glanced at him questioningly. Morton waved his hand. "O. K. Open the second lock and let him get a whiff of air. That'll cure him."

A moment later, he cursed his amazement. "By Heaven, he doesn't even notice the difference between oxygen and chlorine. He hasn't any lungs, or else the chlorine is not what his lungs use. Let him in! You bet he can go in and get the treasure house for a biologist—harmless enough if we're careful. We can always handle his metabolism!"

Smith, a tall, thin, bony chap with a long, mournful face, said in an oddly forceful voice: "I think we've found only two higher forms of life. Those dependent on chlorine, and those who need oxygen and the elements that support combustion. I'm prepared to stake my reputation that no complicated organism has ever adapted itself to both gases in a natural way. At first thought I should say here is an extremely advanced form of life. This race long ago discovered truths of biology that we are just beginning to suspect. We mustn't let this creature get away if we can help it."

"If his anxiety to get inside is any criterion," Commander Morton laughed, "then our difficulty is to get rid of him:

He moved into the lock with Coeurl and the two men. The automatic machinery hummed for a few minutes they were standing at the bottom of a series of elevators that led up to the living quarters.

“Does that go up?” One of the men flicked a thumb in the direction of the monster.

“Better send him up alone, if he’ll go in.”

Coeurl offered no objection, until he heard the door slam behind him; and the closed cage swirled with a savage snarl, his reason swirling into chaos. With one leap, he pounced at the door, bent under his plunge, and the desperate pain maddened him. Now, he was all trapped animal. He bent metal with his paws, bending it like so much tin. He tore great bars loose with his thick tentacles; he screeched; there were horrible jerks as the limitless power pulled the cage along in spite of protruding metal that scraped the outside walls. And then the cage stopped, and he snatched off the rest of the door, which hurtled into the corridor.

He waited there until Morton and the men came up with drawn weapons. “We’re fools,” Morton said. “We should have shown him how it works. He thought we’d double-crossed him.”

He motioned to the monster, and saw the savage glow fade from the coal-black eyes as he opened the door with elaborate gestures to show the operation.

Coeurl ended the lesson by trotting into the large room to his right. He lay down on the floor, and fought down the electric tautness of his nerves and muscles. A very fury of rage against himself consumed him. It seemed to his burning brain that he had lost the advantage of appearing a monster-creature. His strength must have startled and dismayed them.

It meant greater danger in the task which he now knew he must accomplish: To kill everything that could take the machine back to their world in search of unlimited food.

With unwinking eyes, Coeurl lay and watched the two men clearing away the loose rubble from the doorway of the huge old building. His whole body ached with the hunger of his cells for food. It throbbed through his palpitant muscles, and throbbed like a living thing in his brain. His every nerve quivered after the men who had wandered into the city. One of them, he knew, had gone—alone.

The dragging minutes fled and still he restrained himself, still he lay there watching, aware that he watched. They floated a metal machine from the ship to the rock mass that blocked the great doorway under the direction of a third man. No flicker of their fingers escaped his fierce stare, and the simplicity of the machinery became apparent to him, contempt grew upon him.

He knew what to expect finally, when the flame flared in incandescent violence and ate ravenously at the rock beneath. But in spite of his pre-knowledge, he deliberately jumped and snarled as if in fear. Heat burst forth. His ear tendrils caught the laughter of the men, their curious pleasure at his simulation.

The door was released, and Morton came over and went inside with the third man. The latter said:

“It’s a shambles. You can catch the drift of the stuff. Obviously, they used atomic energy, but in a different wheel form. That’s a peculiar development. In our science, atomic energy brought in the nonwheel mechanics possible that here they’ve progressed *further* to a new type of wheel mechanics. I hope their life is more preserved than this, or we’ll never know. What could have happened to a civilization to make it so different?”

A third voice broke through the communicators: “This is Siedel. I heard your question. Psychologically and sociologically speaking, the only reason why a territory becomes uninhabitable is lack of food.”

“But they’re so advanced scientifically, why didn’t they develop space flying and go elsewhere for food?”

“Ask Gunlie Lester,” interjected Morton. “I heard him expounding some theory even before we came.”

The astronomer answered the first call. “I’ve still got to verify all my facts, but this desolate planet revolving around that miserable red sun. There’s nothing else. No moon, not even a planet. The nearest star system is *nine hundred light-years* away.

“So tremendous would have been the problem of the ruling race of this world, that in one jump

not only have had to solve interplanetary but interstellar space traveling. ‘When you consider how development was—first the moon, then Venus—each success leading to the next, and after that the nearest stars; and last of all to the anti-accelerators that permitted galactic travel—considering that it would be impossible for any race to create such machines without practical experience. And, to reach a star so far away, they had no incentive for the space adventuring that makes for experience.’

Coerul was trotting briskly over to another group. But now, in the driving appetite that consumed him in the frenzy of his high scorn, he paid no attention to what they were doing. Memories of past knowledge, stirred into activity by what he had seen, flowed into his consciousness in an ever developing and more intense stream.

From group to group he sped, a nervous dynamo—jumpy, sick with Ibis awful hunger. A little figure stopped in front of him, and a formidable camera whirred as it took a picture of him. Over on another side a gigantic telescope was rearing up toward the sky. Nearby, a disintegrating machine drilled its search for an ever-deepening hole, down and down, straight down.

Coerul’s mind became a blur of things he watched with half attention. And ever more intense was the moment when he knew he could no longer carry on the torture of acting. His brain strained with impatience; his body burned with the fury of his eagerness to be off after the man who had gone to the city.

He could stand it no longer. A green foam misted his mouth, maddening him. He saw that in that moment, nobody was looking.

