

The Hand of Zei

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CONTENT

[CHAPTER ONE](#)

[CHAPTER TWO](#)

[CHAPTER THREE](#)

[CHAPTER FOUR](#)

[CHAPTER FIVE](#)

[CHAPTER SIX](#)

[CHAPTER SEVEN](#)

[CHAPTER EIGHT](#)

[CHAPTER NINE](#)

[CHAPTER TEN](#)

[CHAPTER ELEVEN](#)

[CHAPTER TWELVE](#)

[CHAPTER THIRTEEN](#)

[CHAPTER FOURTEEN](#)

[CHAPTER FIFTEEN](#)

[CHAPTER SIXTEEN](#)

[CHAPTER SEVENTEEN](#)

[CHAPTER EIGHTEEN](#)

## CHAPTER ONE

On a fine clear morning, the sun rose redly over the rim of the Banjao Sea. The three moons of Krishna, which—as happens but seldom on that planet—were all in opposition to the sun at once, slipped one by one below the western horizon.

The rising sun, which the Krishnans call Roqir and the Earthmen call Tau Ceti, cast its ruddy rays slantwise across a vast floating swamp. Near the northern margin of this marine morass, these rays picked out a movement. A small ship crept eastward along the ragged edge of the swamp, where the floating continent of terpahla sea vine frayed out into streamers and floating islands.

A high-peaked, triangular lateen sail, barely filled by the faint dawn breeze from the north, flew from the single mast. To speed the little craft along, seven heavy-shouldered Krishnans sat in a row down each side of the deck, each man heaving on an oar. At the stern a stocky, gnarled old Krishnan, looking like some barnacled sea monster, gripped the tiller. A pair of staring eyes were painted upon the bow; while, across the transom of the stern, a row of hooked characters gave the ship's name as Shambor.

Driven by its sail and its fourteen oars, the Shambor forged ahead into the sunrise, now and then altering its course to dodge a patch of terpahla. After each swerve, however, the steersman swung his vessel back towards a single objective: a primitive seagoing raft, with a tattered sail flapping feebly in the faint breeze. This derelict floated awash a few bowshots ahead.

Two persons lay prone on the rotting planks of this craft, peering towards the approaching ship from under their hands. At first sight they looked like Krishnans, a man and a woman. That is, they were of much the same size and shape as Earthmen, but with minor differences.

Thus their skins had a faint olive-greenish tinge, and the woman's dark hair was decidedly green. The man's head, however, was shaven, although a coarse bronze fuzz had begun to sprout from his scalp. Their ears were larger than those of Terrans, rising to points that gave them an elfin look. From the forehead of each, just above the inner ends of the eyebrows, rose a pair of the feathery antennae, like extra eyebrows, which served Krishnans as organs of smell.

The woman was young, tall, and superbly proportioned, with dark eyes and a prominent aquiline nose. She wore only the remains of a gown of gauze, shortened to knee-length by pulling up through her girdle. The garment, however, was so tattered that it was hardly better than none at all. The right shoulder strap had parted, exposing more of the girl's beauty than many Earthmen would consider seemly. Her bare feet had been chafed raw in places.

The man was tall and muscular, although his large-boned form, with knobby joints and oversized hands and feet, would not have been deemed a thing of beauty. He wore a stained and faded suit of pale blue, with short baggy breeches and a jacket with silver buttons. Thin leather boots rose to his calves. Beside him, on the deck, lay a dented ornamental helmet of thin silver, from which sprouted a pair of batlike silver wings.

The costume was, in fact, the uniform of the Mejrou Qurardena, which may be translated as Reliable Express Company. In this disguise, the man had sought to enter the Sunqar—the floating swamp—and snatch away two persons whom the pirates of that sinister place held captive. He had succeeded with

one, the girl beside him.

Also on the planks of the raft lay four boards, a little over six feet long and whittled into crude skis, together with the ropes that had served as lashings and the oars the fugitives had used as balancing poles. It was on these skis that the man and the woman had escaped the previous night from the settlement of the Morya Sunqaruma—the freebooters of the Sunqar. In all the many centuries of Krishnan history, nobody had ever before thought of using this method of passage over the otherwise impassable mat of terpahla vine.

The terpahla lay all around the raft: a tangle of brown seaweed upheld by grapelike clusters of purple bladders. Peering over the side, one could sometimes catch a flash of motion where the fondaqa, the large venomous eels of the Sunqar, pursued their prey.

The man, however, was not studying the sea life of the Sunqar. He was frowning towards the approaching ship, which showed a faint whitish triangle of sail above the swampy surface. Now and then he cast a glance to southward, towards the main body of the floating continent of terpahla. A vast congeries of derelict vessels broke the horizon in that direction. Here the beaked galleys of Dur and the tubby roundships of Jazmurian slowly rotted in the unbreakable grip of the vine.

Even the violent storms of the Krishnan subtropics could no more than ruffle the surface of the Sunqar. From time to time, however, the swamp heaved and bubbled with the terrible sea life of the planet, the most fell of which was the gvam or harpooner.

But no monsters now broke the sluggish surface. Here in the growing light reigned silence and haze and the stench of the strangling vine.

Here, also, rose the works of man. The Morya Sunqaruma had built a floating city of derelicts. They kept a passage clear from the margins of the vine to their settlement, whence from time to time they sallied forth in reconditioned derelicts, or ships made from the sounder timbers of such, to work their will upon the nations and mariners of the TripleSeas .

Now, as the man on the raft looked towards the settlement, faint plumes of blue smoke arose from the ramshackle cluster of improvised houseboats. Along with domestic doings, the Morya were beginning the day's run of janru—that amazing drug which, extracted from the terpahla and incorporated in perfumery, gave any woman, either Krishnan or Terran, what power she wished over any man. By devious routes the stuff was smuggled from the Sunqar to Earth, where it wrought much social havoc.

Looking back towards the approaching Shambor , the man on the raft muttered: "It's our ship, all right, but..."

"But what, O Snyol?" said the girl.

"Because, Zei darling, it shouldn't have that sail up. Anybody with a telescope could see the sail from the settlement. So either my boys are being stupid, or they're not my boys."

The man had spoken Gozashtandou, the common speech of the western shores of the TripleSeas . He spoke with a marked accent, which he asserted to be that of Nyamadze, the antarctic Krishnan land he claimed as his home. One skilled in such matters, however, would easily have recognized his dialect for that of an Earthman.

For the man was neither Snyol of Pleshch, an exiled officer and adventurer from cold Nyamadze, nor yet

the expressman Gozzan, both of which he had at various times pretended to be. He was Dirk Cornelius Barnevelt, a native of New York State, United States of America, Terra. The points on his ears, the antennae on his brow, and the faint greenish flush to his skin were all artificial, wrought upon his person by the skill of the barber at Novorecife, the outpost on Krishna of the Viagens Interplanetarias.

Moreover, Barnevelt was an employee of the firm of Igor Shtain, Limited. He was in fact the ghost writer for the firm. The corporation included the explorer Shtain himself, who traveled in far places and brought back reels of data; Barnevelt, who composed articles and lectures about these travels; and an actor, made up to look like Shtain, who delivered the lectures. In this age of specialization, the firm also kept a xenologist, who told the others what to think about the data that the intrepid Shtain had gathered.

Zeï said: "When yestereve the brabble broke forth upon the ship, you would fain have trussed an Earthman who dwelt among the Sunqaruma, tossed him into the treasure chest, and borne him forth. You recall the man—a stubby wight with wrinkled, ruddy face, blue eyes, and stiff gray hair, growing upon his upper lip as well as on his pate?"

"Yes."

"Well, at that time, you said you'd vouchsafe me anon the reason for this antic. Methinks the time has come for full confession. So answer, sir: wherefore this caprice?"

Barnevelt took so long about answering that she said: "Well, dear my lord?"

"That man," said Barnevelt carefully, "is Igor Shtain, a Terran who disappeared from the ken of his kind. I promised the Earthmen at Novorecife—for a consideration—to try to find and rescue him. Well, as you saw, he doesn't want to be rescued. Evidently that dinosaur thing who heads the gang—Sheafase—has put the Osirian hex on friend Shtain, so he no longer knows who he is but thinks he's just another Sunqaro buccaneer. At the time I signed up, of course, I didn't know I'd be called upon to rescue you, too."

"How sad that my poor self should thus by inadvertence clog the cogwheels of your worthy enterprise!"

"Oh, don't talk nonsense, darling. I'd rather rescue one of you than a dozen Shtains. Give me a kiss!"

Again, Barnevelt demonstrated the Earthly custom that he had taught Zeï while they waited on the raft for dawn. Aside from the natural pleasure of making love to this gorgeous creature, he hoped thus to distract her mind from further questions.

Moreover, he was more than half in love with her and suspected that—as nearly as one could tell in dealing with one of another species—she felt the same towards him. They had become good friends during the time that he and George Tangaloo, the xenologist, had stayed at Ghulinde, capital of Qirib. Although Zeï was the only daughter of Queen Al-vandi, a combination of circumstances had caused Barnevelt and Tangaloo to be welcomed at the palace as distinguished and sought-after guests while they abode in Ghulinde. They had been outfitting an expedition, supposedly for hunting gvam stones but actually for seeking the missing Shtain.

Then the pirates of the Sunqar had raided Ghulinde and carried off Zeï. In the fracas, Tangaloo had been wounded. Fierce old Queen Alvahdi had seized the genial Samoan as a hostage to force Barnevelt, still under his alias of Snyol, to try to recover her daughter. Although he had succeeded with Zeï, two rescues at once had proved too many. So Shtain, still believing himself a Sunqaruma, remained behind in the settlement.

The daring rescue and the brilliant improvisation of skis to cross the uncrossable weed had naturally enlarged Barnevelt still further in the eyes of the princess. In fact, an hour earlier, when they had removed their soaking garments and hung them on the mast stay to dry, they had come perilously close to consummating their mutual\* desire.

Two natures had struggled for supremacy in Barnevelt. One was the healthy young animal, which was all for it; the other was the cautious, calculating man of affairs. The latter nature had warned that such intimacy might cost Barnevelt his head.

For Qirib was a matriarchate, where the queen took a new consort every year. At the end of the year, the old king was executed and ceremonially eaten at a solemn religious festival. It was this festival, the kashyo, which the piratical raid had interrupted. In the confused fighting, old King Kaj had perished, struck down while wielding the executioner's axe, in a last-minute recovery of his manhood, against the raiders.

Barnevelt, knowing that Queen Alvandi meant to abdicate in favor of her daughter, foresaw a year of bliss for himself—followed, however, by the chopping block and the stew pan. While his impulses contended, the sight of the Shambor had tipped the scale in favor of cautious self-restraint.

Zeï kissed him briefly but continued to ask questions. After all, even though hers was a mild and friendly nature, as a princess she was used to having her own way with everybody except her mother.

"Then," said she, "that tale of the search for gvam stones was but a taradiddle wherewith to cozen us?"

"Not entirely. I hoped to pick up some of the stones, too, in case I failed with Shtain." (Always, he told himself, mix enough truth with your lies and vice versa to make it hard to separate the true from the false.)

"Then neither of us is wholly what he seems." She looked back at the Shambor, slowly meandering towards them. "Will they never come nigh enough to settle our doubts?"

"They have to zigzag to avoid the weed, so it takes much longer than you'd think."

She glanced towards the settlement, springing into full view in the strengthening light. "Is there no shift whereby we could get word of young Zakkomir's fate?"

"'Fraidnot. He's on his own."

Zakkomir was a young Qiribu, a ward of the crown, who had come with Barnevelt on his expedition out of admiration for the heroic deeds of the supposed General Snyol of Pleshch. In the fight on the ships they had become separated. Zakkomir fled in one direction, and Zeï and Barnevelt in the other.

Barnevelt peered again at the Shamhor. "By Bakh, that's Chask, my boatswain, at the tiller!" He stood up, waved, and whooped: "O Chask! Ship ahoy! Here we are!"

"It'll take them some time yet," he told Zeï. "Let's hope the Sunqaruma don't see us."

"'Tisa wonder they returned to rescue us, once they'd won free. Snyol of Pleshch must command deathless loyalty from his men."

"I'm not so good as all that, darling. In fact, Chask is the only one I'd really trust, and I daresay it was his

doing that the ship's here."

Barnevelt then confessed to having spoiled his sailors at the start of the voyage by treating them in too familiar and democratic a manner. After one of them had been snatched from the deck by a sea monster, the rest in terror wished to turn back, and he had almost had to quell a mutiny.

"That smart young squirt Zanzir's at the bottom of the trouble," he growled. "Instead of encouraging him, I should have gotten rid of him the first chance I had."

As the Shatnbor nosed through the weed a few meters from the raft, Barnevelt remembered one of his duties. He stood up and pointed his fist at the ship, moving it slowly back and forth. For the big ring on his finger was really a Hayashi motion-picture camera, and he was filming the approach of the Shambor.

Igor Shtain, Limited, had a contract with Cosmic Features for 50,000 meters of film about the Sunqar. One task of Barnevelt and Tangaloo had been to shoot as much of this film as possible to keep the firm from going bankrupt. Although the regulations of the Interplanetary Council forbade the importation into Krishna of inventions not already known there, an exception was made for the Hayashi camera, because it was so small and inconspicuous that it could hardly upset Krishnan culture. Besides, a destructor spring would make it fly apart in a fine mist of tiny wheels and lenses if a tyro tried to open it up.

"What's that?" said Zei. "Dost cast a spell?"

"Of sorts. Get your sandals on. Here we go." He boosted Zei over the rail and climbed aboard himself, grumpily telling himself that he had been lucky to escape from forming an intimate connection with the princess and ending up as an Earthburger at the next kashyo festival. But, at the same time, the less practical side of his nature—the romantic-dreamer side—whispered: Ah, but you do love her! And some day, perhaps, you and she will be united somehow, somewhere. Some day. Some day . . .

## CHAPTER TWO

As Barnevelt and Zei came over the rail, Chask called another man to the tiller, came forward, and cried: "Tis the Lady Zei herself! The sea gods have surely prospered our enterprise!"

He knelt to the princess while grasping Barnevelt's thumb, looking like some gnarled old sea god himself.

Barnevelt gave the rest of the crew a wave and a grin. "Greetings, men!"

The sailors, resting on their oars or standing by the lines, looked back in silence. One or two smiled feebly, but the rest seemed to glower. With a chill of self-doubt, Barnevelt reflected that he had never been able to get back on good terms with them since he turned down their demand for giving up the expedition.

Chask said: "Is it your pleasure that we make for Palindos Strait with all possible dispatch, Captain?"

"Absolutely!"

"Aye-aye, sir. Back oars!" When they were out of the weed: "Forward on the starboard bank. . . Now all together. . . Haul the sheet. Up the tiller. . . Now row for your worthless lives, ere the Sunqaro galleys find

you. Ave, set course northeast, sailing full and by." He turned back to Barnevelt. "What befell you, sir, and where's the young fan-tastico who accompanied you?"

"Step into the cabin with us," said Barnevelt.

While Barnevelt salved and bandaged Zei's feet with supplies from the first-aid cabinet, Chask rustled them a snack and told his tale.

"We lay at the pier, ye see, until the other shallop ties up beside us, and a battalia of pirates disembarks to mount the gangplank to the big galley. Next we know, one of our seamen leaps from the galley's deck into the briny and clambers over our gunwhale, crying that all is lost and we must needs flee. Whilst we hesitate, unwilling to push off whilst hope remains, down come the men of the Sunqar with weapons bared, crying to take us.

"At that we went, pausing but to cut the rigging of the other shallop, pursuit to incommode. Then forth we row, leaving tumult in our wake, to give the chasers slip under cloak of night. In sooth we hid behind a hulk that lay upon the terpahla's edge and heard the galleys go by close, searching for us. With dawn we issued from our hidey-hole and, seeing no Sunqaro ships, sought this rendezvous in recollection of our skipper's parting orders."

"Good," said Barnevelt. "But why did you keep your sail up after the sky had become light? That's asking for the Sunqaruma to come out and pick you up."

"The lads would have it, sir, misliking to do all the work of moving the ship themselves. 'Twas all I could do to bully and persuade them to turn aside from their flight to pick you up." Chask gave Barnevelt an accusing stare, which said as plainly as words: You're the one who ruined the discipline on this ship, so don't blame me. "And now, Captain, will ye not tell me what befell you?"

Barnevelt told as much of his story as he thought wise. "...so we had to run for it. Zakkomir led the pursuers one way to give Zei and me time to escape in another direction, and we got away by walking across the vine with boards tied to our feet."

"The young popinjay has more mettle than I should have thought. What betid him at the end?"

"I don't know. Now tell me, why are the men so glum? You'd think they'd be glad to see us."

"As to that, two reasons: One, if ye'll pardon my outspokening, they like this voyage not, for that it has already cost the lives of four—five, if ye count young Zakkomir. Ye know, sir, there's many a man who's brave as a yeki in his home port, in planning voyages of hazard, but who develops second thoughts when peril stares him in the face.

"And two: We have that young Zanzir, who mortally hates you because ye shamed him before his comrades after he's boasted of his intimacy with you. Moreover, he's lived in Katai-Jhogorai, where they have no kings or nobles, and there imbibed pernicious thoughts of the equality of all men. So he'll have it that the life of my lady Zei—no disrespect to you intended, mistress—that her life weighs no more in the scales of the gods of the afterworld than that of a common seaman, and that to trade it for four or five of theirs were no exchange but murder and oppression. And thus the crew he's disaffected..."

"Why haven't you done something about this guy?" said Barnevelt, interrupting what promised to develop into a seminar on government. "Anybody knows you can't have democracy on a ship at sea."

Chask said: "I take the liberty, sir, of bringing to your mind your own express orders at the start of this expedition: No 'brutality,' ye said. So now the time for a swift thrust in the dark, that might this sore have cauterized, is past, specially as Zanzir's careful to keep within arm's reach of his more fanatic partisans..."

"Sirs!" cried a sailor, sticking his head in the cabin door. "A galley's on our trail!"

### CHAPTER THREE

They hurried out. The morning sun showed a sail on the horizon, between them and the diminishing Sunqar. Barnevelt scurried up the mast. From the height of the parral, he could see the hull below the sail, end-on, and the bank of oars rising and falling on each side. From his point of vantage he also made out a second and more distant sail.

He climbed down and looked around the deck. Young Zanzir, at the moment bow oarsman on the port bank, returned his stare as if defying him to start something.

Barnevelt called the boatswain and Zei into the cabin, unlocked the arms locker, and got out swords for Chask and himself and a long dagger for Zei.

"Now you see what I meant about the sail. It occurs to me that our young idealist might jump us when the Sun-qaro ships got close and turn us over to them in exchange for his own freedom."

"That could be," said Chask, "though honest mariners mortally fear the Sunqaruma, holding them not men but automata animated by the fiendish magic of the monster who rules the swamp."

"Well, if anybody makes a false move, kill him and throw him over the side," said Barnevelt. "After this, use your judgment in matters of discipline."

Chask gave Barnevelt a ghost of a smile, though he refrained from crowing openly.

"Now," said Barnevelt, "I'll make a plot, if you'll help." He turned to Zei. "You'd better put on some more seagoing clothes. That gauze thing is falling apart."

He unlocked the slop chest and got out the Krishnan equivalent of dungarees. Then he spread his charts on the table and went to work. A swell from the North tossed the Shambor about enough to make position-reckoning a bothersome chore. When Barnevelt had finished, Chask said, "If we go not soon upon the other reach, Captain, the Sunqaruma'll be in position to cut us off from the Strait."

"Let's make our tack, then," said Barnevelt. Not wishing to sunburn his nude scalp, he put on his battered silver helmet and went out again on deck.

The north wind, having freshened, blew spray from the bow slantwise across the deck. Water squirted in through the oar holes from time to time. With the seas so high, the oarsmen could no longer keep a regular rhythm but had to pause between strokes, oars in the air, until the coxswain called "Stroke!" at a favorable instant.

Barnevelt took another turn up the mast, holding the rungs tightly so as not to be jerked off by a sudden pitch. The wind sang in the rigging, the ropes creaked, and the sail was stretched tautly on its yard. Astern, the pursuing galley, though nearer, labored under similar difficulties. From time to time, Barnevelt



could see a burst of spray as she dug her bow into a wave. Being a bigger ship, she dug in farther than the Shambor, which rode like a cork. The galley, he now saw, was a two-sticker with a big mainsail forward and a smaller mizzen aft.

When Barnevelt got down again, Chask called, "Ready about!" the boatswain had to ship several oars to get enough men to handle the sail in this wind. "Tiller hard down to leeward! Pay out the vang! Let go the sheet! Cast off the weather stays!"

Watching this complicated maneuver, Barnevelt feared that a sudden gust might tear the sail, now streaming out ahead of the ship, flapping and booming like a huge triangular flag; or that the mast, now unstayed, might be carried away. In either case they'd be done for. They were drifting before the wind at no small speed, notwithstanding that the remaining oarsmen were backing water.

The deck rumbled under the feet of the crew, scurrying about and wrestling with the sail. At last they got the yard into vertical position and, by means of a complicated tackle, shifted it around to the other side of the mast, with yelling and grunting and heaving on the lines.

"Tiller up! Take in the sheet! Full and by!"

The yard came down to its normal slanting position, but on the other side of the mast. The mast stays were rerigged, and the sail boomed and cracked as the wind filled it on the new reach. The men went back to their oars. How much simpler, thought Barnevelt, with a plain fore-and-aft rig, when all you had to do was to bring your helm up sharply and remember to duck as the boom swung across the deck. You could sail closer to the wind, too. He doubted they were making closer than six and a half points. Even an Earthly square-rigger (if any still existed)—could do as well as that and could also wear much quicker.

Zeï, standing at his side on the poop, said, "O Snyol, wherefore this movement? Will not the Sunqaro ship cut across our path?"

"Not if he uses his sails. He'll have to tack at the same angle we do, and in this chop his oars alone won't be much good..." He frowned at the sky, the sea, and his own rigging. "If we get a real blow, he'll have to run for home, but we shan't be much better off. You can't wear ship with this rig in a gale, and we'd have to run before the wind to stay afloat, which would land us right back in the Sunqar."

"What if the wind drops totally away?"

"Then he's got us too. He has over a hundred men on the oars, compared to our fourteen."

He wondered: If they kept ahead of the galley until night, could they slip away in the darkness? Not with three full moons all shining at once. With rain or fog it would be different, but the present weather did not look much like either. And, from the Shambor's mast, the sail of the second following galley could still be seen.

"Your pardon," said Zeï, "but I feel unwell and must needs retire... wup!"

"Use the lee rail!" cried Barnevelt, pointing.

When Zeï had gone below to lie down, Chask came up and said, "Captain, there's one more item I'd ask you to consider. Not having taken aboard drinking water at the Sunqar, we run low. Men sweat away their water fast on a long oar-chase like this, ye wite."

"Ration it," said Barnevelt, watching the galley, whose bearing was changing fast as the Shambor cut across her course.

Now men were shinnying up the yards of both the galley's masts and furling the sails with gaskets, like little brown ants crawling up a straw. Although not without experience at the monkey work of sail-handling, Barnevelt was glad he was not up there with them, gripping the swaying yard between his knees like a broncho rider and clawing at the canvas.

Little by little the galley's sails shrank until they were bunched against the yards. Then the yards sank to the deck.

