

Jungle in the Sky **By Milton Lesser**

The hunters wanted animals that lived on far Ganymede—though not as badly as the animals wanted the hunters.

THE BIG MAN looked at home among his trophies. Somehow his scowl seemed as fierce as the head of the Venusian swamp-tiger mounted on the wall behind him, and there was something about his quick-darting eyes which reminded Steve of a Callistan fire-lizard. The big man might have been all of them wrapped into one, Steve thought wryly, and there were a lot of trophies.

He was the famous Brody Carmical, and rumor had it he was worth a million credits for each of the many richly mounted heads.

"So you're fresh out of school with a degree in Extra-terrestrial zoology," Carmical grumbled. "Am I supposed to turn cartwheels?"

Steve cleared his throat. "The Placement Service thought you might have a job—"

"I do, I do. That doesn't mean any young pup who comes along can fill it. Ever been off the Earth, Mr. Stedman?"

"No."

"Ever been off the North American continent?"

"No."

"But you want to go galavanting around the Solar System in search of big game. Tell me—do you think they have a Harvard club on every stinking satellite you'll visit? Do you think you can eat beefsteak and drink martinis in every frontier-world dive? Let me tell you, Mr. Stedman, the answer is no."

"Try me, sir. That's all I ask—try me."

"We're not running a school, Mr. Stedman. Either a man's got it or he hasn't. You haven't. Come back in ten years. Ship out around the Solar System the hard way, and maybe we can use you then—if you still remember what you learned about Extra-terrestrial zoology. What in space ever made you study extra-zoo, anyway?"

"I found it interesting," Steve said lamely.

"Interesting? As a hobby, it's interesting. But as business, it's hard work, a lot of sweat, a lot of danger, squirming around on your soft belly in the muck and mud of a dozen worlds, that's what it is. Just how do you think Carmical Enterprises got where they are? Sweat and grief, Mr. Stedman." Carmical yawned hugely and popped a glob of chocolate into his mouth. His fat lips worked for a moment, then his Adam's apple bobbed up and down.

Steve got up, paced back and forth in front of the desk. "I won't take no for an answer, Mr. Carmical."

"Eh? What's that? I could have you thrown out of here."

"You won't," Steve told him calmly. "Maybe I'm just what the doctor ordered, but you'll never know until you try me. So—"

"So nothing! I said this isn't a school."

"They tell me the *Gordak* leaves on a ten-world junket tomorrow. All I ask is this: let me ship along as the zoology man. Then, if you're not satisfied, you can leave me at your first port-of-call—without pay."

Carmical smiled triumphantly. "You know where we space out for first, Mr. Stedman? Mercury, that's where. I'd love to see a sassy young pup like you set loose on Mercury in one of the Twilight Cities."

"Is it a deal?"

"It sure is, Stedman. It sure is! But I warn you, we'll expect perfection. You'll not have a chance to profit from your own mistakes. You won't have a chance to make mistakes. One slip and you've had it, is that understood?"

"Yes."

"I'm not going, of course," Carmical said, patting his great paunch and saying with the action that he was too old and too fat for space. "But I'll hear all about the way you were stranded on Mercury, among a lot of Merxies and—"

Steve smiled grimly, said: "No you won't. Next time you see me will be after the ten-world junket. Whom do I ask for on the *Gordak*?"

Carmical dialed for a bromo, watched it fizz in the glass, drank it, belched. "T. J. Moore's in charge," he told Steve. "Old T. J.'s a mighty rough taskmaster, Stedman. Don't say you weren't warned."

"Thanks."

"Well, I'll hear about how you were stranded on Mercury," Carmical predicted.

"You'll see me after the ten-world junket," said Steve, and closed the door softly behind him.

PIT-MONKEYS scurried about the great jet-slagged underside of the *Gordak*, spraying fresh zircalloy in the aft tubes. Spaceport officers were everywhere in their crisp white uniforms, checking cargo, giving terse directives to the crew of the *Gordak*, lounging importantly at the foot of the gangplank.

"Name?" one of them snapped at Steve.

"Stedman."

The man flipped through a list of the expedition's members. "Stedman, huh? I don't see—oh, here it is, in pencil at the bottom. Last minute addition, huh Stedman?"

"Something like that," Steve admitted.

"Well, climb aboard."

And then Steve was walking up the gangplank and into the cool metal interior of the *Gordak*. His palms were clammy, and he wondered if any of the crewmen within the ship noticed the sweat beading his forehead. He'd managed to come this far with a surprising degree of objectivity, and only now did reaction set in, causing his heart to beat fiercely and his limbs to grow weak. *That T. J. Moore must have been spawned in hell*, Charlie had said—and now Charlie was dead. Because of T. J. Moore? Indirectly, perhaps, but T. J. Moore was responsible. Or, if you looked at it on a different level, the cutthroat competition between *Carmical Enterprises* and *Barling Brothers Interplanetary* was to blame. It didn't matter, not really. Charlie was dead. That alone mattered.

A big man with incredibly broad shoulders, hair the color of flame and a florid face to match it, came stalking down the companionway. Steve said, "I wonder if you know where I can find T. J. Moore."

The giant smiled. "You crew or expedition?"

"Expedition," said Steve, extending his hand. "Steve Stedman's my name."

The hand that gripped his was hard and calloused. "I'm Kevin McGann, boy. Sort of a liaison man between the crew and the expedition, only they call me the Exec to make everything official. Better take some advice—don't look for T. J. now. T. J.'s busy doing last minute things, and T. J. hates to be disturbed. Why don't you wait till after *Brennschluss*, when we're out in space?"

"It can't wait. I've got to see that Moore knows I'm aboard and under what conditions, because I don't want to be thrown off this ship at the space-station. If Moore doesn't like the conditions, Mr. Carmical can be called. But after we blast off it'll be too late."

Kevin McGann shrugged. "It's only advice I gave you, boy. You'll find T. J. down on the third level looking over the cargo holds. Good luck." And McGann took a pipe from his pocket, tamping it full, lighting it and staring with frank, speculative curiosity at Steve. "Stedman, eh?" he mused. "The name's familiar."

"You think about it," said Steve, and made his way toward the third level. Perhaps some of them aboard the *Gordak* had known Charlie, and McGann, being the Exec, must have been around a long

time.

The third was the lowest level of the *Gordak*, or that part of the ship nearest the tubes with the exception of the fission-room itself. Here on the third level were the cages which, in the months that followed, would hold the big game brought within the *Gordak*. But the word cage, Steve realized, can be misleading. A rectangular enclosure, its wall composed of evenly spaced bars—that's a cage. But the bubble-cages of the *Gordak* were something else again; precisely as the name implied, they were huge bubbles of plastic, complete with remote-controlled airlocks. You could pump in any kind of atmosphere, from Jupiter's lethal methane-ammonia mixture to the thin, oxygen-starved air of Mars, and under any desired pressure, too.

And now on the third level a battery of experts was busy checking the bubble-cages for defects, since a leak *after* some noxious gas had been pumped into one of the bubbles could mean death for everyone aboard the *Gordak*. Steve stood there nervously, for what seemed a long while. He let his gaze rove up and down the third level, but he only saw the coverall-clad technicians checking the bubble-cages. Kevin McGann had said he could find Moore here, but unless Moore zipped on a pair of coveralls himself and joined in the work—which certainly seemed unlikely—then Moore wasn't around.

SOMEONE TAPPED Steve's shoulder. Startled, he whirled around. A woman stood there, just behind him, staring at him insolently. She was tall, as tall as Steve himself, with her close-cropped blond hair peeking out around the edges of a black cap. She wore what looked to Steve like a glossy black Martian sand-cape which she let fall straight down behind her so that it almost brushed the floor. Under it, she wore a brief pair of shorts, also black, and a halter. She was muscular in that lithe, feminine way which had grown so popular in the twenty-second century—the century which had finally seen women come abreast of men in all sporting activities and surpass them in some which required special grace and lithe-limbed skill.

"I hope you found whatever you're looking for," she said. She spoke with a complete lack of warmth which startled Steve for the second time in a few moments.

She was a beautiful woman, he realized, but she looked so completely incongruous among the coveralled men that Steve found himself whistling softly. "I never expected to find a girl here," he admitted. "Not on this expedition."

"What's the matter, are you old fashioned? This is the twenty-second century, the enlightened century, remember? There's nothing a girl can't do if she sets her mind to it. A recent survey shows that forty-percent of the homemakers in the U.S.N.A. are men, sixty percent women. Okay, it's only logical that some of the remaining forty percent of females have some tough jobs, too."

"I read the books of the feminist movement," Steve assured her. "But it's going to take a lot to convince me of that. Me and a lot of other people, I suspect."

"Is that so, Mr. Smart-guy? Are you a member of the expedition?"

"Yes."

"Well, anytime you want to hustle down to the gym with me and go a few rounds, let me know."

"Are you serious?"

"Of course I'm serious."

"Well," Steve said, deciding to change the subject and feeling utterly ridiculous about the whole conversation, "let's forget it. I was looking for T. J. Moore."

The woman smiled coldly. "That's me. I'm T. J. What do you want?"

"I—uh—what? You're T. J.? You—a girl?"

"Will you please hurry with whatever you want to tell me? I haven't got all day."

"My name's Stedman." Steve felt his composure returning. The fact that T. J. Moore was a woman didn't make any difference. But unconsciously, Steve regarded her as a member of the weaker sex, and a large chunk of her fearsome reputation vanished because of it. "I wonder if Mr. Carmical contacted you—"

"He sure did, Stedman."

"Good, then we can—"

"Maybe you think it's good. I think it stinks. Listen, Stedman, maybe you think you can pull the wool over my eyes like you did over Brody Carmical—but you can't. He didn't recognize your name, I did. No kid brother of Charlie Stedman's going to make trouble for me because he thinks I was responsible for his brother's death."

"I didn't say—"

"You didn't have to say. I can see it in your face. But get this straight, Stedman. Your brother died on Ganymede three years ago —of natural causes, that is, if you can call some of the local fauna 'natural causes'. He worked for *Barling Brothers Interplanetary*, so I guess the rivalry between them and us didn't help. But no one killed him."

"I didn't say—"

"Is that all you can say, 'you didn't say?' Try to tell me why you came aboard the *Gordak*; go ahead, try."

"I'm an expert in Extra-terrestrial zoology, and you needed one. Mr. Carmical hired me."

"I know that. But I guess I also know a thing or two which Brody Carmical doesn't. All right, Stedman. You come as far as Mercury. But one slip, just one slip—"

"Okay, T. J.," Steve said, almost jauntily. "I'll watch my step."

"I'm the *Gordak's* captain. You'll call me that. Captain—is it clear?"

"No," said Steve, and laughed. The ten-world junket would be a hard, driving, gruelling ordeal come what might, and he wouldn't kowtow to T. J. Moore, male or female, here at the beginning. "No," he said again, forcing the laughter out. "This isn't a military ship, so you won't impose any arbitrary discipline on me."

The woman laughed too, but it was more effective. "I won't, won't I? Once we leave Earth, Stedman, everything we do is dangerous. Everything. I've got to have full authority, every order obeyed at the drop of a hat. Understand?"

"No"

The woman removed the black cap from her head, and Steve noticed; not without surprise, that her pale blond hair wasn't close-cropped after all. It had been piled up inside the cap, and now it spilled down loosely about her shoulders. Smiling, she dropped the cap to the floor. "Pick it up," she said.

"Are you kidding? I'm an expert on Extra-terrestrial zoology. That's what Mr. Carmical hired me for. If you want that hat picked up, better do it yourself." Vaguely, Steve wondered if Charlie had met the woman those final days on far Ganymede, had fought with her tooth and nail for some priceless specimen—and lost, with no witness but the bleak, desolate topography of the Jovian moon.

The woman turned away from him, called: "LeClarc! LeClarc, come here."

ONE OF THE coveredall figures approached them, a thick-thewed man whose muscular strength couldn't be hidden by the baggy clothing. Not as tall as Steve or the woman, he was broad of shoulder and thick through the chest. He had a dark face and deep-set black eyes, and a thin scar ran the length of his right cheek, from eye to chin. "Yes, Captain?"

"Stedman here is new. He questions my authority. I wondered if you'd like to work him over some—"

"A pleasure," growled the stocky, gnarled Frenchman, and swung his right fist up in a quick, blurring motion.

Steve didn't have time to parry it. The blow caught him flush on the mouth and jarred his teeth, sent him crashing back against the wall where he slid down slowly until he was sitting on the floor. Groggily, he got to his feet, wiping his bloody lips with the fingers of one hand. LeClarc, chuckling, hit him once more before he could quite pull himself together. The right hand slammed against his stomach this time, driving the wind from his lungs.

He started to fall, but he clawed at LeClarc's middle as he went down, and held on. Still chuckling, LeClarc cuffed him about the ears almost playfully, but the open-palmed blows stung him and sent wild rage coursing through his blood. Clearly, that was the idea. LeClarc was enjoying himself—but LeClarc wanted him to fight back.

Steve got a hand up in front of his body, palm up, and drove it against the Frenchman's chin. He felt the neck snap back sharply, heard the sudden click as LeClarc's teeth met with savage force. Bellowing, the Frenchman came at him again, fighting southpaw and bringing a roundhouse left from back behind his body.

But Steve's wind had returned and now he sobbed air in great gulps. He ducked the wild swing and found the Frenchman wide-open, pounded lefts and rights to the man's midsection. LeClarc, stunned now, brought his guard down. Steve was in no hurry. He chased the dazed LeClarc around an ever-widening circle, was dimly aware that the other technicians had stopped their work to watch. He jabbed with his left hand, covering the olive face with purple welts. He held the right cocked but did not throw it. Soon, though, he could hear the other technicians—who probably liked a good brawl—muttering. The idea, as they saw it, wasn't to cut LeClarc up completely but instead, to win swiftly.

Shrugging, Steve realized that the anger he felt for the woman had blinded him, and after that, he unleashed his right hand, felt the searing contact with LeClarc's jaw, saw a couple of teeth clatter off the wall as the Frenchman's mouth flew open. Sagging first at the knees, then the waist, LeClarc fell to the floor and huddled there inertly.

Steve turned to the woman, spoke out of fast-swelling lips. "You're the Captain and I only work here, Teejay," he made the initials soused like a name. "So I'll take your orders—provided they make sense. That one about the cap didn't. If you want it picked up, you'd better stoop for it yourself."

Not looking back, he climbed the stairs toward the second level, wiping his bloody lips with a handkerchief.

IT WAS Kevin McGann who showed him around the *Gordak* after *Brennschluss*. Newton's second law of motion carried the ship forward through the near-vacuum of space now, and it would continue that way, plowing ahead at seven miles per second until it was caught and slowed by the space-station's gravity. There the bunkers would be reloaded with slow-fission plutonium for the long dash sunward to Mercury.

"... and through there you'll find the fission-room," Kevin was saying. "That's about the size of it, boy. But I warn you to keep away from the fission-room long as that red light is blinking. Everything inside gets pretty hot, and there's enough radiation to kill an army unless the shields are up. Even then, I'd recommend a vac-suit."

