

# BETWEEN THE DARK AND THE DAYLIGHT

## Algis Budrys

A curved section of the dome, twenty feet thick with the stubs of reinforcing rod rusty and protruding through the dampmarked concrete, formed the ceiling and back wall of Brendan's office. There was a constant drip of seepage and condensation. Near the mildew-spotted floor, a thin white mist drifted in torn swirls while the heating coils buried in the concrete fought back against the cold. There was one lamp in the windowless dark, a glowing red coil on Brendan's desk, well below the eye level of the half-dozen men in the room. The heavy office door was swung shut, the locking bars pushed home. If it had not been, there would have been some additional light from the coils in the corridor ceiling, outside the office. Brendan would have had to face into it, and the men in the front of him would have been looming shadows to him.

But the door was shut, as Brendan insisted it must be, as all doors to every room and every twenty-foot length of corridor were always shut as much of the time as possible--at Brendan's insistence--as though the dome were a sinking ship.

Conducted by the substance of the dome, there was a constant *chip, chip, chip* coming from somewhere, together with a heartless gnawing sound that filled everyone's head as though they were all biting on sandpaper.

Brendan growled from behind his desk: "I'm in charge."

The five men on the opposite side of the desk had tacitly chosen Falconer for their spokesman. He said: "But we've all got something to say about it, Brendan. You're in charge, but nothing gives you the power to be an autocrat."

"No?"

"Nothing. The Expedition Charter, in fact, refers to a Board of Officers--"

"The Expedition Charter was written four hundred years ago, a thousand lightyears away. The men who drew it up are dust. The men who signed it are dust."

"You're in the direct line of descent from the first Captain."

"Then you're recognizing me as a hereditary monarch, Falconer. I don't see the basis of your complaint."

Falconer--lean as a whip from the waist down, naked, thick-torsoed, covered with crisp, heavy fur--set his clawed feet a little apart and thrust out his heavy underjaw, clearing his sharp canine tusks away from his flat lips. He lifted his enormous forearms out from his sides and curved his fingers. "Don't pare cheese with us, Brendan. The rest of the dome might be willing to let it go, as long as things're so near completion. But not us. We won't stand for it." The men with him were suddenly a tense pack, waiting, ready.

Brendan stood up, a member of Falconer's generation, no more evolved than any of them.

But he was taller than Falconer or any other man in the room. He was bigger, his cruelly-shaped jaw broader, his tusks sharper, his forearm muscles out of all proportion to the length of the bone, like clubs. His eyes burned out from under his shaggy brows, lambent with the captive glow of the lighting coil, set far back under the protection of heavy bone. The slitted nostrils of his flat nose were suddenly flared wide.

"You don't dare," he rumbled. His feet scraped on the floor. "I'll disembowel the first man to reach me." He lashed out and sent the massive bronze desk lurching aside, clearing the way between himself and Falconer's party. And he waited, while the other men sent sidelong glances at Falconer and Falconer's eyes slowly fell. Then Brendan grunted. "This is why I'm in charge. Charters and successions don't mean a thing after four hundred years. Not if a good man goes against them. You'll keep on taking my orders."

"What kind of paranoiac's world do you live in?" Falconer said bitterly. "Imposing your will on all of us. Doing everything your way and no other. We're not saying your methods are absolutely going to wreck the project, but--"

"What?"

"We've all got a stake in this. We've all got children in the nursery, the same way you do."

"I don't favor my son over any of the others. Get that idea out of your head."

"How do we know? Do we have anything to do with the nursery? Are we allowed inside?"

"I'm this generation's biotechnician and pedagogical specialist. That's the Captain's particular job. That's the way it's been since the crash--by the same tradition you were quoting--and that's the way it has to be. This is a delicate business. One amateur meddling in it can destroy everything we're doing and everything that was done in the past. And we'll never have another chance."

"All right. But where's the harm in looking in on them? What's your point in not letting us at the cameras?"

"They're being overhauled. We're going to need to have them in perfect working order tomorrow, when we open the nursery gates to the outside. That's when it'll be important to look in on the children and make sure everything's all right."

"And meanwhile only you can get into the nursery and see them."

"That's my job."

"Now, listen, Brendan, we all went through the nursery, too. And your father had the same job you do. We weren't sealed off from everybody but him. We saw other people. You know that just as well as we do."

Brendan snorted. "There's no parallel. We weren't the end product. We were just one more link in the chain, and we had to be taught all about the dome, because the hundredodd of us were going to constitute its next population. We had to be taught about the air control system, the food distribution, the power plant--and the things it takes to keep this place functioning as well as it can. We had to each learn our job from the specialist who had it before us."

"But the next generation isn't going to need that. That's obvious. This is what we've all been working for. To free them. Ten generations ago, the first of us set out to free them.

"And that's what I'm going to do, Falconer. That's my job, and nobody here could do it, but me, in my way."

"They're our children too!"

"All right, then, be proud of them. Tomorrow they go outside, and there'll be men out on the face of this world at last. Your flesh, your blood, and they'll take this world away from the storms and the animals. That's what we've spent all this time for. That's what generations of us have huddled in here for, hanging on for this day. What more do you want?"