The galley crossed the Shambor's wake and continued north. Barnevelt figured that the galley would try to gain the weather gage of her quarry before hoisting sail again, as the difficulties of wearing a lateener would increase progressively with the size of the sail and would be even more onerous for the galley than for the little Shambor.

The long Krishnan day wore on. Barnevelt went into the cabin, slept, and shaved his head with sea water, lest the bronze hair and beard betray his origin. The men grumbled about the lack of water, shutting up when Barnevelt walked past with a hand on his hilt and a hard look on his face.

Evening came. The greenish sky remained clear. To the West, red Roqir set behind the galley, now closer and plowing along, its reset sails silhouetted blackly. The stars came out, shining with a hard brilliance unusual in this hazy latitude. Barnevelt picked Sol out of the unfamiliar heavens; from Star-map Region Eight, in which lay the Cetic planets, Sol was almost in line with Arcturus. The clump of moons came up: Karrim the big, Gohnaz the middle-sized, and Sheb the little.

The wind dropped a little. Looking off to the north, Barnevelt visualized a great high-pressure area lying over the Sadabao Sea, sending a sheet of cool dense air flowing southward towards the Sunqar.

"How long should a blow like this last?" he asked Chask.

The boatswain waved a hand in the Krishnan equivalent of a shrug. "Mayhap a day, mayhap four or five. 'Twill die of a sudden, leaving a week's calm on this stinking sea. I shall rejoice when we're back in the belt of steady westerlies."

The men were tiring, despite the fact that the Shambor still carried enough for two complete shifts at the oars. However, the galley drew no closer; her oarsmen must also be tiring.

"Besides," explained Chask, " 'tis unlikely they'd essay to run us down in the dark. A small craft like this can turn and dodge too well. And shooting catapults and crossbows at night, even with the moons, were wanton waste of missiles. Won't ye snatch some slumber, Captain?"

Barnevelt had been wondering whether he shouldn't put in a turn at the oars himself, though he knew Chask would disapprove. Moreover, he was not sure, now, whether such an act would raise or lower him in the eyes of the crew. His previous attempt to treat them as gentlemen seemed to have miscarried.

Besides, he did not think his muscles would add much to the Shambor's car power. While he was the tallest person aboard, and strong enough by most standards—having the advantage of being brought up on Earth with its slightly greater gravity—he lacked the great bulging shoulders and horny hands of these professionals. In the end he followed Chask's advice, alternating with the boatswain on watch throughout the night.

All night the galley hung off their quarter, a blackness partly outlined by the phosphorescence of her waterline and oar-splashes. Neither ship showed any light.

At the end of his second watch, as the long night drew toward its close, Barnevelt awakened Chask and said, "I've been thinking that with another rig we could outsail those fellows."

"What's this, Captain? Some scheme from the polar regions ye'd broach amongst us? To change a rig in mid-chase like this, be your plan never so good, were to my thinking plain and fancy lunacy, if my frankness ye'll pardon. By the time your newrig were up..."

"I know, but look." Barnevelt pointed to where the galley's sails showed pink in the rising sun. "They're gaining on us, and by my reckoning we shan't reach the Strait before noon. At this rate they're sure to catch us before that."

"Be ye sure of that, sir?"

"Yes. Matter of fact, we're heading too far west and therefore shall have to wear ship again, which'll take us across their bows practically within spitting distance."

"Oursituation's hard indeed, sir. What's to do?"

"I'll show you. If we plan our change-over carefully and then hop to it all at once, we may just get our new rig up before they catch us. And we shall have a better chance if we do it now before the wind rises and those guys get closer."

"Desperate conditions dictate desperate remedies, as says Nehavend. What shall be done?"

"Pick a couple of men you can trust and bring 'em into the cabin."

Half an hour later, Barnevelt's plan got under way. He was not himself so sure of it as he tried to sound, but anything was better than watching the galley crawl up with the inevitability of King Canute's tide.

His plan was nothing less than to convert the present lateen rig into a Marconi or Bermuda rig.

First, one of the men went along the foot of the sail, cutting holes in it at intervals, while another cut a coil of light line into short lengths that would go loosely round the yard, which in the new dispensation would become the mast. When everything was ready, Chask put up the tiller and swung the Shambor's bow into the eye of the wind. The sail luffed and the rowers, knowing they had no more help from it, dug in their blades.

The galley, seeing the maneuver, put up her helm also and let her sails flap. Barnevelt realized with a sinking feeling that she could now cut across the hypotenuse of a right triangle to intercept them, since neither was now depending on wind.

"Lower away!" yelled Chask, and down came the great yard, stretching the whole length of the Shambor

The sailors glowered at Barnevelt, and he caught one tapping his forehead. But the boatswain gave them no time to grumble. A rattle of orders sent some to cast off the stays and knock out the wedges that held the mast. Chask put men holding guys at bow, stern, and sides. Others hauled the mast out of its step and

set the butt of it on deck beside the partners.

Meanwhile, the sailor who had cut holes in the foot of the sail did likewise along the leech, while another cut the straps that held the sail to the yard. Then all hands except the rowers turned to, to step the yard in place of the mast. By hauling on the halyard, they hoisted the bare pole up to the head of the old mast, now serving as a gin-pole, and manhandled the butt end into the partners vacated by the mast. The tall spar swayed perilously; the men at the guys screamed; but the stick finally went home with a thump that shook the ship and was wedged into place. Then, by shifting the guys to the yard and slackening off the old halyard, they lowered the former mast to the deck.

The galley, with sails furled, crept closer. Barnevelt heard a faint hail come up the wind.

When the new and taller mast was in place, they triced the short edge of the sail to the ex-mast, reeving a light line through the holes in the sail and helically around the spar. Then they triced the intermediate edge of the sail to the ex-yard, now the mast, by reeving short lengths of rope through the holes in that edge and around this spar and tying them with reef-knots to form rings. As these rings were installed, the men hoisted the sail.

"Make haste, rascallions!" shouted Chask. "Yare, yare!"

A louder hail came from the galley. The finishing touch was to lash the yoke that had formerly topped the ex-mast to the ex-yard, loosely enough so the ex-mast, now theboom, could swing, but tightly enough to hold it fast.

On the galley a catapult whanged. A black dot grew into a leaden ball which arced across the water and plunked in a couple of oars' lengths from theShambor .

Barnevelt told Zei, "Go into the cabin, Princess."

"I'm no coward. My place is..."

"Into the cabin, dammit!" When he saw her starting to obey, he turned to Chask. "Think that lashing'll do?"

"It must suffice, Captain."

A sharp whistle, as of a whip, made Barnevelt wince. He saw a man on the bow of the galley start to wind up a heavy crossbow. A second bolt whizzed close.

However, the endless work on the new rig seemed finally done. The sail was fully hoisted. Chask shouted, "Belay the halyard!"

The sail hung limp, flapping gently. Another minute would tell whether Barnevelt's scheme was sound. He didn't like the look of that limber new mast, but it was too late for regrets now. He hopped up the steps to the poop and took the tiller from the seaman.

The catapult thumped again. The missile sailed past Barnevelt, skimmed the deck, and carried away a piece of the port rail with a splintering crash. The rowers flinched as it passed them, breaking stroke. The bow of the galley loomed close, clustered with men.

Barnevelt pushed the long tiller arm to starboard. TheShambor responded, her nose swinging to port.

The wind ironed the ruffles from the sail, then filled it. The Shambor heeled sharply as the sail took hold, bringing water in the lee oar-ports and breaking the rowers' stroke again; then recovered as Barnevelt corrected his turn.

The whizz of crossbow bolts was punctuated by sharp drumlike sounds as the bolts tore through the taut sail. Barnevelt could see the two little holes from where he stood. Let's hope they don't start tears! he thought. That sail's a precarious enough proposition with all those ungrommeted holes in it.

Chask, having gotten the crew straightened out, came to stand beside him. He said, "Methinks we gain^sir."

Barnevelt took his eyes off the sail long enough for a quick glance back at the galley. Yes, she did look a shade smaller... or was that wishful thinking?

The sound of the catapult came again. Barnevelt caught a glimpse of the ball flying past him. Then it headed straight for the mast. All they needed now was to be dismasted by a lucky shot!

Closer flew the missile to the mast... and missed it by an eyelash, to graze the roof of the cabin with a loud bang and bounce off into the sea. It was followed by another whizz of crossbow-bolts, one of which struck the wood nearby, plunging down at a steep angle.

"They're lofting 'em at us, being too far for direct aiming," said Chask. "In another twinkling shall we be out of range entirely."

The next catapult missile splashed astern of the Shambor. Little by little they drew ahead. Barnevelt, still tense as a spring, glanced back. The galley, finding oars insufficient, was shaking out its sails again.

However, as the minutes passed it became obvious that the Shambor— with Barnevelt's eye on the sail and hand on the tiller to get every possible degree of close-hauled sailing out of the new rig—could now sail at least a point nearer the wind than her pursuer. Hence the ships were on diverging tracks. The galley, making good time, drew abreast of the Shambor, but too far down-wind to be dangerous.

Barnevelt waited until the galley stood out in profile, then put his helm up sharply. Without hesitation, the Shambor luffed and heeled into the other tack. The galley shrank fast, because the two ships were now sailing away from one another. Barnevelt saw frantic activity on the galley's decks; but, by the time the lateen sails had been laboriously shifted to the opposite reach, she was too far behind for details to be made out.

As the sun climbed towards the meridian, the galley receded until her oars were hidden by the bulge of the sea. However, if anybody expected the pursuers to withdraw in baffled rage, they were disappointed. Unable to keep up with Barnevelt's short quick tacks, the galley plodded on under oars alone.

The Shambor seemed to be doing so well, though, that Barnevelt passed the word to reduce the oar crew to eight men to give the others more rest. He thought the men's attitude towards him improved a bit also.

Then it occurred to him that he was hungry. He had eaten hardly anything in the last tense forty-eight hours, and his animal self was beginning to protest. He turned the tiller over to Chask and started for the forward cabin, hoping for a bite in Zei's company.

"O Captain!" said a voice, and there were three sailors, including the argumentative Zanzir.

"Yes?"

"When shall we have water, sir?" said Zanzir. "We die of thirst."

"You'll get your next ration at noon."

"We ask it now, Captain. Without it we can't row. Ye wouldn't hold out on us, would ye?"

"I said," said Barnevelt, raising his voice, "you shall have your next water at noon. And next time you want to speak to me, get Chask's permission first."

"But Captain..."

"That's enough!" roared Barnevelt, his fury aggravated by the knowledge that the crew's indiscipline was partly his own fault. He went forward to the deckhouse, hearing behind him a mutter in which he caught the words, "...high and mighty emperor, is he?..."

"What ails my captain?" said Zei. "You look as sour as Qarar when he'd been deceived by the King of 'Ishk."

"I'll be all right," said Barnevelt, slumping down on a bench. "How about a spot of sustenance, girl?" He felt too weary to worry about the fact that this was not the usual way of addressing a princess. "That is, if you know how to rustle food."

"And why should I not?" she said, rummaging on the shelves.

"Aaow," he yawned. "Being a Crown Princess and all that nonsense..."

"Canst keep a royal secret?"

"Uh-huh."

"My lady mother, mindful of the revolutions that have most piteously overthrown the ancient order in Zamba and elsewhere, has compelled me to learn the arts of common housewifery, so that come what may, I shall never be utterly at a loss for such elements as feeding and clothing myself. Would you like some of these dried fruits? Meseems the worms have not yet made them their domicile."

"Fine. Let's have that loaf of badr and the knife."

"Heavenly hierarchy!" she exclaimed when she saw what he proposed to tuck away. "But then, I ween, heroic deeds go with a heroic appetite. All my life I've read legends of Qarar and his ilk, though knowing none besides our fragile local popinjays, I had, until I met you, come to think such men of hardihood existed nowhere but in song and story."

Barnevelt shot a suspicious look at Zei. Although he liked her the best of any Krishnan he knew, he thought he had made up his mind against any serious entanglement with the lady.

He said, "You don't look forward, then, to being queen with a freshly painted Qiribu each year for a husband?"

"Not I. Though even misliking it, I lack the force or subtlety to swerve events from their appointed course. 'Tis one thing to talk big, like the heroine in Harian's *The Conspirators*, of casting aside the comforts and prerogatives of rank for love, and quite another so to do in very fact. Yet some-times do I envy common wenches in barbarous lands, wed to great brutes like yourself who rule 'em as my mother does her consorts. For while female domination is the law and custom of Qirib, I fear by nature I'm no dominator."

Barnevelt thought vaguely of suggesting a revolution in Qirib, with Zei in the role of Shaw's Bolshevik Empress. But he was too tired to pursue the matter.

"Ao," he said, "only my fair share of the water!"

"But you're captain. . ."

"Only my fair share."

"Such scrupulosity! One would think you, too, had dwelt among the republicans of Katai-Jhogorai."

"Not exactly, though I sympathize with their ideas." He patted a yawn and sprawled out on the bench while she cleared the table.

#### CHAPTER FOUR

The next he knew, Chask was shaking him.

"Sir," said the boatswain, "the wind drops and the galleys press upon our wake!"

Barnevelt sat up, blinking. Now that he noticed, the motion of the ship did seem less and the noise of wind and wave lower.

He went out. Although they were still bucking a swell from the north, the swells were smooth from lack of wind to ruffle them. There was just enough breeze to keep the sail filled. Chask had already put a full crew back on the oars.

Behind them, the galley loomed about as distant as when Barnevelt had gone into the cabin. No doubt the *Shambor* had drawn farther ahead after he went in and then lost some of her advantage with the dying of the wind. Moreover the second galley, which they had seen the previous day, was now in sight again, its masts alone visible save when a wave lifted the *Shambor* to an unusual height.

Without wind, the galleys would soon catch them. Ahead, no sign of the northern shores of the *Banjao Sea* appeared. Yet the sun was high; it must be around noon.

"Tell 'em to put their backs into it," said Barnevelt.

Chask replied, "They do what they can, sir—but lack of water robs their sinews of their accustomed strength."

The reckoning indicated that, though *Palindos Strait* was not yet in sight, it must lie not far below the horizon. Careful estimates showed that they could just nip through the strait ahead of the following ship.

Chask said, "Then we shall be in the Sadabao Sea, but what will that avail us? For you cut-throats will follow us even to the harbor of Damovang."

"True," said Barnevelt, frowning over his chart. "How about running ashore and taking to the woods?"

"Then they'll put ashore, too, to hunt us down, and with hundreds to carry on the search there's little doubt in my mind of its outcome. What else would ye?"

"How about doubling around one of the headlands of the Strait and hiding in a cove while we're out of sight?"

"Let's see, sir." Chask pointed a stubby finger at the chart. "The easterly shore of the Sadabao Sea, along here, is rocky and hard to draw nigh to without staving your bottom. The westerly has some rock, much open beach, and few places to hide. Fossanderan may have such coves upon its northern flank, but never will ye persuade ordinary seamen to go ashore on that accursed isle."

"Oh, foof! Are they afraid of the mythical beast-men?"

"No myth, Captain. At least I've heard the sound they say is the drums of these demons. And myth or no, the men would not obey."

Barnevelt went out again, to be greeted by a chorus of hoarse cries: "Water!"

"Water, Captain!"

"Water, we pray!"

"We demand water!"

The galley was crawling up once more. The wind had now ceased entirely save for an occasional light puff. The sail flapped limply, reminding Barnevelt of Chask's prediction of a week's calm.

He gave orders to ration out the men's noon sip of water, which he hoped would quiet them. Instead, they only grumbled the more for its paucity.

The galley was now all visible again, her oars rising and falling with mechanical precision now that the sea was comparatively smooth. The second galley, too, was closer.

A sailor in the bow called, "Land ho!"

There is was: a cluster of wooded peaks—the hills of Fossanderan. Barnevelt went back into the cabin to correct his reckoning and lay his course for the eastern channel. Zei watched him wordlessly with large dark eyes.

He ran over his jestimates again. This time it looked as though the galley would overhaul them in the throat of the eastern channel of the Strait. Then why keep trying? The usual hope for a miracle. The galley just might spring a seam or have a mutiny at the last minute...

Too bad the western channel wasn't deep enough to float the Shambor, so that he could lure the galley on to the bottom.



Well, wasn't it? With three moons in conjunction at full, Krishna would have record tides. And, while the tides in these seas were usually nothing much, because of the limited size of the seas and the complicated tidal patterns engendered by Roqir and the three moons, on this one occasion the tidal waves should all be in phase, producing a tide of Earthly dimensions.

Barnevelt got out the handbook he had bought in Novo-recife. The sight reminded him of Vizqash bad-Murani, the Krishnan clerk who had sold him the book. Vizqash had then tried to betray him into the hands of a gang of kidnappers or slayers on a picnic; had later, in the guise of a masked gentleman, started a riot in the tavern at Jazmurian; and finally had turned up as a pirate of the Sunqar, to ruin Barnevelt's neat getaway with Zei and Shtain.

Barnevelt had no doubt, now, that all these events were connected. The Morya Sunqaruma, he was sure, had had their eye on him ever since the Amazonas had landed him at Novorecife. He grinned at the thought that the very book that Vizqash had sold him might be the means of frustrating the fellow's knavish tricks.

The book, along with the rest of Barnevelt's gear, had been soaked when the Earthman had fallen through a hole in the terpahla during his flight. He found that he had to pry the pages—actually one long strip of paper folded zigzag—apart with care to avoid tearing them. Once opened up, however, the book was found to include not only tables for computing the revolutions of the moons, but also a table showing how much time the tidal waves caused by each luminary led or followed the movement of that moon in various places.

Majbur, Jazmurian, Sotaspe, Dur... Here it was, Palin-dosStrait. Barnevelt whooped when he saw that here Kar-rim's tide lagged behind that moon by less than a Krishnan hour, and the tides of Golnaz and Sheb by even smaller amounts.

"Chask!" he yelled.

Although Chask looked dubious, he had to admit that there was nothing to do but try the western channel, especially as they should hit it a little past noon. Then, and a little past midnight, were the times of the highest tides.

TheShambor swung to port and crept towards the channel, while the galleys crept towards theShambor. The wooded hills of the peninsula that came down to the Strait from the west now rose into view. As they plodded over the glassy sea, the land rose higher until it looked as though the island were part of the mainland. Then, as they came still closer, the western passage opened out.

Still the galleys lessened their distance. Barnevelt looked back with a shiver. Would they have to duck another barrage of bolts and missiles?

One of the sailors called out, " 'Tis no use, Captain. We're spent!" Others joined the chorus of defeatism: "They'll take us long ere we reach sanctuary..."

"Let's give up on terms..."

"Shut up, all of you!" said Barnevelt. "I got you out before..."

At that moment a sailor—not Zanzir, but an older and bigger fellow—began to harangue the crew. "This haughty captain cares nought for you, but only for his royal doxy. Let's throw them to the fish..."

Barnevelt at the start of this speech drew his sword and walked towards the man. The latter, hearing his approach, spun round and reached for his knife. Others among the crew did likewise.

Barnevelt made his last two steps running and, before the mutineer could either stab or throw, struck the side of his head with the flat of his rapier. The man staggered side-ways, across the deck, through the gap in the rail left by the galley's catapult missile, and over the side. Splash!

"Anybody else?" he asked the crew.

Nobody answered. He walked up and down the catwalk, peering at the rowers. One whom he judged to be shirking he whacked on the bare back with the flat of his sword.

"Lay into it, you!"

They passed a rock. Barnevelt said, "Chask, take the tiller. Put a couple of men in the bow to take soundings. I'll go aloft—oh-oh!"

"What, sir?"

"Our new rig has no ratlines. Get me a hammer, some spikes, and a length of rope."

Presently Barnevelt, his implements dangling from him, began to shinny up the mast. It was a foul job, since all he had to climb by were the rope rings holding the luff of the sail to the mast, and these provided poor purchase. When he was about two-thirds of the way up, he drove a couple of spikes into the mast and looped his rope from them to make a crude boatswain's chair. Though neither safe nor comfortable, he could now at least judge depths from the varying shades of green of the water ahead. From behind came the thump and splash of the galley's oars.

"A point to port," he called down. "Little to starboard. Steady as you go..."

Any minute the ship might touch ground, probably snapping him off his perch. He kept peering for patches of dark water. A slight tidal current through the Strait to northward helped the Shambor along.

When he found a good channel, he snatched a look aft. The galley was still coming up, also picking its way, and a couple of hoda behind it came its sister ship. The cries of men taking soundings in the galley drifted up to the Shambor like an echo of the calls of her own leadsmen in the bow, except that the figures were different.

Barnevelt concentrated on a bad patch, where pale-green shoals seemed to block his way completely.

A sudden outburst of yells came up to his ears, "She's aground! The pirate ship has struck!"

Ha! he thought, his scheme had worked. Still he dared not take his eyes off the water ahead. He'd feel foolish indeed if he lured the pirate aground only to strand himself a minute later.

A jerk of the mast told him the Shambor had touched, too. "Pull hard!" he shouted. "A hair to starboard!"

The oars dug in and the Shambor came free. Ahead lay all the dark-green water anyone could ask.

Barnevelt drew a long breath and looked back again. The galley was backing water furiously, the sea

foaming about her oar blades. Behind her the second galley, in response to flag signals, had turned to starboard and now showed her profile heading east.

Barnevelt guessed that the second ship had received orders to go around by the eastern channel and try to catch the Shambor in the Sadabao Sea. Therefore it would not do to sail blithely on for Qirib as if their worries were over. Once the second galley sighted them in the open sea, they'd be in the same fix as before, without any shallow strait or north wind to rescue them.

What the Shambor needed was a hiding place where the water supply could be replenished. The men were not exaggerating their exhaustion. Barnevelt's own throat felt like something dug out of an Egyptian tomb. If his own sailors for superstitious reasons were afraid to land on Fossanderan, the pirates would probably feel the same way.

He told Chask, "Hard to starboard, and find me a cove on the north side of Fossanderan that might be the mouth of a stream."

"But Captain..."

"That's where we're going!"

Chask, shaking his head, swung the ship east. As they emerged into the Sadabao Sea, the promontories of Fossanderan hid the stranded galley. The breeze freshened a little. Sailing with the wind on the beam, they made good time along the rocky, wooded shores.

After most of a Krishnan hour, Barnevelt said, "That looks like a good place; a little valley that ought to have a stream."

"Say not I failed to warn you, sir," said Chask, and turned the Shambor shoreward.

At once the men, who had been very quiet since the mutineer had fallen overboard, set up an outcry: "The haunted isle!"

"Our mad captain's taking us to the home of the demons!"

"All's lost!"

"He must be a demon himself!"

"Anywhere but that!"

"We'd liefer forgo water!"

Again Barnevelt faced them down, though the oarsmen relaxed their efforts until they were merely dipping their oars in the water. That, however, made little difference, because the breeze wafted them shoreward.

"The first man who backs water without orders," said Barnevelt, "gets this. Zeil Come out. We're going ashore. Get out the buckets."

The Shambor nosed gently into the embayment until tree branches swept the deck and swished against the rigging. Chask ordered the sail and the anchor dropped and then hurried forward. Barnevelt dropped

off the bow into knee-deep water and caught Zei as she climbed down.

He shouted, "Fresh water!" and pointed to where a little trickly stream spread itself out thinly over a small sandy delta. The men scurried to the bow to leap off also, drink, and fill buckets for the ship's water tank, which they passed to others on deck. Although he was as thirsty as they, a quirk of vanity made Barnevelt hold off from drinking until everyone else had done so. He turned a grin to Zei.