"I'll remember that," Steve said, lighting a cigarette.

"Word gets around a ship like the *Gordak* pretty fast. I didn't see your fight with LeClarc, but I sure heard enough about it. There's only one man aboard ship who can beat the Frenchman in a fair fight, and—"

"You?" Steve wanted to know. But it was hardly a question. It looked to him like Kevin could take on two LeClarcs with no trouble at all.

"Yes, boy. Me. But now there are two of us, and you've made yourself an enemy. LeClarc doesn't forget easy, so you'd better be on your guard."

"I'll remember that, too," said Steve, laughing. "But it looks like you keep warning me about something all the time, Kevin. Why?"

"You're Charlie Stedman's kid brother, aren't you?"

"Yeah. Yeah, but how did—"

"How did I know, boy? It's written all over your face, and Charlie may have been with *Barling Interplanetary*, but a lot of us knew him. Charlie was the best, boy."

"Thanks. Kevin, how did Charlie die?"

The giant shrugged eloquently. "I don't know. It was T. J. who found him out on Ganymede. She was out tracking an anthrovac, and you don't track anthrovacs in crowds. Well, it seems Charlie had landed for Barling, and Charlie had the same idea."

"He never told me Teejay was a woman, but he said once she must have been reared in hell."

Again, Kevin shrugged. "It's open to question, boy. I don't like T. J., but I like working for her. You take a man like LeClarc, he'll die for T. J. All she'd have to do is ask him, and he'd die. You see, boy,

big game hunters don't come any smarter. Trouble is, T. J. knows it and flaunts it. Also, she's a woman but she's strong as a man and knows that, too. She dares you to fight her every step of the way, and it takes a big man to—"

"I thought you said Charlie was the best!"

"And I still do. But a man's got to have some flaws. Maybe he couldn't take T. J. and had to let her know. The same thing happened to you, after only five minutes. The gals have won their spurs in every field which was strictly masculine a hundred years ago. Men tend to resent that, especially when a talented woman like T. J. let's them know it, and no bones about it. So, that's T. J."

"Yeah," said Steve, frowning. "That's Teejay."

"What's the trouble, boy?"

"I've got to find out what happened to Charlie, that's all. But Teejay's going to be a problem."

"The grandmother of all problems, you mean. With all of that, though, she can still be all female when she wants to be. Maybe Charlie fell for her—"

"Charlie falling for that cheap, no good—"

"Careful, boy. She's my Captain, and a good one. I wouldn't ship out on the *Gordak* if I didn't think so. Careful." Then Kevin smiled. "You'll learn, in time. Anyway, Charlie was a good-looker and attractive to the girls, he was romantic—so maybe T. J. fell for him, too. Then they had a parting of the ways and—"

"Sure!" Steve exploded. "Sure, they fell in love or something only Charlie forgot to mention in any of his letters she was a woman. You're barking up the wrong tree, Kevin:"

"Maybe. Maybe not. I'm only talking off the top of my head, boy. But it's worth considering." Kevin jabbed a thick finger against his calloused palm. "What I'm getting at is this, whether they made love or not, I don't think T. J. would kill anyone out of cold blood."

"I'll think about it," said Steve, and then a whistle shrilled through the length of the ship. They were nearing the space-station, half as far from Earth as Luna, and deceleration came upon them gradually and would continue to increase until they all had to bed down in the accel-hammocks for landing.

Unexpectedly, Teejay herself was checking in the members of the expedition as their two-hour stop over at the station drew to an end. As he approached her along the gangplank, Steve looked down and saw the station-men wheeling the small but tremendously heavy plutonium bunkers under the ship, each compact unit weighing a couple of tons with its concrete shielding.

"Well, Stedman," said the woman, the broad black sand-cape wrapped around her completely now, as if only the members of her crew had the right to see what lay beneath it, "I see you've never watched a ship getting ready for blast off."

"That's right," Steve admitted. "First trip out."

"You want some pretty sound advice? I'd suggest you stay here at the station and wait for the first Earthbound ship."

"Thanks," said Steve. "But Mr. Carmical hired me at least as far as Mercury, so that's where I'm going."

Teejay grinned. "You're a plucky kid, Stedman. All right, Mercury it is—but LeClarc can do the honors when it's time to see you off the *Gordak* for good. He doesn't exactly like you, Stedman."

"I've been told that."

"All right, move along. There's a whole line of men I've got to check in behind you."

A plucky kid, Steve thought, and laughed. She'd called him that, although he knew she'd probably have a hard time matching his twenty-five years. Well, she'd spent her life in space and on the frontier worlds. Maybe that did make a difference.

Five minutes later, they blasted clear of the space-station on an orbit that would intersect the Mercurian ellipse at perihelion. From there, the *Gordak* would visit Venus, Mars, the planetoid Ceres, the four large Jovian moons. Titan and Uranus. Ten worlds in all the hunters would touch on—and each world would offer up its native fauna for the *Brody Carmical Circus*. Steve wondered if there'd be trouble with *Bailing Brothers Interplanetary*. There generally was. But then he smiled without mirth, for the chances were he'd never get beyond the first landing on Mercury, anyway.

THERE WERE fifty men in the *Gordak's* crew and another thirty-odd in the expedition, and a space ship being the complicated, labyrinthine device that it is, it wasn't too strange that Steve failed to encounter LeClarc until immediately before landing on Mercury. Then the *Gordak's* deceleration tubes had cut in and Steve found the most readily available accel-hammock in the general lounge. The Frenchman was stretched out on the cushions three feet from him.

LeClarc said, "This will be a terrible, hot place."

"I know. At perihelion, Mercury's not much more than thirty million miles from the sun." If the Frenchman wanted to bury the hatchet, fine.

LeClarc strained to raise himself on his elbows against the increasing deceleration. "Sure," he said, "a hot place. After you foul up, Stedman, my vote will be to leave you on the hot side instead of giving you passage to the twilight zone."

The Frenchman was being illogical and pointlessly childish. "I didn't ask you to fight with me," Steve told him. "Why don't we forget all about it?"

"If you want to, forget. I, LeClarc, never forget."

"By space, LeClarc—" the voice came from the other side of the lounge "—then you're a spoiled little child." It was the big Exec officer who spoke, Kevin McGann.

LeClarc did not answer. Kevin winked at Steve, then set his face grimly against the bone-crushing deceleration. Fifteen minutes later, they landed at Furnacetown. The names of the new frontier settlements, Steve thought with a grin, were as picturesque as the names of the old Wild West towns.

There was a huge, priceless matrix of ruby far below the surface near Furnacetown, and the frontier settlement existed to mine from it. But the place was named aptly, for here on the hot side of Mercury, the temperature was hot enough to melt tin and lead. A community of half a thousand hearty souls, Furnacetown shielded itself from the swollen, never-setting sun with a vacuum-insulated dome and a hundred million credits worth of cooling equipment. Even so, the atmosphere within the dome was a lot like New Orleans on a sultry summer day.

The mayor of the town, a man named Powlaski, met them at the landing field. "It's hot," said Tee-jay, offering her hand and shaking with the plump official, man-fashion.

"It's always hot, Captain Moore. At any rate, be happy that you've beaten Barling here this time."

"Oh, did we? Good. We'll need three asbestos suits, Powlaski. I never did trust plain vac-suits on the sunward side of this boiling mess of a planet. Say, has anyone got a cool drink? I'm roasting."

Someone wheeled out a portable refrigerator and the synthetic gin-and-orange stored therein tasted to Steve's thirsty lips almost like the real thing. Then LeClarc, who had ventured into one of the squat buildings with Powlaski's lieutenant, a middle-aged woman, returned with three heavy asbestos suits draped ponderously over his arm. Their combined weight was perhaps two hundred pounds, but it became negligible under Mercury's weak gravity.

"We're ready," he said, extending one of the suits to Teejay and helping her slip it on over her shorts and halter. This was the first time that Steve had ever seen her without the black cape, which seemed a sort of affected trade-mark.

"Three suits?" Steve demanded. "What for?"

"The third one's for you, Stedman," the woman told him. "I know your job is to see that the game stays alive in our bubble-cages, but I don't think it would hurt if you had a look-see at the stone worm in its own environment."

"That's not what I meant," Steve told her. "Why LeClarc?"

Teejay shrugged, zipping up the suit. "Because I said so, that's why. Also, LeClarc's something of an expert on the inner planets and he goes wherever I do, anyway."

"Sort of a bodyguard," the Frenchman purred, strapping a neutron gun to the belt of his asbestos suit. "Hey, who's got those helmets?"

And then Steve felt them slipping the thick, clumsy helmet over his head. Kevin stood nearby and the Exec looked like he wanted to say something, but Steve's helmet had snapped into place and from that point he could only talk by radio—and over the crackling interference of the swollen sun, at that.

Moments later, he'd stepped through an airlock at the side of the Furnacetown dome and plodded out on the surface of Mercury.

ON VENUS there was the thick, soupy atmosphere and the verdant tropical jungles. On Mars, the rusty desert and the ruins of an eon-old civilization. But on Mercury you knew at once that you trod upon an alien world. At perihelion, the sun swelled to almost four times its size as seen from Earth, and because Mercury's tenuous atmosphere had boiled off into space half a billion years ago, the sky was black. The sun had lost its spherical shape, too. Great solar prominences licked out at the blackness, and the visible corona seemed to swell and pulse.

Underfoot, Steve could feel the crunchy ground powdering beneath his asbestos boots with every step. And far off toward the horizon, a jagged ridge of blood-red mountains bit at the black sky like festering, toothless gums.

Before long, Teejay's voice sang in Steve's earphones. "Over here, you boys." And Steve could see her crouching, shapeless in the loose asbestos suit, off to his left. The sun's heat had parched a long, snaking crack in the surface and Steve lumbered over to it clumsily, letting his shadow fall across the crevice. "Those stone worms are umbra-tropic," he called, and waited.

"I don't wonder," said Teejay, looking up at the sun through the smoked goggles of her helmet.

The stone worms, Steve knew, were attracted by darkness—hence they generally dwelled in the deepest crevices, although a man's shadow might bring them to the surface. He'd never seen a stone worm, but he'd read about them and seen their pictures.

"You'll see something very unlovely," Teejay predicated. "The stone worm isn't a carbon-basic animal, but a silicate creature with a sodium-silicon-nitrogen economy. It's about four feet long and kind of like some ghastly white slug. It—hey, Stedman, get on your toes!"

The worm was coming.

It poked its head up out of the crevice first, and then the slug-like body followed, curling quite instinctively until the whole thing lay in Steve's shadow. Four feet long and a foot across at tite middle, it looked like the product of nightmare. The head was one huge, lidless, glassy eye—with a purple-lipped mouth where the pupil should have been! The mouth opened and shut like that of a fish, but when Steve lifted the monster by its middle and brought it out into the sun, the lips puckered completely shut and the white slug began to thrash dangerously.

But under the influence of the sun's heat it soon subsided. Trouble was, Steve thought vaguely as they made their way back toward Furnacetown with the quiescent monster, the sun's heat did not subside. Probably, it was his imagination, but the sun had seemed to become, if anything, stronger. He looked at the others, but they merely walked forward, completely unconcerned. Maybe he'd tired himself subduing the stone worm, for he knew that might seem to intensify the heat.

Inside his asbestos suit, Steve began to sweat. It did not start slowly, but all at once the perspiration streamed down his face and body.

It was then that his left leg began to burn. Down below the knee it was, a knife-edged burning sensation which became worse with each passing second. Someone had heated a knife white-hot, had applied its sharp point to the nerve-endings of his leg—and then twisted. It felt like that.

Screaming hoarsely, Steve fell, watched through burning eyes as the stone worm commenced crawling laboriously away. It was LeClarc who went after the worm and retrieved it, but Teejay knelt at Steve's side and, surprisingly, real concern was in her voice when it came over the radio.

"What's the trouble, Stedman?"

"I don't know," Steve gritted. "I'm hot all over—and my leg feels like it's on fire. Yeah, right there—ow!—go easy!"

Teejay frowned or at least Steve guessed she frowned by the way she spoke. "There's nothing much we can do about it, Stedman. Seems to be a hole—just a pinprick, but a hole—in the asbestos. It's a wonder you weren't screaming bloody murder before this. How's the air?"

It *was* getting hard to breathe, Steve realized, but dimly, for his senses were receding into a fog of half-consciousness. Something hissed in his ears and he knew Tee-jay had turned the outside dial of his

air-pump all the way over. It made him feel momentarily better, but the pain still cut into his leg.

"I've got the worm," said LeClarc. "But what happened to him?" He asked the question innocently—too innocently.

Teejay didn't answer. Instead: "Can you walk, Stedman?"

"I—I don't think so."

"Then I'll carry you. But remember this: if we get you back all right, you can thank the twenty-second century feminist movement. Can you picture an old-fashioned gal slinging a man over her shoulder and toting him away to safety like a sack of grain? Here we go.

And she got her arms under Steve's shoulder, tugging him upright and swinging him across her back in a fireman's carry. He felt in no mood to question her motive, but he could sense the triumph in her as if she had said, "See, I'm as strong as a man, and don't you forget it."

In spite of himself, he couldn't help responding to the unspoken challenge. "Sure," he said, "I can thank the feminist movement, but more than that I can thank Mercury's light gravity, Teejay. We're lucky I don't weigh more than fifty pounds here."

An hour later they arrived back at Furnacetown, but by then Steve was unconscious from the pain.

"**HOW ARE YOU** feeling, boy?" It was Kevin McGann, the battered, unlit pipe clamped tightly between his teeth as he spoke.

Steve sat propped up in a bed in the *Gordak's* infirmary, his left leg wrapped in bandages from knee to ankle. "Pretty good, I guess. Kind of weak, but there's no pain."

"You're lucky the Captain got you back here in time. Four inches of your calf was cooked third degree, but she carried you back here soon enough to cut it away before deep decomposition, and spray on syntheplasm. You'll be as good as new in a week, and no scar, either. Thanks to the Captain, boy."

"Yeah," Steve admitted. "Sure. But what I want to know is this: how did it happen?"

Kevin shrugged his massive shoulders. "I won't make any accusations, boy, not without positive proof. But I took the liberty to examine your suit, and it looked to me like someone had punctured a small hole almost all the way through. The heat did the rest."

"You mean LeClarc?"

"I never said that. But LeClarc was the one who got the suits, so he—more than anyone—was in a position to do something like that. Further than that I won't carry it. This is not an accusation."

"Suits me," Steve told him. "And thanks, Kevin. But after this, Frenchie had better watch his step. Are we out in space again?"

"Yes. Passed *Brennschluss* forty-eight hours ago."

"What?"

"Sure. They had you doped up for two days, till the syntheplasm had a chance to set."

"How soon can I get out of bed?"

"Depends. If you don't mind hobbling around on crutches, today probably. If you want to wait till you can walk, four or five days. What's your hurry, boy?"

"I've got to take care of that stone worm, remember?"