Like a shot from a gun, he was off. He floated along in great, gliding leaps, a shadow among the rocks. In a minute, the harsh terrain hid the spaceship and the two-legged beings.

Coerul forgot the ship, forgot everything but his purpose, as if his brain had been wiped clean by a memory-erasing brush. He circled widely, then raced into the city, along deserted streets, taking advantage of the ease of familiarity, through gaping holes in time-weakened walls, through long corridors, and into buildings. He slowed to a crouching lope as his ear tendrils caught the faint vibrations.

Suddenly, he stopped and peered from a scatter of fallen rock. The man was standing at what had been a window, sending the glaring rays of his flashlight into the gloomy interior. The flashlight man, a heavy-set, powerful fellow, walked off with quick, alert steps. Coerul didn’t like the man; he presaged trouble; it meant lightning reaction to danger.

Coerul waited till the human being had vanished around a corner, then he padded into the street, running now, tremendously faster than a man could walk, because his plan was clear in his brain. He slipped down the next street, past a long block of buildings. He turned the first corner at top speed, with dragging belly, crept into the half-darkness between the building and a huge chunk of debris. Ahead was barred by a solid line of loose rubble that made it like a valley, ending in a narrow neck. The neck had its outlet just below Coerul.

His ear tendrils caught the low-frequency waves of whistling. The sound throbbed through his head, suddenly terror caught with icy fingers at his brain. The man would have a gun. Suppose he levered atomic energy—one burst—before his own muscles could whip out in murder fury.

A little shower of rocks streamed past. And then the man was beneath him. Coerul reached out for a single crushing blow at the shimmering transparent headpiece of the spacesuit. There was a thud of metal and a gushing of blood. The man doubled up as if part of him had been telescoped. For a moment his bones and legs and muscles combined miraculously to keep him standing. Then he crumpled, and the clank of his space armor.

Fear completely evaporated, Coerul leaped out of hiding. With ravenous speed, he smashed through the man’s body within it to bits. Great chunks of metal, torn piecemeal from the suit, sprayed the ground. Flesh crunched.

It was simple to, tune in on the vibrations of the id, and to create the violent chemical dis freed it from the crushed bone. The id was, Coeurl discovered, mostly in the bone.

He felt revived, almost reborn. Here was more food than he had had in the whole past year.

Three minutes, and it was over, and Coeurl was off like a thing fleeing dire danger. Cautiously the glistening globe from the opposite side to that by which he had left. The men were all bu Gliding noiselessly, Coeurl slipped unnoticed up to a group of men.

Morton stared down at the horror of tattered flesh, metal and blood on the rock at his tightening in his throat that pre-vented speech. He heard Kent say:

“He *would* go alone, damn him!” The little chemist’s voice held a sob imprisoned; and Mor that Kent and Jarvey had chummed together for years in the way only two men can.

“The worst part of it is,” shuddered one of the men, “it looks like a senseless murder. His bo like little lumps of flat-tened jelly, but it seems to be all there. I’d almost wager that if we we here, there’d still be one hundred and seventy-five pounds by earth gravity. That’d be about o seventy pounds here.”

Smith broke in, his mournful face lined with gloom: “The killer attacked Jarvey, and then dis was alien—uneatable. Just like our big cat. Wouldn’t eat anything we set before him—” His w sudden, queer silence. Then he said slowly:

“Say, what about that creature? He’s big enough and strong enough to have done this w paws.”

Morton frowned. “It’s a thought. After all, he’s the only living thing we’ve seen. We can’t jus suspicion, of course—”

“Besides,” said one of the men, “he was never out of my sight.”

Before Morton could speak, Siedel, the psychologist, snapped, “Positive about that?”

The man hesitated. “Maybe he was for a few minutes. He was wandering around so n everything.”

“Exactly,” said Siedel with satisfaction. He turned to Morton. “You see, commander, impression that he was always around; and yet, thinking back over it, I find gap moments—probably long minutes—when he was completely out of sight.”

Morton’s face was dark with thought, as Kent broke in fiercely:

“I say, take no chances. Kill the brute on suspicion before he does any more damage.”

Morton said slowly: “Korita, you’ve been wandering around with Cranessy and Van Hom pussy is a descendant of the ruling class of this planet?”

The tall Japanese archeologist stared at the sky as if collecting his mind. “Commander M finally, respectfully, “there is a mystery here. Take a look, all of you, at that majestic skyline. M Gothic outline of the architecture. In spite of the megalopolis which they created, these people v soil. The buildings are not simply ornamented. They are ornamental in themselves. Here is the Done column, the Egyptian pyramid, the Gothic cathedral, growing out of the ground, earnest, If this lonely, desolate world can be regarded as a mother earth, then the land had a warm, a spir hearts of the race.

“The effect is emphasized by the winding streets. Their machines prove they were mathema were artists first; and so they did not create the geometrically designed cities of the ultra-sop metropolis. There is a genuine artistic abandon, a deep joyous emotion written in the curving and arrangements of houses, buildings and avenues; a sense of intensity, of divine belief in an inner not a decadent, hoary-with-age civilization, but a young and vigorous culture, confident, strong v

“There it ended. Abruptly, as if at this point culture had its Battle of Tours, and began to

ancient Mohammedan civilization. Or as if in one leap it spanned the centuries and entered contending states. In the Chinese civilization that period occupied 480-230 B. C., at the end of of Tsin saw the beginning of the Chinese Empire. This phase Egypt experienced between 1780 which the last century was the 'Hyksos'—unmentionable—time. The classical experience Ch~aeronea—338—and, at the pitch of horror, from the Gracchi—133—to Actium—31 B. C. European Americans were devastated by it in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and modern that, nominally, we entered the same phase fifty years ago; though, of course, we have solved the

"You may ask, commander, what has all this to do with your question? My answer is: there is a culture entering abruptly into the period of contending states. It is always a slow development; it is a merciless questioning of all that was once held sacred. Inner certainties cease to exist, are the ruthless probings of scientific and analytic minds. The skeptic becomes the highest type of being

"I say that this culture ended abruptly in its most flourishing age. The sociological effect of a catastrophe would be a sudden vanishing of morals, a reversion to almost bestial criminality, unbelief, a sense of ideal, a callous indifference to death. If this this pussy is a descendant of such a race, a cunning creature, a thief in the night, a cold-blooded murderer, who would cut his own brother's throat for gain."