"We'll tell old Qvansel his three moons did save our skins— not by occult astrological forces, but by the good old force of gravity."

Chask came ashore last. He walked up to Barnevelt swinging an axe, and said, "I like this not, Captain. We should all be armed in case the beast-men appear. Yet with the crew in its present temper 'twere folly to serve out arms to 'em. Besides, we're low on stove wood, and methought..."

Barnevelt said, "I haven't heard any spirits of the waste and weald moan—Hey , what goes on?"

In a concerted movement, all the sailors rushed back to the Shambor and scrambled aboard. Before Barnevelt and Chask could even reach the ship, they were hoisting the anchor and backing water vigorously. The ship started to move.

Barnevelt and Chask seized the anchor before it disappeared over the gunwale and pulled on it, as though two men could counteract the thrust of fourteen vigorously wield-ed oars. Suddenly the tension in the anchor rope ceased, and Barnevelt and Chask sat down with a splash. Somebody had cut the rope.

As Barnevelt sat foolishly in the shallow water, the Shambor receded rapidly, the sailors jeering: "Fare thee well, Captain!"

"May the demons give you pleasant dreams! " And Zanzir, loudest of all: "We thank you for the fine ship, Captain. We'll make our fortunes in't!"

There was no use swimming after the Shambor , which backed out into open water, hoisted sail, and swung round to head off northeast, close-hauled. Soon she was out of sight, leaving Barnevelt, Zei, and Chask on the doubtful shores of the island of Fossanderan .

## CHAPTER FIVE

Barnevelt said, "I should have run that young squirt through the first time he gave us a piece of his lip."

He wondered, now, what would happen to the Shambor in her new rig, which he had intended to change back to the old before reaching Damovang to avoid trouble with the Vi-agens over the introduction of an invention to Krishna.

"Nor should we have both come ashore at once," said Chask. "That last blunder was of my doing."

"Instead of apportioning blame," said Zei, "weren't not more profitable to plan our next course?"

Chask said, "The princess is a fount of wisdom. The sooner we're off this accursed isle the sooner shall we be home. By the gods' own luck we have this axe and that length of anchor rope. I propose, Captain, that we build a raft, utilizing trunks of trees and the rope to bind them. Then shall we paddle to the

western mainland and thence proceed to the Shaf-Malayer road, which runs not far west of here."

"Two logs is all we have rope for," said Barnevelt. "We'll have to straddle 'em as if we were riding an aya."

Chask found a likely tree and felled it. He was still trimming the glossy branches away when a hideous clamor arose from the woods around.

A swarm of creatures rushed out of concealment and gal-loped towards the three. They were of about human size and shape, but with tails, heads faintly resembling those of Earthly baboons, and hair in lieu of clothes. They carried stone-age clubs and spears.

"Run!" screeched Chask.

The three ran to the mouth of the stream and turned westward along the shore. The shore here took the form of a crescent-shaped beach, ending in a rocky promontory. Barnevelt and Zei, being taller than Chask, drew ahead of the boatswain as they raced along this beach, the beast-men howling behind. Barnevelt heard them gaining.

A sudden break in the noise behind made Barnevelt snatch a look to the rear. What he saw filled him with horror. Chask had stubbed his toe on a stone and fallen. Before he could get up again, the beast-men had reached him and were working him over. Barnevelt checked his stride and reached for his sword before realizing that Chask must be already dead under the shower of blows and thrusts, and for him to go back would be to throw his life away to no purpose.

He ran on. At the promontory, he and Zei leaped from rock to rock until they found before them another short stretch of beach.

"Ao, Zei!" he said. "In here!"

At the beginning of this curve of beach, the waves had undermined the bank beneath a big old tree, whose roots now dangled barely from the overhang and whose trunk leaned seaward at an ominous angle. One good storm would send the whole tree crashing into the sea, but meanwhile the space beneath it formed a small cave.

The fugitives burrowed in among the rootlets, bringing showers of dislodged dirt down on their heads and disturbing many-legged creeping things. One of the latter got inside Barnevelt's jacket and squirmed about while Barnevelt swatted frantically. In its death throes it bit a crumb of flesh out of his chest, making him suck his breath in sharply in lieu of yelling.

When they were as far back as they could push, they found that they could no longer see the beach for the curtain of roots that hung down from the roof of their refuge like the baleen from the palate of a whale.

Well, thought Barnevelt, if I can't see out, they can't see in. How about footprints? Between the wet sand and the bank of which the tree formed a part there was a strip, not much over a meter wide, of soft dry sand, and they could hope that this would not betray them. They crouched in their hole, rationing breaths in an effort to be quieter than utter silence.

The noise attending the butchery of Chask died down. Bare feet trotted by, slap-slap, over the wet sand. Beast-men called to one another in their own tongue. For all Barnevelt knew, they were organizing

an attack on the cave. Any minute now, he expected to have to start thrusting at the bestial heads as the creatures came crawling into their refuge. He could put up quite a scrap...

Then all sound died away, save the swoosh of the surf and the sigh of the wind. Nevertheless, the fugitives continued to crouch for hours.

Barnevelt whispered, "Just like 'em to be waiting out there to greet us!"

When the dimming of the light at last showed that afternoon was well advanced, Barnevelt murmured, "You stay here. I'm going out to scout."

"Take care!"

"You're durn tootin' I'll be careful. If I don't come back by tomorrow morning, try to swim for the mainland."

He pushed his way out, centimeter by centimeter, like some timid mollusk emerging from its shell. However, he could neither see nor hear any trace of his enemies.

The tide, which when they had sought refuge was almost lapping the mouth of the cave, had now receded many meters. Barnevelt skulked back to the place where Chask had fallen. The sand was roiled and stained with brown Krishnan blood running down to the water in a broad band, but no bodies were in sight.

Barnevelt followed the teeming humanoid footprints back to the mouth of the little stream. A few meters up the stream, where lay the trunk the boatswain had felled, he came upon the ax that Chask had been using, lying in the stream bed with the water rippling over it. He picked it up.

Barnevelt pushed upstream looking for spoor of the beast-men. He found broken bushes and blood from their burden, but the mold of the forest floor did not take footprints with any clarity, and soon the trail died out. Too bad, he thought, that he was not a trained jungle wallah.

While he cast about in perplexity, a sound came to his ears: a rhythmic booming, too sharp and high for a drum of the conventional type, too resonant for mere banging on a log. At first it seemed to come from all directions. After a while of turning his head this way and that like a radar antenna, he thought he fixed its direction and struck off uphill to the southeast.

An hour later he knew he was nearing the source of the sound. He drew his sword, to have it handy and so as not to let it clank in its scabbard. Creeping stealthily over the curve of a rounded saddleback he looked down upon the scene of activity that he was stalking.

On a level space, cleared of trees, the beast-men were dancing around a fire while one of their number pounded on a drum made of a hollowed log. Or rather, Barnevelt saw what he had supposed to be beast-men, but which now turned out to be ordinary tailed Krishnans, *Krishnanthropus koloftus*, like those of the Koloft Swamp and the island of Za. They had been wearing carved animal masks when they made their attack and had now removed these and hung them on stubs\* of branches around the clearing. And, whereas the tailed men of Za were semi-civilized and those of Koloft had at least been subdued by the authorities of Mikardand, the present examples of the species were carrying on their aboriginal traditions with full savage vim.

Across the fire, Barnevelt was distressed though not much surprised to see parts of his late boatswain

hung on lines to sizzle. Barnevelt swallowed the lump in his throat and started back.

Back at the hiding place, Barnevelt said, "I found him all right. They're eating him."

"How dreadful!" said Zei. "And he such a worthy wight! What a bestial and abhorrent custom!"

"Too bad, but actually it's no different from what you do in Qirib."

"Not at all! How can you utter such blasphemous sophistry? Whereas the one's solemn ceremony, the holy powers above to gratify, the other's but the swinish satisfaction of the alimentary appetite."

"Well, that's how some people look at it. But let's not argue—let's get out of here. It's pretty far to swim, and we don't want to leave our clothes and/ weapons behind..."

"So why not finish the raft our slaughtered friend and deputy began?"

"Because the sound of the axe would fetch 'em running." He sniffed the breeze. "The wind's backed to the northwest, and we're on the northwest shore of the island. The woods look dry, and my lighter should be working."

"You mean to set the weald ablaze, to distract the tailed ones from our enterprise?"

"Matter of fact I'll set the damndest forest fire you ever saw. Bear a hand, gal."

For the next hour they prowled the shore, piling sticks and dead shrubs where they would do the most good, until they had a line a hoda long running along the shore, bending inland at the mouth of the stream to afford room to finish the raft.

When that task was done, Barnevelt started at the east end of his line of bonfires and lit the first with his lighter. When it blazed up, he and Zei each thrust into it a torch of faggots and ran down the line, igniting blaze after blaze.

By the time they finished, the whole slope extending inland was a roaring hell, the fire leaping from tree to tree.

Barnevelt, his face red from the heat, sweated over his raft. There was not much more to be done: to cut two logs from the felled trunk, shove these into the water, and tie them together with the piece of anchor rope. Then he felled a sapling and trimmed the soft wood of the trunk down to a couple of crude paddles—too narrow in the blade to be efficient, but not even the long Krishnan day provided time for a better job.

"Off we go!" he shouted over the roar of the fire, and drove the axe blade into one of the logs to secure it. Zei straddled the logs forward. With their footgear hung around their necks, they paddled out from shore, the heat of the blazing hillsides beating with blistering force upon their backs. All of Fos-sanderan seemed to be red with fire or black with smoke.

The thick stems of the paddles were awkward; Barnevelt wondered if bare hands wouldn't have done as well. Every swell swirled up to their waists as they angled out from shore. When they were far enough to start west for the mainland, the swells made their craft roll precariously; every second Barnevelt expected the raft to roll clear over and dunk them.

Meter by meter they struggled westward as the sun sank. The first stars were out when they came to the western channel of the Strait of Palindos. This was just as well, Barnevelt thought, because the stranded galley was all too visible from where they crossed the channel.

The galley sat with lanterns hung about her. The low tide had left her hull exposed down to the curve of the bilge, and the settling of her weight upon her keel had made her heel over at an undignified angle. Beyond her, a dark-red shape in the twilight where the fires of Fossanderan shone upon her, lay the galley's consort. Hawsers stretched in graceful catenary curves between the two ships; the banked oars of both rested quietly upon the water.

Peacefully, Barnevelt and his companion paddled across the channel. When all three moons arose, now more widely spaced than they had been the previous night, the travelers grounded gently on the sand spit projecting from the mainland towards the blazing island.

## CHAPTER SIX

Three days later, in the early afternoon, Barnevelt and Zei came out of the forest of Rakh beside the Shaf-Malayer road. Both were gaunt, dirty, worn-looking, and shabby. Zei carried a spear, which Barnevelt had made by lashing the hilt of his dagger to a pole. After they had been treed by a yeki, Barnevelt had made the spear in case they met another one. But, having assembled the weapon, they had no occasion to use it.

Barnevelt sighed. "I suppose we ought to start hiking north, but let's sit here a while and hope to catch a ride."

He tossed his axe on the ground and sat down heavily with his back to a tree. Zei dropped down beside him and laid her head on his shoulder. He said, "Let's see the rest of those berries."

She handed over her seaman's cap, which she had been using as a bag. Barnevelt started fishing out berries, feeding them alternately to her and to himself.

He looked hard at one and threw it away, saying, "That's the kind that gave us a bellyache. Can't you just imagine the meals we'll have when we get to town?"

"Aye, verily! A fine roast unha, with tabids on the side, and a tunest in its mouth. The platter swimming in betune sauce."

"And a bunch of those yellow what-d'you-call-'ems for dessert, and a big mug of falat wine..." ,

"Not the falat of Mishdakh, which is thin stuff, but that of Hojur, especially that of the year of the yeki..."

"Don't talk to me about yekis! I've seen all I want of them. We'll also have a loaf of badr, to sop up what's left..."

She raised her head. "What a blade! Here you sit, with a most royal maiden all but lying in your arms, and all you think upon's your beastly stomach!"

"Just as well for you."



"How mean you?"

"There's no guardian of virtue like starvation. If I had my strength you wouldn't be a maiden long."

"Braggart! Your thoughts would still center upon aliment. Oh, I saw the repasts you consumed aboard the Shambor and knew your nation's gluttonous reputation were but a pallid phantom of the fact."

"It's a cold country," he said.

"But you're not cold now!"

"And at least we eat normal wholesome food, and not our husbands."

"The kashyo's no feast, dolt, but a solemn ceremony..."

"I've heard that before, and I still think it puts you on a level with the tailed men of Fossanderan."

"Insolent carper!" she cried, and slapped him—gently, to show it was in fun.

"And," he continued, "I don't see how your royal line perpetuates itself if every time the consort finds the queen looking at him he wonders if it's the love light in her eyes or whether she's picking out a nice chop. That sort of thing must be unmanning."

"Perchance our men are less readily unmanned than those of your chill abode. A Qiribu on the verge of death retains his gallantry, whereas if you put a Nayme on berries and shellfish for three days...\*\*

"Four!"

"Four days, he's blind insensible to aught but food."

"Foof! You were imagining just as big a meal as I was."

"I was not! The repast of your fancy overtopped mine as the Zogha overshadows Mount Sabushi."

"How d'you expect to prove that?"

"A princess royal has no need to put matters to proof. Her word alone is adequate."

"Is that so? Then you'd better learn some new customs."

"Such as that Earthly usage called 'kissing,' wherein you've schooled me. Methinks I need more practice at this sport..."

After a while, Barnevelt said, "I'm afraid I'm not so near starvation as I thought."

"So? Seek not to violate the ancient customs of Qirib, or you shall learn the rough-and-tumble methods taught by our lanistae in the maiden warriors' palaestra... Are you perchance carrying a gvam stone in your pocket?"

Barnevelt shifted his position. "No, I'm relying entirely on my native charm. Anyway, I doubt that such a stone really gives a man power over women, as the janru does in reverse. Sounds like wishful thinking."

"Yet you abet this superstition by hunting the sea monster for its stones."

"Who am I to upset age-old beliefs? I had enough trouble back in Nyamadze, as a result of trying to enlighten people about some plain and obvious facts. But speaking of your women warriors, I hope this experience has convinced you that manning an army with women—if you can man something with a woman—isn't practical."

"And what's the cause of that?" she asked.

"Because the men are bigger. If this were that planet where the females are ten times the size of the males, it would be different."

" 'Twas most unfair of Varzai this disparity to establish."

"Sure, if you must blame the gods."

"If not the gods, then whom?"

"That depends on what you believe about such matters."

"Do you not take the gods seriously?"

"No. I think things just happen."

"No wonder the Kangandites sought for heresy to slay you!"

"No wonder at all. But still, it's a wonder Qirib hasn't been swallowed up by some powerful neighbor, with that set-up."

"Our queens have averted war by a diplomacy of marvelous subtlety, using our mineral wealth to play one foe against another."

"Fine, but eventually some tough guys say, 'Tight or give up!' and that's all the choice you have."

"Do you present me with these grim alternatives, O scoffing nihilist, fear not but that I'll fight."

"Oh, no. I'd use that marvelous subtlety you were talking about to gain my ends. As for instance..."

"Malapert!" she said when she could speak again. "Could you not remain at Ghulinde to play this gladsome game with me forever?"

"Unh? That depends."

"On what? Another, I command... \*\*"

"If your mother abdicates, your consort mightn't like it."

"He'd have nought to say. My word were law."

"Still, it might be considered pretty familiar," he said.

"Well then, could you not teach the wight? Or better yet, become my first consort yourself?"

"Good gods, no! You don't think I want to end up on your sacrificial stove, do you?"

She looked surprised and a little hurt. "Tis an honor many would envy you. Art afraid?"

"Damn right! I like you fine, but not that much."

"Oh! Plain blunt fellow, Nyamen."

"Anyway I'm not eligible."

"That could be arranged," she said.

"And I thought your consorts were picked by lot."

"That, too, were no obstacle insurmountable. All's not what it seems in the drawing of the sort."

"So I've heard. But I still don't intend to spend a year as a lady's pup-eshun and then be killed. Can you imagine your hero Qarar doing such a thing?"

"N-nay, but..."

"It reminds me too much of a bug in my country called a mantis, of which the female eats the male during coiture."

Her eyes filled with tears. "You said you liked me, and we're really of one kind, you and I, despite our seeming differences exterior."

"So I do." He took time off to demonstrate the new game. "Oh, hell, I'm madly in love with you. But..."

"I love you too."

"As a man or as a steak? Unhl" She had punched him sharply in the short ribs.

"As a man, fool," she said. "At least a putative one, for the proof definitive has yet to be submitted."

"Well, that's something. And don't make cracks about my self-restraint, or I'm likely..."

"Hold, perchance there's a way out. Know you the agitation of the Party of Reform, to convert the execution to mere symbolism? Well, having seen a greater portion of the world and having heard the irreverent talk of yourself and other skeptics, I'm not so sure as once I was that the Divine Mother in fact demands this sacrifice."

"You mean you want to adopt the Reformers' program when you come to power?"

"Why not? Then you'd have no dire doom to dread."

"No," said Barnevelt firmly. "Look, sweetheart. In the first place your mother'll keep on running things, as you said yourself, even after she's abdicated, and I don't think she'd stand for such monkeying with

custom."

"But..."

He placed a hand firmly over her mouth. "In the second, when I love a girl I want her permanently and not on a one-year lease. The idea of watching a parade of successors doesn't—ouch! You little devil, are you sneaking a snack in advance to see how I taste?"

"Nay, you mass of string and bone! I did but nip you gently to remind you that I, too, must breathe to live and cannot with that great hand clamped upon my countenance. As for your theories of love and life, that's a view extraordinary for a wandering adventurer. Most such, I've heard, prefer a short hot love and a speedy departure."

"I'm different. In the third place I intend to damn well be the boss and not one of your Qiribo househusbands. Which lets out your whole matriarchal system."

"If the women be housewives in the barbarian nations, why in equity should not the men be househusbands with us?"

"No reason at all, darling. If they put up with it that's their business. But I will not. Nor will I stand for being doped with that janru drug."

"I'd swear by the six breasts of Varzai never to use it on you."

"How could I be sure of that? No, my dear, I'm afraid..."

Barnevelt sighed unhappily, for he now saw what showing his genuine fondness for Zei was getting him into. The real reason for his adamant refusal was the fact that they were of two different species. Yet, with Tangaloo in the clink, Shtain unrescued, and the Cosmic contract unfulfilled, he did not yet dare admit his Earthly origin, knowing the parochial prejudices of many Krishnans. Still, her nearness filled him with desire.

"What then?" she asked with a dangerous gleam in her eyes. "To what extent must one of my proud lineage abase herself before you?"

"You'll have to let me think," he stalled.

"You slippery equivocator!" She jumped up, gave him a sharp kick in the thigh, and started off. "The bigger fool am I, so to cozen me have let you! Here, sir, part our ways for good. I'll to Ghulinde alone."

She started walking briskly northward along the road.

Barnevelt watched her straight receding back with mixed feelings. On one hand he should be glad she'd broken off this dangerous and unprofitable game. On the other he was horrified to hear his softer self call, "Come back, sweetheart! Let's not fight. How will you manage without money?"

She kept on. In a few seconds she would be out of sight around the next bend.

At the last minute, he put his hands over his mouth and imitated the grunt of a hunting yeki. He did not really expect it to work and was all the more surprised when Zei jumped into the air with a cry of alarm, dashed back to him, and flung herself into his arms.

"There, there," he said. "You needn't be afraid with me around. Let's sit down again and take it easy."

"Concerning our future relationship, my love..." she began.

Barnevelt laid a finger on her lips, saying, "I said I should have to think about it, and I meant that."

"I insist..."

"Darling, you've got to learn in dealing with men from outside Qirib that they won't stand for your insisting. I have decided we won't talk about that subject for a while."

"Oh," she said in a small voice.

"Besides, when we're practically starved to death is not time to make vital decisions."

"Food again!" she cried, her irrepressible good humor fully recovered. "Said I not all Nyamen were gluttons? And now back to our game..."

Starvation or no starvation, Barnevelt thought, it was just as well for the ancient customs of Qirib that a few minutes later a shaihan cart, headed north, creaked up the road. Instantly he and Zei were on their feet thumbing. The driver spat and halted his animal.

"Clamber aboard, sir and madam," he said. "Tis long since the Mejrou Quarardena has honored my poor slow vehicle with a commission, but your uniform is credential enough for me."

## CHAPTER SEVEN

The stagecoach to which they had changed in Alvid stopped at the border between Suruskand to the south and Qirib to the north. On the Qirib side of the line was the usual Amazon guard, the usual inspection, and the usual warning that Barnevelt's sword would have to be wired up in accordance with Qiribo law.

"And now," said the customs inspector while a guard went to fetch the wire kit, "your names?"

Barnevelt had not given the question of identification a thought. Therefore he simply answered, "I'm Snyol of Pleshch, and this young lady is Zeibab- Alvandi..."

"What?" cried the inspector, her voice leaping an octave. "So she is! Your Altitude!" The inspector knelt. "We were commanded to watch for you."

Barnevelt started to say, "Oh, let's not make a fuss..."

"Girls! The princess is saved! Light a fire in the smoke box to send a signal message to the capital! But Your Preemin-encies cannot continue on in a vulgar noisome common carrier! Our dispatch coach is at your service, and I myself will escort you. Descend, I pray. Your baggage? None? What ignominy you must have suffered! Girls, hitch up the carriage. Saddlejap— let's see—five aya. Vaznui, you shall command the post till my return. Rouse the second watch from their slothful beds and bid 'em don parade uniforms, with boot and lance for escort duty..."

Half an hour later, Barnevelt found himself speeding toward Shaf in the back seat of the official barouche, with the top down, Zei beside him, and the customs inspector, her knees touching theirs, facing them from the front seat. The vehicle had a plain black-lacquered body with the royal arms in gold on the doors. A mere male drove the two oversized aya, while the five customs guards, resplendent in purple and gilded brass, galloped before and behind. To clear the road when they approached a settlement, the leader of these blew a shrill little silver trumpet.

Although this was both faster and less smelly than the public tallyho they had just quitted, Barnevelt was not altogether pleased by the change, for his intimacy with Zei was now cut off. Besides, the accouterments of the escort clattered so that one had to shout to be heard, and on the dry stretches one had to breathe the clouds of dust the hooves of those in front stirred up. Finally, Barnevelt had no escape from the chatter of the inspector, a gushy female. She gar-ruled on about the gloom that had descended upon the realm with Zei's disappearance and the unbounded joy that would now reign...

By frequent changes of teams they kept up their headlong pace, save when a rain slowed them during the afternoon. The second day after passing the frontier saw them winding along the road on the north shore of the Qiribo peninsula, the same road on which the emissaries of the Morya Sunqaruma under Gavao had ambushed Barnevelt and Tangalao on their first approach to Ghulinde. This time, however, there was no interference. To the left crawled the emerald waters of Baj-jai Bay; to the right rose the shaggy peaks of the Zogha.

Roqir was descending behind them when they came in sight of the capital of Qirib. Barnevelt had not seen Ghulinde from this angle, whence the colossal image of the god Qunjar showed his profile, brooding over the spired city on his knees like an overstuffed Buddha with a birthday cake in his lap.

To the left and lower lay the harbor of Damovang. As it came clearly into view, Barnevelt saw the harbor was crammed with shipping. Moreover, most of the ships were war galleys, making a much larger fleet than the modest navy he knew Qirib to possess.