"Say, that's right! No one knew what to do, so they suspended it in a deep freeze until you could go to work. A hideous brute, I might add."

"Will you ask the doctor to give me some crutches? Swell. First, though, I'd like a good meal. And listen, Kevin—I guess Teejay saved my life, at that. Want to tell her I'd like to see her?"

"Of course," said Kevin, and left the white-walled infirmary, grinning from ear to ear.

By the time Teejay arrived, Steve was eating his first solid meal in two days. "Hello," he said. He almost found himself adding, "Captain"—but he checked the impulse just in time.

"McGann tells me you're ready to get to work today."

"That's right."

"Good. That stone worm won't stay in ice indefinitely—not when it lives on the sun-side of Mercury."

"Teejay, I want to—well, I want to thank you for saving my life."

The woman opened her cape, reached inside, took a pack of cigarettes from an inside pocket and puffed on one until it glowed. "Don't thank me," she said coolly. "It really isn't necessary. You're the only extra-zoo man aboard, Stedman, so we needed you. I'd have saved a valuable machine under the same circumstances."

"Well, thanks anyway."

"There's one thing more, Stedman. As far as I'm concerned, you haven't proven yourself yet. So the same conditions apply to our next landing point."

"Where's that?"

"Venus, of course. Do you think I want to play hop-scotch all over the Solar System? Well, you finish your meal and give that stone worm a nice comfortable bubble to live in." And Teejay departed.

LATER, AFTER he'd evacuated the air from one of the bubble-cages and increased the temperature to seven hundred degrees Fahrenheit, after he'd supervised a slow warming process for the worm and seen it deposited, still drowsy, in the bubble with sufficient quantities of silicon-compounds to keep it well fed, Steve hobbled with his crutches to the general lounge. Teejay sat there with half a dozen of the Venusian experts, for the hunt would be much more protracted on that teeming jungle-world. The woman stood up at once and crossed the floor to Steve. "How's the worm?"

"Fine." He always felt a little edgy and on his guard when the woman spoke to him.

"And how's the extra-zoo expert's bum leg."

"Coming along, I think."

Teejay turned to the six men seated around the lounge, said: "This is Steve Stedman, our extra-zoo man—at least temporarily Stedman, Phillips knows more about amphibians than any man alive, Ianello is our aboreal expert, Smith ferrets out the cave-dwelling mammals—we hope, Waneki goes floundering around after sea-monsters, St. Clair is—"

Then something buzzed shrilly on the adjacent wall, and Teejay flipped a toggle switch. "Captain here."

"Radio from Earth, Captain. Mr. Brody Carmical himself."

"Is that so?" said Teejay, her eyebrows lifting. "Give me a circuit." And, a moment later, "What's the trouble, Brody?"

The big man's voice came through faint and metallic over more than fifty million miles of space. "Plenty, T.J. Barling decided to start in the middle this year. Some of our—er, contacts told us his ship's rocketing for Ganymede, and fast. You'll have to get there first if you can, naturally."

"We'll get there," said Teejay, quite grim, and cut the connection.

Steve had time to think one thought before he was swept along in the general rush, crutches and all, after the woman galvanized into activity. She might take orders from Brody Carmical, but she even had a way with the big man, making him cow to her—perhaps unconsciously.

Teejay was yelling and pointing, it seemed, in all directions at once. "Hey you, Ianello, shake a leg down to the fission-room and tell 'em to start straining. Smith, get me Kevin McGann on the intercom. Waneki, you can forget all about those Venusian sea-monsters and tell the dots to be ready for plenty of acceleration cases. You better bed down right now, Phillips, you're not as strong as the rest of us, not with sixty years of junketing behind you. Hello, McGann? Listen, Mac, I want the entire crew assembled in General inside of ten minutes. Yeah, expedition too. Everyone but those boys down in fission. And tell your orbit-man to figure a way to get us off this trajectory and on a quick ellipse from here to the Jovian moons. Yes, that's what I said—the Jovian moons."

She paused long enough to take a breath and turn to Steve. "Well, Stedman, we'll be dropping down over your brother's grave on Ganymede before you know it. Maybe then you'll be able to remove that chip from your shoulder."

"Me? From my shoulder? Sister, you've got things backwards."

But the woman pivoted away, and Kevin's voice bleated over the intercom: "Crew and expedition—all to general lounge on the double! You boys in fission stay put, Captain's orders. This is urgent."

Almost before Kevin's voice had stopped echoing through the corridors, LeClarc popped into the lounge. "You wanted me, Captain? May I help?"

"I wanted everyone. Everyone can help. Just sit still till the rest of 'em get here."

LeClarc appeared hurt, but he took a seat in glum silence. In twos and threes the members of the crew began to drift in, wild rumors circulating among them in whispers. Finally, LeClarc counted noses and told his Captain that everyone except the fission crew was present.

Teejay nodded, stepped to the center of the floor. She removed her cape and dropped it, discarding it so suddenly and yet with such a polished flourish that a complete silence fell upon the large room almost at once.

She paced back and forth, her bare, lithe limbs flashing under the green-glowing wall panels. "You've all come to know that cape," she said, her voice strident and alive.

"It's a sort of affectation I have. But it's not necessary. Like everything that's not necessary, it must be discarded, at least temporarily. Men, we're in serious trouble."

Just like that, inside of a few seconds, she had them eating out of the palm of her hand. She went on to say that Barling's ship had already blasted off from the Earth for Ganymede, how, unless their efforts here on the *Gordak* were Herculean and then some, Barling's ship would reach Ganymede first. "And you all know what that would mean," she continued. "Like the elephant of two centuries ago, the Ganymeden anthrovac is the one solid necessity for any circus sideshow. But the anthrovacs have a way of going into hiding when they're disturbed. So, if Barling gets to Ganymede first, we've had it. We can all start looking for jobs after that, do you understand? I want full acceleration from here to Ganymede, as soon as we can get the new orbit plotted. Nothing but the immediate problem—to reach the Jovian moons before Barling—nothing else matters. If I tell you to work two shifts and go without sleep one night, you will do that. If I decide that a man must go beyond the shieldings in fission, he'll climb into a vac-suit and hope for the best. It's going to be like that, men, and I can't help it. I crack the whip and you jump. Any questions?"

She stood dramatically, hands on hips, somehow poised on tip-toes without straining, a tall, impressive and quite beautiful figure.

"Yes," said one of the orbiteers. "I have a question. Can I get to work on the new orbit at once?"

There were hoarse shouts of approval, some applause and a scattering of deep-throated laughter. Steve watched Teejay walk off her improvised stage, complete master of the situation. If it were humanly possible for the *Gordak* to reach Ganymede before Barling, they'd do it.

IN THE WEEKS which followed, Steve learned something of what the big Exec officer had meant that first day he had spoken about Tee-jay. She drove her men relentlessly and some of them may have resented it. But she drove herself as well, and once when a crewman had gone beyond the shieldings to repair the mechanical arms which regulated the flow of powdered plutonium fuel from the bunkers and had emerged with a serious case of radiation sickness, Teejay donned a vac-suit and went in herself to finish the job.

Most of the men liked her. Some, frankly, did not. But all of them knew they served under a captain as good as any.

Two days before landing on Ganymede, Teejay gathered her chief lieutenants for a final planning session. Kevin was there, and LeClarc, and a tall, wraith-thin man with a bushy head of white hair named Simonson, and Steve. Teejay spread a chart out and peered down at it intently. "This is Ganymede Northeast," she said, indicating the circled, central area of the map. "It is here that, for some reason, the anthrovacs gather. And here inside the circle is an area of one thousand square miles which Mr. Simonson has marked off—yes, Stedman, the red square. We'll be operating there. If the Barling ship has landed ahead of us, we can assume the same for them."

Teejay paused to light a cigarette, then crushed it out after her first puff. "The darn smoke gets in my way when I try to think," she smiled, and went on, "Anyway, here's the square. We'll be using the crew and the expedition—everyone aboard ship—because we're in a hurry. Simply put, we'll be a bunch of beaters to drive the anthrovacs together at the center of the square. Then, well, then it's up to Mr.

Simonson and Stedman. Any questions?"

"Yes, Captain," said LeClarc. "Just how do we get the anthrovacs aboard ship?"

"Don't ask me. But you might ask Mr. Simonson."

The bushy-haired man named Simonson grunted. "Umm-mm. There are several ways. We could set up elaborate traps, such as Thorndyke employed two years ago, and—"

"Can't," Teejay objected. "No time."

"Why don't we just clobber them?" LeClarc suggested. "A few might die, but we'll get the specimens we want."

Steve shook his head. "You don't know your anthrovacs. Chase them and they'll try to run away. But hurt them—just hurt one of them so the rest of them can see—and they'll swarm all over you until either all the men or all the anthrovacs are dead, or both. No, there's another way."

"What's that?" Teejay leaned forward, chin cupped in hands, definitely interested.

"Anthrovacs are non-breathers. Most gasses won't hurt them, but you can give them a good, old-fashioned oxygen jag with the slightest whiff of pure oxygen."

"I've heard of that," Simonson said.

"Sort of like getting them drunk, isn't it, boy?" Kevin wanted to know.

But LeClarc wasn't satisfied. "I still say we ought to clobber them. We can't waste time experimenting with any crazy jags."

"It's no experiment," Steve told him coldly. "It works."

"I still say we ought to—"

"Clobber them, I know," Teejay finished for him. "If there's any clobbering to be done, LeClarc, I'll let you know. Meanwhile, we're trying Stedman's plan. Any further questions?"

And, when no one spoke: "Good. Mac, I want you to let Mr. Simonson and Stedman pick three men to help 'em. You're to divide the rest of us into groups of half a dozen each, with each group serving under a leader. I'll give each leader a designated area in that square, so there won't be a lot of bumping around when we land on Ganymede. LeClarc!"

"Yes, Captain?"

"Take yourself a group of three idle technicians and check all the vac-suits. If there's any trouble, make sure it's repaired before we land. What are you gawking at me like that for?"

"I only thought—"

"What? What did you think? Speak up, man!"

"I thought you would have a job of more import for me. Had you, for example, decided that we ought to clobber—"

"Clobber, clobber, clobber! Will you shut up and get to work?"

"Yes, Captain." And more than a little stooped of shoulder, LeClarc left the lounge.

Teejay didn't pause for breath. "You, Stedman! What's so funny? What are you laughing about?"

"Nothing. It's just the way LeClarc—"

"Forget it, before *you* get clobbered."

GANYMEDE. After the landing, an unreasoning fear gripped Steve tightly.

It wasn't anything he could put his finger on, but he felt it gnawing at the fringes of his mind, probing, seeking, thrusting for a way in. There was nothing to be afraid of, and Steve smoked one cigarette after another while the six-man parties disembarked to take up their beater-stations on the edges of the square.

Ganymede, he recited to himself, is the largest satellite in the Solar System. 664,200 miles from Jupiter, it has a diameter of thirty two hundred and six miles, or bigger than the planet Mercury and almost as large as Pluto. It swings around Jupiter in a little over seven Earth days and in appearance the moonscape's enough like Luna to be a twin-brother, except for fat, bloated Jupiter hanging in the sky.

What was there to be afraid of? Steve didn't know. His brother had died on Ganymede—and the circumstances of Charlie's death still bordered on the mysterious. Well, he'd see for himself about that. Did the fear crawl around the edges of his brain because he thought Tee-jay was responsible? But that

didn't make sense, for to a certain degree he'd thought that all along. Unless the appalling thought of having to fight Teejay and her whole loyal crew had taken hold of him unconsciously.

"What are you moping about, boy?"

"Huh? Oh, Kevin. Nothing much, I guess. I—"

"You look to me like you've seen a ghost. What is it, scared?"

"Yeah. Yeah, I guess so."

"So what? Buck up, boy."

"I don't want to be scared, Kevin."

"Who does?"

"That's not what I mean. It's one thing to say that if you aren't—"

"Who isn't? Don't look at me, boy. And didn't you watch all the men trooping outside with the blood drained from their faces, and their eyes sort of big and too bright behind the face-plates? We're all scared."

"But why?"

"Mean to say you spent so much time on zoology and forgot about other things? Like, for instance, Ganymede-fear?"

"Huh? How's that?"

"Everyone is afraid, Steve. Everyone. Whenever a man gets near Ganymede, he suddenly becomes afraid. It's some sort of a psychological or maybe parapsychological phenomenon and none of the medicos could ever figure it out. It isn't the kind of fear that paralyzes, boy, but still, it holds on all the time a man's on Ganymede and it doesn't leave until he blasts off again. Didn't you ever hear about that?"

"No. That is, I knew it happened somewhere, but I forgot where."

"Well, that's all there is to it, boy."

"All! Don't you think it's enough? Something lurks out there, something makes people afraid, and we've never been able to find out why, but you say—"

Teejay came up and smiled at them, but there was something grim about her smile. "You can always tell when someone comes to Ganymede for the first time. He's jumpier. Just relax, Stedman. By the time they start beating the anthrovacs in toward the *Gordak* you'll be feeling better—and raring to go to work with that oxygen-jag stunt of yours, too." And she added, "Say, have you been watching your stone worm?"

"He sure has," Kevin told her. "He took me down there yesterday and that worm's been growing fat on all the sand he's fed it. Sand—for food, that's what the worm eats. Imagine how that would settle the over-population problems on Earth if people, too, could eat sand."

"Yes, and then—" Teejay was speaking again—but words, just words, and Steve stopped listening. It occurred to him all at once that they were engrossed in their meaningless conversation for one reason only—to keep the fear from their minds. If you thought about something else, the fear would retreat at least in part, and if you could hold a conversation about everything and nothing, that was even better.

Steve almost jumped off the floor when a metallic voice blared forth from the loudspeaker, echoing and re-echoing in the near-empty room.

"Captain! Captain, this is Moretti, Group Seven."

"Go ahead, Moretti," Teejay said into the mike. "I'm listening."

"Who the devil's on radar, Captain?"

"Why—no one! We forgot."

"There's a ship coming down. We can see it plain as day out here."

"What ship?" Teejay asked softly, but they all knew the question was totally unnecessary.

Moretti's voice jumped an octave as he cried: "It's Barling!"

WITHIN TEN minutes, all the beaters had been called in. Barling's big ship, the *Frank Buck*, snorted back and forth angrily on its landing jets.

"Are they gonna land or ain't they gonna land?" someone said as Kevin broke out the neutron guns and saw that every third man had one.

"Depends on their boss," said Kevin. "If he figures we can be scared off, he'll land. Otherwise, maybe he'll go away."

"Not that little stinker," Teejay told him. "Not Schuyler Barling. He won't go away. Will the fact that we're here first matter? It will not, for Schuyler knows we can't prove it. You ought to know better than to hope for that, Kevin. No, we can figure that Schuyler will move in on us."

"What happens then?" Steve demanded.

Teejay shrugged her bare, beautiful shoulders. "That I don't know. Schuyler may be a stinker and may be predictable, but he's not *that* predictable. Hey, it looks like the *Frank Buck* is coming down!"