"That's enough!" It was Kent's clipped voice. "Commander, I'm willing to act the role of executioner."

Smith interrupted sharply: "Listen, Morton, you're not going to kill that cat yet, even if he is a biological treasure house."

Kent and Smith were glaring angrily at each other. Morton frowned at them thoughtfully, then said: "I'm inclined to accept your theory as a working basis. But one question: Pussy comes from a planet of our own? That is, we are entering the highly civilized era of our culture, while he became suddenly the most vigorous period of his. *But* it is possible that his culture is a later one on this planet than the galactic-wide system we have civilized?"

"Exactly. His may be the middle of the tenth civilization of his world; while ours is the eighth, sprung from earth, each of the ten, of course, having been builded on the ruins of the one before."

"In that case, pussy would not know anything about the skepticism that made it possible for us to come out so positively as a criminal and murderer?"

"No; it would be literally magic to him."

Morton was smiling grimly. "Then I think you'll get your wish, Smith. We'll let pussy live; and if there are fatalities, now that we know him, it will be due to rank carelessness. There's just the chance that we're wrong. Like Siedel, I also have the impression that he was always around. But now—we've got Jarvey here like this. We'll put him in a coffin and bury him."

"No, we won't!" Kent barked. He flushed. "I beg your pardon, commander. I didn't mean to say that maintain pussy wanted something from that body. It looks to be all there, but something must be missing. I'm going to find out what, and pin this murder on him so that you'll have to believe it beyond the shadow of a doubt."

It was late night when Morton looked up from a book and saw Kent emerge through the door of the laboratories below.

Kent carried a large, flat bowl in his hands; his tired eyes flashed across at Morton, and he said in a harsh, voice: "Now watch!"

He started toward Coeurl, who lay sprawled on the great rug, pre-tending to be asleep.

Morton stopped him. "Wait a minute, Kent. Any other time, I wouldn't question your actions; but you're overwrought. What have you got there?"

Kent turned, and Morton saw that his first impression had been but a flashing glimpse of the t dark pouches under the little chemist's gray eyes—eyes that gazed feverishly from sunken cheeks to face.

"I've found the missing element," Kent said. "It's phosphorus. There wasn't so much as a of phosphorus left in Jarvey's bones. Every bit of it had been drained out—by what super-c know. There are ways of getting phosphorus out of the human body. For instance, a quick happened to the workman who helped build this ship. Remember, he fell into fifteen tons of mo least, so his relatives claimed—but the company wouldn't pay compensation until the metalite, found to contain a high percentage of phosphorus—"

"What about the bowl of food?" somebody interrupted. Men were putting away magazz looking up with interest.

"It's got organic phosphorus in it. He'll get the scent, or whatever it is that he uses instead of

"I think he gets the vibrations of things," Gourlay interjected lazily. "Sometimes, when h tendrils, I get a distinct static on the radio. And then, again, there's no reaction, just as if he's lower on the wave scale. He seems to control the vibrations at will."

Kent waited with obvious impatience until Gourlay's last word, then abruptly went on: "All r he gets the vibration of the phosphorus and reacts to it like an animal, then—well, we can de proved by his reaction. May I go ahead, Morton?"

"There are three things wrong with your plan," Morton said. "In the first place, you seem to a only animal; you seem to have forgotten he may not be hungry after Jarvey; you seem to think th suspicious. But set the bowl down. His reaction may tell us something."

Coeurl stared with unblinking black eyes as the man set the bowl before him. His ear tendrils the id-vibrations from the contents of the bowl—and he gave it not even a second glance.

He recognized this two-legged being as the one who had held the weapon that morning. Dang he floated to his feet. He caught the bowl with the fingerlike appendages at the end of one loop emptied its contents into the face of Kent, who shrank back with a yell.

Explosively, Coeurl flung the bowl aside and snapped a hawser-thick tentacle around the curs He didn't bother with the gun that hung from Kent's belt. It was only a vibration gun, he powered, but not an atomic disintegrator. He tossed the kicking Kent onto the nearest couch—a a hiss of dismay that he should have disarmed the man.

Not that the gun was dangerous—but, as the man furiously wiped the gruel from his face w reached with the other for his weapon. Coeurl crouched back as the gun was raised slowly and flame was discharged at his massive head.

His ear tendrils hummed as they canceled the efforts of the vibra-tion gun. His round, black e he caught the movement of men reaching for their metalite guns. Morton's voice lashed across th "Stop!"

Kent clicked off his weapon; and Coeurl crouched down, quivering with fury at this man who to reveal something of his power.

"Kent," said Morton coldly, "you're not the type to lose your head. You deliberately tri knowing that the majority of us are in favor of keeping him alive. You know what our rule is: If to my decisions, he must say so at the time. If the majority object, my decisions are overruled. one but you ob-jected, and, therefore, your action in taking the law into your own hands is mo and automatically debars you from voting for a year."