"What's all that?" he asked the customs inspector.

"Know you not? Of course, I'm a witless wench, how could you? 'Tis the combined fleet of the powers of the Sadabao Sea, which our magnificent monarch seeks to plat into a firm alliance for the extirpation of the scoundrels who've so grievously affronted us. She does but wait to be sure of the fate of my lady princess ere setting her martial machine into motion. Yonder lie the battleships of Majbur, of Zamba, of Darya, and of other powers of the western Sadabao. Never since Dezful the Golden reigned in riotous ribaldry in Ulvanagh has the sea groaned beneath such armament."

"What kind of ship is that?" asked Barnevelt, pointing. "The galley with a roof."

The ship in question did indeed look like an enormous galley with a flat roof over it.

The inspector giggled and said, "It is a ship of Prince Ferran of Sotaspe, who's ever dazzling the world with some new thing. One of his subjects has invented a glider of novel design, differing from other gliders in that 'tis propelled through the empyrean by engines pyrotechnic. This galley is adapted to bear a score of such devices on its roof, where-with, 'tis said, he hopes to assail these pirates in their swampy home by flying over them and lapidating them with missiles. But hold, we must make arrangements for your arrival."

She called to the leading customs guard and gave her instructions to gallop on to the palace while the

coach dawdled to give the queen time to get organized.

Thus, when the barouche drew up in front of the palace, all the elements of a royal reception were present: Amazons with lances presented, trumpeters blowing flourishes, and the royalty of Qirib and its neighbors drawn up on the steps in glittering array.

Ta-raawent the trumpets. Barnevelt almost glanced over his shoulder to see if there wasn't a movie camera on a boom dolly hovering behind him, so cinematogenic was the scene. Then he remembered the camera on his own finger, and pressed the stud as he advanced toward the queen. A few paces from Queen Alvandi in the front rank, George Tangaloo flashed him a wink, while moving his fist in a way that showed that he, too, was filming the performance.

Barnevelt knelt to the queen while the latter embraced her daughter, then rose at the sound of Alvandi's stentorian voice:

"...inasmuch as our state, in accord with its divinely ordained institutions, does not possess an order of knighthood, I cannot confer it on you as a token of the favor and esteem in which I hold you, General Snyol. I do however hereby confer upon you honorary citizenship in the Monarchy of Qirib, with full rights appertaining not only to the male but to the female as well—together with a draft upon our treasury for fifty thousand karda.

"Now let me present you to these lords and princes gathered here. Ferrian bad-Arjanaq, Prince Regent of Sotaspe. King Rostamb of Ulvanagh. President Kangavir of Suruskand. Sofkar bad-Herg, Dasht of Darya. Grand Master Juvain of the Order of the Knights of Qara of Mikardand. King Penjird the Second of Zamba..."

Having tucked the draft into his jacket, Barnevelt tried to impress on his memory the long roll of names and faces. The first Krishnan whose thumb he grasped, the famous Prince Ferrian, proved a youngish-looking fellow of middle height, slim, swarthy, and intense-looking, wearing a cuirass of overlapping plates, of black-oxidized steel damascened with gold. Next came Rostamb of Ulvanagh, big, burly, and wearing a straggly caricature of a beard, who looked at Barnevelt with dour intentness. After that, however, the unfamiliar names and faces merged into one big confusion in his mind.

The queen was speaking again, "Where's Zakkomir, Master Snyol?"

"I don't know, Your Altitude, but I fear the worst. We got separated while they were chasing us in the Sunqar."

"A woeful loss, but we'll keep hope for the nonce. Let's within, to restore your tissues before the banquet."

Banquet? Barnevelt feared there'd be speeches, and after all his narrow escapes from death it would catch up with him in the form of acute boredom.

They filed into the palace and were passed mugs of spiced kvad. Barnevelt had his thumb wrung by admirers until he thought it would come off. He couldn't get near Zei who, still in her seagoing rig, was surrounded by the gilded youth of the land packed four deep.

The President of Suruskand, a stout little party in hornrimmed spectacles and vermilion toga, astonished Barnevelt by producing a little native notebook and a pen-and-inkwell set from the folds of his garment, saying, "General Snyol, since my elevation has my eldest chick besought me to exploit my station to

gather for him autographs of the great. So, sir, if you'd not mind posing your signature hereon..."

Barnevelt laboriously indited a series of Gozashtandou curleycues upon the proffered sheet. "Excuse me, Your Beneficence," said Barnevelt and tore himself away. Since Zei had disappeared, he went over to speak to Tangaloa, who was quietly swilling his drink and waiting.

The big brown man was as stout and jovial as ever. Wringing Barnevelt's hand, the xenologist said, "My God, cobber, but you resemble a swagman!"

"You would, too, if you'd been with us. When did she let you out of pokey?"

"As soon as she got word by that smoke-telegraph thing that you and the sheila were safe."

"How's your arm?"

"Nearly as good as new. But you're the lad with things to yarn about. Let's have the dinkum oil."

Barnevelt gave a synopsis of his adventures. "...so we can take it as proved that this Osirian, Sheafase, is the boss of the buccaneers. Further, he's put Igor under Osirian pseudo-hypnosis, so that our cream of the Muscovite team doesn't know who he is any more. It was only those silver helmets that saved Zakkomir and me from the same fate."

Tangaloa clucked. "That'll complicate our efforts to rescue him, but I daresay something will turn up. Go on."

When Barnevelt told of setting fire to Fossanderan, he was surprised to see Tangaloa's good-humored face take on a look of stern disapproval.

"What's the matter?" said Barnevelt.

"That was a hang of a thing to do! Think of all the good timber you destroyed! On Earth we have to watch every stick of it. And what happened to the tailed men?"

"How should I know? Maybe they got roasted. Maybe they swam over to the mainland on the other side. What about them?"

"Why, there's a whole culture group that has never been investigated! They sound like the same species as those of Koloft and Za, but the culture may be quite different. These groups are all enclaves of the tailed species that were left when the tailless Krishnans overran the country thousands of years ago. Perhaps our hosts here derived their cannibalism from the tailed aborigines they displaced. Oh, there are all sorts of possibilities—or there were until you burned the evidence. How could you, Dirk?"

"Jeepers!" cried Barnevelt. "What the hell d'you expect me to do, let these bloody savages eat me so you can come along later with your little notebook to study 'em?"

"No, but..."

"Well, it was them or us. As for the trees, Krishna's only got a small fraction of Earth's population, with three or four times the land area, so we needn't worry about its natural resources yet. Tailed men, foof!"

"But when I think of the scientific data going to waste... What happened next?"



Barnevelt told the tale of their adventures in the forest of Rakh. "The only thing that saved us," he said, "was stumbling on a cache of eggs. Four big ones. I don't know which of the local critters laid 'em. Anyway, mama was away from the nest, so we scooped up the eggs and legged it."

"How'd you cook them?"

"Set them on the ground beside the fire and turned them every few seconds. Turned out all right—they must have been freshly laid. Otherwise the yekya would be gnawing our bones in the somber forest of Rakh."

"Oh, nonsense, cobber, don't make such a big thing of it! A healthy young couple like you and the princess could have gone for weeks without food before you collapsed. We did on Thor, when they thought we'd stolen their sacred pie and we had to shoot our way out. We didn't even have shellfish and berries, let alone eggs to eat." Tangaloa looked down at his paunch. "I was actually slender when we'd finished that stroll. And, by the bye, how much film did you get?"

"Not enough. We were in the Sunqar only overnight, and after we got away I hardly gave the Hayashi a thought until now. The forest was mostly too dark anyway. I have some exposed rolls in my pocket, if the water hasn't gotten into the capsules. But what'll we do about Igor? He'll have to be taken by force."

"That will take care of itself," grinned Tangaloa.

"How d'you mean?" said Barnevelt uneasily.

"The queen is pushing you for commander-in-chief of this expedition against the pirates."

"Me? Why me?"

"Because you're a famous general, if you've forgotten. As you're from a distant country, she figures these temperamental skites might agree on you when they wouldn't let one of their own group lord it over the rest. Penjird is jealous of Ferrian, Ferrian is jealous of Rostamb, and Rostamb is jealous of everybody."

"But I'm no admiral. I couldn't even keep control of the crew of a little fourteen-oared smuggler."

"They'll never know that if you don't tell 'em. Here they have been beating their brains out to think of a way through the sea vine, and you've solved it."

"You mean my skis? Maybe..."

Barnevelt hesitated. On one hand, the expedition would furnish a good excuse to get clear of Qirib before he fell so deeply in love with Zei that his will power could no longer extricate him. Besides, something had to be done about Igor Shtain and the Cosmic Features contract. On the other hand, his old shyness filled him with dread at having to stand up in front of hordes of strangers and shoulder vast responsibilities to which he was unequal.

"Of course it is all nonsense," said Tangaloa. "If Castan-hoso had given me the name he gave you, I should have been chosen admiralissimo instead of you. As it is, having no military ambitions, I will happily shoot film while you wrestle with logistics."

The flash of jewels in the gaslight caught Barnevelt's eye. Here came Zei, freshly scrubbed and waved, in

gauzy tunic and glittering tiara, dodging through a scrimmage of painted youths towards himself and George. Barnevelt whistled his admiration and quoted:

"Let never maiden think, however fair,She is not fairer in new clothes than old!"

"What's that, my lord?" she asked, and he translated.

She turned to Tangaloo. "Does he narrate our adventures, Master Tagde? The telling could never in a millennium do justice to the doing, for compared to our struggles were the Nine Labors of Qara as nought. Has he told you of the time, after we attained the mainland, when we were treed by a yeki? Or again how, after his lighter broke down, he made a fire by rubbing sticks together?"

"No—did you?" asked Tangaloo.

"Yes. The Boy Scout handbooks are right. It can be done if you have dry wood and the patience of Job. But I don't advise..." He glanced at the clepsydra on the wall. "I'd better get washed and dressed:

"The Bird of Time has but a little wayTo flutter—and the Bird is on the Wing."

## CHAPTER EIGHT

As guest of honor, Barnevelt had the seat on the queen's right, with Zei on her left looking like one of the gauzier Greek goddesses. The rest of the company ranged in a crescent, jewels gleaming in the gaslight.

There were speeches, as Barnevelt had feared: one dignitary after another getting up and—often in a dialect Barnevelt could hardly understand—saying nothing with all the eloquence and elegance at his command. As Admiral Somebody from Gozashtand launched into his speech, the queen spoke to Barnevelt in a whisper that must have carried to the kitchen.

"I'll break this up early, so that the council meeting shall be started. Dost know that the staff of command's to be thrust into your grip tonight?"

Barnevelt gave a polite but inarticulate murmur, and said, "Is there anything you want me to do to clinch it?"

"Just keep your big sack of a mouth tightly shut and allow me to manage the matter," the queen replied graciously.

After the banqueters had been dismissed, the council meeting assembled in a smaller chamber of the palace. There were about a dozen present: all head men and high military officers of the neighboring states.

First the Gozashtando admiral, in a long speech, gracefully explained why his imperial master, King Eqrar, could not join the alliance because he was in the midst of negotiating a treaty with Dur, and—ahem—everybody knew what that meant.

"It means your royaj niggard will endure piracy and pilferage rather than sacrifice some piddling commercial advantage," said the queen, "whereas if he could see beyond that beak of his he'd know he stands to lose tenfold as much from unchecked lawlessness. Unless in plain poltroonery he fears Dur'll

assault him for clipping their furacious frends' claws."

"Madam," said the admiral, "I cannot permit such contumelious gibes towards my master to pass unrebuked..."

"Sit down and shut up, or take the road back to your craven king!" yelled Alvandi. "This is a meeting of warriors, not of palsied recreants! Whilst we face the foe with what we have undaunted, he sits on his fat podex in Hershid with more force at his command than all of us together, but trembling in terror lest a bold move cost him half a kard. He makes me sick."

The admiral gathered up his papers, bowed stiffly, and walked out without a word. When he had gone, Prince Ferrian flashed the queen a sardonic grin.

"That's drubbing the old runagate!" he said. "No wonder the women rule in Qirib. Of course, had we frontiers in common with Dur, as has Eqrar of Gozashtand, well might we sing a less temerarious tune. Howsomever, let's to business."

"Right are you," said Alvandi. "Here upon my right sits he of whom I told you—the hero who has penetrated to the Sunqar's heart and lived to tell the tale. General Snyol, tell these lords in brief how you rescued my daughter."

Barnevelt gave a condensed account up to the incident of the improvised skis, then asked, "Do you know what skis are?"

All looked blank save Ferrian, who said, "I do. We had a Nyame in our island last year who showed us how to shape boards for walking on soft stuff. Having none of that strange frozen rain called 'snow' in sunny Sotaspe, we coated a hill with fine wet clay and slid adown it. I blacked an eye and bent an ankle so that for a week I walked on crutches, though the sport was worth it. Is that how you escaped? By striding over the terpahla on these contrivances?"

"Yes. You see I took some boards and whittled..."

"I see it all! We'll equip our entire battle with skids and send 'em forward over the vine, while the silly Sunqaruma look on in amaze, having thought themselves impregnable in their marine morass. I'll take the training and command of these troops, and tomorrow set all the carpenters in Ghulinde to carving skids."

"Nay!" cried King Penjird. "While we all know you for a man of impetus and soaring spirit, Ferrian, yet never shall you command my soldiers!"

"Nor mine," said Rostamb of Ulvanagh. "Who's this young rashling who'd upset the tried and proven principles of war? I was commanding soldiery ere he'd broke the shell of's egg..."

"Quiet, sirs," said Queen Alvandi. "For this selfsame reason have I inveigled hither this ugly wight from far fantastic lands of cold and ice. His worth's already demonstrate, by his known repute in deeds of dought and by his recent solitary foray..."

"I care not," said Penjird of Zamba. "Be he a very Qarar returned to the mortal plane, yet shall he not command my men. They're mine, recruited, trained, and paid by me through all vicissitudes, and none but me they'd trust. I am who I am!"

"I crave pardon, lords," said the Chief Syndic of Majbur, whose plain brown suit contrasted with the

gaudery around him.

He went on quietly, "Most of those here hold their authority by hereditary right or lifelong tenure. To accommodate yourselves to the interests and desires of other men is not your habitude. Yet, without a single head, an expedition such as ours is doomed to prove abortive, as those versed in the lore of war can readily confirm. Therefore, if we'd sink our shaft in the pupil of the shaihan's eye, must we all our independence compromise, as we who politick in states of rule elective learn to do habitually. And for that purpose, who could better leader be than this one—a man of force and craft from distant lands, having no local ties to sully his disinterest?"

"Right, old money-bags!" said Ferrian. "While I'd liefer lose a tooth than lessen my authority, yet do I yield to your logic's overriding force. Will you stand with me in this Penjird my lad?"

"I know not. 'Tis without..."

"Not I!" roared Rostamb of Ulvanagh. "How know we Snyol of Pleshchhas truly earned the reputation that is his? Tales shrink not in telling, and we know him but by rumor that has wafted halfway round the globe. How know that he'll prove impartial as contends our friend from Majbur? For some substantial time has he frequented Qirib's court, and how know we what secret offers or relations bind him to the douri's interest?" Rostamb looked hard at Zei. "For that matter, how know we he's the authentic Snyol of Pleshch? I should have thought the General Snyol an older man."

Queen Alvandi whispered behind her hand to Barnevelt, "Tell the oldfastuk you left your papers in Nyamadze, and challenge him for unfaming you!"

"What? ButI .

"Do as I command! Challenge him!"

Barnevelt, unhappily realizing that who rides the tiger cannot dismount, rose and said, "My means of identification were left behind in my native country when I fled. However, if anybody wishes to press a charge of lying against me, I shall be glad to settle the question privately, as one gentleman to another."

With that he whacked the council table with his sword, making the ash trays dance. Rostamb growled and reached for his hilt.

"Guards!" shrilled the queen, and Amazons leaped into the room. "Disarmthese twain ! Know you two bibacious recusants not the law? 'Tis only in deference to your rank that we let you come armed within our purlieus at all, and any further swinish male brawling shall result in heads' bedizening the city wall, though they be royal ones. Be seated. My lord Ferrian, meseems your head's the levellest of those here. Continue your argument..."

For hours they went round and round. First it was only the queen, Prince Ferrian, and the Chief Syndic for Barnevelt. Then they won over the President of Suruskand, then Penjird of Zamba, and little by little the others until only Rostamb of Ulvanagh held out.

King Rostamb snarled, "You're all bewitched by that perfume the barridans of Qirib use to subjugate their miserable men. When I came hither I thought 'twould be a fair and open enterprise 'mongst comrades and equals, 'stead of which I find a most nefarious palpable swindle whereby Alvandi hopes to gain control not merely of the Sunqar as she does openly admit, but also of all of you, to impose upon your hapless lands her own perverse iniquitous dreams of female rule. To Hishkak with it! Before that, I'll

see the bloody flagoi the Sunqaruma flying over golden Ulvanagh. You'll see I'm right, sirs, and meantime I bid you good night."

Out hewent, his bristly chin in the air. The impressive-ness of his exit was impaired by the fact that, not watching where he was going, he tripped on a fold in a rug and fell flat on his face.

As a result of the delays that plague every large-scale operation, more than a ten-night passed before the skis were built, the men taught to use them, the organizational wrinkles smoothed out, and the expedition against the Morya Sun-qaruma squared away. Barnevelt, having deposited his reward from the queen with the banking firm of Ta'lun & Fosq, worried because the hurricane season in theBanjaoSea was drawing close. He found, however, that there was little he could do either to help or to hinder; the commanders under him went about their several tasks regardless. He was, he thought, a figurehead, though a necessary one to keep the others from trying to boss one another and quarreling.

One day Tangaloo said, "Dirk, I think we can stoush the Sunqaruma all right. But how the floppinghell are we to keep our troopers from doing in Igor Shtain along with the rest?"

Barnevelt thought. "I think I know. We'll take a leaf out of the pirates' own book. Have you still got that photograph of Igor I left with you when I went after Zei?"

"Yes."

Then Barnevelt went to the queen and said: "YourAltitude, there's an old photographer in Jazmurian..."

"I know the one, for but lately did the Artists' Guild of Jazmurian hale him into court on charges that he'd hired a band of bravoos to assail them in the streets, their competition to abate. But when the case came up it transpired that the bravoos were but a pair of travelers named Snyol of Pleshch and Tagde of Vyutr—names possessing a familiar sound—who did nothing but resist this Guild's extortionate demands. So my judge dismissed the case with a warning to those overweening daubers. What about him?"

"He's a spy for the Sunqaruma, and I wish you'd have him arrested..."

"Arrested, forsooth! I'll have the blackguard boiled alive till the flesh sloughs from his bones I Bethis his gratitude for our even-handed justice? I'll have his head sawn off with a jeweller's saw, a hair's breadth at a stroke! I'll..."

"Please, Queen! I have another use for him."

"Well?"

"There's an Earthman in the Sunqar I particularly want taken alive..."

"Why?"

"Oh, he did me a bad turn once and I want to work him over little by little, for years. So I don't wish one of our soldiers to give him a quick death. Now, I want the old photographer allowed to keep his head and go scot-free in return for a piece of work—to reproduce a picture of this Earthman. He can have all the help and materials he needs, so long as he turns me out three thousand prints before we sail. Then I'll distribute them among the assault troops, with word there's a five-thousand-kard reward for this Earthman alive, but none dead."

"You have strange ideas, Master Snyol, but it shall be as you desire."

On the appointed day, Barnevelt led those who were seeing him off onto the deck of Majbur's Junsar, which he had selected as flagship. (The queen had been surprised and disappointed, expecting him to choose her own Douri De-janai. He persisted in his choice, however, to avoid any appearance of partiality. Besides, the Junsar was bigger.) Everybody came aboard to drink and chatter like any sailing party.

Barnevelt wanted a private good-bye with Zei, with whom he had hardly had a private word since their return to Ghulinde. However, for a long time both he and she were enmeshed in polite conversations with others. At last he took the shaihan by the horns, excused himself, and said, "Will you step in here a minute, princess?"

He led her into his private cabin, stooping to avoid hitting his head on the cross-beams.

"Good-bye, darling," he said, and swept her into his arms.

When he released her she said, "You must come back, my dearest love. Life will otherwise be savorless. Surely we can come to some agreement to meet your stipulations. Why should I not make you paramour permanent, when I'm queen, to reign over my affections perennially whilst my wittol spouses come and go?"

"Fraid not. Don't tell anybody, but I'm really a very moral fellow."

"If that concordat suits you not, such is the burning passion in my liver that I'd cast away my royal rank to tramp the world with you, or plunge into the dread deeps of space whence come the exotic Terrans. For my secret hope has ever been to be mastered by a man of might and mettle such as you."

"Oh, come, I'm not that good. . . /"

"There's none like unto you! Qara, if indeed he lived and be no figment of a poet's fancy, were no stauncher hero. But say the word. . ."

"Now, now, stop crying. We'll settle that when I see you again." He neglected to add that, if his plans worked out, that time would never come.

Her praise made him uncomfortable, for he could not help a guilty feeling that much trouble, including the death of Chask, might have been avoided had he handled the Shambor's crew more skillfully. Although he did love her (damn it all!) he still thought the course he planned the best for all. He hoped, once Shtain were secured and the film shot, to fade quietly out of the Krishnan landscape and return to Earth.

He kissed her with a fervor that would have done credit to the great actor Roberto Kahn, dried her eyes, and led her back on deck. The party broke up, those who—like Prince Ferrian—were going along, to scatter to their own ships; those who—like King Penjird of Zamba—weren't, to go ashore. With flags flapping, bands blaring, fireworks fizzing, thousands waving from the docks of Damovang, oars thumping, and one of Ferrian's rocket gliders circling overhead, the combined armada filed out upon the smaragdine sea.

## CHAPTER NINE

Again the hills of Fossanderan came into view, this time covered with black stumps like an unshaven chin seen under the microscope. Only away to the left, towards the eastern end of the island, did the greens and browns and mauves and purples of growing Krishnan vegetation persist.

Barnevelt, leaning against the forward rail of the Junsar, said, "George, pass the word we're putting in to the cove on the north shore of Fossanderan to top off our water. I don't want to be caught short again."

"If they make a stink about the demons?"

"Oh, foof! Remind 'em I'm the guy who cleaned up on the demons single-handed. Of course the water parties will need guards."

The fleet drew up along the north shore of the island and gathered water while hundreds of rowers went ashore to catch a few hours' sleep on solid ground after putting up with cramped dozens on their benches since leaving Damovang. Of the tailed men there was no sign, and the story of Barnevelt's exploit seemed to have killed much of the popular dread of the place.

When the leaders gathered aboard the Junsar for a conference, the Dasht of Darya asked, "Suppose these villains ask terms?"

"Heave their emissaries into the sea!" said Queen Alvandi.

"Not in accord with the practice of civilized nations..." began the Majburo admiral.

"Who cares? Who calls these sanguinary filchers civilized?"

"A moment, madam," said Prince Ferrian. "A proper moral tone is no small advantage to an enterprise like ours, so be it it costs but little. Offer 'em, say I, terms they'll refuse. Like-say—their bare lives alone."

And so it was decided.

When the water had been replenished and the sleeping oarsmen roused, the fleet put forth again. Behind the leading Junsar plowed the grotesque shape of Ferrian's oared aircraft carrier, the Kumanisht. The catapult in the latter's bow whanged, hurling a rocket-glider into the air on a practice flight, to circle over the fleet and drift in over the tail of the flight deck, where the handling crew caught it.