The big ship, Steve saw, was doing precisely that. Its jets had been cut, and the ship fell like a stone. Twice its length separated it from the rubble-strewn pumice when the pilot kicked his jets over again, and something seemed to slap the *Frank Buck* back up toward the starry sky. The result was a first-rate landing.

"That would be Schuyler showing off," said Teejay wearily. "He must have been born in a tube and weaned on jet-slag, and he sure lets you know it."

Fifteen minutes later, Schuyler Barling and three of his officers entered the *Gordak*.

Barling got out of his vac-suit first, a tall, handsome man of about thirty, with short-cropped blond hair, pale blue eyes and petulant lips. "Captain Moore," he said, bowing slightly from the waist. Making fun of Teejay.

"Mr. Barling." As ever, the woman seemed cool and unruffled.

"With us," said Schuyler Barling, "it's in the family. I work for my father. Obviously, it means something to me whether he succeeds or not. But you, Captain Moore, you're a hired hand. You work for Brody Carmical, on a paycheck.

Therefore, your loyalty could not possibly be as strong as mine, and—"

"Get to the point!"

"We arrived here on Ganymede almost simultaneously. One of us will have to leave."

"It didn't look simultaneous to me."

Barling ignored her. "Yes, one will have to leave, because the anthrovac is frightened off easily and unless a hunt is carried on with the utmost precision and timing, no one will catch any anthrovacs."

"Go on," said Teejay. She spoke quietly, but Steve knew the woman well enough to realize her temper was coming to a boil, inside.

"My *Frank Buck* got here first," Barling told her blandly. "Therefore, you will leave."

"That's a stinking lie!" Teejay cried. "We were here first and you know it."

"Who can prove it? The *Frank Buck* landed first." Barling's hand flashed down to his waist, came up gripping a neutron gun. "If we have to, we'll force you to leave."

Teejay stood with hands on hips, facing him. "I know I'm not conducting myself like a lady, but then, this is the twenty-second century," she said, smiling—and struck out with her balled right fist. It bounced off Barling's jaw with savage force and the man stumbled back against the wall and crashed to the floor, his neutron gun clattering away. Barling shook himself, tried to rise. He got to hands and knees, then fell forward on his face.

Teejay whirled on his officers. "All right, get him out of here! Come on, move."

THE THREE men looked at each other. None of them did anything.

"You see, boy?" said Kevin, grinning. "That's our Captain and we'll fight for her. She won the beauty pageant five years ago in Ceres-town, and she can fight like a man. She's a woman for the stars, and we're proud to—"

"Shut up," said Teejay. "That won't get us anywhere."

By now, Barling had stirred, had come up, dazed, into a sitting position. He rubbed his jaw, winced. "Assuming we return to our ship, we still won't leave Ganymede. Not without our anthrovac."

"Nor will we."

"But you had to hit me! You had to flaunt your—"

"No one told you to draw your gun."

"—flaunt your Amazonian prowess."

"Stop sniveling, Schuyler. I think we'll have to reach some sort of a compromise, but I'll dictate terms, not you.

"Yes?" Barling growled up at her. "Who says we'll obey?"

"Oh, get up off the floor! You look so silly, sitting there and rubbing your chin.

Barling stood up, retrieving his gun but holstering it. Kevin watched him, toying with his own weapon—not pointing it at anyone in particular, but tossing it back and forth idly from hand to hand.

"Give us twenty four hours," said Teejay. "We'll look for our anthrovac. In that time, none of your men is to leave the *Frank Buck*. After that, you get twenty four hours, and we're confined to the *Gordak*. Then us, then you. And so on, till one of us gets his anthrovac. Then he pulls out and the other is left here. Is it a deal?"

Barling considered, said: "Well, yes—with one change. *We* get the first twenty four hours."

"No."

"Then you can forget your deal, Captain Moore."

"Well, then let's toss for it." Tee-jay reached into a pocket of her cape, flipped a coin to Steve. "Here, Stedman. You toss it."

"Who gets to call?" Barling demanded.

"Do you, want to?"

"Well—"

"Good. Then I will. Ladies first, you know. Go ahead, Stedman."

Steve tossed the coin, and Teejay cried: "Heads!"

Palming the coin, Steve flipped it over on the back of his left hand, peered at it. Staring up at him was the metallic likeness of Angus MacNamara, first man to reach the planet Mars. "Heads," said Steve, and one of Barling's officers came over to verify it.

Barling shook his head stubbornly. "How do I know it isn't a phony, a two-headed coin?"

Teejay glared at him. "That's insulting, Schuyler."

"Well, I'd like to look at it. How do I know—"

"You don't. But I said *it's* insulting. So, if you want to see the coin, you'll have to fight me!"

"Never mind," said Barling, climbing into his vac-suit. "You get first try." And all of them garbed in their vac-suits once more, the men of the *Frank Buck* departed.

"Get those beaters out again!"

Teejay was calling into her microphone, and Kevin grasped Steve's arm, said:

"Go ahead, boy. Look at the coin."

Steve did. It had two heads.

And later, Teejay said to him: "Listen, Stedman. All the beaters are out now, but frankly, I don't trust Schuyler."

Steve said he did not blame her, and Kevin was there to nod his red head.

"So, Stedman, the beaters have their jobs to do. That's almost everyone. But temporarily at least, it leaves you and Mac here with nothing to do."

"That's true," said Kevin.

"But not for long, Mac. Schuyler may try something, I don't know what. You two are probably the strongest men on this ship. I know what you can do, Mac—and I saw a sample of Stedman at work when he had that little run-in with Le-Clare. All right: you two hop into a couple of vac-suits. That is, if Stedman's ready to fight for us if he has to—"

Steve chuckled. "I don't go around carrying two-headed coins, Teejay, but I know a rat when I see one. I'll go, and your friend Schuyler better not try anything." Almost, he was surprised at his own words. Teejay had a way of commanding respect, and if he didn't watch himself, he'd be talking like Kevin soon. Well, perhaps the woman merited it. . . . His thoughts took him that far, and then he remembered Charlie. "I'll go," he said again, almost growling.

"But you still have a chip on your shoulder—well, never mind. I'll expect quarter-hourly reports from you two."

"You'll get them," said Kevin, and climbed into his vac-suit.

INCREDIBLY, Steve found himself out on the bleak, desolate surface of Ganymede, walking with Kevin past the long, silent length of the *Frank Buck*. And here, outside the confining walls of their spaceship, the Ganymede-fear seemed stronger. Steve felt it as something palpable, clutching at his heart and constricting it, bringing sweat to his forehead and clouding the inside of his helmet with moisture.

Fear—of what?

Not of the frontier world itself, surely. Not of some unknown menace lurking out among the crater-lets and ringwalls. No, for while Ganymede was not yet as familiar as Mars or Venus, mankind still had explored it extensively. There were the strange anthrovacs, animals which looked like over-sized and less brutish gorillas but which were not protoplasm creatures and which took their energy directly from sunlight and cosmic radiation. But that was all—no other life existed on Ganymede, and the anthrovacs on their frigid, airless world were something of an oddity.

Then what caused the fear? And was the fear responsible in any way for what had happened to Charlie?

"Hey, Steve—snap out of it!" Kevin's voice, floating in thinly on the intercom.

"Huh? Oh, yeah, Kevin. Sure. It's that fear, sort of gets you out here. You can't help it."

"I know. A ship seems to cut it off to some extent, boy. But it's around, lurking, waiting to get you."

"What do you mean, waiting to get you?"

"Well, not directly. But it makes you make mistakes. Men have died that way—paying so much attention to the fear that they didn't pay enough attention to whatever was happening."

"Kevin, do you know anything about how Charlie died you haven't told me?"

"Maybe. Maybe not. It's kind of vague, boy. Teejay went out alone and when she came back—why, she looked scared. That's common enough on Ganymede—everyone looks scared. But Teejay looked puzzled and confused also, and that's not like her. She wouldn't talk much for a time, and when she did she just said she'd found Charlie Stedman, your brother, dead."

"Where?"

"What do you mean, where? Out here on Ganymede, naturally."

"No, I mean exactly where. What was done with the body?"

"That I don't know," said Kevin, and Steve could picture him frowning inside his helmet.

"Well—listen, Kevin! Do you hear something?"

"Hear something? How can you hear anything on Ganymede, with no air to carry it? Except on the radio, of course. I hear you, but get a grip on yourself, boy."

"No. I hear something. There it is, louder. My God, Kevin! My God—" And clumsily in his vac-suit, Steve began running away across the pumice.

"Hey, come back! Back here, you crazy fool—" Kevin charged after him, taking long, ungainly strides in the light gravity. But Steve was quicker and soon the distance between them increased and Kevin realized he wouldn't be able to overtake Steve at all.

"Come back! What do you hear, boy? At least tell me that."

Steve told him, and ran on. Amazed, Kevin lumbered back toward the *Gordak*.

"But what made him do it?" Teejay demanded, later.

"I told you all I know, Captain. He said he heard something and started running. I chased after him, couldn't catch him. He told me what he heard."

"What?"

"Well, you won't like this, because it doesn't make sense. But he said he heard his brother—calling him. Charlie Stedman, calling."

"Charlie Stedman is dead." Suddenly, Teejay was curt, preemptory.

"That's what I thought, too."

"Forget it. It's the Ganymede fear, Mac. Somehow it got to Stedman stronger than it got to most people. Maybe his brother was hit that way, too. Maybe, right now, Stedman is off his rocker, running out across the pumice somewhere, shouting his brother's name into the soundless void of space."

"We'll have to find him," said Kevin.

"How can we, Mac? He's got air for five or six hours, and Ganymede is big."

"I'm going to take a set of shoulder-jets and go looking for him, Captain. I hope you won't try to stop me. I'm going either way."

Shrugging, Teejay went to a cabinet, handed Kevin a pair of shoulder-jets, which he strapped at once to his vac-suit. The woman took another suit and another pair of jets. "Once I heard voices out here on Ganymede, too," she said. "So did Charlie Stedman. They killed Charlie and they almost killed me. Enough's enough, Mac. I'm going with you."

THE RINGWALL was not very large. Slowed by his vac-suit, a man might cover its diameter in half an hour. But Steve did not traverse the circular area. Instead, he climbed the ringwall laboriously and then made his way down, tumbling and sliding, to the rocky floor of the shallow crater.

The voice came from within it—from within the crater. It could not be! He told himself that more than once. The rock of Ganymede itself might carry sound, but you'd feel it only as a throbbing through the soles of your boots, for the vacuum of space which encroached on all sides could not transmit sound-waves.

That was science. That was elementary. But the voice whispered in his ears, ebbing and flowing, first loud, then soft—and science be damned.

Charlie was calling. *I am Charlie Stedman. I am Charlie Stedman*— That was all, but it was enough. Charlie's name, and Charlie's voice. "It can't be happening," Steve said, aloud, and heard his own voice roaring inside the helmet. It drove the other voice, the impossible voice, out for a moment, but it returned. Around the inner, circumference of the ringwall Steve ran, seeking a source for the impossible. Sobbing, stumbling, he plunged ahead. It was only when he returned to his starting point, a needle-like pinnacle of rock that he realized his supply of air would be exhausted in three hours.

"He couldn't have gone much farther than this, Mac."

"We've got plenty of air, Captain. I'm not giving up—"

The two figures soared on spurting jets a hundred feet above the surface of Ganymede. When Teejay went higher every few moments, she could barely, make out the two spaceships, far away to the left. Occasionally she saw the beaters working in teams of six, cumbersome tanks of oxygen strapped to their backs.

"Did you hear the voice, Mac?" "No."

"Had Stedman been drinking?" "That's ridiculous. The boy was with us, and you saw for yourself." "True. And I've said that the voices of Ganymede are no strangers to me, anyway. Maybe I was trying to rationalize."

"We'll see when we find Steve." *If we find him.* The fear can make you do crazy things out here, Mac. Like going for too long without sufficient oxygen."

"That's what I'm worrying about."

A phonograph needle caught in one groove, spinning out its brief message over and over again—that was the, voice. *I am Charlie Stedman.* And the ringwall might have been the record, Steve thought bitterly, except that it was utterly deserted. He hadn't covered its entire rock-strewn area an army of searchers would be necessary to do that. But he had seen enough to convince him that—

The thought fled.

Coming toward him over the floor of the ringwall was a huge anthrovac, walking erect with a shuffling gait. Charlie's voice grew louder.

"It's no good, Mac. We can't find him."

"As soon as we turn back he's as good as dead."

"Our air won't last forever," Teejay said.

"He's got even less."

"Ten more minutes?"

"All right, ten. But why did you come out here with me if you're ready to give up so easy?"

"Who said I am? I'm trying to be practical, Mac. Listen, I saved Stedman's life once already—and

stayed out on the hot side of Mercury longer than a person should, too. I like Stedman, but if we ever find him, better not say that or I'll break your neck, hear? So I want to find him, but I don't want to sacrifice your life or mine in the attempt. Is that clear?"

Kevin said that it was.

A moment later, Teejay climbed higher. Half a thousand feet above the surface of Ganymede she circled. Abruptly, she leveled off at a hundred feet again, said:

"There's something over there, Mac. In that ringwall."

"What?"

"I don't know. Movement. A big figure and a little one. The big one seems too large for a man, but the smaller—well, let's go."

The anthrovac paused a dozen yards from Steve. There had been nothing hostile in its movements to begin with, and now it might have been a statue for all the activity it displayed. From crown of head to small, handlike feet, it stood almost a yard taller than Steve, but it did not have the great-muscled girth of a gorilla. Instead, it looked quite manlike, except for the incredibly broad shoulders, the thick, matted hair covering its entire body, the too-long arms, the nine feet of height.

Did the voice emanate from it? Now that the creature had approached him, Steve wasn't sure. The voice continued, pulsing and throbbing in his ears like the Ganymede-fear itself—but *in his ears*. Not from the bleak terrain around him, and certainly not from the anthrovac.

"I'm going crazy," he said, aloud, driving the voice away temporarily. "No. No, I'm not, because I realize it too soon. A crazy man doesn't realize it and doesn't warn himself about it—certainly not at the outset." But did that mean the voice had any real existence? How could it?

I am Charlie Stedman...

Smiling bleakly, Steve picked up a loose chunk of rock, tossed it at the anthrovac. The creature merely swung its huge body gracefully at the hips, avoiding the missile. Then it stooped, found a stone for itself, hurled it at Steve. He ducked, feeling completely and tremendously foolish. He should have been prepared, for the anthrovacs are playful and can mime almost any human action.

He did not duck in time. He felt the stone *thunk* against his helmet, peered with horror at the glassite inches from his face until he saw that it hadn't cracked. Grinning now, he shook his fist at the creature, watched it duplicate the motion with its great hairy hand. It was a game, Steve told himself, a lot like the meaningless conversation Teejay and Kevin had had to dispell the Ganymede-fear.