Kent stared grimly at the circle of faces. "Korita was right when he said ours was a highly c decadent." Passion flamed harshly in his voice. "My God, isn't there a man here who can see



situation? Jarvey dead only a few hours, and this creature, whom we all know to be guilty, lying planning his next murder; and the victim is right here in this room. What kind of men are we ghouls or is it that our civilization is so steeped in reason that we can contemplate a murderer sy

He fixed brooding eyes on Coeurl. "You were right, Morton, that's no animal. That's a devil hell of this forgotten planet, whirling its solitary way around a dying sun."

"Don't go melodramatic on us," Morton said. "Your analysis is all wrong, so far as I am concerned, not ghouls or cynics; we're simply scientists, and pussy here is going to be studied. Now that we doubt his ability to trap any of us. One against a hundred hasn't a chance." He glanced around for all of us?"

"Not for me, commander!" It was Smith who spoke, and, as Morton stared in amazement, amidst the excitement and momentary confusion, no one seems to have noticed that when Kent fired his beam hit this creature squarely on his cat head—and didn't hurt him."

Morton's amazed glance went from Smith to Coeurl, and back to Smith again. "Are you certain you say, it all happened so swiftly—when pussy wasn't hurt I simply assumed that Kent had mi

"He hit him in the face," Smith said positively. "A vibration gun, of course, can't even kill away—but it can injure him. There's no sign of injury on pussy, though, not even a singed hair."

"Perhaps his skin is a good insulation against heat of any kind."

"Perhaps. But in view of our uncertainty, I think we should lock him up in the cage."

While Morton frowned darkly in thought, Kent spoke up. "Now you're talking sense, Smith."

Morton asked: "Then you would be satisfied, Kent, if we put him in the cage?"

Kent considered, finally: "Yes. If four inches of micro-steel can't hold him, we'd better give h

Coeurl followed the men as they went out into the corridor. He trotted docilely along as Morton motioned him through a door he had not hitherto seen. He found himself in a square, solid metal clanged metallicly behind him; he felt the flow of power as the electric lock clicked home.

His lips parted in a grimace of hate, as he realized the trap, but he gave no other outward reaction to him that he had progressed a long way from the sunk-into-primitiveness creature who, a few moments had gone incoherent with fear in an elevator cage. Now, a thousand memories of his powers were in his brain; ten thousand cunningnesses were, after ages of disuse, once again part of his very being.

He sat quite still for a moment on the short, heavy haunches into which his body tapered, examining his surroundings. Finally, he lay down, his eyes glowing with contemptuous fire. The fools!

It was about an hour later when he heard the man—Smith—fumbling overhead. Vibrations passed and for just an instant he was startled. He leaped to his feet in pure terror—and then realized that they were vibrations, not atomic explosions. Somebody was taking pictures of the inside of his body.

He crouched down again, but his ear tendrils vibrated, and he thought contemptuously: the silly surprised when he tried to develop those pictures.

After a while the man went away, and for a long time there were noises of men doing things, too, died away slowly.

Coeurl lay waiting, as he felt the silence creep over the ship. In the long ago, before the dawn of the coeurls, too, had slept at night; and the memory of it had been revived the day before when the men dozing. At last, the vibration of two pairs of feet, pacing, pacing endlessly, was the only frequency that throbbed on his ear tendrils.

Tensely, he listened to the two watchmen. The first one walked slowly past the cage door. Ten feet behind him came the second. Coeurl sensed the alertness of these men; knew that he could not escape either while they walked separately. It meant—he must be doubly careful!

Fifteen minutes, and they came again. The moment they were past, he switched his se

vibrations to a vastly higher range. The pulsating violence of the atomic engines stammered its brain. The electric dynamos hummed their muffled song of pure power. He felt the whisper of the wires in the walls of his cage, and through the electric lock of his door. He forced his quivering straining immobility, his senses seeking, searching, to tune in on that sibilant tempest of energy. His ear tendrils vibrated in harmony—he caught the surging change into shrillness of that rippling force.

There was a sharp click of metal on metal. With a gentle touch of one tentacle, Coeurl pushed and glided out into the dully gleaming corridor. For just a moment he felt contempt, a glow of satisfaction, a thought of the stupid creatures who dared to match their wit against a coeurl. And in that moment a thought of other coeurls. A queer, exultant sense of race pounded through his being; the driving force of ruthless competition yielded reluctantly before pride of kinship with the future rulers of all space.

Suddenly, he felt weighed down by his limitations, his need for other coeurls, his aloneness. He was alone, a hundred, with the stake all eternity; the starry universe itself beckoned his rapacious, vaulting ambition. If he failed, there would never be a second chance—no time to revive long-rotted machinery, and attend to the secret of space travel.

He padded along on tensed paws—through the salon—into the next corridor—and came to the door. It stood half open. One swift flow of synchronized muscles, one swiftly lashing tentacle, one unresisting throat of the sleeping man, crushing it, and the lifeless head rolled crazily, the body twitching.

Seven bedrooms; seven dead men. It was the seventh taste of murder that brought a sudden realization of a pure, unbounded desire to kill, return of a millennium-old habit of destroying everything contained within his id.

As the twelfth man slipped convulsively into death, Coeurl emerged abruptly from the sensuous world to the sound of footsteps.

They were not near—that was what brought wave after wave of fright swirling into the chamber. The door became his brain.

The watchmen were coming slowly along the corridor toward the door of the cage which he was imprisoned. In a moment, the first man would see the open door—and sound the alarm.

Coeurl caught at the vanishing remnants of his reason. With frantic speed, careless now of accident, he raced—along the corridor with its bedroom doors—through the salon. He emerged into the next room, cringing in awful anticipation of the atomic flame he expected would stab into his face.