As they rounded the eastern end of Fossanderan into the larger channel of Palindos Strait, Barnevelt touched Tanga-loa's arm and pointed. A small group of tailed men were spear-fishing in the shallows. The instant they saw the Jun-sar they scampered back to shore, to disappear among the trees.

Tangaloa said, "I say, couldn't we stop long enough for me\* to interview them? I'll take a guard..."

"No! If we win the war, maybe we can stop on the way back... Yes?"

An officer had come up to report that Captain So-and-so had sprung a seam and asked permission to turn back.

"Zeus!" said Barnevelt. "That's the fourth or fifth that's aborted. We started out with plenty of margin, but Rostamb ratted on us, and at this rate we'll be tackling a larger force than our own."

"We inspected them at Damovang," said Tangaloo.

"Sure. I suspect some of 'em have been sabotaged by people who want to stay out of the fight. I'll go look at this sprung seam."

Barnevelt made his inspection, told the captain to caulk his leak with sailcloth, and returned to the Jumar. As they emerged from the Strait into the Banjao Sea, he detached a couple of empty cargo ships to sail straight for Malayer, fill up with food and water, and then rejoin the main fleet at the Sunqar. Then he resumed his former position, elbows on the forward rafl, staring somberly over the sea.

"What makes you so gloomy?" said Tangaloo. "You weren't this way when you set out before, though you were running a worse risk."

"Oh, am I? It's not the fighting."

"What then?"

"Hollow, hollow, all delight."

"I know, you're in love!"

"Uh-huh," Barnevelt admitted.

"Well, what's that to be sad about? I have always found it fun."

"I've said good-bye forever to her."

"Why?"

"She had the idea I'd make a good consort. And..." Barnevelt struck his neck with the edge of his hand.

"I had forgot that angle. It could have been arranged."

"It was arranged! That was what I objected to."

"No, no. I mean if you played your cards right you could overthrow the matriarchy and end the custom. It is not a really stable set-up, the one they have in Qirib."

"You mean because the males are bigger than the females, as among us?"

"Not exactly, though that helps. Ahem. I meant this female-dominated society didn't grow naturally, but was suddenly imposed upon a different culture pattern as a result of a couple of historical accidents\* The people's basic cultural attitudes are still those of the surrounding Krishnan states, where the pattern is approximate sexual equality."

"I see. It is the little rift within the lute, that by and by will make the music mute."

"Precisely. Now in Nyamadze, on the other hand, I understand that..."

"Haven't the people's—uh—basic cultural patterns changed since Queen Dejanai set up the



matriarchate?"

"No. That will take centuries yet. You see, most people get their basic cultural attitudes before they reach school age and never change them thereafter. That is why on Earth there are still traces of racial hostility and discrimination in spots, after all the good-will propaganda and legal measures of the last few centuries. And apparently culture patterns are transmitted on Krishna in the same way. So if you want to break up this pattern of basilophagous gynecocracy before it hardens..."

"Of what?" said Barnevelt.

"Sorry, bod, I forgot this isn't a meeting of the Anthropological Association. This pattern of king-eating petticoat rule, I should have said, can be overthrown by a resolute man, and you will have all the advantages—an inside position, a hero's prestige..."

Barnevelt shook his head. "I'm a quiet sort of guy and don't care for the fierce light which beats upon the throne and blackens every blot."

"Oh, nonsense, Dirk. You love leadership. I have been watching you."

"Well, I don't intend to put my head in that particular noose so long as the queen uses that Unbridled Lust perfume to keep the men subdued. Anyway there are my obligations to the firm."

"True—I'd forgot Igor Shtain, Limited. Couldn't you persuade the sheila to chuck her job? Then you wouldn't have to be consort."

"Matter of fact she's already offered to. She'd have gone back to Earth with me."

"For God's sake, why didn't you take her up on it?" said Tangaloa. "She's a bonzer little squid. I shouldn't mind a bit of a smodge with her myself."

"She's a Krishnan, dammit!"

"So what? Relations are possible despite—or is there some rule in Deuteronomy against it?"

"It's not that. We're not interfertile."

"So much the better. One need not worry about..."

"But that's not what I want!"

"You mean you want a lot of little Dirks running around? As if one were not enough?"

"Ayuh," said Barnevelt.

"A sentimental yearning for vicarious immortality, eh?"

"Not at all. I prefer a stable family life, and poor old sex alone won't give you that."

"Ha ha," said Tangaloa. "What was that thing you were quoting to Castanhoso about loathing the bright dishonor of her love? You're still full of irrational inhibitions, my boy. We Polynesians have found..."

"I know. Your system of progressive polygamy may be all right for you, but I'm not built that way. So no egg-laying princesses need apply."

"A bigoted, race-conscious attitude."

"I don't care, it's my attitude. Good thing this expedition came along to separate us, or I should never have had the will power to leave her."

"Oh, well, it's your life." Tangaloa wiped his forehead.

"This is hotter than the Northern Territory of Australia in January."

"South wind," said Barnevelt. "It'll make it tough for us all the way to the Sunqar."

"We ought to do like those blokes from Darya. As soon as we were out of Damovang Harbor they reverted to their native costume, a coat of grease, and now they just leave the grease off."

## CHAPTER TEN

At last the Sunqar appeared again upon the hazy horizon. Barnevelt, beginning to feel as if he knew these waters well, gave the course for the northwest coast of the floating island where lay the entrance to the pirate settlement.

A glider returned to the Kumanisht with word, passed on to the Junsar by flag signals, that a ship was coming out to meet them. The ship itself followed hard upon the word of its coming. As she approached, she furled her sails and headed straight for the Junsar, both slowing until they rested motionless with bows almost touching. The green truce pennon flew from the pirate's mainmast.

"Who be ye and what do ye here?" came a rasping voice in the Qiribo dialect from the bow of the Sunqaro ship.

Barnevelt told the herald with the megaphone beside him: "Tell him we're the allied navies of the Sadabao Sea, come to clean out the Sunqar."

"Clean us out!" came the yell from the other ship. "We'll teach you..." the spokesman for the Morya Sunqaruma mastered himself with an almost audible effort. "Have ye terms to present ere the hand play begins?"

"If you surrender we'll guarantee your lives, but nothing more—not your liberty or property."

"Very kind, ha ha! I go to carry your generous offer to our chiefs."

The Sunqaro galley backed oars until she was several lengths away before turning; her captain evidently did not care to expose his vulnerable side to a hostile ram at close quarters, truce or no truce. Then the pirate's oars thumped and splashed furiously as the ship raced for the entrance to the weed.

The Junsar started to follow at a leisurely pace to give the Sunqaruma a fair chance to consider the ultimatum. Then Barnevelt became aware of another rapid thumping on his left as Queen Alvandi's Douri Dejanai foamed past in pursuit of the pirate.

"Hey there!" Barnevelt called across the water. "Stay back in line!"

Back came the queen's hoarse bawl, "That's Gizil the Saddler who served as herald! I'll sink his ship and..."

"Who's Gizil the Saddler?"

"A saucy runagate from Qirib and a notorious fomenter of discontent among our males! We'd have hanged the losel but that when he heard there was a warrant out for him he fled. He shan't escape us this time!"

"Get back in line," said Barnevelt.

"But Gizil will escape!"

"Let him."

"That I'll not! Who think you you are, to command the Queen of Qirib?"

"I'm your commander-in-chief, that's who. Now stop where you are, or by Qondyor's toenails I'll sink you myself!"

"You'd never dare! Faster, boys!"

"Oh, no?" Barnevelt turned to Tangaloa and said, "Pass the word: Full speed ahead—load the forward catapult-secure to ram."

Although the Douri Dejanai had drawn ahead of the Junsar during this exchange of unpleasantries, the larger ship soon overhauled the smaller.

Barnevelt said, "Fire one shot over her poop. Try not to hit anything."

Whang! went the catapult. The great arrow as long as a man screeched across the narrow space between the two ships. Barnevelt had intended to miss the queen by a comfortable margin. However, whether because the target was too tempting or because the motion of the ship affected the crew's aim, the point of the missile struck Alvandi's cloak, ripped the garment from her shoulders, and bore it fluttering far out into the sea, where missile and cloak disappeared with a single splash. The queen spun and sprawled on the deck. One of her Amazons rushed to help her up.

She stopped her ship's oars, then shook a fist at the Junsar. Barnevelt saw grins everywhere, for Queen Alvandi's highhandedness was notorious even in a fleet whose leaders included such uninhibited individualists as Prince Ferrian of Sotaspe. Thereafter there was no more disobedience to Barnevelt's orders.

Me and Napoleon! he thought. If they only knew who he really was...

As they neared the Sunqar, the patches of terpahla became commoner until they occasionally fouled an oar. Through a long brass Krishnan telescope, Barnevelt saw that the ship that had met them was the one that stood guard at the entrance. This ship had resumed her former position and was pulling the detached floating mass of terpahla into the mouth of the entrance. Meanwhile a longboat was rowing up the

channel.

The Sunqaruma were standing on the defensive. Barnevelt passed the word: "Carry out Plan Two."

With much signaling and trumpeting, the fleet changed formation. Two groups of ships that had been modified from regular galleys to troop carriers by cutting down their oarage drew off on the flanks, while Barnevelt in the Junsar led the Majburo squadron straight for the plug that blocked the channel into the Sunqar.

The pirate galley still stood guard inside the channel, a tackle of ropes connecting her with the plug. Beyond her, other ships moved about the channel.

Barnevelt wondered if the Sunqaruma would try a further parley, but then the Junsar's captain pointed out to him the maroon war pennant flapping lazily from the mainmast head of the guard ship.

"There's your answer, my lord," said he.

An instant later a catapult thumped, and lead balls and feathered javelins began to arc across the intervening water. As these got closer they were accompanied by arrows and crossbow bolts. Under the Junsar's captain's directions, some men of the crew rigged a bulwark of shields around the bow so that Barnevelt and the others could watch more safely.

"Shall we shoot?" said the captain.

"Not so long as they're kind enough to do our ranging for us," said Barnevelt.

He swung his telescope, trying to see if the squadrons were following the plan, though with the haze that the warm wind had brought he could do almost as well with his naked eyes.

A missile plunked into the water between the Junsar and her starboard neighbor. "Shoot," said Barnevelt, and the catapults on the bows of the Majburo squadron went off.

Things began to hit the bulwark of shields with resounding bangs. Aft, a crash and an outburst of yells told that the defenders' fire had gotten home.

Barnevelt, peering over his breastwork, found that only the plug of weed and a few meters of open water separated him from the galley that guarded the portal. This galley shot fast, things going overhead with a continuous swish and hum. Four Majburo galleys had come up to the plug and were shooting back, though being end-on they could only use their forward catapults, and there was not much room for archers to deploy on their forecastles.

Men scrambled down the bows of the attackers onto the rams with hooks and rakes, dug these into the terpahla, and pulled up streamers of the golden-brown slimy stuff with its purple floats. These they passed up to others above them in an effort to get a firm grip on the plug. In front of Barnevelt a man gaffing the sea vine was transfixed by a shaft and fell into the water. Another took his place.

A prolonged swish overhead made Barnevelt look up. It was one of Ferrian's gliders making a sweep over the enemy, its rockets leaving a trail of the yellow smoke of yasubar powder. As it passed over the guardship, something like rain fell from it. Barnevelt knew that this was a handful of steel darts, of which Prince Ferrian had prepared great numbers for his aviators.

Another glider went on to the main settlement, where it dropped something. There was a burst of smoke and the sound of exploding fireworks, though Barnevelt could not see whether these pyrotechnics had done any real damage.

Bang! A leaden shot from a hostile catapult smashed through the bulwark, two shields away from Barnevelt, and went rolling along the forecastle like a bowling ball. A couple of men struggled to replace the broken shield. Below, other men were lying in the water among the vines. Barnevelt saw one of them jerk in a peculiar fashion and caught a flash of spotted hide. Drawn by the blood, the fondaqa or venomouseels were gathering.

A Majburo galley had belayed a number of strands of sea vine to its decks and began to back oars; but, as the tension increased, the vines broke one by one until none was left. Another glider hissed overhead. As it passed over the guard-ship, a spray of missiles reached up ineffectively for it.

"My lord Snyol!" cried the Junsar's captain. "Here comes Prince Ferrian."

Barnevelt ran aft just as Ferrian, slim and swarthy, popped over the stern, the sun gleaming on his damascened armor. Below, the crew of the longboat that had rowed him over from the Kumanisht rested on their oars under the Junsar's stern.

Ferrian took a few seconds to get his breath back, then said: "A strange fleet nears from the North, my lord. One of my fliers saw it from his height."

"What sort of fleet?"

"We know not yet, but I've dispatched another glider to see."

"Who's it likely to be? King Rostamb, ashamed of himself, come to help us?"

"All things are possible, but more likely, 'tis the fleet of Dur, come to save their piratical friends."

Dur! Barnevelt had not thought of that possibility. Up forward, the racket of the fire fight with the Sunqaruma continued.

He said, "I'll go back to the Kumanisht with you to see about this. Carry on here," he told Tangaloo. "Send out a signal for the troop ships not to disembark their ski troops until further notice."

It would hardly do, he thought as he climbed down the rope ladder into the longboat, to be attacked from the seaward side in the midst of that delicate operation.

Aboard the carrier he fidgeted on the flight deck, ducking out of the way during glider operations. Finally the glider that had been sent north to scout came back, drifting in with butterfly grace until seized by the deck crew.

The aviator climbed out, saying, "Another quarter-hour and I should have been in the sea for want of fuel. My lords, the approaching fleet's indeed that of Dur, as could be ascertained from their sails, cut square in the fashion of the stormy Va'andao."

"How many?" asked Ferrian.

"I counted fourteen of their great ships, plus perhaps an equal number of small craft."

Barnevelt calculated. "If we can keep the Sunqaruma bottled up, that should leave us a margin to deal with Dur."

"You know not the great ships of Dur," retorted Ferrian. "Their biggest galleys are manned by nearly a thousand men, and one of those could destroy a squadron of ours as a man treads bugs under heel. With due respect, therefore, my lord, let's see a demonstration of this preternatural resourcefulness whereof Alvandi told us, lest the setting sun illumine the un-joyous spectacle of you, me, and all our brave people furnishing food for the fondaqa. What, sir, do you command?"

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

Food for the fondaqa? Barnevelt pondered, his long chin in his hand. Maybe two could play at that game.

"Tell me," he said. "For nearly an hour your gliders have been dropping things on the Sunqaruma without effect..."

Ferrian replied hotly, "My gliders are the greatest military invention since Qara smote the dames of Varzeni-Ganderan with his magic staff! They'll make us as fearsomely puissant in the arts of Qondyor as the damned Earthmen! But as you say," (he calmed down) "they're not fully perfected. What would you do?"

"How much load do they carry?"

"For a short flight, the equivalent of one man besides the pilot. What's in your mind?"

"We have a lot of water jars in the supply ships. If we dumped half or two-thirds of the water out, they'd weigh about as much as a man—at least the smaller..."

"But wherefore a bombardment of water jars? Though you yerk the nob of one or two foes..."

"But if the jars were full of fondaqa?"

"Hao, now speak you sooth!" cried Ferrian. "We'll cut up the cadavers of the fallen for bait and use those hooks wherewith your sturdy Majburuma seek to claw apart the sea vine... Captain Zair, more ship's boats! Our admiral has an order for the fleet! Yare, yare!"

"But, my lords!" cried Captain Zair with an expression of horror. "The men mortally fear these creatures, and with good reason!"

Barnevelt took a hitch in his mental pants. "Oh, foof! I'm not afraid of them. Get me a thick leather jacket and a pair of gauntlets and I'll demonstrate."

As usual, once he had grasped the basic idea, Prince Ferrian took the bit in his teeth and ran away with it. He rushed about, haranguing everybody to break out fishing tackle, to bend the heads of spears for gaffs, and to get the order to the rest of the fleet.

All this took time. First Barnevelt had to demonstrate how to handle a fondaqa without getting bitten, thanking the gods for his experience with Earthly sharks and eels. By the time the crews of the ships

along the edges of the weed were hooking, gaffing, and spearing the wriggling, snapping monsters and popping them into water jars, another glider returned to report that the Dura fleet would soon be in sight.

Barnevelt glanced at the high, hot sun. "With this south wind," he told Ferrian, "we should have another hour to get organized. I'm going to divide the fleet and put you in charge of the part sent against the Duruma."

Seeing Ferrian's antennae rise quizzically he added, "Our main weapon against them will be the gliders, which you understand better than anyone. I'm going back to the Junsar because I think when the pirates see most of the fleet going off, they'll try a sortie." He turned to the skipper of the Kumanisht. "Captain Zair, signal all admirals to come here."

A longboat loaded with jars pulled up under the stern of the Kumanisht, the coxswain chanting, "Fish for sale! Nice fresh fish for sale! One bite and ye're a dead carcass!"

The sailors fell to work transferring the jars to the carrier. One of the smaller ships pulled alongside with another load of amphorae. The rows of jars along the flight deck began to grow.

The commanders came aboard, one by one. Barnevelt explained his plans, cutting short arguments. "That's all—carry on."

As he lowered himself into the longboat, hails came from the mastheads of the allied fleet: "Sail ho!" "Sail ho!"

"SAIL HO!"

The Duro fleet had been sighted.

On the Jimsar, the missile fight went on. All the ships were looking battered where catapult bullets had carried away parts of their rails or stove in their deckhouses. One Majburo ship had her mizzenmast knocked over, another her forward catapult smashed, while the decks of the enemy seemed to be heaped with wreckage.

From the Junsar's poop, Barnevelt and Tangaloo watched the main fleet get under way, the big Kumanisht in the middle, the others spread out across the sea in a crescent formation with horns forward. On the horizon, little pale rectangles appeared: the sails of Dur.

After two hours, the men of the Majburo squadron had torn away about half the weed of the plug, which brought them closer to the Sunqaro guard ship and made the fight hotter.

The Majburo admiral said, "My lord Snyol, methinks they make a sally, as you predicted."

Beyond the guard ship, down the channel came the galleys of the Sunqar in double column. Barnevelt could not count them because the hulls of the leading pair obscured the rest, but he knew he was outnumbered. The allied armada was caught between Dur and the pirates as in a nut-cracker.

Tangaloo paused in his motion-picture making to say, "Those blokes will try to make contact with us, then line up, ship to ship, so they can pour an endless supply of boarders into us."

"I know. Wish I could persuade you to wear some armor."

"And if I fell into the water?"

Barnevelt somberly watched the Sunqaruma approach. If he could only think up some bright idea... If the pirates did break through his blockade, would they fall on the allied fleet from the rear or flee to parts unknown? It wouldn't matter to him; he'd be dead.

The noise forward died down. The guard ship's people had stopped shooting in an effort to turn her around so that she should not block the way for her sisters. Her oars moved feebly, leading Barnevelt to guess that most of them had less than their normal complement of rowers.

Barnevelt told the Majburo admiral, "Have 'em stop shooting to clear wreckage, build up the bulwarks, and gather more ammunition. How's it holding out?"

"Well enough, sir, with all the bolts and arrows that prickle my ship like the spines of the irascible 'evashq."

"Lash our six ships together the way I told you and push forward against the plug; And remind the men about that man we want taken alive." Barnevelt felt his sword edge.

The Majburo ships made fast, all the rowers except those on the outside banks of the outside pair shipping their oars because there was no longer room to ply them. The remaining rowers began to drive this super-catamaran forward, pushing the plug of weed and the crippled guardship ahead of it up the channel.

But soon the two leading pirate ships thrust their rams into the weed from their side and began to push back. Having more oars in use, they halted the movement of the plug and started it back towards the open sea.

Barnevelt asked, "What are you doing, George?"

"Just an idea of mine," said Tangaloo. He held a broken length of catapult arrow about a meter long, to the end of which he was tying a light rope several meters long.

"Here they come," said Barnevelt.

The two leading Sunqaro galleys had pushed the plug and the six Majburo ships back far enough down the channel so that it opened out enough to let one of the smaller following pirates slip past and work around the plug, albeit fouling its oars in the vine at every stroke. Little by little it crawled through the narrow lane in the terpahla until its bow touched that of the outermost starboard ship of the Majburo squadron.

Barnevelt and Tangaloo had hurried to the outermost ship, crowded with men released from oar duty. As they arrived, spiked planks were flung across from ship to ship. Trumpets blared and boarding-parties rushed from each end of the planks. They met with a crash in the middle. Men clinched and tumbled off the planks, to thump against the rams below or splash into the weedy water. Others pressed up behind them while, on the forecastles of both ships, archers and crossbowmen sent missiles into the thick of the opposing fighters. The archers of the Majburo ship's neighbor added their weight to the fire.

Tangaloo elbowed his way through the throng at the bow. At the rail he unlimbered his improvised whip and sent it snaking across the gap. Crack ! The end coiled around the neck of a Sunqaru, and a jerk



pulled the man over his own rail. Splash ! He gathered up the rope and let fly again. Crack! Splash !

Barnevelt had worked himself into an adrenal state where he was eager to fight, but the crowd at the bow blocked his way. Between the superior fire-power of the Majburuma and Tangaloo's whip, the Sunqaruma on the planks began to give way, until the Majburuma poured into the waist of the pirate galley, sweeping Barnevelt along in the current. He stumbled over bodies, unable to see for the crowd or hear for the din.

The pressure and the noise increased as another force of pirates swarmed over this ship's stern from another Sun-qaro ship. As Tangaloo had predicted, the pirates were passing from ship to ship to bring their full force into use. Barnevelt found himself pushed back towards the bow of the Sunqaro ship, until the rail pressed against the small of his back. Now, while a sudden push might send him over the side, he could at least see. The after half of the ship was full of Sunqaruma fighting their way forward.

Unable to reach the crowded gangplanks, Barnevelt put his sword away, climbed over the rail of the Sunqaro ship and down on the ram, stepped over a corpse, leaped to the ram of the Majburo ship, and climbed up. The forecabin was still crowded, the Majburo admiral, armored like a lobster, bellowing orders in the midst of it all.

Tangaloo leaned against the rail, smoking. The latter said, "You shouldn't have done that, Dirk. The commander-in-chief ought to stay back where he can command-in-chief, and not get mixed up in vulgar fighting."

"Matter of fact, I haven't been near the actual fighting."

"You will be soon. Here they come!"

A wedge of Sunqaruma had bored through their opponents and gained the planks. The Majburuma on the planks were struck down or hurled off or pushed back on their own ship, and then the pirates were after them, fighting with insensate ferocity. At their head stormed a stocky Earthman with a red face seamed with many small wrinkles.

"Igor!" yelled Barnevelt, recognizing his chief behind the nasal of the helmet.

Igor Shtain saw Barnevelt and rushed upon him, whirling a curved blade. Barnevelt parried slash after slash, and now and then a thrust, but the blows came so fast he could do no more than defend himself.

Step by step Shtain drove him back towards the stern of the Majburo ship. Barnevelt's helmet clanged from a blow that got home. Once or twice Shtain laid himself open to a riposte, but Barnevelt's hesitancy cost him his chance. If he could only hit the guy with the flat over the head, as he had done with the artist in Jazmurian... But he'd break his sword on Shtain's helmet.

Barnevelt was vaguely aware that fighting had spread throughout the mass of Majburo ships. He threw occasional glances over his shoulders lest somebody stab him from behind. He caught a glimpse of Tangaloo staving a pirate skull with his mace; of a pirate thrusting a Majburo over the side with the point of his pike.