But if the anthrovac could mime human actions, perhaps the anthrovac could also mime voices! That would necessitate telepathic powers, naturally. But the anthrovac, like many denizens of terrestrial forests and tundras, changed its habits immensely in captivity. A captured anthrovac, one which had been reared with one of the circus troupes, could never tell you what a wild anthrovac was like. And a wild anthrovac, somehow living on airless Ganymede and taking its energy directly from cosmic and solar radiation, might be able to do anything.

I am Charlie Stedman...

Steve carried the thought to its logical conclusion. Suppose an anthrovac—this anthrovac which faced him now—had somehow heard Charlie speaking. Charlie might have been introducing himself to someone: "I am Charlie Stedman."

But the hypothesis wasn't much more than a bubble, and it burst completely when Steve remembered he was the only one who could hear the voice.

"Hey, Stedman! You trying to kill yourself?"

Steve whirled, looked up. Two figures, no more than vaguely human in their cumbersome vac-suits, hovered over him, jetting around in circles. The anthrovac had seen them too—and now, apparently alarmed by the twin forms floating just out of reach, the creature turned and bounded away over the uneven terrain.

"What gave you that idea?" Steve called into his intercom. "The anthrovac wasn't looking for trouble."

"I don't mean that, stupid." Tee-jay had a way of jarring him back to reality with a few words. "I mean, how much air have you left?"

Steve looked at the gauge. "Enough to return to the *Gordak*, provided I get on my horse."

"We'll walk with you, then," said Teejay, and dropped to the ground at his side. "I think I'll hold onto your arm, too. You're liable to go wandering again, and we might not be able to find you."

Kevin alighted, switched off his jets. "How about the voice, boy? Do you still hear it?"

"Why—no! But I did a minute ago, until the anthrovac ran away."

"That's peculiar."

"There's a lot that's peculiar out here on Ganymede, Kevin. I think—"

"Stop thinking and start walking," Teejay told him.

Less than two hours later, they reached the *Gordak*. A vac-suited man met them at the airlock, and Steve saw LeClarc's face through the glassite helmet.

"I'll bet you were worried," said Teejay.

"Sure," LeClarc answered, drawing a neutron gun from his belt. "See, my Captain, I'm so worried I can hardly think straight. Will the three of you please turn around and march over to the *Frank Buck*?"

They were too stunned to do anything else.

"DON'T MIND ME," Kevin said, within the *Frank Buck*. "If I'm confused it's merely because I can't believe this. Not you, LeClarc, not you."

They'd been ushered into the main lounge of the *Frank Buck*, a ship of about the *Gordak's* dimensions, but two or three years older. LeClarc stood there with his neutron gun, watching them carefully. In a few moments, Schuyler Barling joined them, a greasy salve covering the discoloration on his jaw. The jaw looked painfully swollen too, and Barling rubbed it speculatively. "I won't forget this," he growled briefly to Teejay, then turned to LeClarc. "Kevin McGann I know, but what about this man?"

"Stedman?" said LeClarc. "You'll want him, because he's the extra-zoo man on the *Gordak*. If you took McGann and the woman alone, they still might be able to do their work on Carmical's ship. But with Stedman your prisoner as well, their hands are tied over there."

"What is this?" Teejay demanded defiantly. "What's the meaning of—"

"Will you be quiet and let me do the talking?" Barling interrupted her. "It was LeClarc who radioed and told me your coin had two heads. If you wanted to play the game that way, I wasn't going to stand by and let you. So—"

"So," LeClarc took up the thread for him, "we got together, Mr. Barling and I."

"But you, LeClarc," said Kevin. "You'd jump through a fire-hoop into a pit of acid if Captain Moore told you to."

"Would I?" LeClarc chuckled softly.

"Yes. Yes, you would."

"Perhaps there was a time I'd have done that, McGann. Perhaps. But then I thought the Captain needed me, and wanted me to help her, too. Now, with you and Stedman—well, LeClarc isn't so important, is he?"

"So that's it!" Kevin roared. "You're jealous. Not jealous the way a man should be, when he loves a woman, but jealous because you believed Captain Moore had discarded you—had decided you weren't such an essential cog in the *Gordak* machine."

"Shut up." LeClarc took a quick step toward Kevin and hit him, hooking his left fist at the bigger man's jaw. Kevin staggered but did not go down. Bellowing, he charged at LeClarc, but the Frenchman waved him off with the neutron gun.

"Stop it, LeClarc!" Barling snapped. "I didn't have you bring them here to make a shambles of the lounge. Just stand off in the corner—that's right, there—and watch them. I'll do the talking."

"You realize, of course," Teejay told him calmly, "that this is kidnapping."

"Is it? Who is to say? You never entered the *Gordak*; LeClarc met you within the airlock. For all your crew knows, the three of you are out on Ganymede somewhere—with not much air left. After a time, they'll have to give you up as dead. With the Captain gone, and the Exec, and the expert on Extra-terrestrial zoology—their expedition won't amount to much. It looks to me like old man Carmical will be without a circus this year, unless he resorts to a strictly terrestrial shin-dig."

"What happens then?" Teejay wanted to know.

"Well, I'll be frank with you. I haven't decided. I can't simply return you to civilization, of course."

"Of course," Teejay echoed him acidly.

"Then you'd be able to holler 'kidnapper'. It would seem that you give me only one alternative.

Ah—excuse me a moment."

A trio of men had entered the lounge and the leader, a stocky man of about thirty-five, was beaming. "We've got three," he said.

"Splendid, splendid. In that case, nothing remains to keep us on Ganymede."

"Chief, I'm sure glad of that. This place can give you the heebies, and you never know why. Those three anthrovacs should be a fine core to build your circus around, though."

"Three anthrovacs?" Teejay cried, her composure fading for the first time. "You've got three anthrovacs?"

Barling nodded. "LeClarc here was good enough to tell us Stedman's plan. A first-rate idea, as you can see, only we were able to carry it out. Frankly, I wasn't so optimistic at first."

"Let's get back to us," Teejay suggested. "You were saying . . .?"

"Umm-mm, yes. There's only one alternative, and much as I regret—"

"What is it? What's the alternative?"

"Please, must I say it? I think you know, and there's no need for me to—"

"No, I want to hear it."

"Suit yourself," said Barling. "The only solution is this: we'll have to eliminate you."

"When?"

"The sooner the better. But Captain Moore, you're making me feel—"

"That's all I wanted to know!" Teejay cried, and hurled herself at Barling. "We might as well try to escape while we still have a chance."

AFTER THAT, things happened almost too fast for Steve to follow. Kevin got the idea at once, charging at LeClarc before the Frenchman had time to gather his wits. The neutron gun hissed violently, searing a three-inch chunk out of the ceiling. But then LeClarc was struck by two hundred pounds of Kevin McGann, and went down before the onslaught.

Something exploded against Steve's jaw and he did a quick flip and landed on his back. He'd hardly had time to declare himself in the battle, when one of Barling's men had jumped him. Now the man came down atop him, flailing with both fists, but Steve chopped at his face with short, clubbing blows and scrambled to his feet while the man caught his breath.

Steve didn't wait, plunging toward the man with murder in his eyes—and failed to reach him. An arm circled his neck from behind and he was dragged to the floor again, by the second of the three anthrovac hunters. He rolled over, saw Kevin and LeClarc off to his right, standing toe-to-toe and slugging. And beyond them, Teejay was cuffing Barling around the lounge with lusty, man-sized blows. Barling went down under the onslaught, falling at the woman's feet, but then the third hunter had grasped her swirling black cape from behind, throwing it over her head and tripping her. She fought blindly as she went down, taking the hunter with her; and with Barling, they became a tangled melee of thrashing arms and legs.

Steve rolled out from under the second hunter, but the first one met him halfway and pole-axed him down to the floor again with a hard right hand. Sobbing, clutching at the man's legs, Steve began to pull himself upright and got a knee in his face. He went down again, and this time everything in the room receded into a vague, shadowy fog.

When Steve could see again, there was still no order to the chaos.

He hadn't lived a violent life like Kevin or Teejay—such things were not part of his background, although he'd boxed in college and won the light-heavyweight championship, too. But there was something different, something elemental about a free-for-all brawl.

LeClarc lay on his back, supine. He looked out of it for the duration, which still set the odds at four to three against the trio from the *Gordak*. Right now Kevin held his own with the two hunters who'd done Steve in, at least temporarily. But that couldn't last, for both were big, muscular men. And Teejay?

She was a woman, so perhaps the-odds were even worse. Steve smiled grimly as he clambered to his feet to help Kevin. Teejay was a woman, but she was the new twenty-second century woman, and proud of it. The third hunter kicked and thrashed helplessly on the floor as she held him in a head-scissors and at the same time fended off Barling—who was crawling around them and looking for an opening. Teejay, definitely, was an asset.

Steve got to hunter number three quickly, pulling him off Kevin and straightening him with an uppercut. After that, it was a set-up. Steve pounded once and then again with his left hand at the man's midsection, then finished by crossing his right and feeling it crunch against the man's jaw.

"Now I see how you could take care of LeClarc that first day!" Kevin yelled, and promptly polished off the other hunter with a blow that lifted him completely off the floor.

As one, they whirled around to face the other side of the room. Barling and his henchman had finally got the upper hand. Teejay lay on her side, her hands behind her back. Not unconscious, she was completely spent, and an almost equally exhausted Barling was attempting to tie her hands with the black cape. The hunter sat there, dull-eyed, watching them. It was Kevin who lifted the hunter and hurled him away, and when Steve rolled Barling over and pushed him against the wall, the man did not resist.

Teejay climbed to her feet, unsteadily. "I—guess I'm growing—soft," she panted. "Maybe—I don't know—maybe training and muscle-toning from—infancy—aren't the answer. A gal just isn't cut out for rough and tumble fighting." Her hand flashed up to her forehead, the back of it resting against her brow. "Ooo, Steve, catch me—"

She fainted in his arms.

Somehow, they got Teejay into her vac-suit. The walls of the lounge were sound-proofed, and the struggle had attracted no one. Silently they made their way out of the lounge and through the corridors of the *Frank Buck*, heading for the airlock. Steve toted Teejay over his shoulder, and remembering Mercury, felt very good about it. He ached all over from the fight and he knew he'd need some mending. But she'd called him Steve, and that—suddenly and ridiculously—was most important.

"What's going on here?" A crewman met them in the corridor and bellowed his challenge.

Kevin raised the neutron gun he had taken from LeClarc.

He never used it.

A fraction of a second later, the *Frank Buck* blasted off from the surface of Ganymede, and sudden acceleration threw them all to the floor. As Steve was to learn later, no hands were at the controls. No *human* hands.

"THIS, ROUGHLY, is the situation," began Barling, pacing back and forth, speaking out of swollen lips and averting the right side of his face with its puffy cheek and blackened eye. "We are all in this together, and—"

"You hypocrite!" cried Teejay. "Six hours ago, you wanted to kill us. Now, because something unexpected pops up, you change your mind. Temporarily, for as long as you can use us, is that it?"

"No. If we can get out of this I'll forget about killing, provided you forget about kidnapping."

"Well ..."

"You haven't any other choice, Captain Moore."

"He's right," Kevin admitted. "But what's the trouble we're in, Mr. Barling?"

"Six hours ago you three jumped us and almost made your escape. But the *Frank Buck* took off; suddenly, without warning. *None of my men was at the controls.*"

"That doesn't make sense," Steve objected.

"I didn't think so, either. I almost don't know how to explain it, what I've seen with my own eyes after my men held you in detention here in the lounge."

"Why don't you begin at the beginning?" Teejay said, and yawned.

"Don't be funny. Somehow, the anthrovacs escaped from their bubbles and—"

"What?" This was Steve, more than slightly incredulous. "Anthrovacs are mild creatures and unless they're attacked they won't do anything violent."

"That's what I thought, Stedman. I don't know what to think now. The anthrovacs escaped—and

freed all the other animals. We've been out longer than the *Gordak*, we have a couple of dozen prize specimens. Lead by the anthrovacs, they've taken over the ship."

"Now you're joking," Teejay told him. "They're all brainless, those creatures, except for the anthrovacs."

"They *were* brainless, Captain Moore. But not now. Now they behave logically, with a purpose, and they've taken over the *Frank Buck* from stem to stern—all except those animals that need a special sort of atmosphere to breathe, and they've remained in their bubbles.

"Otherwise, the animals took over. And I suppose you can imagine—the crew was too astounded to resist, especially since the anthrovacs had gotten hold of neutron guns and seemed to know how to use them. Result—we've all been disarmed, we're prisoners aboard our own ship, and bound for I don't know where."

"Sounds crazy to me," Teejay said, and stalked toward the door.

Steve took a quick step after her, but Barling held him back. "Let her find out for herself, Stedman. Then maybe we can talk sense."

Teejay opened the door, stepped out into the corridor. Tensely, Steve waited, ready to bolt after her at the first indications of trouble. But what he heard was a yelp of surprise from the woman, and then she came running back into the lounge, slamming the door behind her.

"A Martian desert cat!" she cried. It didn't do anything; it just stood there, all ten feet of it, looking at me!"

"Then you believe me?" Barling demanded. "As I see it, we must have been struck by some cosmic radiation which mutated the animals, and—"

"No," Steve told him bluntly. "That's impossible. First place, any such change would have to be selective. *All* the animals wouldn't be affected. And more important, mutation takes generations to manifest itself. You never see the change at all in the original creature. Look at Earth, way back in the early years of atomics. Genes were mutated at those two Island cities—Nagasaki and, umm-mm, I forget the name of the other. Anyway, Genes were mutated, but it took over two hundred years for those mutations to become apparent. See what I mean?"

"I do," said Barling. "And that's precisely why I think we ought to fight this thing together. I had an idea, you helped me with it. We can continue like that."

"Well," Steve nodded, "we have a first-class problem on our hands. We can't do anything about it until we know what's going on—only the mystery's a little deeper than you think. First, I heard a voice out on Ganymede. My brother's voice."

"Your brother's?" Barling scratched his head, "Oh, wait a minute! You must mean Charlie Stedman who was killed out here a few years back?"

"Yeah, Charlie. You can't hear voices on Ganymede, but I heard them, inside my head. Also, don't forget the Ganymede-fear. I'd say the three things will fit together when we begin to learn what's going on."

"Provided we can find out," Tee-jay told him. "You can keep your scientific mysteries for a while, Steve. What I want to know is this: where are we going, and why?"

"Ask your desert cat out there." Kevin's laughter was sour.

"What we need is a good turncoat," Teejay assured him. "Some, one who can go out among the animals and ask questions. I'm joking, of course, but if anyone could do it, it would be that rat, LeClarc."

Steve frowned. "That's not as funny as it sounds. Has anyone seen LeClarc since the fight?"

"No!" Kevin slammed fist against palm.

Steve was about to answer, but quite suddenly the lights blinked out. Somewhere outside, a dozen animals roared their fear. Within the lounge, Kevin commenced cursing lustily and an involuntary moan escaped Barling's lips.

The darkness was the bleak, utter black of deep space. Further, Steve realized, the steady humming of the fission engines had ceased.

Minutes later, impossible pain gripped him and flung him, sobbing to the floor. He'd never felt anything like it, a gripping, grinding, twisting torment which tried to turn him inside out. He heard the

others dimly, reeling about the lounge and falling to the floor, and in the darkness someone fell near him.