The two men were together, standing side by side. For one single instant, Coeurl could scarcely believe his tremendous good luck. Like a fool the second had come running when he saw the other stop. He opened the door. They looked up, paralyzed, before the nightmare of claws and tentacles, the ferocious stare, the hate-filled eyes.

The first man went for his gun, but the second, physically frozen before the doom he saw, uttered a shrill cry of horror that floated along the corridors—and ended in a curious gurgle, as Coeurl pushed the corpses with one irresistible motion the full length of the corridor. He didn't want the dead bodies in the cage. That was his one hope.

Shaking in every nerve and muscle, conscious of the terrible error he had made, unable to think, he plunged into the cage. The door clicked softly shut behind him. Power flowed once more through the electric lock.

He crouched tensely, simulating sleep, as he heard the rush of many feet, caught the vibrations, the voices. He knew when somebody actuated the cage audioscope and looked in. A few moments later other bodies would be discovered.

“Siedel gone!” Morton said numbly. “What are we going to do without Siedel? And Br Coulter and— Horrible!”

He covered his face with his hands, but only for an instant. He looked up grimly, his heavy he stared into the stern faces that surrounded him. “If anybody’s got so much as a germ of an ic

“Space madness!”

“I’ve thought of that. But there hasn’t been a case of a man going mad for fifty years. Dr everybody, of course, and right now he’s looking at the bodies with that possibility in mind.”

As he finished, he saw the doctor coming through the door. Men crowded aside to make way

“I heard you, commander,” Dr. Eggert said, “and I think I can say right now that the space-m out. The throats of these men have been squeezed to a jelly. No human being could have exerted strength without using a machine.”

Morton saw that the doctor’s eyes kept looking down the corridor, and he shook his head and

“It’s no use suspecting pussy, doctor. He’s in his cage, pacing up and down. Obviously and— Man alive! You can’t suspect him. That cage was built to hold literally anything— micro-steel—and there’s not a scratch on the door. Kent, even you won’t say, ‘Kill him on sus there can’t be any suspicion, unless there’s a new science here, beyond anything we can imagine

“On the contrary,” said Smith flatly, “we have all the evidence we need. I used the telefluor know the arrangement we have on top of the cage—and tried to take some pictures. They just jumped when the telefluor was turned on, as if he felt the vibrations.

“You all know what Gourlay said before? This beast can apparently receive and send v lengths. The way he dominated the power of Kent’s gun is final proof of his special ability energy.”

“What in the name of all the hells have we got here?” One of the men groaned. “Why, if he power, and sent it out in any vibrations, there’s nothing to stop him killing all of us.”

“Which proves,” snapped Morton, “that he isn’t invincible, or he would have done it long ago

Very deliberately, he walked over to the mechanism that controlled the prison cage.

“You’re not going to open the door!” Kent gasped, reaching for his gun.

“No, but if I pull this switch, electricity will flow through the floor, and electrocute whatever never had to use this before, so you had probably forgotten about it.”

He jerked the switch hard over. Blue fire flashed from the metal, and a bank of fuses above hi with a single bang.

Morton frowned. “That’s funny. Those fuses shouldn’t have blown! Well, we can’t even lo wrecked the audios, too.”

Smith said: “If he could interfere with the electric lock, enough to open the door, then he p every possible danger and was ready to interfere when you threw that switch.”

“At least, it proves he’s vulnerable to our energies!” Morton smiled grimly. “Because he harmless. The important thing is, we’ve got him behind four inches of the toughest of metal. At t open the door and ray him to death. But first, I think we’ll try to use the telefluor power cable—

A commotion from inside the cage interrupted his words. A heavy body crashed against a wa dull thump.

“He knows what we were trying to do!” Smith grunted to Morton. “And I’ll bet it’s a very sic What a fool he was to go back into that cage and does he realize it!”

The tension was relaxing; men were smiling nervously, and there was even a ripple of humorle picture Smith drew of the monster’s discomfiture.

“What I’d like to know,” said Pennons, the engineer, “is, why did the telefluor meter dial ju full power when pussy made that noise? It’s right under my nose here, and the dial jumped like a

There was silence both without and within the cage, then Morton said: "It may mean he's got everybody, and keep your guns ready. Pussy was a fool to think he could conquer a hundred men, far the most formidable creature in the galactic system. He may come out of that door, rather than a trap. And he's just tough enough to take some of us with him—if we're not careful."

The men backed slowly in a solid body; and somebody said: "That's funny. I thought I heard 'Elevator!' Morton echoed. "Are you sure, man?"

"Just for a moment I was!" The man, a member of the crew, hesitated. "We were all shuffling. Take somebody with you, and go look. Bring whoever dared to run off back here—"

There was a jar, a horrible jerk, as the whole gigantic body of the ship careened under them. Morton fell to the floor with a violence that stunned him. He fought back to consciousness, aware of the other men around him. He shouted: "Who the devil started those engines!"

The agonizing acceleration continued; his feet dragged with awful exertion, as he fumbled for the audioscope, and punched the engine-room number. The picture that flooded onto the screen bellowed to his lips:

"It's pussy! He's in the engine room—and we're heading straight out into space."

The screen went black even as he spoke, and he could see no more.

It was Morton who first staggered across the salon floor to the supply room where the space suits were. After fumbling almost blindly into his own suit, he cut the effects of the body-torturing acceleration for the semiconscious men on the floor. In a few moments, other men were assisting him; and only a matter of minutes before everybody was clad in metalite, with anti-acceleration motor power.

It was Morton then who, after first looking into the cage, opened the door and stood, silencing a crowd crowded about him, to stare at the gaping hole in the rear wall. The hole was a frightful thing of jagged, horribly bent metal, and it opened upon another corridor.