Shtain continued, with demoniac force, to press him back. Barnevelt wondered where the hell a man of Shtain's age got such physical endurance. Though much younger and a better fencer, Barnevelt was beginning to pant. His aching fingers seemed hardly able to hold the sweaty hilt, and still Shtain came on.

The poop of this ship was raised only half a deck. Bar-nevelt felt the steps to the quarterdeck behind him and went up them, step by step, parrying Shtain's swings at his legs. It was unfair to have to fight a man who wanted to kill you while you were trying to avoid killing him.

Back across the quarterdeck they went. Barnevelt thought that if he didn't disable Shtain pretty soon, Shtain would kill him. He began thrusting at Shtain's arm and knee. Once he felt his point hit something, but Shtain kept coming as furiously as ever.

The rail touched Barnevelt's back. Now he had no choice between the wicked blade in front and the Banjao Sea behind. In back of Shtain appeared the bulk of Tangaloo, but for some reason George simply stood there on the quarterdeck.

Shtain paused, glaring, shifted his grip on the saber, and threw himself upon Barnevelt. Still Tangaloo stood idly. This time it would be one or the other...

There was an outburst of trumpet calls. At the same time something flicked out, cracked, and coiled itself around Shtain's left ankle. The rope tautened with a jerk, yanking Shtain's foot from under him and sending him asprawl on the deck. Before he could rise, the huge brown form of Tangaloo landed on him, squeezing the wind out of him like an accordion.

Barnevelt leaped forward, stamped on the fist that held the saber, and wrenched the weapon out of Shtain's hand. He pulled off the helmet and smote Shtain smartly with the flat of his blade. Shtain collapsed.

All over the Majburo ships, the Sunqaruma were running back towards the gangplanks leading to their own vessels. A little fighting still flickered, but for the most part the Majburuma, having lost a quarter of their number, were glad to let their foes go unmolested. The ships were littered with swords, pikes, axes, helmets, bucklers, and other gear, and with the bodies of friends and foes.

As Tangaloo tied Shtain's hands behind his back, Barnevelt asked, "How'd you get so handy with a whip, George?"

"Something I picked up in Australia. Beastly business, fighting. A scientist like me has no business getting mixed up in it."

"Whyth & hell did you stand there like a dummy when you first arrived? The guy nearly got me!"

"I was shooting film."

"What?"

"Yes, I got a marvelous sequence of you and Igor battling. It will make our Sunqar picture."

"Jeepers cripus!" cried Barnevelt. "I like that! I'm fighting for my life and losing, and all you think of is to shoot film! I suppose..."

"Now, now," said Tangaloo soothingly. "I knew such an expert fencer as yourself was in no real danger. And it came out all right, didn't it?"

Barnevelt hardly knew whether to rage, to laugh, or to be flattered. He finally decided that since George was incorrigible he might as well drop the subject. He asked, "Why are the Sunqaruma running away? I

thought they'd won!"

"Look behind you!"

Barnevelt looked around, and there came the entire allied fleet, gongs beating time for the oars. In the center wallowed the carrier *Kumanisht*, towing a huge square-rigged galley with great eight or ten-man oars staggered in two banks.

The pirates, having all regained their own ships, pried the gangplanks loose and pushed off from the *Majburow* galleys with poles, pikes, and oars. Presently the whole lot were splashing back up the channel towards the main body of pirate ships.

For the first time in hours Barnevelt noticed the sun, now low in the west. The fight had lasted most of the afternoon.

The sun had set. *Shtain* was safely stowed in the *Junsar's* brig. Barnevelt's wounds—a couple of superficial cuts—had been bandaged. Barnevelt presided over a meeting of his admirals in the big cabin on the *Junsar*.

"How about it, Lord *Snyol*?" cried Prince *Ferrian*. "The men will have it you led the boarders into the *Sunqaro* ship, smiting off three piratical heads with one blow and generally winning the fight single-handed. Is't true?"

"They exaggerate, though *Tagde* and I did personally capture that Earthman we were looking for."

"Won't you let me boil him in oil?" said Queen *Alvandi*. "The pirates of our own world be bad enough, but..."

"I have other plans, Your Altitude. Prince *Ferrian*, tell me what happened at your end."

'Twas no great affray—rather a comedy worthy of *Harian's* genius. You know that *Dur* uses slave rowers on those monstrous ships, for not even their ill-gotten wealth suffices to hire so many thousands of free oarsmen. And the usage is, when going into action, to run a chain through a shackle on the leg of each thrall, binding him securely to his bench by means of a bronze eye set in the wood.

"Now, these *Duro* ships were bearing down upon us like a charge of wild *bishtars*; but, seeing nought but our masts on the horizon, like a picket fence, they thought themselves well provided with time to make ready, when down upon them swooped the first of my intrepid lads in his glider, to drop his jar upon the flagship. It struck square among the rowers' benches, ere the slave masters had half finished shackling their rowers, and wrought most wondrous confusion, the *fondaqa* squirming and snapping, the slaves screaming and those bitten writhing in their death agonies, the slave drivers rushing about with their whips, and all in turmoil.

"Then came two more such love epistles, and the slaves went genuinely mad and mutinied. Those still free unshackled the rest, whilst others assailed the drivers and marines with bare hands, hurling some to a briny doom and others rending in bloody bits. The *Duro* admiral saved his gore by doffing his cuirass and leaping into the sea, where a dinghy picked him up.

"Meanwhile other fliers had dropped their jars. While some of these fell in the water, others struck home, with admirable results. For, even if the slaves in the other ships were bound, still the presence of these loathsome sea creatures destroyed all order and made maneuver flat impossible. In short, the novel

nature of this onset so demoralized the foe that some of their ships began to flee before we came upon them.

"Others, seeing the carnage still raging on the flagship and not knowing that the admiral had been saved—for he'd left his personal flags behind—hesitated, and when the Saqqand of Suruskand rammed another of the great ships, the latter doing nought to avoid the dolorous stroke, and breaking up in consequence, away the rest of 'em went. We boarded the flagship, where still the anarch battle raged, quelled both disputing parties, and towed her back with us. Our total loss was one of my fliers, who missed his alighting and drowned, poor wight."

## CHAPTER TWELVE

Next morning, as Roqir redly burst the bounds of the hazy horizon, the trumpets of the allied fleet sounded the assault. Up the channel rowed the Majburo squadron, the battered Junsar in the lead.

Meanwhile, along the edge of the solid terpahla on both sides of the entrance to the pirate stronghold, in a far-reaching crescent, troops with skis on their feet lowered themselves from their ships on to the weed. They teetered and splashed on the wet and wobbly footing. Some fell and had to be helped up again. At length they began to move forward, hundreds of them in three lines: the first line carrying huge wicker shields to protect themselves and those behind them from missile fire; the second line with pikes; the third with bows.

From the pirate stronghold came no sound. During the night the Sunqaruma had drawn most of their ships together in a kind of citadel, the biggest galleys in the middle, around them a ring of smaller ships, and around these again an outwork of rafts and scows. This formation would prevent the attackers from sinking the pirate ships by ramming, at least until the low craft around the edge had been gotten out of the way.

Closer came the Junsar; still an ominous silence. The men splashing over the terpahla came closer from their side, lapping around the settlement so as to approach it from opposite sides.

As she came within catapult range, the Junsar slowed to let the bireme Saqqand pass her: the same ship that had so doughtily rammed a Duro galley thrice her size the previous day.

From the outlying houseboats around the edges of the settlement came the thrum of crossbows, and bolts streaked towards the lines of advancing ski troops. Barnevelt realized that not all the pirates had withdrawn to the central citadel, but they would fight delaying actions around the edges of their city. The archers among the ski troops shot back over the heads of their own men.

A catapult went off in the citadel. A giant arrow soared down the channel to dive into the water beside the Saqqand. And then the creak and thump of catapults and the snap of bow-strings began their din again.

The Saqqand nosed up to the nearest of the rafts around the citadel. The Junsar made her bow fast to the starboard quarter of the smaller ship, while Queen Alvandi's Douri Dejanai made fast to her port quarter. Other ships nosed up behind these two, like a parade of elephants, and their people threw planks from rail to rail so that fighters could pour up towards the citadel as they were needed.

Barnevelt, in the Junsar's bow, heard the yell and clatter of combat around the far fringes of the

settlement as the ski troops reached the outlying ships and strove to secure a lodgment on them. He could see little of this, however. Behind him his warriors lined up to go down the rope to the Saqqand's deck, while on the Saqqand herself they began to climb over the bow to the raft.

Then from the citadel burst the greatest storm of missile-fire Barnevelt had seen: catapult missiles, bolts, arrows, and sling bullets. The whistle of missiles merged into a continuous ululation. The deadly rain swept over the raft and over the Saqqand's deck, dropping men everywhere. The survivors pushed forward and closed up, to be mown down in their turn. The lucky ones dashed across the raft to climb the rail of the small galley on the other side. Sunqaruma rose to meet them.

Barnevelt found himself yelling, "Go on! Go on!"

Now another element appeared: From the citadel a large rocket with a spear shaft or catapult arrow for a stick soared down the channel, leaving a trail of thick smoke. It went wild, as did the next, but then one struck the Junsar's deck forward of the poop and burst with a roar, showering the ship with burning fragments. The men lined up on the catwalk, awaiting their turn to attack, scattered, and the Junsar's crew had to turn to put out a dozen small fires. Another such rocket hit the bow of the Douri Dejanai. The smoke and flame broke up the supporting fire from the ships.

Finally the attack broke. The men streamed back, dozens of them hobbling with arrows sticking in them, while other dozens lay scattered about the Saqqand and the raft, dead or too badly hurt to flee.

Under the bombardment from the citadel, it took hours to organize another attack. Barnevelt saw that the men of the leading group were furnished with big wicker shields like those of the ski troops. These latter had secured a footing here and there around the settlement. More than that Barnevelt could not find out, as communication between them and the ships from which they had come could only be effected by a runner plodding over the terpahla on skis.

The second attack got under way shortly after noon. The men with the big shields got into the small galley on the other side of the raft and almost drove the pirates out of it before a counter-attack sent them running.

The long Krishnan day wore on. Barnevelt got out all the rowboats in the fleet and ordered a combined attack, the longboats to row around the citadel and disembark their men at various points.

This time the attackers did secure a foothold on the small galley nearest to the channel, which they still held when the sun went down and the longboats, those still afloat, rowed back down the channel. But then another counterattack in the fading light drove the allied troops out of the ship they had occupied, and everything was as it had been at the start.

At the evening conference, the Dasht of Darya reported that the ski troops had occupied most of the outlying ships. Queen Alvandi said, "O Ferrian, why don't your brave fliers land their kites in the middle of the citadel, thus taking our foes in the only rear they present to us?"

"'Twould serve no good purpose. Coming down singly, and mayhap smashing their craft and having to crawl by degrees from the wreckage, they'd be butchered like unhas at a country fair."

"Or do they fear the handplay, preferring to do their fighting at a safe distance? A mort of my brave girls lie dead out yonder because your delicate heroes'U fight only when they can drop things on the heads..."

"Enough, hag!" shouted Ferrian. "Who put the Duro fleet to rout? I'll match my fliers against your

pseudo-warriors..."

"No warrior you, but a contriving calculator..."

By banging on the table and shouting, Barnevelt restored order. Nevertheless, the admirals were quarrelsome over their failures and snarled at each other and at Barnevelt for hours without getting anywhere. Barnevelt realized that his ski-troop idea, while bright, had not been quite good enough to carry that strong defense with one push, at least not with the number of men he had available.

He stood up with the air of one who has listened long enough. "Tomorrow we attack again, using everything at once. Prince Ferrian, load up your gliders with darts and fireworks, and get more jars of fondaqa to drop. My lord Dasht, make your ski troops move forward from their present positions if you have to poke 'em in the rump. Post ski archers around the inner edges of the terpahla to throw more covering fire into the citadel. Queen Alvandi..."

After the admirals had returned to their ships, Barnevelt strolled out upon the deck of the Sunqar. He looked at the wan stars and thought of Zei. The few days since he had seen her last had done nothing to abate the fires within him; on the contrary. Fantastic thoughts ran through his mind, of swooping down on Ghulinde with some personal followers, snatching up Zei, and bearing her off to Earth. Silly, of course...

Sounds in the darkness indicated that men were fetching back dead and wounded from the Saqqand and the adjacent raft, the live ones to be tended and the dead to be stripped of usable equipment before being consigned to the fondaqa. Sounds of carpentry came from the pirate citadel of ships.

"Have a cigar?" said Tangaloa's musical voice.

"Thanks. If I could get away with it I'd call this off."

"Why? You are doing fine—a bosker hero and all that rot."

"We've got Igor, and our film, and that money the queen gave us..."

"You mean you've got it! It belongs to you, not the firm."

"A nice idea," said Barnevelt. "Whether Panagopoulos would agree is something else."

. "Don't tell him. Speaking of money, do you suppose we could claim that reward we offered for the capture of Igor, since we did the capturing? It would have been charged to the company if somebody else had caught the bloke."

"I'm sure Panagopoulos wouldn't allow that! But, as I was saying, it's not our fight any more. All we're doing is to help these poor benighted Krishnans to kill each other, and maybe stop a stray arrow ourselves. Why don't we load Igor into a boat and silently steal away?"

Tangaloa said, "I should like to get some proper pictures inside the settlement. Those you took are half pie articles."

"What about those you've been taking?"

"Inadequate. Cosmic wouldn't accept them. Besides, anything like that would rouse the suspicions of the admirals, and with gliders to scout for them they'd easily catch us. Some of them are violently anti-Terran,

and I hate to think what would happen if we were dragged back and—ah—unmasked."

"I could say I'm feeling poorly and turn the command over to Ferrian, since he thinks he can do anything better than anybody else."

"You forget—Igor is still under Osirian pseudo-hypnosis. I don't know whether it wears off..."

"It does," said Barnevelt, "but I understand it leaves you full of neuroses unless you get another Osirian to break the spell."

"Precisely! Therefore we must get Sheafase alive and force him to restore the Old Man's mind."

"I don't know. There are other Osirians, and I've drunk delight of battle with my peers enough to last me for some time."

"Look here, battler, while I don't like to throw my weight, I fear we must go on with this. Even if you are admiralissimo of the fleet, don't forget I'm your boss in Igor Shtain Limited."

Barnevelt was astonished to see the easy-going Tangaloo, for the first time, pull rank. George must take his xenological investigations—if nothing else—seriously.

"Oh, tamates !I've taken most of the responsibility and you know it. If it comes to a fight I know worse fates than not working for Igor."

"Then let's not fight, by all means," said Tangaloo pacifically. "If you can arrange one sunny day in the citadel for me, I'm easy as far as the war is concerned."

"Okay. I'll watch for a chance to effect such an agreement."

"Good-o. And now if you will excuse me, I have a date."

"Youwhat ?"

"A date. With one of Queen Alvandi's lady troopers, for some xenological work. I find them really quite feminine, in our sense of the term, under the warlike getup. Which—ahem—merely proves what I said the other day about the stability of basic cultural attitudes. Cheerio!"

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Next morning a heavy overcast, a high fog that barely cleared the mastheads, confined Ferrian's fliers to their ship and reduced the effectiveness of long-range missile fire. By the leaden light it was seen that the besieged had erected bulwarks of timber, slotted for archery, around the outer rails of the ships forming the citadel. They had also rigged boarding nets and had fixed numbers of pikes with their points projecting outward, to aggravate the hazards facing the attackers.

After the usual delays, the trumpets sounded. Again the men advanced. Bows twanged, catapults thumped, swords clanged, and wounded men screamed.

By evening the allied forces had cleared the Sunqaruma out of all the outlying positions and had secured

a precarious lodgment in the citadel itself. But again the cost had been heavy, and the Sunqaruma could by no means be deemed beaten.

The admirals, a couple of them nursing injuries, gathered for the post-mortem in a worse mood than ever, snapping at each other like crabs in a bucket. "Why supported you not my men when I signalled for help?"

"My lord Ferrian, what good are your damned idlers lounging on the Kumanisht while better men and women die among the spears?"

"Madam, should I use a scalpel to split kindling? One of my fliers is worth six common soldiers..."

"Where's the genius of the great General Snyol?"

"We should cease these vain assaults and starve the dastards out!"

"A cowardly counsel!"

"Who's a coward? I'll have your liver..."

Barnevelt was trying without much success to establish order when the sentry announced, "A boat from the Sun-qaruma, my lords, seeking a parley."

"Send them in," said Barnevelt, glad of the interruption. If the enemy were softening up to the point of asking terms, the battle should soon be over.

Steps sounded outside. The sentry announced: "Gizil bad-Bashti, High Admiral of the Morya Sunqaruma!"

"Gizil the Saddler!" shrieked Queen Alvandi. "Recreant traitor! Just wait till..."

"Vizqash!" said Barnevelt, for the small scar-faced fellow in the doorway was the Krishnan he had known off and on as Vizqash bad-Murani.

The man, wearing his lordly hidalgo manner, took off his helmet and made a mock bow. "Gizil bad-Bashti, otherwise Gizil the Saddler, otherwise Vizqash the Haberdasher, at your service," he rasped. "I greet my old acquaintance Snyol of Pleshch, otherwise Gozzan the Express-Courier, otherwise..."

He trailed off and sent a knowing grin at Barnevelt, who introduced him round and said, "Since when have you been chief of the Sunqaruma, Gizil?"

"Since the fourth hour today, when our former chief, Sheafase the Osirian, expired of an arrow wound received yesterday."

"Sheafase dead!" said Barnevelt, and exchanged a look of consternation with Tangaloo. If the Osirian chief no longer lived to cure Shtain of his affliction, there would have to be a radical alteration in their plans.

"Yes," continued Gizil-Vizqash. "Promotion has been swift, for grievous has been the loss among our chiefs. Gavao did perish in our raid on Ghulinde. Qorf and Urgan the mighty Snyol did slay when he snatched the princess from our grasp."



And even the Earthman, Igor Eshtain, who'd risen swiftly after his late enrollment in our company, was missing after the first day's battle. So—here am I, High Admiral.

"And speaking of the raid of Snyol upon our stronghold: In going through one of our provision ships in preparation for this siege, we found a youth asleep upon a sack of tunesta, clad as an expressman. Questioning revealed that he was the companion of your General Snyol, the suppositious Gozzan, on their foray. Becoming separated from his comrades, he'd hidden in this ship since then, subsisting on our stores. He says he's Zakkomir bad-Gurshmani, a ward of Qirib's throne. Be that the truth, Queen Alvandi?"

"It could be. What have you done with the boy?"

"Nought as yet. His safety answers for my own, in case you should by reasoning sophistical convince yourselves that faith need not be kept with such as we."

Barnevelt said dryly, "Interesting, but that's not why you came here. Are you surrendering?"

"Surrender?" Gizil's antennae rose. "A horrid word. I speak, rather, of honorable terms whereby this bloody conflict may be terminated."

"A pox upon this chaffering!" cried the Suruskando admiral. "Let's terminate him with a length of rope and press the attack with pitiless ferocity. They must be low on men or muniment, to offer terms."

"Wait," said Queen Alvandi. "You do forget, sir, they hold my sweet ward Zakkomir."

"What, you turning soft?" cried Ferrian. "You speaking for prudence and moderation, old battle-ax?"

Barnevelt broke in, "Say your say, Master Gizil."

"Let's consider our positions," resumed the pirate admiral unruffled. "By the grace of Da'vi you did rout our rescuers, the fleet of Dur. But it follows not they'll scamper all the distance to their stormy home. Rather is it likely that their admiral will think him of the loss of rank or head awaiting him at home and turn again for one more blow.

"Now, one need not be able to see through a plank of qong wood to know that you've had grievous losses in the last three days of combat, perhaps a quarter of your total force dead or disabled. Therefore I now expect, even if you set out at once on your return, you'd find many ships with oars but partly manned. Another day of this contention will find you in a parlous plight indeed.

"Then as to our situation. 'Tis true we are surrounded and, supposing Dur does not return, we must depend upon our own resources, while you can replenish and reinforce. It is also true that we've expended men and weapons. 'Tis even true that we've been driven from our outposts by that brainsome scheme of sending men across the weed with boards upon their feet. Who thought of that must be a very Qarar reincarnate.

"Still, by making use of cover, we have kept our losses small. As for weapons and missiles, we'd taken the precaution, in setting up our floating citadel, to include within it all supplies of such contrivances, and also ample food and water.

"Let us assume, to make your case most favorable, that you can in the long run overcome us. What

then? Remember that your troops confront despairing men with nought to lose, and who will therefore fight to death—whilst yours, however brave, are not inflamed by such a desperate animus. This, combined with the advantage of a strong defensive stand, means that you will lose a pair or trio for every one of us you slay. You'll be lucky if such slaughter, in addition to bleeding your realms of their most stalwart battlers, do not to blank dissent and open mutiny incite them ere the siege be over.

"Then, what seekye here? Queen Alvandi, we surmise, covets the Sunqar itself, and also her ward Zakkomir un-perforate. You others seek our treasury and fleet, and also wish to rid yourselves of the menace of our jolly rovers on the seas. Speak I not sooth? So if you can center the shai-han's eye without further bloodletting, were't not shear perversity and madness to refuse?"

"What are your terms?" asked Barnevelt.

"That all surviving Morya Sunqaruma, unharmed, be set ashore upon the mainland, each man to be allowed to take family and personal possessions, including cash and weapons."

Gizil looked narrowly at Barnevelt and chose his words with care. "Snyol of Pleshch is widely known as a man of most meticulous honor, a quality sadly lacking in these degenerate days. For that reason alone do we propose to place ourselves upon your mercy, for if the veritable Snyol avers he will protect us, we know he will."

Again that knowing look. Barnevelt realized Gizil was saying: Carry out your end of the bargain, as the real Snyol would, and I won't spill the beans about having known you at Novorecife as an Earthman. Smart gloop, Gizil—alias—Vizqash.

"Will you step out, sir?" said Barnevelt. "We'll discuss your offer."

When Gizil had withdrawn the admirals sounded off: " 'Twere a shame to let slip the prize when 'tis almost in our grasp..."

"Nay, the fellow has reason..."

"That stipulation about personal moneys will never do. What's to hinder them, when Gizil goes back, from dividing the entire treasury amongst 'em?"

"The same with their weapons..."

"They must be nearly spent. One good push..."

"We should at least demand the leaders' heads..."

After an hour's argument Barnevelt called for a vote, which proved a tie. The queen was now for peace, since the Sun-qaruma held Zakkomir.

"I say peace," said Barnevelt. "As for details..."

When Gizil was readmitted, Barnevelt told him they would take the terms with two exceptions: the Morya Sunqaruma might not take their money and weapons, and those originally from Qirib should be set ashore as far as possible from that land—say on the southeast shore of the Banjao. This last was at Alvandi's behest, as she did not want them to drift back to Qirib to make trouble.

Gizil grinned. "Her Altitude seems to think that, having once escaped her yoke, we wish to return thereunder. How-somever, I'll take your word to my council. Shall we prolong this truce until the matter be decided?"

So it was agreed, and out he went.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Next day the opposing forces lay in uneasy silence, both of them repairing damages and strengthening their positions. Shortly after noon Gizil came out again, and a flutter of flag hoists called the admirals to the Junsar .