"Steve? Steve, is that you?" Tee-jay . . .

"Yeah." The pain seemed to come in waves, and Steve gritted his teeth when the second turned out to be worse than the first. He reached out with his hand, found Teejay's and squeezed it. "Hold on, kid. It can't last forever."

"It better—not."

When her hand tensed in his, then relaxed, Steve knew she'd fainted. And soon after that, his own senses reeled and deserted him.

Teejay's hand was still tightly clenched in his when he regained consciousness. A dozen feet from them, Kevin sat up, shaking his head slowly back and forth. Schuyler Barling lay stretched out on his stomach.

"Whatever happened," Kevin growled, "I didn't like it."

Teejay extricated her hand, looked at Steve, smiled. "It's still awful quiet outside."

It didn't remain that way for long. As if Teejay's words had been a signal, a voice boomed at them from the wall-microphone. "We have landed. All humans will please file out into the main corridor in an orderly fashion and make their way to the airlock."

Schuyler Barling sat up groggily.

Teejay said, "I could swear I know that voice from somewhere."

"And I," Kevin told them. "It's familiar, though I can't place it."

Steve felt his heart pounding. The voice was Charlie's.

THEY STOOD on a flat, grassy plain which stretched halfway to the horizon and then began to undulate into low hills. And far off, shrouded by purple mists, a range of mountains loomed distantly.

Purple mist; a purplish cast to the sky; a fiercely bright blue sun. "What world is this?" said Kevin.

The crew of the *Frank Buck*—a hundred men—stood in a long, thin file outside the ship. They'd balked at first, but silently, the three anthrovacs had ferreted them out with their neutron guns, never uttering a sound, merely motioning with the weapons. Of the other animals Steve saw nothing, but within the corridors of the *Frank Buck* he'd encountered a sand crawler and a desert cat, both dead.

The seconds fled, became minutes. When half an hour had passed, the crew became restless and some of them ambled off on the grassy plain until one of the anthrovacs herded them back. The *Frank Buck's* Exec, a short, wiry man, strode within the ship and came out a few moments later, scratching his head. "I can't understand it," he said. "None of the instruments work. I thought we could just pile back into the ship and blast off, but apparently someone has other ideas."

Someone did.

Someone came striding across the plain, a small dot of a figure at first. He came closer.

Steve ignored the anthrovacs, ran forward. "Charlie!" he cried. "Charlie!"

The man was shorter than Steve, and stockier. His eyes searched Steve's face briefly, and he said: "Should I know you?"

"Should you! I'm your brother!"

"Interesting, but quite impossible."

The words hardly registered, and Steve babbled on, "We thought you were dead. It was Teejay here who reported back to Earth saying you'd died on Ganymede. Now you're alive and—" Abruptly he whirled, turned to Teejay. "You lied, damn you! Here's Charlie, see? Charlie was never dead, But you said—"

"I said Charlie was dead." The woman met his gaze levelly. "He was. I know a dead man when I see one. He was dead."

"But—"

"But nothing. I don't know who this is. I can't explain it. That has nothing to do with what happened on Ganymede years ago."

"Yes? Then what did happen? Why did Charlie write once that you must have been spawned in hell? You never did want to tell me what happened on Ganymede, did you? Maybe Charlie can."

"That is my name, Charlie Stedman. It is the name this body has always had, although when I do not inhabit it I assure you I am not Charlie Stedman," the stocky man said. "You see, the original inhabitant of the garment—the body—was destroyed. The name applied to the body as well as the inhabiting mind. The language remained engraved in the brain cells, and impersonal parts of the memory, too. In that sense, I am Charlie Stedman. Does it satisfy you?"

"Hell, no," said Steve, bewildered. Mystery had been piled upon mystery, with no solution in sight. And grim confusion turned to grimmer anger as he faced Teejay once more. "All right, start talking. Just how did you find Charlie? And what made him hate you like that? Talk, damn you!"

"Okay, I will. But I don't know why Charlie hated me, and that's the truth. I only met him once or twice and—unless it was Schuyler here. Hey, Schuyler!"

Barling joined them. "What do you want?"

"Answer this question: do you make a practise of poisoning the minds of your crew against me?"

"Well, I don't know what you mean by poi—"

Teejay grabbed a handful of his shirt and twisted, constricting the collar about his throat. "Answer me," she said. "And no run around."

"I—I guess so. It's only business, Captain Moore. The more they hated you, the more they'd be willing to fight you in the hunt every step of the way."

"How about Charlie Stedman?"

"I don't remember. Probably, it was like that."

Teejay flung him away from her. "Does that satisfy you, Steve?"

"For that part, yes. But what about the rest of it?"

"Not much to tell. I was out alone on Ganymede, a few miles from the ship. I thought I heard voices, sort of inside my head. I went forward to explore, just like you did, and also like you, I almost didn't have enough air to get back. Especially since I found your brother on the way."

"And he was dead?" As he spoke, Steve looked at his brother, standing right there in front of him, and wondered if anyone ever asked a more impossible question.

"Yes. He was dead. I don't know how he died, but I placed my ear against the chest of his vac-suit. The heart-beat is amplified through it, you know. But there wasn't any. After that, I ran back to the *Gordak*, and I had barely enough air to make it. I reported Charlie's death, of course."

Charlie's death. Well, she sounded sincere. But there was Charlie, standing two paces to her right and apparently listening to an account of his own demise.

CHARLIE CLEARED his throat. Quite evidently, it wasn't Charlie at all, but Steve could think of the man in no other way, for down to the smallest physical detail, he was Charlie. "That will suffice," he said. Again, it was Charlie's voice, but expressionless. "Enough of bickering. You will all march with me toward those hills, and we have a long journey before sunset."

The nine-foot anthrovacs took up their positions one on each side of the column and one behind it, and no one disobeyed. Once Steve looked back over his shoulder and saw the purple mists had almost completely swallowed the *Frank Buck*.

Then the irony of the situation struck Steve and he smiled—almost. He'd come to Ganymede after anthrovacs. But he'd left the satellite under an anthrovac guard! Fine thing. A mighty hunter was he! Clear across the universe to be bagged by his own game!

Obviously, Steve thought as they marched on, the blue day-star was not Earth's sun. Somehow, in a matter of moments, they'd left the Solar System entirely. He knew that theories had been advanced about traveling through something called sub-space, something which could make flight to the farthest stars almost instantaneous, since sub-space existed outside the space-time continuum. And that wrenching from one spatial plane to another might explain the tremendous pain they'd undergone, too. But surely the *Frank Buck* had never been equipped for such flight. The whole concept of sub-space flight was strictly theoretical and hadn't even reached the drawing-board stage.

Then how had it happened?

Kevin had some vague, half-formed ideas on the subject, and he leSteve know about them. "It's a

puzzler, boy. They took us a long way, space alone knows how far. I don't pretend to know why; we can't figure that out, not yet. But I know this: they could not have done that without help. Someone had to bring the ship."

"The anthrovacs?" Steve suggested.

"Not the anthrovacs. For all their handling neutron guns and taking the *Frank Buck* over, they're just big apes to me. Maybe they were able to take the ship off Ganymede, but no more than that. They had help, boy, and from the inside."

"Who? Who do you mean?"

"I'm not sure I know. But look at it this way. The *Gordak* wasn't taken, the *Frank Buck* was. Why? I'll tell you why, or at least I'll tell you one possibility. There were scores of men on each ship, but while the *Gordak* had only one animal—the stone worm you got on Mercury—the *Frank Buck* had dozens. All right so far, boy? Well, here's what I think: *whoever took the ship wanted both men and animals.*"

"I still don't understand."

"I'm not sure I do, either. Let's get back a little. The *Frank Buck*, not the *Gordak*, was taken. Strange, isn't it, that just before that happened LeClarc bolted our ranks and joined the enemy! Does that mean LeClarc had to be on the *Frank Buck* before anything happened? And where'd he get to, anyway? I haven't seen him since the fight; I don't think anyone has. Now, a man spends years idolizing a woman—I've been around, and I think I told you LeClarc would have done anything for Captain Moore. Suddenly, he gets sulky because he's out of favor with her, and decides on a double-cross.

"It smells bad, boy. Sure, he was sulky, but the LeClarc I knew would have come crawling to Captain Moore, anyway. This one didn't." Kevin paused, ran a hand through his red hair. "Maybe it means he isn't the same man. Maybe it means he's something like that thing which calls itself your brother. That's not Charlie Stedman and you know it. Trouble is, boy, you can't admit it to yourself."

"I won't argue about it," Steve replied. "But you're off the beam there. Charlie doesn't remember me, but LeClarc's memory seemed fine."

"That's true, Steve. I can't explain it, except like this: whatever happened to both of them, we don't know a thing about it. Maybe it works in a different way on different people. Maybe because Charlie was dead first, his personal memories were a loss, but LeClarc's weren't because he might have been possessed alive."

"Possessed?"

"Yes, possessed. Oh, not by spirits, that's for sure. But possessed nevertheless. I won't say the anthrovacs were possessed, for we don't know enough about them to begin with. But look at those other animals now, the ones that died. You won't deny that something took over their brains?"

"Damned right I won't. But I still don't see how it all adds up."

"Nor do I," said Kevin. "Unfortunately, the brutes seemed to have perished in transit from Ganymede to here, wherever here is. It could be that the strain on their brain-tissue, with sentience and intelligence taking over where before only sentience had resided, was too great."

Kevin paused, then concluded: "whatever the reason, whatever the reason for all of it—I think you'll find LeClarc knows all about it."

The blue sun had neared the horizon and the purple mists had become cool and chilling at journey's end. It was then that they saw LeClarc.

THE COLUMN of men had traversed the grassy plain, had climbed steadily, through the region of undulating hills. And suddenly, hidden until the last moment by a rise in the terrain and spread out at the foot of the higher mountains, they saw a city. Circular, walled, pleasantly pastel-tinted despite the purple gloom, it lay before them, lights which might or might not have been electricity winking on to dispel the gathering darkness.

And there, at the city's gateway, stood LeClarc. LeClarc—and not LeClarc. The man seemed as much LeClarc as the short stocky figure who led the procession seemed Charlie Stedman. "Welcome to Uashalume," he said, and Steve pulled up short at the sound of his voice. There was something of the

volatile Frenchman in it, but something else which was alien.

"You will be billeted in temporary quarters for the night," LeClarc continued. "You will of course have no need for such quarters after tomorrow's bazaar."

"Of course, my foot!" Teejay cried petulantly. "See here, LeClarc, we've been getting orders and directives without knowing what they mean or why they were given or—"

"Must you be so impatient?" LeClarc's smile was almost devoid of mirth. "You've come one hundred thousand light years, and surely you can wait until morning."

"Light years!" This was Steve.

And Kevin, "One hundred thousand!"

The academic problem didn't bother Teejay as much as the human one. She said, defiantly, "What he needs is a good swift kick."

LeClarc failed to wait for that, or anything else. Chuckling, he led the first anthrovac through the high-arched stone gateway and the other two creatures herded the humans in after him.

Charlie—although obviously, the man was not Charlie—went on ahead with LeClarc, and Steve had to restrain Teejay with a few terse words.

The purple mists cloaked the city completely now, and as they plodded along a wide roadway, Steve half-saw 'figures watching them from the darkness. He could not make the figures out, however, and he heard nothing but the sounds their feet made on the stone roadway.

Presently, they came to a smaller, divergent path which led back to the base of the wall. Here, in deepest shadow, was their destination—a squat, rectangular building carved from stone. A gate creaked and clanged open before them; they streamed through, weary after hours of forced march; the gate clanged resoundingly behind them. Charlie had not entered with them, nor LeClarc, nor the anthrovacs. It took Steve only a moment to discover the gate had been securely fastened from the outside.

"I guess we bed down here for the night," he said, grinning ruefully.

Teejay shrugged, wrapped the black cape tightly about her. It was cold and damp in the one large chamber which took up the interior of the building. In the center of the place stood a stone table, and on it a gas lamp which flickered and spluttered and cast grotesque shadows as the men wandered about. There were no beds, no furniture of any sort except for the table. And the two small peep-hole windows were fifteen or more feet off the ground.

The crew of the *Frank Buck* gathered in small, anxious knots and whispered grimly among themselves. After a time, men circulated between one group and another, and finally one of them, evidently designated as spokesman for the rest, approached Schuyler Barling.

He seemed nervous, frightened, unsure of himself. "Captain Barling, my name's Steiner, and the fellows thought that—well, that I might speak for them. We don't know what's going on, but we do know this much: we don't like it."

"I can't blame you," said Barling.

"Point is, sir, we want you to do something about it."

"Eh? Me? What can I do?"

"We don't know that, sir. But a spaceman's a peculiar individual; some say he's got characteristics you won't find elsewhere, and one of them is this: he has complete confidence in his captain."

"Why, thank you, Steiner."

"Me, I work in fission. I like to have that confidence and the rest of the men, they like to have it too. When they lose it, they're kind of at a loss. We don't want to think we've lost it here, sir."

"What do you want me to do?" Barling was restless, fidgety, twisting his hands together.

"Lead us, sir. Tell us you can get us out of here. Tell us we must be prepared to fight behind you and maybe to die, but lead us."

"But how can you expect me to lead you when I don't know what's 'happening? How can I plan for escape when I don't know what it is we have to escape from?"

"There's talk among the men, sir," Steiner went on. "Some of them are for you, although be frank. There aren't many, sir. But they need a leader, all of them agree on that. What they want to know is this: are you their man?"

Barling squared his thin shoulders arrogantly. "I'm the *Frank Buck's* Captain.

"The *Frank Buck* lies behind us in those purple mists, sir. Could you find it? Finding it, could you make it run again?"

"I don't know."

"Then the fact that you captain the *Frank Buck* doesn't mean much. We've decided that leaves us without a leader, sir. We need a leader."

Barling smiled coldly. "Are you trying to tell me the men have selected you?"

"No, sir. I'm not. But the 'majority of the men have their choice —and that is Captain Moore. We who have been with the *Frank Buck* longest have heard a lot of bad talk about Captain Moore, but that changes completely whenever we make planetfall. The talk in all the frontier towns is all in Captain Moore's favor. When there are decisions to be made, sir, we'd like her to make them."

"A woman? When all your lives may be at stake?"

ONE OF THE three hunters who'd fared so poorly in the lounge fight strode forward, saying: look at yourself, sir. You're beaten and battered, and that's Captain Moore's work. Did her sex matter then?"

Barling reddened, said nothing.

"We have a pressing need for a leader," Steiner continued. "Our behavior cannot be chaotic. The leader must plan for us, and we must be prepared to carry out those plans with no hesitation. We must have faith in our leader."

Teejay joined them, grinning. "Thank you, Mr. Steiner. There was a time not long ago when what you've just finished saying would have meant more to me than anything. Literally, more than anything. But would you think it strange if you hear that I don't think that now?"

"What do you mean?" Steiner demanded.