"I'll swear," whispered Pennons, "that it's impossible. The ten-ton hammer in the machine shop couldn't more than dent four inches of micro with one blow—and we only heard one. It would take at least an atomic disintegrator to do the job. Morton, this is a super-being."

Morton saw that Smith was examining the break in the wall. The biologist looked up. "If our men weren't dead! We need a metallurgist to explain this. Look!"

He touched the broken edge of the metal. A piece crumbled in his finger and slithered away into a cloud of dust to the floor. Morton noticed for the first time that there was a little pile of metallic debris.

"You've hit it." Morton nodded. "No miracle of strength here. The monster merely used his strength to interfere with the electronic tensions holding the metal together. That would account, too, for the telefluor power cable that Pennons noticed. The thing used the power with his body as a transformer. He smashed through the wall, ran down the corridor to the elevator's shaft, and so down to the engine room."

"In the meantime, commander," Kent said quietly, "we are faced with a super-being in control of a completely dominating the engine room and its almost unlimited power, and in possession of the machine shops."

Morton felt the silence, while the men pondered the chemist's words. Their anxiety was a talisman lay heavily upon their faces; in every expression was the growing realization that here was the ultimate stake of their lives; their very existence was at stake and perhaps much more. Morton voiced the thought in his mind:

"Suppose he wins. He's utterly ruthless, and he probably sees galactic power within his grasp."

"Kent is wrong," barked the chief navigator. "The thing doesn't dominate the engine room. We control the control room, and that gives us first control of all the machines. You fellows may not know

set-up we have; but, though he can eventually disconnect us, we can cut off all the switches in now. Commander, why didn't you just shut off the power instead of putting us into spacesuits? you could have adjusted the ship to the acceleration."

"For two reasons," Morton answered. "Individually, we're safer within the force fields of our we can't afford to give up our advantages in panicky moves."

"Advantages! What other advantages have we got?"

"We know things about him," Morton replied. "And right now, we're going to make a test. five men to each of the four approaches to the engine room. Take atomic disintegrators to blast doors. They're all shut, I noticed. He's locked himself in.

"Selenski, you go up to the control room and shut off everything except the drive engines. Close the master switch, and shut them off all at once. One thing, though—leave the acceleration on. anti-acceleration must be applied to the ship. Under-stand?"

"Aye, sir!" The pilot saluted.

"And report to me through the communicators if any of the machines start to run again." He said. "I'm going to lead the main approach. Kent, you take No. 1; Smith, No. 3, and Pennons, No. 4. find out right now if we're dealing with unlimited science, or a creature limited like the rest of us. second possibility."

Morton had an empty sense of walking endlessly, as he moved, a giant of a man in his armor, along the glistening metal tube that was the main corridor of the engine-room floor. Real creature had already shown feet of clay, yet the feeling that here was an invincible being persisted.

He spoke into the communicator: "It's no use trying to sneak up on him. He can probably hear. So just wheel up your units. He hasn't been in that engine room long enough to do anything.

"As I've said, this is largely a test attack. In the first place, we could never forgive ourselves to conquer him now, before he's had time to prepare against us. But, aside from the possibility to destroy him immediately, I have a theory.

"The idea goes something like this: Those doors are built to withstand accidental atomic explosion. It will take fifteen minutes for the atomic disintegrators to smash them. During that period the main power will be on. True, the drive will be on, but that's straight atomic explosion. My theory is, he can't hear that; and in a few minutes you'll see what I mean—I hope."

His voice was suddenly crisp: "Ready, Selenski?"

"Aye, ready."

"Then cut the master switch."

The corridor—the whole ship, Morton knew—was abruptly plunged into darkness. Morton's dazzling light of his spacesuit; the other men did the same, their faces pale and drawn.

"Blast!" Morton barked into his communicator.

The mobile units throbbed; and then pure atomic flame ravened out and poured upon the blast door. The first molten droplet rolled reluctantly, not down, but up the door. The second was followed a shaky downward course. The third rolled sideways—for this was pure force, not gravitation. Other drops followed until a dozen streams trickled sedately yet unerringly in all directions—streams of hellish, sparkling fire, bright as fairy gems, alive with the coruscating light. Suddenly tortured, and running blindly, crazy with pain.

The minutes ate at time like a slow acid. At last Morton asked huskily:

"Selenski?"

"Nothing yet, commander."

Morton half whispered: "But he must be doing something. He can't be just waiting in there like

Selenski?"

"Nothing, commander."

Seven minutes, eight minutes, then twelve.

"Commander!" It was Selenski's voice, taut. "He's got the electric dynamo running."

Morton drew a deep breath, and heard one of his men say:

"That's funny. We can't get any deeper. Boss, take a look at this."

Morton looked. The little scintillating streams had frozen rigid. The ferocity of the disintegration against metal grown suddenly invulnerable.

Morton sighed. "Our test is over. Leave two men guarding every corridor. The others come to the control room."

He seated himself a few minutes later before the massive control keyboard. "So far as I'm concerned, it was a success. We know that of all the machines in the engine room, the most important to the operation is the electric dynamo. He must have worked in a frenzy of terror while we were at the doors."

"Of course, it's easy to see what he did," Penrions said. "Once he had the power he increased the tensions of the door to their ultimate."

"The main thing is this," Smith chimed in. "He works with vibrations only so far as his speciality is concerned, and the energy must come from outside himself. Atomic energy in its pure form, not as we can handle it, he can't handle any differently than we can."

Kent said glumly: "The main point in my opinion is that he stopped us cold. What's the good of having his control over vibrations did it? If we can't break through those doors with our atomic disintegrator, it's finished."

Morton shook his head. "Not finished—but we'll have to do some planning. First, though, we must stop the engines. It'll be harder for him to get control of them when they're running."