Gizil said, "My lords, your counterterms are hard—too hard to be endured by warlike men with weapons in their fists. Therefore do I present to you an amended offer, thus: That our men take with them money to the sum of one gold kard apiece, that they shall not starve while seeking honest work, and weapons to the extent of one knife or dagger each, that they shall not be utterly defenseless. And that only able-bodied ex-Qiribuma like myself be sent to those distant shores whereof Alvandi speaks, wounded ones being set ashore nearer home in civilized regions."

"We accept," said Barnevelt quickly before the admirals had time to speak. Some of them looked blackly at him, the queen especially assuming the appearance of a snapping turtle. But with peace so nearly in his grasp, he did not intend to let it slip. If they didn't like it, well—George and he would soon be going, and it mattered little to him if future Krishnan history books denounced him.

"Do you give your solemn promise, O Snyol of Pleshch?" said Gizil.

"I do."

"Will you come with me aboard my ship and repeat your promise to my chiefs?"

"Sure."

"Ohe!" said Prince Ferrian. "Art not thrusting your head into the yeki's mouth? Trust you the rascal so far?"

"I think so. He knows what they'd have to expect if they tried any monkey business at this stage. If I don't come back, you're boss."

Barnevelt went with Gizil to the citadel and climbed through the pikes and outer defenses to the big galleys forming the keep of this floating fortress. He saw signs of much damage, and dead and wounded pirates; withal, there were lots of live ones left. Gizil had not stretched the truth too far.

Introduced around the circle of officers, he repeated his promises. "Of course your men must submit to search," he said.

They drew up a written agreement covering the terms of capitulation, signed it, and took it back to the Sunqar for the admirals to sign too. This was all a tedious and time-consuming business.

Zakkomir, perky as ever but with the pussycat roundness gone from his face, was released. Barnevelt

got him aside, saying, "Want to do me a favor?"

"My life is yours to command, Lord Snyol."

"Then forget that the pirates were interested in getting hold of Tagde and me. Get it?"

The business of searching the Morya Sunqaruma to make sure they were not carrying more money and weapons than they were allowed, and loading them into various allied ships, took the rest of the day. Because the pirates from Qirib—who comprised nearly half the total—were to be sent to a special destination, Barnevelt borrowed a troopship, the Yars, from the Suruskando admiral.

Queen Alvandi insisted upon manning it with her own people: men to row and Amazons to guard the passengers. She said, "I shan't be satisfied until I hear from my own girls that these villains have been landed at a place whence it'd take 'em years to regain Qirib."

By the red evening light of Roqir, the unwounded ex-pirates filed aboard the Yars near the mouth of the channel. There were three hundred ninety-seven men, one hundred twenty-three women, and eighty-six children, which crowded the ship even without the Qiribo rowers who were going along to bring her back.

Barnevelt ate alone, Tangaloo being off shooting movie film. After his meal, Barnevelt had himself rowed from the Junsar down-channel to Alvandi's Dour Dejanai. He had not previously seen the queen's private cabin, now streaked with black from a fire set by the Sunqaro rockets. He was surprised to be greeted by a raucous cry of "Baghan! Ghuvoi zu!"

There was Philo the macaw chained to a perch at the side of the room. He looked at Barnevelt first with one eye and then the other, finally seemed to recognize him, and let his feathers be scratched.

In came Queen Alvandi, saying, "You and I are the only ones who can handle yon monster. You have a subtle power over such creatures, and me he fears. Guzzle yourself a mug of prime falat, in the carafe yonder. I suppose you'll preside over the meeting to divide the spoils this eve?"

"Yes, and I dread it. Everybody'll be grabbing at once. I'm comforted, however, by the knowledge that this'll be about my last act as commander-in-chief."

"Oh, no need for dissonance. Tell 'em your decision and make it stand. I ask but my fair share—all the Sunqar, plus my proportionate part of ships and treasure."

"That's what I'm afraid of."

She made a never-mind gesture. "So that you demand not a fourth for your private portion there'll be no discord."

"Matter of fact I wasn't going to ask any for myself."

"What? Art mad? Or be this some subtle scheme to rive one of us of our throne? Seek you to subvert the popinjay of Sotaspe?"

"I never thought of such a thing! I like Ferrian!"

"What have likes to do with high politics? No doubt Ferrian likes you too, which fact wouldn't hinder

him from slitting your weazand for the good of Sotaspe. But then it matters not, for I have other plans for you."

"What?" said Barnevelt apprehensively. Alvandi had a way of carrying through her plans in spite of hell or high water.

"Relinquish your share of loot, if you will, with a hoity-toity affectation of simple honesty, like Abhar the farm lad in the fable. But see to it that what would have been your share goes to me. Then 'twont matter for it will all be in the family. Though you did vex me sore this afternoon when you gave in to the thieves on their demand to let wounded Qiribuma land upon the nearer mainland."

"I came here to ask about that," said Barnevelt. "The wounded ones are no problem, since they'll be mixed in with the rest. But I've been calculating, and the Yars with the unwounded ones will never get to where you want to send them with enough food and water for all those people. Therefore we must either divide them among two ships, or..."

"Nonsense!" cried Alvandi in her Queen-of-Hearts manner. "Thinkye for an instant I mean to set these ravening predators ashore, my realm to infiltrate and subvert? Am I daft?"

"What d'you mean?"

"The captain of the Yars has my orders, as soon's he's out of sight, to pitch these miscreants into the sea, and their drabs and brats with 'em. For a carbuncle nought serves but the knife."

"Hey! I can't allow that!"

"And why not, Master Snyol?"

"I gave them my word."

"And who in Hishkak are you? A foreign vagabond, elevated by my contrivance to command of this expedition— and now our labor's over, chief no more, but one of my subjects, to do with as I will. And my will in this case..."

Barnevelt, feeling as if a cold hand were clutching his windpipe, jumped up, spilling his wine. "What's that about it's being all in the family?"

"So you've guessed? 'Tis plain as the peaks of Darya that my daughter Zei's in love with you. Therefore I choose you as her first husband, to serve in accordance with our ancient and unalterable custom until your function be performed. The lot's a fake, of course. And let's hope you provide a better meal at the end of your service than would the unlamented Kaj have done!"

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Barnevelt stood, breathing hard. At last he said: "You forget, madam, I'm not a Qiribu, nor is this Qirib. You have no jurisdiction over me."

"And you forget, sirrah, that I conferred Qiribo citizenship upon you when you returned to Ghulinde with Zei. By not refusing then, you did incur the usual obligations of such status, as the most learned doctor of

laws would agree. So let's have no more of this mutinous moonshine..."

"Excuse me, but we'll have a lot more of it. I won't marry your daughter and I won't let you massacre those surrendered Qiribuma."

"So? I'll show you, you treasonous oppugner!" Her voice rose to a scream as she hurried across the cabin to fumble in a drawer.

Barnevelt at once guessed that she was after a container of janru perfume—perhaps a bottle or a water pistol—to spray him with. One whiff and he'd be subjected to her will as if he were under Osirian pseudo-hypnosis. She was nearer the door than he at the moment; what to do?

"Grrrrkl" said Philo, aroused by the shouting.

Barnevelt thought of the one defense he had against such an attack. He leaped to the parrot's perch, seized the astonished bird, pressed his long nose in amongst its breast feathers, and inhaled vigorously.

Philo squawked indignantly, struggled, and bit a piece out of the rim of Barnevelt's left ear, as neatly as a conductor punching a ticket.

Barnevelt released the bird as Alvandi rushed upon him with an atomizer, squirting at his face. His eyes were red, his nose was dripping, and blood ran down his ear from the notch the bird's beak had made. He whipped out his sword, grinning.

"Sorry," he said, "but I cadt sbell a thig. Dowget back id your bedroob, ad dot a word out of you, or Zei'll be queed without your havig to abdicate."

When he reinforced the command with a sharp jab in her midriff, she went, muttering maledictions like a Gypsy grifter being marched off to the paddy wagon. In the royal bedchamber he collected sheets, which he tore into strips: "... my best sheets, inherited from my grandmother!" wailed Alvandi.

Soon her complaints were smothered by a tight gag. In another quarter-hour he bundled her, trussed and bound, into her own clothes-closet and locked the door.

He told the sentry at the cabin door: "Her Altitude feels udwell, ad seds word thatod do accout is she to be disturbed. By boat, please?"

He returned to his own ship filled with an odd bubbly elation, despite the peril in which he stood, as if in quelling the queen he had also defeated his own mother once and for all.

On the Junsar's deck he found Tangaloa, who began, "I've been looking for you..."

"Matter of fact I've been looking for you too. We've got to get out of here. Alvandi thinks she's going to massacre all those surrendered Sunqaruma from Qirib and make me her son-in-law, complete with chopping block."

"My God, what shall we do then? Where is the old bat?\*"

"Tied up in her closet. Let's load Igor into our boat and—let me see—the Yars is at the mouth of the channel, isn't it? We'll row down there. You distract Alvandi's girl warriors while I arrange with Vizqash—I mean Gizil—to take over the Yars and sail back to Novorecife."

"With the ex-pirates as crew?"

"Why not? They're homeless men who'll probably be glad of our leadership. They'll believe me when I tell 'em I've switched to their side rather than let 'em be killed, because that's the sort of damn-fool thing the real Snyol would do."

"Good-o!" said the xenologist. They hurried below.

"Get me a pair of handcuffs," Barnevelt told the sergeant-at-arms. With these they went into the brig, where Shtain sat apathetically upon his bunk.

"Put out your hands," said Barnevelt, and snapped the cuffs on Shtain's wrists. "Now come."

Shtain, who had sunk into a torpor, shambled back up on deck with them and over the side into the longboat.

"Pull down the channel to the Yars," Barnevelt told his rowers. "Quietly."

"How did you avoid a whiff of that nuit d'amour perfume while you were tussling with the queen?" asked Tangaloo. When Barnevelt told him he laughed. "I'll be damned! That is the first time I ever heard of a bloke being saved from a fate worse than death by feathers!"

To facilitate loading, a small floating pier had been towed down the channel and made fast to the side of the Yars. The rowboat pulled up to this, and its passengers got out.

The sentry on the pier flashed her lantern towards them and challenged, then said, "I crave pardon, General Snyol. Oh, Taggo! Girls, 'tis Taggo come to sport with us!"

"So that's what they call you?" said Barnevelt. "Try to inveigle 'em into the deckhouse. Tell 'em you'll teach 'em strip poker or something." He raised his voice. "Admiral Gizil!"

"Here I be. What would you, General Snyol?"

"Come down here and I'll tell you. It's all right, girls— everything's under control. Go topside and play with Taggo while I hold a conference."

The Krishnan dropped lightly from the rail of the Yars to the pier. When the Amazons were out of earshot, Barnevelt told him what had happened.

Gizil struck his palm with his fist. "A prime fool I, not to have thought of such waggery! Now that we know, what's to be done? Here lie we with nought but eating knives to fight with, under guard, surrounded by unfriendly ships. What's to stop them from working their will upon us?"

"I'll stop them."

"You?"

"Yes. Will you and your men follow me?"

"You mean you'll take our side instead of theirs, solely on a matter of honor?"

"Certainly. After all I am who I am," said Barnevelt, using a favorite Krishnan cliché.

"Let me grasp your thumb, sir! For now I do perceive that, though you be no more Snyol of Pleshch than I, but a vagrant Earthman, yet have you the true spirit that rumor credits to the noble Nyame. Fear not. Your secret's safe with me. 'Twas for such urgency as this I did withhold it in the council with your admirals. What's to be done?"

"When Tagde gets those women in the cabin, we'll call a conference with your officers—have you still got an organization?"

"Of sorts."

"We'll tell them what's up, and at the proper time we'll bar the cabin door, cut the mooring lines, and shove off. If anybody asks questions I'll handle 'em."

From the cabin came sounds of ribald revelry. Barnevelt reflected that discipline had surely gone to hell in the fleet in the last few hours, but he supposed that was a natural let-down after the tension of the campaign.

The word was passed. Barnevelt added, "Assign the men to the benches and have 'em get their oars ready to thrust through the ports. The first man who drops an oar gets left. Who's got a sharp knife? Cut the ropes and push the pier away with a boathook. The first pair of oars out first... Cut the lines to the weed... Now row. Softly—just enough force to move the ship... Here, stuff rags into the ports to deaden the sound. No rags? Use your women's clothes. If they object, smack 'em... That's right. Now another pair... Take that kid below..."

As the Yars crept snail-like out into the fairway and down the channel, a hail came from close aboard.

"What is it?" asked Barnevelt, peering over the rail at the ship they were passing. A man's head showed in the light of a riding lantern. "I'm Snyol of Pleshch, and all's well."

"Oh, my lord Snyol... I thought... Be that not the Yars, with the pirate prisoners?"

"It's the Yars, but with her regular crew. The prisoners haven't been put aboard yet, and we're going out for a practice row."

"But I saw them filing aboard this afternoon..."

"You saw them boarding the Minyan of Sotaspe, where they'll be quartered for the time being. There she lies now!" He pointed up-channel towards the vague black mass of hulls.

"Well," said the man in a puzzled tone, "if ye say all's well, it must be so."

And the ship dropped astern to mingle with the rest of the fleet.

"Whew!" said Barnevelt. "Right rudder—steady as you go. All oars out. Number three port, you're fouling up the stroke! Now pull! Stroke! Stroke!"

They issued from the mouth of the channel, leaving behind the mass of the allied navy moored along the edges of the terpahla, the ships' lanterns showing like a swarm of fireflies frozen in position. As the breeze



still blew from the south, Barnevelt ordered the sails set wing-and-wing to take full advantage of it and turned the Yars north. Under the blanketing overcast, the Sunqar receded into the darkness.

Barnevelt watched it go with mixed feelings. If their luck held, they'd stop at Majbur and then go straight up the Pichide to Novorecife, where he'd pay off the Sunqaruma.

Sometimes he thought he was tired of blue-green hair and olive-tinted skins, bright skimpy clothes, clanking cutlery, and windy speeches delivered with swaggering gestures in rolling, rhythmic, guttural Gozashtandou. He glanced towards where Sol would be were it visible. New York with its labyrinthine tangle of transportation, its suave eating and drinking and living places, and its swift wisecracking conversation, would look good...

Or would it? He'd be returning to a New York almost twenty-five years older than the one he'd left. Although his friends and relatives, thanks to modern geriatrics, would mostly be still alive and not much aged, they'd have scattered and forgotten him. He'd be separated from them by a whole generation, and it would take him a year just to get oriented again. Shortly before he left, he'd bought a hat of the new steeple-crowned shape. Now such hats were probably as archaic as derbies—which might in their turn have been revived. He understood why people like Shtain and Tangaloo, who made a business of interstellar trips, formed a clique of their own.

And his mother would probably be there. While he had accomplished the tasks formally set him—to solve the Sunqar mystery, rescue Shtain, and fulfill the Cosmic Features contract—he had not yet solved his personal problems. Or rather he'd solved his mother problem by removing himself light-years away from her, but his impending return would cancel that solution.

He also suffered an odd feeling of loss, as if he were missing a chance. One of his old professors had once told him that a young man should obey the romantic impulse at least once:

"Come, fill the Cup, and in the fire of Spring Your Winter garment of Repentance fling..."

As by telling his boss to go to hell, or by joining a radical political movement. And here he was, letting prudence and foresight get the better of him.

On the other hand, George's suggestion that he bring a creature of another species to Earth and live with her there daunted him utterly. Such a life would be just too damned complicated for him to cope with, especially if his mother...

At least, he swore, this time he'd use his head in his relations with his crew: Be kind and affable, but firm and consistent, allowing no undue familiarity.

Gizil came up to report. Barnevelt asked, "Weren't you the masked man I conked with the mug in Jazmurian?"

Gizil grinned shamefacedly. "I hoped your lordship had not recognized me, but such is indeed the fact. I was to make a disturbance—as ye saw me do by picking a quarrel with the Osirian—while Gavao did drug your drink, but the lard-head must have doctored his own by error. 'Twas like an imbecile Balhibu so to do."

"Were you really going to kill Sishen?"

"No-o, I suppose not, though it did my liver good to see the eldrich monster quake with fear."

"One would think you didn't like Osirians, though you worked for one."

"Perforce—for once having clamped his claws upon our helm, Sheafase gained such power over us by his fascinative talents that there was no shaking him, though many of us privately opined his reckless course would bring us to disaster, as indeed it did. Had the dice of Da'vi not turned up a double blank, thus terminating his existence, he'd have compelled us to the last man to resist."

"What were you trying to do to Tagde and me?"

"To abduct, or failing that to slay. I trust you'll hold it not against us, for we did but as Sheafase commanded—commands we could not shirk for the mental grip he held upon us. By his acquaintanceship with Earth, he knew full well the plans of Igor Eshtain the Sunqar to explore, and laid his gins accordingly."

Gizil went on to explain the inner workings of the janru ring, an organization that included Earthmen, Osirians, and Krishnans—how they had kidnaped Shtain and put him under pseudo-hypnosis on Earth; how they had planted Gizil, under the name of Vizqash, at Novorecife to watch for people sniffing on Shtain's trail, and so on.

"... one of the heads of the ring is an officer on that Viagens ship—achivenjinir, I think they call—what's that?"

Pandemonium from the cabin announced that the Amazons now knew they had been deceived.

Two ten-nights later, the Yars put in to bustling Majbur, having been blown out of her course by the tail of the season's first hurricane and having twice fled from unidentified fleets on the horizon.

Barnevelt and Tangaloea went ashore, dragging Shtain between them and leaving Gizil in charge of the ship. Barnevelt had come to have a good deal of respect for the ex-pirate, despite the Krishnan's lordly airs, predatory past, and assorted attempts to murder him.

They proceeded to the office of Gorbovast, official agent in Majbur of King Eqrar of Gozashtand and unofficial agent for the Viagens Interplanetarias.

"By all the gods!" cried Gorbovast, startled out of his habitual suavity. "The Free City's fleet arrived two days ago with a wild and wondrous tale of how you twain did lead the allied fleet to triumph over the Sunqar and then, over some darksome dispute with old Alvandi, did truss her like an unha on the way to market, steal a ship of Suruskand manned by pirate prisoners, and vanish into air attenuate. And here you be! What led a wight of proven probity to turn his coat in such amazing fashion?"

Barnevelt told the commissioner about the queen's plan to kill the surrendered Sunqaruma.

"Ah well," said Gorbovast, "'tis said you are to singular idealisms given. Who's this frowsy fellow in gyves? The Free City forbids unlawful restraint upon free men, even Earth-men..."

"This," said Barnevelt, "is the Shtain we were hunting."

"Igor Eshtain, eh?"

"The same. The janru ring captured him, and the Osirian members of the ring made him into a pirate by

their mental powers, so now he doesn't know his old friends. Sheafase's dead, but we met another Osirian, Sishen, in Jazmurian some ten-nights back. I think he was on his way to Majbur. D'youknow if he's here?"

"No, but we can learn. Let's to the Chief Syndic's chambers, across the street."

The Chief Syndic, whom they had seen last in Ghulind6, greeted them with even more amazement than had Gorbovast. When the situation had been explained, he sent for his chief of police, who sent for one of his subordinates, who said yes, this Sishen was staying at the Chunar and could be brought in within the hour.

"Don't frighten him," said Barnevelt. "He's a timid soul. Tell him some old friends want to see him."

"Ahem," said the Chief Syndic. "While I mislike to dampen so auspicious an occasion, yet duty forces me to bring up certain matters." He fumbled in his desk. "I have here a letter from the President of Suruskand, requesting help in recovering his stolen ship."

Barnevelt dismissed the question of the Yars with an airy wave. "He shall get his ship back. Meanwhile I'll pay him rent for it. Have you a draft blank?"

After puzzling over the strange printed instrument, arranged quite differently from an Earthly check, Barnevelt wrote out a draft to the Republic of Suruskand, on Ta'lum and Fosq for five hundred karda. "Send him this and tell him I'll settle the balance later."

"I trust he'll take your—uh—rather cavalier treatment of the matter in good part," said the Chief Syndic. "I have here another letter that concerns you, sir. It arrived but this morn, in diplomatic cipher—from Zakkomir bad-Gurshmani, a ward of Queen Alvandi. After the usual preamble he says: 'Since our return to Ghulinde, I have been doomed to grisly death, to wit: chosen by this false lottery as Princess Zei's first consort, to wed her on the day of her accession, on the tenth of Sifta.' (That, as you'll perceive from yonder calendar, is six days from now.) 'You know, Master Syndic, the fate awaiting one on whom that honor falls at end of year. Nor is Zei happier than I in this predicament, but we are helpless puppets in my guardian's royal grip, for she will keep all the leading strings in her own fists even after she has nominally resigned. There is one, however, who might us rescue: the mighty Earthman traveling under the pseudonym of Snyol of Pleshch.' That, I take it, means you, sir?"

"That's right," said Barnevelt.

The Chief Syndic made a deprecatory motion. "Fear not to acknowledge the fact in the privacy of our chambers, for Gorbovast and I are enlightened men who strive against the prejudiced disfavor, in which Terrans are by many held. Some of our best friends are Earthmen, for we take the view: Because some of the louts act with unseemly arrogance, insolently boasting of the superiority of all things in their own fear-some world, should the whole enseamed race be damned unheard?"

"Howsomever, let's to our embroidery return. I quote: 'I did not know this hero was an Earthman till Zei told me after my rescue from the Sunqar, though I did before suspect it. Here's the kernel. He is a Terran, and so is Zei—a fact I have long guarded as a courtly secret. She is no chick of Queen Alvandi, who is barren as the rocks of Harqain, but an Earthly waif procured from slavers and reared as the queen's own, being taught from early years to disguise herself as a native of this planet. For Qirib's law not only dooms the consort yearly. It likewise damns the queen who within five years of her accession fails to lay a fertile egg.'

'The princess tells me she did learn this pseudo-Snyol's true nature during the rescue and assumed he likewise learned of hers. And therefore was she all the more perplexed by the inconsistent sentiments he manifested towards her.

The Syndic looked up. "I presume you know to what he refers, sir? To continue: 'Since he is an Earthman, it seems likely that he would direct his course towards Novorecife and his fellows. We therefore beg you with all the ardor we command to watch for him. Should he reach Novorecife without your interception, essay to get a word to him in the stronghold of the Terrans. For thus you may save, not merely my own worthless life, but the happiness of my lady princess. I add that Queen Alvandi also knows of Snyol's true nature and was therefore all the more eager to obtain him as a consort for her daughter, for she would rather have foreign rule in this Qirib than jeopardize her matriarchal principles. Failing to hold him, she has chosen me as second best—a choice I should find flattering did not the vision of the chopper spring uppermost in my thoughts. Since Zei—for whom my feelings are of sib - affection only—could not be fructified by one of my species, I ween Alvandi plans to smuggle in another waif to carry on the line.'

"There you have it," said the Syndic. "What you do now is up to you. I beg you, if you turn your back upon this world, not to reveal these matters, which contain most dire subversive possibilities."

Gorbovast said, "I suspect who Zei really is."

"Who?" said Barnevelt sharply.

"Know you that Earthly missionary for a cult of more than normal incoherence, Mirza Fateh? Whose wife was slain and daughter carried off by robbers in the Year of the Bishtar?"

The Syndic made the affirmative head motion. "Zei would be of the right age and type, though my information was the child was sold in Dur and there did die. Where's Mirza Fateh now?"

"He was in Mishe," said Gorbovast. "It transpires, General Snyol, that you may be in a position to bring about a most affecting family reunion."