"I'm a twenty-second century female, strong as a man and proud of it. *Too* proud, Mr. Steiner, for I've spent my whole life trying to prove it. Plenty of men have cursed me for it, I'll bet, and I guess they were right.

"So I don't want that job you offer. It took a kind of free-for-all brawl to make me realize it, but a woman's still a woman, and that's one thing I had to learn. I fought your Captain Barling and I beat him. Probably, I could do it again' But I—well, I was fighting with Captain Barling and saying to myself all the time, 'This is stupid. What are you—a girl—doing this for? Don't you know you shouldn't go around fighting like a man?' " Steve noticed in the dim light that Teejay had begun to blush. "I hate to bare my life before you like this, Mr. Steiner, but the way it adds up I've suddenly found I've had enough of fighting and galavanting around. So the answer is no: I won't be your captain. The way I feel now, I can't be."

"Where does that leave us?" Steiner asked her sullenly. "We don't think Captain Barling can do the job, whatever the job turns out to be. It's one thing to serve on a largely automatic ship under Captain Barling, but another thing to have to take his orders here—wherever we are."

"May I make a suggestion?" Teejay asked. And, after Steiner nodded and most of the men grumbled their assent: "There are two men here who can lead us the way we should be led. One is Kevin McGann, Exec of the *Gordak*; the other is Steve Stedman."

A stir of surprise passed among the men. It was one thing to offer their allegiance to the Captain of another ship—and an unusual thing at that—but quite another to offer it to a couple of men they hardly knew. The men began heated discussions once more, louder this time, and Teejay drew Steve off into a corner.

"Does that surprise you?"

"It sure does, Teejay. On both counts. But I'll tell you this: I think I could like you a lot better in your new role, and—Teejay?"

"What?" Her voice was soft and he felt her hand snuggle into his.

"I—I like you plenty right now." He slid his arms around her waist, drew her toward him, one small part of his mind expecting a roundhouse right-handed wallop from the old Teejay. But she merely sighed contentedly and slipped her arms around his neck. He kissed her—tentatively at first—then long and deep, and Teejay's eyes were all aglow when he finished.

"You lug," she said, "if you didn't do something like that, and soon, I was going to be an Amazon just once more to make you do it."

Someone—Steve saw it was Steiner—stood before them clearing his throat. "Captain Moore?"

"Yes?" Teejay hardly saw him.

"The men have decided to accept your recommendation. McGann and Stedman it is, Captain Moore. They bark and we'll jump. And we'll be hoping something comes of it."

"If it's at all possible, they'll get us out of here," Teejay predicted, and squeezed Steve's hand.

"Any orders, sir?" Steiner looked at Steve.

"Umm-mm, no. Except that we'd like to have this corner to ourselves for a while."

"Done," said Steiner, smiling and striding away.

"I have one order," Kevin called out loudly, and silence fell on the room quite abruptly. "Let's all get the hell to sleep before we're too tired to do anything when morning comes."

A PURPLE-BLUE dawn crept in through the two small windows, bringing strange bird-sounds with it. Steve was stiff and chilled and he'd slept badly on the hard stone floor. The groans and frowns all around the room showed him he wasn't the only one. Teejay slept like a baby, the cape wrapped about her, and she didn't arise until one of the men began to bang on the Stone and metal door.

"Is it morning?" said Teejay, coming into Steve's arms almost before she was fully awake. "I had the nicest dreams, darling!"

Abruptly, Steve whirled away from her. The door had begun to creak in ponderously on little-used hinges.

An anthrovac bent and came within the chamber, bearing a bath-tub-sized bowl of what looked like hot, steaming cereal. It was deposited near the table, along with a dozen or so stone spoons. Foolishly, one of the men darted for the doorway. Reaching out with a long, hairy arm, the anthrovac scooped him up by the scruff of the neck and flung him back inside. He got to his feet with a nasty gash on his forehead which Teejay bandaged with a strip of cloth ripped from the hem of her black cape.

The spoons were passed around after that, and the men of the *Frank Buck* dug into the gruel with gusto. It had been fifteen hours since any of them had eaten and surprisingly, the gruel turned out to be quite palatable, with an appealing, nutlike flavor.

The anthrovac waited fifteen minutes, then lifted the huge bowl and departed with it. But the door didn't close fully.

Charlie Stedman came through it.

"Good morning," he said. "We're a little late, and we'll have to hurry if we want to reach the bazaar in time for opening."

"Are you sure we want to?" Kevin demanded sarcastically.

And Steiner suggested: "Maybe you'd like to answer a few questions first."

"Sure." This was Teejay. "About a thousand questions."

It was as if the man hadn't heard them at all. "Outside a vehicle awaits you. There is room for all, provided each man occupies one of the squares you will find marked off on the floor. Let's go."

Angry, sullen, but still thoroughly bewildered, the men trooped outside.

The vehicle was a sort of bus, although the noise of a gasoline engine or the purring of a fission engine would have shocked Steve here on the world called Uashalume. As it turned out, the bus started with a whining whistle which quickly climbed to the supersonic and faded beyond the level human ears could reach. Within the vehicle there were no seats, but the floor had been divided into two-foot squares, a thin white line marking off each box. When each man had occupied his square, the bus slipped away from the squat building and was soon streaking down the roadway at a good clip.

Steve saw other buildings, most of them squat and shapeless. And now, with the coming of daylight, he could see some of the inhabitants of Uashalume. He'd steeled himself for it. He hadn't expected human beings. Any variety of six-legged, multi-tentacled, bug-eyed creatures would have been strictly in order.

He gasped.

He got more than he bargained for. Hardly two of the creatures gazing in at them were alike! The

differences were not those you might expect to find among the members of a particular species. The differences were *extreme*.

A furry thing hovered alongside the open-windowed bus on six gauze-like wings.

Multiple eyes stared up at them out of a pool of amorphous protoplasm.

A bony, stick-like creature with four arms and one cyclopean eye covering almost its entire head peered at them.

An ecto-skeletoned monstrosity made clicking noises as they passed.

Big horrors and little horrors.

Steve found himself laughing harshly. What did all his knowledge of Extra-terrestrial zoology amount to now? Extra-terrestrial — that meant the Solar System, one tiny, inconsequential corner of a great galaxy. But here, here on Uashalume, denizens of a hundred Solar Systems might have been gathered.

Why?

Such utterly different creatures—each conforming to a particular environmental niche—would not be found together. Unless someone had probed the depths of space for life-forms that might all be capable of surviving on. Uashalume, as, indeed, humans could survive there! But why? The question returned, taunted him. Again, such a gathering wouldn't be out of direct choice. If each of the creatures seemed so completely strange, so horrible, so ludicrous to human eyes—they probably appeared that way to one another as well.

Steve wondered how some of them might describe the obnoxious, featherless, hairless bipeds which walked upright on two limbs and carried two other limbs for more varied purposes than walking. Bipeds which called themselves humans. And that, precisely, was the point. Such a gathering stemmed from no natural cause. Such a gathering had been imposed arbitrarily, but for what purpose? And what, if anything, did the bazaar have to do with it? A bazaar of the worlds, bringing together for trade, creatures of every form and size and color? Steve doubted that somehow, for the bazaar would lack a universal means of exchange, and even if barter were resorted to, how could totally alien life-forms assess the value of completely foreign produce? They couldn't.

That left Steve with nothing but a lot of half-formed questions and no answers at all.

He had a hunch he'd begin to get some answers when the bus reached its destination. As with the inhabitants of Uashalume, he was to get more than he bargained for.

THEY MILLED about in confusion on a large raised platform under the blue sun. A sea of impossible creatures rolled and seethed on all sides of them, shutter-eyes, pin-hole eyes, simple lightsensitive receptors, multiple-tube eyes—hundreds of varieties all intent upon them.

Steve heard voices around him on the platform, confused, alarmed. "What's happening?"

"This place looks like an auction block!"

"Look at those creatures, will you?"

"Are we for sale or something?" The human voices faded into a meaningless babble. Someone else was speaking, but not aloud. It was like Charlie Stedman's voice, that day on Ganymede. Steve heard it inside his head and this time—because they all stood about more bewildered than ever—he knew that the *Frank Buck's* crew heard it too.

"Friends of Uashalume," the voice purred mentally, "here, at opening day of the bazaar, we have a most unusual treat. Most unusual. Two of us, as you know, have already tested the models in question, and we find them entirely satisfactory."

Charlie Stedman and LeClarc stepped forward, bowed.

"For the rest of you, one hundred choice specimens! We set no fixed price, but let this be said about the new garments. They are unspoiled, virgin material; they've not been used-before. You'll find them stimulating for that reason alone, I'm sure. As for the vital statistics, they vary in height from three and a half to five *klars*; in weight from fifteen to twenty-nine *jarons*; they are a bisexual lot, although only one

female of the species is present; their intellectual capacity is on the seventh level, their better minds can attain to problems of relativity and universal field; emotionally, they have twice the range of any previous garment!"

The voice paused significantly, permitted that point to sink in. "Yes, twice the range. We none of us have ever experienced such strong, vital emotions. Can you imagine, twice the emotional range of the *scouradi* of Deneb XIX! It means a new way of life for those among us who select some of these humans for their own.

"Now, the auction-master will please step forward."

"We *are* for sale," Steiner gasped.

It was Charlie Stedman who came to the fore, climbing the auction-block and looking around him. After a time, he singled out Steiner and pulled the man forward by an elbow. "The first specimen is typical," he droned in English, and Steve figured he spoke mentally to the assembled throngs, reeling off the height, weight, and other vital statistics for Steiner. Finally: "What am I bid?"

Mental voices sang out, one after another:

"Three *char*!"

"Four."

"Six."

"Ten *char*."

"Ten?" The man who was Charlie Stedman laughed. "Ten *char* indeed! One hundred is not enough."

The bidding continued, became hot, became a contest between two mental voices. Steiner went for seventy-four *char*, whatever a *char* was.

They took him down and carted him away, struggling. It looked like an ugly scene would develop, for a score of men surged toward the front of the block angrily. But some of the creatures held what looked like strange, possibly lethal weapons, and Kevin growled: "Not now! There's no sense getting all of us killed. Relax, and we'll see."

Grumbling, the men subsided, and Kevin turned to Steve: "If this isn't the damndest cosmic joke of all."

"What do you mean?"

"We're hunters, big game hunters. We go out into space to hunt for specimens, only this time we've become specimens ourselves! This time we weren't the hunters, but the quarry!"

The auction continued, and one by one the men were sold. Once one of them, a radar technician, bolted and ran. He was cut down quite efficiently by one of the hand-weapons and Charlie Stedman asserted it was a pity one of the specimens had been lost. "Keep your tempers," Kevin said grimly as a wave of anger washed over the auction block. "I don't like it any more than you do, but we won't fight until we understand—and then perhaps we'll have a chance."

WHEN HALF the men had been taken, Charlie Stedman reached for Teejay and dragged her forward. "This," he said, "is the female of the species. You will notice the long hair atop her head and the twin out-thrust developments of the upper ventral region; these are the marks of distinction. And for two reasons we will demand a special price for the female.

"First, we are primarily interested in these humans for emotion. Stronger garments we have, and garments which live longer. But none attain to the human emotional level, and, among the humans, the female is capable of stronger surges of emotion, perhaps because in general she is physically weaker and must compensate for it, although, from what I've seen, this particular specimen is a physical match for the others.

"Second, one specific high degree of emotion is possible only when a male and a female are in one another's presence. Therefore, whichever one of you owns the female can be certain of that added stimulus, and, as a consequence, certain of a more satisfactory garment from the emotional point of view. Now, what am I offered?"

Teejay went for three hundred *char*.

Kevin had to circle Steve's body with his huge arms and hold him firm as they took Teejay away.

He'd found the woman quite suddenly, and he loved her all the more for it. His potential worst enemy had become his lover. And now, brief hours later she was taken from him, perhaps forever. "Let go of me! Get your filthy hands off me. That's Teejay they're taking! Teejay!"

"And they'll take you too. But you're going alive, not dead. Stand still and let them get on with this." "Don't you realize what they've been talking about?" Steve shouted his rage. "They'll *wear* us, like clothing. They'll get inside our brains and share our bodies with us, like they've done with all these other creatures. Did you think these monsters were all native to Uashalume? I wouldn't be surprised if none of them was. They've all been taken, as we have, from their own worlds. They all live here—as clothing. Maybe the masters don't have physical form at all, maybe they're Just mental essence.

"And all they want to do is run the gamut of our emotions. They know how to play with emotions, too. Remember the Ganymede-fear, Kevin?"

"I remember, boy." Kevin still held him.

"Well, that was their work. Probably, Ganymede was their base in our Solar System, although it's possible they first got into LeClarc's brain on Mercury. And Kevin, all those theories you had were right!"

"Yes, I know. And sub-space—"

"The hell with that. They're taking Teejay and they may take all of us and spread us out all over the face of this world. We'll never find each other. We'll—"

"You're next, Steve Stedman." It was Charlie's voice, and Steve felt Kevin release him with a word of warning, felt himself drawn to the front of the block. Somehow, he found he was incredibly objective as the bidding began. He was claimed for one hundred fifty *char* and led away by a creature with a stilt-like body and six arms. Or rather, he thought, that was the garment. But the real creature—the mental entity within it—had grown tired of last year's cloak, and Steve was to take its place.

Moments later, Steve's buyer whisked him away in a smaller version of the bus that had taken the *Frank Buck's* crew to the bazaar. On the outskirts of the city, the car stopped. Steve climbed out, followed the stilt-figure up a flight of stairs as a round, fat, furry creature bounced up behind him with a weapon.

Inside, the place looked like a laboratory. And at the center of the room squatted a great round tank, large enough to hold a man. A green liquid boiled within it, but somehow Steve got the impression of boiling without much heat. He became absorbed in the idea, reached up over the tip of the tank to verify it on a thoroughly peculiar impulse.

Something struck him from behind. He staggered to his knees and tried to keep his eyes opened. The hard stone floor slammed against his face as he lost consciousness.

HE WAS floating, and when he could see again, a murky green haze surrounded him. *Floating, completely submerged!* He felt no desire to breathe. He did not have to breathe at all. It was as if his life had been suspended completely, as if there was no need for his body to carry out its normal functions. But he wasn't dead. He could open his eyes and stare at the green liquid, and he could think. And after a time, vague forms appeared outside. He saw the walls of the laboratory and the shining instruments—through green murk. And he saw something else moving about, a shadowy form. The stilt-like creature?

Abruptly, sharp pain lanced from the front of his skull to the back. Briefly. And it did not repeat itself.

A voice whispered, "You are struggling. Do not struggle, for it can only prolong the inevitable. Transfer takes time, of course; but the longer it takes the more unpleasant it will be for you."

"Go to hell."

It was then that the pain came back—stronger. And something almost physical pushed in at his mind, something ugly, unclean, wet with a damp, chilling moisture which brought twinges of fright. *Like the Ganymede-fear but more intense.*

"To struggle is useless." "

The wet feeling, like fingers now, fingers which oozed slime, clung to his brain, probed it, bore

inward.