He pulled the master switch back into place with a jerk. There was a hum, as scores of machines began their violent life in the engine room a hundred feet below. The noises sank to a steady vibration of throbbing.

Three hours later, Morton paced up and down before the men gathered in the salon. His face was uncombed; the space pallor of his strong face emphasized rather than detracted from the aggressiveness of his jaw. When he spoke, his deep voice was crisp to the point of sharpness:

"To make sure that our plans are fully co-ordinated, I'm going to ask each expert in turn to outline the method of the overpowering of this creature. Penrions first!"

Penrions stood up briskly. He was not a big man, Morton thought, yet he looked big, perhaps from the air of authority. This man knew engines, and the history of engines. Morton had heard him speak through its evolution from a simple toy to the highly complicated modern instrument. He had seen the development on a hundred planets; and there was literally nothing fundamental that he did not know of mechanics. It was almost weird to hear Penrions, who could have spoken for a thousand hours on the subject, have touched upon his subject, say with absurd brevity:

"We've set up a relay in the control room to start and stop every engine rhythmically. The relay is triggered a hundred times a second, and the effect will be to create vibrations of every description."

There is just a possibility that one or more of the machines will burst, on the principle of so-called bridge in step—you've heard that old story, no doubt—but in my opinion there is no real danger of that tough metal. The main purpose is simply to interfere with the interference of the creature through the doors."

"Gourlay next!" barked Morton.

Gourlay climbed lazily to his feet. He looked sleepy, as if he was somewhat bored by the whole thing, yet Morton knew he loved people to think him lazy, a good-for-nothing slouch, who spent his

and his nights catching forty winks. His title was chief communication engineer, but his knowledge was of every vibration field; and he was probably, with the possible exception of Kent, the fastest thinker. His voice drawled out, and—Morton noted—the very deliberate assurance of it had a soothing effect on the men—anxious faces relaxed, bodies leaned back more restfully:

“Once inside,” Gourlay said, “we’ve rigged up vibration screens of pure force that shield everything he’s got on the ball. They work on the principle of reflection, so that everything he does is reflected back to him. In addition, we’ve got plenty of spare electric energy that we’ll just feed into the copper cups. There must be a limit to his capacity for handling power with those insulated nerves.”

“Selenski!” called Morton.

The chief pilot was already standing, as if he had anticipated Morton’s call. And that, Morton thought, was the man. His nerves had that rocklike steadiness which is the first requirement of the master commander of a ship’s movements; yet that very steadiness seemed to rest on dynamite ready to explode at its command. He was not a man of great learning, but he “reacted” to stimuli so fast that he always seemed to be on top of things.

“The impression I’ve received of the plan is that it must be cumulative. Just when the creature can’t stand any more, another thing happens to add to his trouble and confusion. When the time comes, I’m supposed to cut in the anti-accelerators. The commander thinks with Gunlie I’m sure that the creatures will know nothing about anti-acceleration. It’s a development, pure and simple, of interstellar flight, and couldn’t have been developed in any other way. We think when the creatures are subjected to the effects of the anti-acceleration—you all remember the caved-in feeling you had the first month—what to think or do.”

“Korita next.”

“I can only offer you encouragement,” said the archeologist, “on the basis of my theory that the creature is all the characteristics of a criminal of the early ages of any civilization, complicated by an appalling degree of primitiveness. The suggestion has been made by Smith that his knowledge of science is puzzling, but it doesn’t mean that we are dealing with an actual inhabitant, not a descendant of the inhabitants of the dead world. This would ascribe a virtual immortality to our enemy, a possibility which is borne out by his ability to breathe both oxygen and chlorine—or neither—but even that makes no difference. He comes from a civilization; and he has sunk so low that his ideas are mostly memories of that age.

“In spite of all the powers of his body, he lost his head in the elevator the first morning, until he was rescued. He placed himself in such a position that he was forced to reveal his special powers against the wall. He bungled the mass murders a few hours ago. In fact, his whole record is one of the low cunning and egotistical mind which has little or no conception of the vast organization with which it is confronted.”

“He is like the ancient German soldier who felt superior to the elderly Roman scholar, yet the scholar was a mighty civilization of which the Germans of that day stood in awe.

“You may suggest that the sack of Rome by the Germans in later years defeats my argument. But modern historians agree that the ‘sack’ was an historical accident, and not history in the true sense. The movement of the ‘Sea-peoples’ which set in against the Egyptian civilization from 1400 B.C. was only as regards the Cretan island-realm—their mighty expeditions against the Libyan and Phoenician empires, the accompaniment of viking fleets, failed as those of the Huns failed against the Chinese Empire. The great cities have been abandoned in any event. Ancient, glorious Samarra was desolate by the tenth century. Asoka’s great capital, was an immense and completely uninhabited waste of houses when the Hsinan-tang visited it about A. D. 635.

“We have, then, a primitive, and that primitive is now far out in space, completely outside our present habitat. I say, let’s go in and win.”

One of the men grumbled, as Korita finished: “You can talk about the sack of Rome being

about this fellow being a primitive, but the facts are facts. It looks to me as if Rome is about to be won't be no primitive that did it, either. This guy's got plenty of what it takes."

Morton smiled grimly at the man, a member of the crew. "We'll see about that—right now!"

In the blazing brilliance of the gigantic machine shop, Coeurl slaved. The forty-foot, cigar-shaped ship was nearly finished. With a grunt of effort, he completed the laborious installation of the drive shaft. He paused to survey his craft.

Its interior, visible through the one aperture in the outer wall, was pitifully small. There was nothing but the engines—and a narrow space for himself.