"We'll see," said Barnevelt, whose mind had been whirring like a generator. "I sort of think young couples are better off without too many parents cluttering up the landscape."

Tangaloa said: "If you want to check, say to Zei: Shumafarsi harf mizanid ?"

"What's that?"

"That's 'Do you speak Persian?' in Persian. I lived in Iran once. But you won't have a chance, because I don't see how you will see the sheila before we push off for Earth."

Barnevelt was still practicing the sentence when Sishen came in. The Osirian, resembling a man-sized bipedal dinosaur, took one look at Barnevelt and leaped upon him as he had upon Tangaloa that time in their room in Angur's Inn .

"Hey!" yelled Barnevelt, trying to wriggle out of the reptilian embrace.

"Oh, my dear rescuer!" hissed the Osirian. "How good to see you again! Not for a minute has my gratitude wavered in the time since we parted in Jazmurian! I love you!"

"Let's not be so demonstrative about it," said Barnevelt, detaching himself by force. "If you really want to do me a favor, here's an Earthman under Osirian pseudo-hypnosis who's forgotten his life on Earth and thinks he's a pirate of the Morya Sunqaruma. Can you cure him?"

"I can try. May we have a room to ourselves?"

While the reptile led Shtain out, Barnevelt inquired after the Shambor. The little Marconi-rigged smuggler, however, seemed to have disappeared without a trace. Barnevelt suspected that the mutineers had probably capsized or otherwise wrecked her as a result of their unfamiliarity with the rig. At least that would save him from trouble with the Viagens.

Half an hour later Shtain came out of the room, shaking his head and rubbing his bristly scalp. He wrung the hands of Barnevelt and Tangaloo.

"God!" he said, "it's good to be normal again! It is the damnedest feeling, to have part of your mind that knows perfectly well what's going on, but can't do a damn thing about it. You boys were fine, very fine. I could not have done better myself. When do we shuff off?" Shtain's thick Russian accent was as dense as ever.

"I don't know about you two," said Barnevelt, "but I'm going back to Ghulinde with my Pirates of Penzance."

"What?" shouted Shtain. "Don't be ridiculous! You're coming back to Earth with us..."

"I am not!"

"Wait, wait, both of you," said Tangaloo. "Let me handle him, Igor. Look here, cobber, don't take this business about Zakkomir and Zei seriously. We've got our film. We've had our adventure; and now you can return to Earth to live on your laurels..."

"No," said Barnevelt. "In the first place my mother lives on Earth, and in the second I'm going to rescue Zei."

"There'll be another Sheila along in a minute!"

"Not the one I want."

"If you do rescue her, will you bring her to Earth on the next ship?"

"I think not. I've about decided to make my fortune here on Krishna."

Shtain had been hopping about with clenched fists in an agony of suppressed emotion. Now he burst out: "Are you crazy mad? What will Igor Shtain Limited do without you? Where would I ever get such a ghawst-writer again? I'll double your salary! You can't walk out on us like that!"

"Sorry, but you should have thought how valuable I was sooner."

Shtain began to swear in Russian.

Tangaloo said, "Ahem. Dirk, you know these Earthly adventurers who run around backward planets exploiting the natives are inferior types who can't compete with their own kind back home. They take

advantage of Earth's more sophisticated culture, which they themselves have done nothing to create..."

"Oh, foof! I've heard that lecture too. Call me inferior if you like, but here I'm quite a guy, not a shy schizoid Oedi-pean afraid of his ma."

"It's still no life for a man of intellect..."

"And just think. Although we busted Sheafase's gang, the Sunqar's still in Krishnan hands, so we haven't settled the janru problem. Since Alvandi's a fanatical—uh..."

"Gynarchist?"

"Thanks, gynarchist, she'll go on making and selling the drug. Her objection to Sheafase was not that he sold it to the interstellar smugglers but that he charged her all the traffic would bear."

"What of it? We have our information. The rest is up to the World Federation and the Interplanetary Council."

"But think how it'll simplify matters if I'm running the Sunqar!"

"There's that." Tangaloo turned to Shtain, whose lips were still spitting Slav consonants like a machine gun. "We might as well let him go—the romantic bug's bitten him. In a couple of years he may get tired of it and drift back to Earth. Besides, he's in love."

"Why did you not say so? That's different." Shtain sighed like a furnace. "When I was yong I was in loff too—wit three or four girls at once. Good-bye, my boy! I hate your guts, but I loff you like my own son."

"Thanks," said Barnevelt.

"If you come around in a year, I will first break your neck and then give you back your old job. George, how the hell do we get to Novorecife?"

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Six days later, two ships pulled into Damovang Harbor. One was the Yars, the other a stock boat full of ayas, which Barnevelt had bought for his private army with part of Alvan-di's reward. The flag that flew from the masts of these ships made the folk of Damovang scratch their heads, for it was the ancient flag of Qirib, used back before the days of Queen Dejanai and the matriarchate.

The ships came quietly up to the vacant wharf. A line snaked ashore and was caught and belayed by one of the loafers to be found on any pier. Then out of the first ship tumbled a swarm of armed and armored men. Before their points, the people about the docks scattered with screams like a flock of frightened aqebats.

"Hurry up with those ayal" yelled Barnevelt, clad in steel from head to knee.

From the second ship, more men were leading the beasts to the wharf. As they arrived, Barnevelt's most heavily armed men climbed or were boosted into the saddles.

(After a long argument between Barnevelt and Gizil over the merits of an assault on foot from the sea versus one mounted from the land, they had decided to combine the two in an amphibious cavalry assault. Barnevelt's hardest task had been to compel his men to wear armor. Being mostly sailors bred, they distrusted the stuff because they knew how quickly it could drown them if they fell overboard during a sea fight.)

"Follow me!" called Barnevelt. Gizil behind him blew a trumpet. The force clattered up the nearest street in double column. Behind them came the rest of the army on foot.

"What means this?" screamed a voice, and there came a trio of Amazon guards to block the way.

"The men of Qirib come back to claim their own!" said Barnevelt. "Out of the way, girls, if you don't want to get hurt."

One Amazon poked a pike at Barnevelt, who chopped off the spearhead with a swift slash, then whacked the brass helmet with the flat of his blade. The girl rolled on the cobbles. As his aya plunged forward, he spanked the second girl. As the third turned to run, he reached out and caught the hair that flowed from under the helmet.

"Just a minute, beautiful," he said. "Where's this wedding between the new queen and her consort?"

"At the't-temple of the Mother Goddess in the upper city."

"Gizil, lead the way. And make it snappy with those handbills."

Certain of Barnevelt's men began pulling fistfuls of handbills out of saddlebags and tossing them fluttering into the air. They read:

**MEN OF QIRIB, ARISE!**

**Cast Off your Shackles! The Day of Liberation has Come !**

Today, after five generations of female tyranny, a dauntless band of exiles has returned to Qirib to lead the glorious revolution for

**EQUAL RIGHTS FOR MEN!**

Arm yourselves and follow us! Today we shall hurl from its base the ugly image of the false vampire goddess whose degrading worship and obscene rites have so long served as a pretext for a vicious and unfair oppression...

Barnevelt held down his impulse to gallop madly ahead, leaving his foot troops behind. As the column, brave with pennon-bearing lances, wound up the slope to the spired city in Qunjar's lap, he looked back and saw that behind his own foot came a straggling column of male civilians waving chair legs and other improvised weapons. Some people ran away as he approached, while others crowded up to see. Men cheered while women shook fists and spat threats.

In the plaza in front of the temple of Varzai, Barnevelt reined in. Across the plaza, ranged in a semicircle in front of the entrance, a body of Amazons was getting into formation. An officer rushed up and down, pushing the girls into place. All held their spears outthrust, as on the night of the pirate raid on Ghulinde; those of the rear rank held their pikes over the heads of those in front, who knelt.

Barnevelt signaled Gizil to hold the men back while he trotted across the plaza.

"How's the wedding coming?" he asked the officer.

"Tiseven now being solemnized. What's this incursion?"

Barnevelt looked back. The logical way to attack the Amazons would be by archery, holding his cavalry back in case they tried to charge on foot. But his pikemen and ar-balesters were only now beginning to file into the square, and to organize such a barrage would take several minutes. He made up his mind.

"Disperse!" he shouted. "We're coming in!"

"Never! We defy you!"

Barnevelt whirled and galloped back. "Form a square!" He backed his aya into the center of the front rank and brought down his visor with a clang. "Ready? Walk!"

Plop-plop went the hooves on the flagstones. It would be nice to work such a coup without bloodshed; but this was Krishna, where they had not attained the squeamishness towards violent death that Earth took pride in.

"Trot!" These six-legged mounts had a hard, jarring trot, as the saddle was right over the middle pair of legs.

"Canter!" The pikes ahead looked awfully sharp. If the girls did not break before they arrived, and if the aya's did not shy back from the hedge of points, there'd be a messy moment. He hoped he wouldn't be thrown off and trampled.

"Charge!" Down came the lances. The gallop of an aya's six hooves had a drumlike roll. Barnevelt slacked up until he could see the points of lances on either side of him; no use being absolutely the first to hit the line.

Closer came the line and closer. He'd try not to kill the pretty girl facing him...

Crash! The pretty girl warrior disappeared. Barnevelt knocked one pike point aside with his left arm while another glanced from his armor. His aya stumbled and was pulled up again with a furious yank on the reins braided into the animal's mustache. For an instant, the world was all Amazons and ex-pirates turning somersaults. The middle of the Amazon line disappeared as the aya's rolled over it; the other girls dropped their pikes and shields and ran.

A riderless aya ran past. A dismounted man was hitting an Amazon with a broken lance shaft. Another was getting back on his animal. There were a couple of dead aya's and several Amazons lying still.

Raising his visor, Barnevelt snapped orders to Gizil to call off the fighting, tend the injured, and mount a guard around the temple and the plaza. Then he led a squad into the temple.

The audience sat frozen as the animals and their riders in steel plate clattered down the central aisle to where Queen Alvandi, Zei, Zakkomir, and some priestesses of Varzai stood in a group.

"Saved!" cried Zakkomir.



Alvandi spoke: "Never shall you carry through this antic enterprise, detestable Earthman! My people will tear you to pieces!"

"Yes? Come and see what your people are doing, madam." He grinned down at her, then turned his aya and led the group back up the aisle, crowding past the column of his own men who had followed him in. At the portal he said, "See?"

His own men had formed a square around the portal, and beyond it the plaza was packed with male Qiribuma. Gizil was harranguing them, and from the way they yelled and waved their cudgels they seemed to like it.

"What mean you to do?" said Alvandi. "Frighten me with threats you cannot, for my superior social order is dearer to me than life itself."

Barnevelt said, "Madam, I admire your courage even if I can't approve your principles. First, you're a usurper yourself, because you've never laid a fertile egg and therefore should have been executed long ago." (The queen quailed.) "Instead, you bought a kidnaped Earth girl, a small child, and reared her as your own. Will you demonstrate, Zei? Like this."

He reached up to his forehead and wrenched off the false antennae. Zei did likewise.

"Now," he continued, "I won't kill you merely because you should have been sent to the chopper by your own silly law. Since the present regime is proved illegitimate and unlawful, it's time the old order changed, yielding place to new. I'll help them draw up a constitution..."

"With yourself as ruler?" sneered Alvandi.

"By no means. I won't have the job. I'll just give advice— for instance to exile you. Then I'll take Zei, some ships, and some volunteers, and take over the Sunqar."

"But that's mine by treaty with the admirals..."

"Was, you mean. It's state property, and my followers, who being both Qiribuma and Sunqaruma are qualified to decide its fate, have given it to me."

The queen turned to Zei. "At least, daughter, you'll not willingly yield to the wicked importunities of this crapulous vapor?"

"And why not? No daughter of yours am I, but one of another race whom you've sought to use as a puppet to prop your own power, even to forcing me into an alliance mis-cegenetic. I prefer my own."

"Zakkomir?" said Alvandi.

"The same for me."

"You're all against me," said the queen, drooping. She turned to Barnevelt with a last flicker of defiance. "What have you done with my warrior girls you carried off? Deflowered them and fed them to the fish?"

"Not at all, Queen. They're all married to my ex-pirates."

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

After doing what had to be done to secure order in Ghu-linde—such as hanging a couple of liberated males who tried to celebrate their freedom by robbing shops—Barnevelt visited with Zei in her apartment.

When she could talk she said, "My lord and love, if indeed you love me, why, knowing I was of Earthly origin, did you hold off until Zakkomir's letter reached you? Another instant and the link had been forged."

"How was I supposed to know you were human? You couldn't expect me to yank your antennae to see if they'd come off!"

"By the same means I knew you for such."

"What was that? Did my ear points come loose or something?"

"Nay, but when we dried our apparel on the raft in the Sunqar, and again when we washed the soot of the fire from our bodies, I saw that you possessed a navel!"

Barnevelt clapped a hand to his forehead. "Of course! Now that you mention it, I can see how a person hatched from an egg would have no use for one."

"Nay further, knowing that you knew I had one, I recked that you knew all and could conceive no reason for your strange evasive diffidence. Perhaps, methought, he's been reared in Nyamadze, even as I was in Qirib, and thinks himself more Krishnan than Terran. Perhaps he's a cogwheel in some vast plot; or perhaps he does but find me ugly."

"Ugly! Oh, darling..."

"In any case, 'twas plain as the peaks of Darya that, whereas you and I each knew the other's true race, you wished nathless to maintain this pretense of deeming us Krishnans still. Albeit curiosity consumed me, I durst do no more than hint. Thus it was that I said we were of the same kind, and neither was quite what he seemed."

"I remember you did, but I didn't catch on. My mind was on—other things." His eyes devoured her until she colored.

"Well, when you let these hints fall as dead as an aqebat struck by the fowler's bolt, I acceded to what I took to be your wish. For I loved you so that—despite my noble resolution to guard my chastity, as a princess must needs do—had you pressed me to yield a maiden's ultimate gift, I should not have known how to gainsay you."

Barnevelt drew a long breath. "I understand now. Put it down to sheer stupidity on my part—though perhaps in the long run it was a fortunate mistake. But how'd you hide your navel when you went swimming or pretended to be a statue in the park?"

"I wore a patch of false skin, but for the kashyo I'd left off my little patch, seeing no need for it under that formal gown."

"I see. While we're confessing impostures, that wasn't a real yeki that growled on the road to Shaf, when you started to leave me. It was I doing imitations."

"Why, I knew that!" she said.

Presently, Barnevelt said, "Now we have to figure out how we can get married—we are going to get married, aren't we?"

"I wondered when you'd bethink you of that," she said in a marked manner. "Well, sirrah, since you at last had the wit to ask me, the answer's aye, and aye again. But what's the obstacle?"

"We're Terrans, and I've read somewhere that only Terrans can legally carry other Terrans. The only people of Krishna who could splice us—with any legal effect under Earthly law, that is—are Commandante Kennedy and Judge Keshava-chandra at Novorecife. And we hardly want to go all that distance in the wrong direction, when we're bound for the Sunqar."

"How about Qvansel theastrologer, or one of the priestesses?"

"No good. Your marriage with Zakkomir wouldn't have been legal, either. Let me think... There are some jurisdictions on Earth where a man and a woman can become legally married by standing up in front of witnesses and saying so. It's called common-law marriage. The Quakers have a similar system, and they're highly respectable. So that would have as much legal effect as anything our Qiribo friends could do. Wait here."

A few minutes later, he fetched Gizil, Zakkomir, and the court astrologer back to Zei's apartment.

When they were lined up, he said, "Now stand up and give me your hand, darling—the left. Do you, Zei bab- Alvandi, take me, Dirk Cornelius Barnevelt, to be your husband?"

"Aye. Do you, Dirk, take me to be your wife?"

"I do. With this ring..." (he slipped the Hayashi camera off his finger and onto hers) "... I thee wed." And he swept her close.

Another ten-day, and the freshly painted Douri Dejanai, at its dock in Damovang Harbor, prepared to cast off its lines. In the stern, Barnevelt bid farewell to his Krishnan friends.

Gizil said, "We all deem you a man of super-human self-restraint, elevating me to the presidency in lieu of taking it yourself."

"I'm not a Qiribu, remember," said Barnevelt. "They'd have gotten tired of being ruled by a damned Earthman and thrown me out. Besides, they chose you."

"Thanks to that constitution you prescribed for us."

"Well, you asked for the latest model of republican constitution, so I obliged. I hope it works. Drink up, pals—we're shoving off."

The visitors went ashore. The ship pulled out from its berth, followed by the remaining two ships of Barnevelt's little fleet.

When people could no longer be recognized for the distance and the sun was setting behind the Zogha, Barnevelt turned away, threw an arm around Zei, and went below. He paused at Philo's cage to scratch the roots of the macaw's feathers (the queen having left the bird behind when she fled from Qirib) and then at the cage of his latest acquisition, a pair of bijara, bought at the same pet shop in Ghulinde where he had found the lost Philo.

Zei said, "Think you this new law you've given the Qiri-buma will last like the rocks of Harqain?"

Remembering Tangaloo's remarks about basic cultural attitudes, he said thoughtfully, "Considering that they don't have a tradition of democratic self-government, I shall be pleasantly surprised if this shiny new constitution stands up to the strains of human weakness and ambition for many years. But this purblind race of miserable men will have to manage as best it can."

"What sort of rule will you establish in the Sunqar? Come, sir, more attention to me and less to your insensate beasts, specially since the Earthly monster makes you snuffle. At your present rate of accumulation, I foresee the day when the Sun-qar's greatest renown will be as a park zoological."

"Sorry." He drew out a chair and poured her a drink. "I think I'll set up what on Earth would be called a stock corporation, with you and me holding a majority of the stock. We'll be capitalists. Say, Zei..."

"Yes, dearest Snyol—I mean Dirk?"

He smiled at her slip. Then it occurred to him that "Zei" was probably not her original name, either—though, if it suited them both, there was no point in digging up some forgotten Persian praenomen. With so many pseudonyms in his circle—his own, Tangaloo's, Gizil's—it was hard enough to keep track of names. To aggravate matters, the men of Qirib had all changed their surnames from metronymics to patronymics.

Out of curiosity, however, he said, "Shuma fdrsi harf mizanid?"

She gave a little start. "Why, yes—what was that, beloved? 'Tis a tongue I seem to recall once-knowing, but now all's hazy. Didst not ask me if I spoke some speech?"

"Tell you some day," he said, running his fingers luxuriantly through his new bristle-brush of hair. Since she had stopped dyeing hers, Zei's, too, had begun to come in with its normal glossy black.

"Why did Alvandi adopt an Earthly child instead of a Krishnan one?" he asked.

"She did adopt a Krishnan babe, but it died a ten-night before the ceremony of Viewing the Heir. So Alvandi in great haste and secrecy besought the trafficker in slaves to give a surrogate. He sent me, not telling her I was of Earth, and by the time she learned her error 'twas too late and he'd vanished with his price. Oftimes have I wondered who my authentic parents were."

Here was a chance to play God by reuniting a family, for there was no doubt in his mind now that she was Mirza Fateh's daughter. However, it might be better to let sleeping eshuna lie. He'd want to look Papa Fateh over with care before inviting him to move in with them. From what he'd heard about the missionary, he doubted whether he'd be a vast improvement on his own mother or Queen Alvandi.

A hectic week of politicking had left him little time to think about the future. For one thing, to help finance his Sunqar project, he had made a deal with Shtain to shoot additional film and send it to Earth

from time to time, to pay for which Shtain had set up a drawing account for him in the bank at Novorecife. Tangaloo particularly wanted film and data on the tailed Fossanderaners. For another, the Mejrou Quararderra was suing him in the courts of Qirib for impersonating one of their expressmen. . .

"Dirk," said Zei, "happy though I am that we're now a peaceful, settled, wedded pair, in a way I miss the excitement of our flight from the Sunqar. Never have I lived with such intensity. Think you such feelings will ever come again?"

"Stick around, darling," he said, lighting a cigar. "The excitement's just beginning."

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

A Kkishnan year later, a drunken fat man in the Nova Iorque Bar at Novorecife was declaiming, "All nonsense, letting these barbarians do as they please. Oughta send the army and civilize 'em. Make 'em adopt modern plumbing, democracy, mass production, and all the rest. And some good up-to-date religion. . . Say, who's that?"

He indicated a tall, horse-faced Earthman in Krishnan costume, with a small notch in his left ear, drinking with Commandante Kennedy and Assistant Security Officer Cas-tanhoso.

The notch-eared man was saying, ". . . I did not invite him! He read about us in that paper they publish in Mishe and put two and two together. The next thing I knew, he showed up on a ship from Malayer saying he was my long-lost father-in-law. And since Zei's crazy about him, there's no getting rid of him. Matter of fact I don't mind Mirza so much, and he was at least able to splice us properly, so there's no more question of whether we're properly married. But those funny people who come to visit him. . ."

"Why do you not put him to work?" asked Castanhoso.

"I will, as soon as. . .",

"That," said the fat man's companion, "is the famous Dirk Barnevelt, president of the Sunqar Corporation. He's just pulled a big deal with the Interplanetary Council. Like to meet him?"

"Sure. Like to meet anybody human. . .",

"Oh, Senhor Barnevelt, may I present Senhor Elias? A new arrival."

"Glad to know you," said Barnevelt, squeezing the pudgy hand.

"You're one of these guys who lives among the natives?"

"You can put it that way," snapped Barnevelt, and started to turn away.

"No offense meant, son! I just wondered if you consider 'em better than your own kind."

"Not at all. Some find them easier to live with than Earth-III men, some don't. I do, but I don't think them either better or worse. It all depends on the individual."

"Sure, sure. But aren't they awfully primitive? National sovereignty and wars and nobility and all that

crap?"

"Matter of fact, I like them that way."

"You're one of these romantic guys?"

"No, but I guess I like pioneering."

"Pioneering." The fat man sank into sodden silence. Barnevelt, finding his new acquaintance a bore and a bore, made a withdrawing moment. But Elias asked, "What's that new deal? Wong was telling me about it."

"Oh. Know the Sunqar?"

"A big mess of seaweed, isn't it?"

"Ayuh. There were some people who made janru out of the terpahla vine..."

"Say, I know you—the guy who eloped with a native princess, only she turned out human after all. Excuse me, what was the deal?"

"Well, I'm now lord high whatsit of the Sunqar and was willing to stop janru-making and turn over the names of the smuggling ring. But I wanted something in return, so I persuaded the I. C. to let me have engineering help to set up a soap works in the Sunqar. The vine gives us unlimited potash, and there's no soap on Krishna. So..."

Again Barnevelt started to withdraw, but the fat man clamped a grip on his arm. "Gonna be the plant's soap magnate, eh? When you finish with the Krishnans, they'll be all civilized like us and you'll have to find another planet. Say, when'd you—uh—marry this dame?"

"About a year ago."

"Any kids?"

"Three. And would you mind letting go my arm?"

"Three. Let's see. Three? Is this the planet with years twice as long as ours? No-o, the years are shorter than on Earth. Three, eh? Haw haw haw..."

Barnevelt's ruddy countenance turned purple and his knobby fist smashed into the fat face. Elias reeled back, upset a table, and crashed to the floor.

"For God's sake, Dirk!" cried Kennedy, moving to interfere.

"Nobody insults my wife," growled Barnevelt.

"But," said the fat man's companion, "I don't understand. You did say three, and, that is, you know..."

Barnevelt turned on him. "We had triplets. What's funny about that?"