"Why struggle? I think you will make a good fit."

"Go away. Damn you, go away!"

"I see the auction-master was right. Emotionally, you are strong."

The fingers departed, came back again, more insistent. No longer wet, they were digits of fire now, burning, burning.

Steve screamed soundlessly and fainted.

When Steve came to, he was outside the tank. He was tired and did not feel like walking. Nevertheless, he walked. At first he did not understand. He thought: *I will sit down and rest.*

His body failed to obey, continued walking.

"We share this body," the voice whispered to him, within his skull. "You are merely an observer as long as I am awake. I am in control. Henceforth, I dwell in this body."

"I want to sleep."

"You will learn that your mind can sleep while your body does not. And the body interests me, human. The body is capable of strong emotion. I want to feel that emotion."

The place, Steve realized later, was a sort of proving-grounds. He felt himself walking, walking. He reached the edge of a cliff, 'stared down from giddy heights. He felt himself tetering on the edge, saw jagged rocks far below him. He jumped. He did not want to, but he jumped.

"We'll be killed!" he cried, icy fear making his heart pound.

"That is fear," said the voice in his skull. "That is wonderful fear. So strong—"

Something cushioned their fall, slowly. It *was* that, Steve knew. *Their* fall, not his alone. For the creature shared it with him.

He tumbled, but slowly, like a feather, like a wraith of fog. He alighted on the rocks with hardly a jar, cushioned by some advanced application of a force-field. A large cube of metal was there to convey them to the top once more.

After that, he became giddy. He did not know why, but the impulse to laugh was too strong to resist. He laughed until it grew painful, laughed until the tears came to his eyes.

"That is joy," said the voice. "I can instill joy in you. But the way you express it, that is unique. More!"

And Steve's laughter bubbled up insanely again. The creature was wrong—not joy. Hysteria, more nearly. Unused to emotions, the creature could not tell them apart.

Something grabbed his arms and held it. A giant vise which could crush and twist. He saw nothing, realized that it was some mental trick—but thoroughly effective. His arm was being wrenched from its socket, slowly, terribly.

He clenched his teeth, groaned. From somewhere far off, the voice laughed calmly. "I like that. Oh yes, I do. I like your reaction to pain."

An intense loathing he had never before experienced took hold of him. At first he thought it was another trick, but he could sense alarm in the creature which shared him. The loathing, then, was his body's reaction to its parasite. Almost, he could feel the creature squirming, and he gave free reign to the emotion.

"Stop!" The voice was strident, alarmed.

I hate you, Steve thought intensely. *I hate you.*

"Stop! I warn you, you will kill us with that, or drive us insane."

Vertigo followed the loathing as the creature fought back. Steve was tired, suddenly more tired than he'd ever been. He sank back into blackness, knew even as his senses fled that his mind alone would sleep, not his body. With two minds, the body would not sleep at all—and in a matter of months it would perish of fatigue. But the creature within him feared his hatred, and that he must remember.

THE DAYS followed each other 1 in a slow, tortuous procession. Nothing seemed to satiate the parasite, for each day it strove for new emotions, and after a time Steve learned he could frustrate it by regarding everything as unreal, imaginative, non-existent.

Sometimes, the guest slept when the host did not. At such times, Steve found, he had freedom of a sort. His field of action was not circumscribed in any way except that violent activity would awaken the parasite. Steve toyed with his freedom, timorously at first, then grew more confident. He played with it, basked in it after steady days of control. He even discovered he could use the telepathic abilities of his uninvited mental guest.

He missed Teejay, wondered about her, longed for her. His astonishment was so extreme when he first heard her voice within his head that he almost awakened the parasite.

"Steve? Steve, is that you?" "Teejay—"

"I've been trying to reach you. When these creatures sleep, we can use *their* minds."

"Then you're all right?"

"I'm as all right as can be expected, Steve. But they've been running me through all sorts of emotional mazes. My clothing is torn and they don't care about it. My skin is torn and bruised. They don't care about that, either. They'll run us down. Did you notice all the other creatures here? Some of their bones are broken—if they have bones—and they've never been set. They're bruised and bloody and infected and the parasites don't care! Why should they, they can get new bodies? But Steve—oh, Steve, I've never felt so unclean in all my life and it's just as if I've been defiled and—"

"Take it easy, Teejay. Thinking like that won't help."

"I hate them. Oh, I hate them. I—"

"Listen. I want you to concentrate like that. Hate weakens them. Remember how the animals aboard the *Frank Buck* died? Well, since our emotions are so much stronger than the parasites, maybe, maybe—"

"You mean it could work in reverse?"

"I don't know."

"You want me to try, darling?"

"Yes—no! We can't do it now. If it works, we'd still be leaving a hundred men here. They're doomed, Teejay. We're all doomed unless we can do something about it, and soon. But at night they sleep. Yeah, they sleep at night! If we can contact the others, and make a concentrated effort of it, using the telepathic powers of the parasites—"

"Shh! That's enough, Steve. My friend here is getting up. I can feel him stirring inside my head. Shh, later!"

At the end, hope had made Tee-jay her old spunky self again. But when Steve's own master awakened, that hope seemed mighty slim indeed.

Each night they managed to contact two or three of the others, and the word was supposed to be passed on. Finally, it was arranged. The night for action was decided upon, and for some few of them it would be a gamble, for there was no guarantee that all the parasites would be asleep. Once the attempt was made, however, there would be no turning back. Whoever was left behind—was left behind.

Provided the plan worked at all.

THE CREATURE was asleep I again. "I hate you," Steve said quietly. Silence.

"*I hate you.*" He thought it now, thought it with all his being—and somehow he could sense the thought was being reinforced as scores of men concentrated on it around the city. The mind within him stirred sluggishly, but he pushed it under again. Hate, hate, hate.

Hadn't the creature said it could kill them both? A gamble. Everything was a gamble. Naturally the parasite would say that.

Steve began to sweat, physically. He was weak and the muscles of his arms and legs trembled. His mind found the strange telepathic channel of the parasite, traveled inward along it—with hatred. That, at least, was easy. He did *hate* the creature so thoroughly and so completely that the feeling pushed everything else from his mind.

A concert of hatred, all over the city. And slumbering masters who might or might not awaken.

"Stop!" A clarion command inside his skull. The parasite was fighting back.

Steve tumbled to the floor, lay there writhing. Two minds fought for control of his body, and he was

being pushed back and out of control. He got to his feet stiffly, strode to a cabinet, took out a knife. He stared at the knife, fascinated, pointed it toward his chest.

"One of us must die, human, but it shall not be I!"

He drove the knife inward, slowly, an inch at a time toward his chest. He felt the point sting, saw a thin trickle of blood. For a moment, he fought to possess his arms and the knife with them. That was a mistake—almost, a fatal one.

The parasite wanted that, for, in such a battle, it would win every time. Perhaps it could not fight his hatred, but it could fight anything else he had to offer.

The knife went in, scraped against a rib.

Steve yelled hoarsely, drenched every atom of his soul in hatred. Slowly, he withdrew the knife, watched bright red blood well up after it.

Something tugged at his mind, slipped away—first scalding, then wet. It oozed out, and pain blurred Steve's vision as he tumbled to the floor again.

When he got up moments later and managed to staunch the flow of blood, he knew the parasite had perished.

BARELY SIXTY of them met near the city gate—grim and weary, most of them with fresh wounds. Steve's joy was an emotion the dead parasite would have loved to share when he saw Teejay among the sixty. Kevin was there too, and Steiner. Surprisingly, Schuyler Barling seemed more sprightly than the rest.

"LeClarc?" Steve demanded.

"He was the first," said Kevin. "Stronger control, perhaps. He's among those who could not make it."

"Maybe they're still alive."

"No," Teejay told him. "I saw three men die, horribly. Most of the others probably did, too."

"Don't you see, boy, we can't chance survival for all of us to seek out one or two who might still be alive! It wouldn't be fair." Kevin shook his head grimly.

Steve knew he was right. He was far too exhausted to argue, anyway. "Then we'll go as we are?"

"Well, there are half a dozen others in the gatehouse now, forcing information from some of the hosts."

"What information?"

"About sub-space, boy. A hunter named McSweeney was possessed by a scientist of sorts, and he learned the sub-space gear is a compact little device which a man can carry. They store a few dozen of 'em in the gatehouse, and—hello!" Half a dozen men emerged from the stone structure, and one of them fell as a beam of energy seared out and caught him. A variety of creatures streamed out after them, triggering strange weapons. Soon the fighting became general, and it looked for a time as though the humans—without weapons of any sort—would be slaughtered. But Steve grabbed one of the stilt-creatures, twisted its neck quickly, heard a sharp cracking sound. The creature fell and Steve plunged down with it, coming up with the hand-weapon and firing into the ranks that bore down upon them.

As others of the aliens fell, men retrieved their weapons, fighting back with ever-increased firepower, although their numbers were decreasing. And battling thus, they broke through the gate and out among the purple-misted hills. Hissing beams of energy emitted sufficient light to see by, and Kevin's voice could be heard roaring above the sounds of fighting:

"Stick together! If a man's lost in this purple fog, he's done for! Stick together!"

It was a nightmare. Steve fought shoulder to shoulder with Teejay. Now that he'd been reunited with her, there'd be no more separation, he vowed silently. Not unless he died here on the purple world.

Energy beams crossed back and forth as the men retreated, stumbling and darting among the little hillocks. Time lost its normally rigid control. Hours might have been minutes, or the other way around. Time became utterly subjective, with each man living in his own particular continuum. For Steve it seemed at least a short version of eternity until they reached the *Frank Buck*. And when they did, dawn

was streaking the horizon with pale blue radiance, casting a deep purple shadow from the ship to where they fought.

It was Kevin who reached the airlock first, Kevin who sprung it open. Two by two they filed in, still facing the aliens and firing their weapons. At the last moment—when fully half of those who remained had entered the ship—the three anthrovacs appeared, came loping across the plain toward them.

Steve cut the first one down and drew careful aim on the second. It wasn't necessary. The third anthrovac abruptly turned on its fellow and sent it reeling, senseless, with one blow. In the confusion, its parasite must have been careless, must have relaxed its control. The anthrovac, which made a habit of miming men, whirled and began to wreck havoc among the pursuers.

It helped turn the tide of battle, and with Steve and Teejay, it was the last to enter the ship.

"TWENTY-TWO of us," Kevin said grimly. "There are twenty-two who survived." They all sat about, nursing their wounds. The ship had flung itself through hyper-space, now hovered a million miles off Ganymede. "You're wrong. There are twenty-three." It was Charlie Stedman. In the darkness and confusion, he'd managed to fight his way back with them. But why?

"Charlie!" Steve forgot the question. "You're free too."

Charlie lifted a neutron gun. "No. You're wrong. None of us is free. You'll find a ship has followed you here. And you're going to follow it back."

Of course, Steve thought dully. Charlie was dead. Charlie could not return as himself. But they were right back where they started from, for the creature who was Charlie could force their return.

Kevin stood near the viewport, spoke grimly. "He's not lying. There's a ship out there."

Schuyler Barling smiled coldly, took up his position near Charlie. "You all rejected my command once," he said. "You shouldn't have. I had no desire to come back to Earth like that. I've also learned that I can share my body on an equal basis with my master, something none of you would consider. Now we'll take you back."

Almost eighty men had died—for nothing. Steve held Teejay's hand briefly, released it. One life more wouldn't matter, and if there were a chance. . . .

"Charlie, don't you remember anything?"

"What should I remember?"

"I'm your brother."

"That much I knew when I called you on Ganymede. But there are no emotional ties. Keep back!"

Steve took a step toward him. "You're my brother, and you wouldn't kill me. You can't."

It was wild, impossible, and he knew it. The creature was not his brother, had not been his brother for years. Yet if some small vestige of his brother's emotional memories remained—

"Keep back, I warn you!"

Steve could see the finger tightening on the trigger when he dove. His shoulder jarred Charlie's knees, and they went down together, rolling over and over on the floor. The neutron gun hissed once, between them, and Charlie relaxed.

A smile tugged at the corners of his mouth for a moment, and he said, "Steve." He died that way, with the smile still on his lips.

Schuyler Barling was laughing and screaming, froth flecking his chin. The delicate balance between parasite and host had been entangled, possibly beyond repair. Neither could dominate, and the result was a hopeless, gibbering hulk of a man.

"Poor devil," said Kevin. "He'll get psychiatric treatment on Earth, if that will help."

Steve crossed to the airlock, climbed into a spacesuit.

"What the hell do you think you're doing?" Teejay wanted to know.

"You're forgetting about the other ship. We haven't got a blasting cannon on the *Frank Buck*, and there isn't one down on the *Gordak*, either. But with no absorbing medium in space, one of these neutron guns can be a potent weapon." Steve clamped the fishbowl helmet down over his head and activated the airlock.

Soon he stood outside, with nothing but space on three sides of him. On the fourth, his magnetic

boots gripped the *Frank Buck's* steeloid hull as he set himself, ready to fire the small hand gun.

Energy flared brightly from its muzzle, and the other ship, a slim, sinister shape miles off in the void, flared up with it and dissolved in a shower of sparks and mist. But the neutron gun had a kick which dislodged Steve from the hull and sent him spinning off into space.

Through the lock-port, no more than four feet away, he saw Kevin donning a vac-suit. The big Exec reached out to grab him but his arm fell a full foot short. All at once, Kevin was dwarfed by the anthrovac as the big animal joined him, scratching its head as Kevin reached out hopelessly into space. The gap was increasing.

Did the anthrovac understand? No, Steve thought; an anthrovac could no more understand than a parrot could actually talk. But like a parrot, an anthrovac could mimic.

A huge hairy arm reached out into space, the hand locking on Steve's gauntleted fist. He was drawn back into the *Frank Buck* and to safety, and it was many minutes before they could stop the anthrovac from probing out experimentally into empty space.

"YOU KNOW," Steve told Teejay and Kevin later, "I think at the last minute my brother understood."

"It looked that way to me, boy," Kevin nodded. "So he died happy. But there's a lot of work for Earth to do. We'll have to clear the System of anything that remains here of Uashalume's power. And then maybe someday we'll have to get up an expedition and clean out that foul place."

"One good thing came from it," Steve told them. "We've got subspace drive now, and the stars are ours." He lit a cigarette, frowning. "But I think we ought to go easy on our game-hunting, and you can tell that to Brody Carnical or anyone else, Teejay. Those, creatures out there were hunters too, you know."

"Forget about the past, will you?" Teejay snapped at him, then grinned when he looked hurt. "I still feel unclean, Steve. I'd love to sit in a hot bath for about twenty-four hours straight."

Steve grinned back. "If we were married, I could scrub around your shoulder-blades for you."

Kevin cleared his throat ominously. "They made me Captain of this ship, didn't they. What are we waiting for?"

The ceremony was brief, and after it, Steve and Teejay hustled back to the recreation rooms and swimming pools with a bar of strong soap, a couple of washcloths, and a lot of pleasant ideas.

THE END