He plunged frantically back to work as he heard the approach of the men, and the sudden, tempest-like thunder of the engines—a rhythmical off-and-on hum, shriller in tone, sharper, more insistent than the deep-throated, steady throb that had preceded it. Suddenly, there were the atomic disintegrators, the massive outer doors.

He fought them off, but never wavered from his task. Every mighty muscle of his powerful body he carried great loads of tools, machines and instruments, and dumped them into the bottom of the ship. There was no time to fit anything into place, no time for anything—no time—no time.

The thought pounded at his reason. He felt strangely weary for the first time in his long existence. With a last, tortured heave, he jerked the gigantic sheet of metal into the gaping hole of the ship—and stood there for a terrible minute, balancing it precariously.

He knew the doors were going down. Half a dozen disintegrators concentrating on one point, though slowly, eating away the remaining inches. With a gasp, he released his mind from its concentration, concentrated every ounce of his mind on the yard-thick outer wall, toward which the blunt nose of the ship was pointing.

His body cringed from the surging power that flowed from the electric dynamo through his body, that resisting wall. The whole inside of him felt on fire, and he knew that he was dangerously close to his ultimate load.

And still he stood there, shuddering with the awful pain, holding the unfastened metal plate with his tentacles. His massive head pointed as in dread fascination at that bitterly hard wall.

He heard one of the engine-room doors crash inward. Men shouted; disintegrators rolled forward, power unchecked. Coeurl heard the floor of the engine room hiss in protest, as those beams of light tore everything in their path to bits. The machines rolled closer; cautious footsteps sounded behind him. In a minute they would be at the flimsy doors separating the engine room from the machine shop.

Suddenly, Coeurl was satisfied. With a snarl of hate, a vindictive glow of feral eyes, he ducked under the craft, and pulled the metal plate down into place as if it was a hatchway.

His ear tendrils hummed, as he softened the edges of the surrounding metal. In an instant, the metal was welded—it was part of his ship, a seamless, rivetless part of a whole that was solid opaque metal with two transparent areas, one in the front, one in the rear.

His tentacle embraced the power drive with almost sensuous tenderness. There was a forward motion, a fragile machine, straight at the great outer wall of the machine shops. The nose of the ship touched—and the wall dissolved in a glittering shower of dust.

Coeurl felt the barest retarding movement; and then he kicked the nose of the machine out into space, twisted it about, and headed back in the direction from which the big ship had been coming. Hours.

Men in space armor stood in the jagged hole that yawned in the lower reaches of the gigantic ship, and the great ship grew smaller. Then the men were gone; and there was only the ship with its thousand blurring portholes. The ball shrank incredibly, too small now for individual portholes to



Almost straight ahead, Coeurl saw a tiny, dim, reddish ball—his own sun, he realized. He headed full speed. There were caves where he could hide and with other coeurls build secretly a spaceship that could reach other planets safely—now that he knew how.

His body ached from the agony of acceleration, yet he dared not let up for a single instant. He was half in terror. The globe was still there, a tiny dot of light in the immense blackness of space, but it twinkled and was gone.

For a brief moment, he had the empty, frightened impression that just before it disappeared, he could see nothing. He could not, escape the belief that they had shut off all their lights, and were leaving him in the darkness. Worried and uncertain, he looked through the forward transparent plate.

A tremor of dismay shot through him. The dim red sun toward which he was heading was not there. It *was* becoming *smaller* by the instant, and it grew visibly tinier during the next five minutes, becoming a dot in the sky—and vanished like the ship.

Fear came then, a blinding surge of it, that swept through his being and left him chilled with a sense of the unknown. For minutes, he stared frantically into the space ahead, searching for some landmark. Remote stars glimmered there, unwinking points against a velvet background of unfathomable distance.

Wait! One of the points was growing larger. With every muscle and nerve tensed, Coeurl watched it becoming a dot, a round ball of light—red light. Bigger, bigger, it grew. Suddenly, the red light turned white—and there, before him, was the great globe of the spaceship, lights glaring from every part of the very ship which a few minutes before he had watched vanish behind him.

Something happened to Coeurl in that moment. His brain was spinning like a flywheel, fast and incoherently. Suddenly, the wheel flew apart into a million aching fragments. His eyes almost started from their sockets as, like a maddened animal, he raged in his small quarters.

His tentacles clutched at precious instruments and flung them in-sensately; his paws smashed against the very walls of his ship. Finally, in a brief flash of sanity, he knew that he couldn't face the inevitable disintegrators.

It was a simple thing to create the violent disorganization that freed every drop of id from his mind.

They found him lying dead in a little pool of phosphorus.

"Poor pussy," said Morton. "I wonder what he thought when he saw us appear ahead of him. The sun disappeared. Knowing nothing of anti-accelerators, he couldn't know that we could stop and turn back, whereas it would take him more than three hours to decelerate; and in the meantime he'd be drifting farther away from where he wanted to go. He couldn't know that by stopping, we flashed past him at ten miles a second. Of course, he, didn't have a chance once he left our ship. The whole world must have been topsy-turvy."

"Never mind the sympathy," he heard Kent say behind him. "We've got a job—to kill the damned miserable world."

Korita murmured softly: "That should be simple. They are but primitives; and we have men and women, and they will come to us, cunningly expecting to delude us."

Smith snapped: "You fellows make me sick! Pussy was the toughest nut we ever had to deal with. Everything he needed to defeat us—"

Morton smiled as Korita interrupted blandly: "Exactly, my dear Smith, except that he reacted to the biological impulses of his type. His defeat was already foreshadowed when we unerringly arrested a criminal from a certain era of his civilization."

"It was history, honorable Mr. Smith, our knowledge of history that defeated him," said the archeologist, reverting to the ancient politeness of his race.