"Some of the kids are going to die," one of the other men growled. "No matter how well they're equipped to handle things outside, no matter how much has been done to get them ready. We don't expect miracles from you, Brendan. But we want to make sure you've done the best possible. We can't just twiddle our thumbs."

"You want work to do? There's plenty. Shut up and listen to what's going on outside."

The gnawing filled their heads. Brendan grinned coldly. And the chipping sound, which had slowed a little, began a rapid pace again.

"They just changed shifts," Brendan said. "One of them got tired and a fresh one took over."

"They'll never get through to us in the time they've got left," Falconer said.

"No?" Brendan turned on him in rage. "How do you know? Maybe they've stopped using flint. Maybe they've got hold of something like diamonds. What about the ones that just use their teeth? Maybe they're breeding for tusks that concrete won't wear down. Think we've got a patent on that idea? Think because we do it in a semi-automatic nursery, blind evolution can't do it out in that wet hell outside?"

Lusic--the oldest of them there, with sparse fur and lighter jaws, with a round skull that lacked both a sagittal crest and a bone shelf over the eyes--spoke for the first time.

"None of those things seem likely," he said in a voice muffled by the air filter his generation had to wear in this generation's ecology. "They are possibilities, of course, but only that. These are not purposeful intelligences like ourselves. These are only immensely powerful animals--brilliant, for animals, in a world lacking a higher race to cow them--but they do not lay plans. No, Brendan, I don't think your attempt to distract us has much logic in it. The children will be out, and will have destroyed them, before there can be any real danger to the dome's integrity. I can understand your desire to keep us busy, because we are all tense as our efforts approach a climax. But I do think your policy is wrong. I think we should long ago have been permitted a share in supervising the nursery. I think your attempt to retain dictatorial powers in an unhealthy sign. I think you're afraid of no longer being the most powerful human being in our society. Whether you know it or not, I think that's what's behind your attitude. And I think something ought to be done about it, even now."

"*Distract!*" Brendan's roar made them all retreat. He marched slowly toward Lusic, and the other man began to back away. "When I need advice from a sophist like you, that'll be the time when we all need distraction!" He stopped when Lusic was pressed against the wall, and he pointed at the wall.

"There is nothing in this world that loves us. There is nothing in this world that can even tolerate us. Generations of us have lived in this stone trap because not one of us--not even I--could live in the ecology of this planet. It was never made for men. Men could not have evolved on it. It would have killed them when they crawled from the sea, killed them when they tried to breathe its atmosphere, killed them when they tried to walk on its surface, and when they tried to take a share of food away from the animals that could evolve here. We are a blot and an abomination upon it. We are weak, loathsome grubs on its iron face. And the animals know us for what we are. They may even guess what we have spent generations in becoming, but it doesn't matter whether they do or not--they hate us, and they won't stop trying to kill us.

"When the expedition crashed here, they were met by storms and savagery. They had guns and their kind of air regenerators and a steel hull for shelter, and still almost all of them died. But if they had been met by what crowds around this dome today, they would never have lived at all, or begun this place.

"You're right, Lusic--there are only animals out there. Animals that hate us so much, some of them have learned to hold stones in their paws and use them for tools. They hate us so much they chip, chip, chip away at the dome all day, and gnaw at it, and howl in the night for us to come out, because they hate us so.

"We only *hope* they won't break through. We can only hope the children will drive them away in time. We don't know. But you'd rather be comfortable in your hope. You'd rather come in here and quibble at my methods. But I'm not your kind. Because if I don't know, I don't hope. I act. And because I act, and you don't, and because I'm in charge, you'll do what I tell you."

He went back to his desk and shoved it back to its place. "That's all. I've heard your complaint, and rejected it. Get back to work re-inforcing the dome walls. I want that done."

They looked at him, and at each other. He could see the indecision on their faces. He ignored it, and after a moment they decided for retreat. They could have killed him, acting together, and they could have acted together against any other man in the dome. But not against him. They began going out.

Lusic was the last through the door. As he reached to pull it shut, he said, "We may kill you if we can get enough help."

Brendan looked at his watch and said quietly: "Lusic--it's the twenty-fifth day of Kislev, on Chaim Weber's calendar. Stop off at his place and tell him it's sunset, will you?"

He waited until Lusic finally nodded, and then ignored him again until the man was gone.

When his office door was locked, he went to the television screen buried in the wall behind him, switched it on, and looked out at the world outside.

Rain--rain at a temperature of 1° Centigrade--blurred the camera lenses, sluicing over them, blown up through the protective baffles, giving him not much more than glutinous light and shadow to see. But Brendan knew what was out there, as surely as a caged wolf knows the face of his keeper. Near the top of the screen was a lichenous graygreen mass, looming through the bleakness, that he knew for a line of beaten slumped mountains. Between the mountains and the dome was a plain, running with water, sodden with the runoff from the spineless hills, and in the water, the animals. They were the color of rocks at the bottom of

an ocean--great, mud-plastered masses, wallowing toward each other in combat or in passion, rolling, lurching, their features gross, heavy, licking out a sudden paw with unbelievable speed, as though giant hippopotami, swollen beyond all seeming ability to move, still somehow had managed to endow themselves with the reflexes of cats. They crowded the plain, a carpet of obscenity, and for all they fed on each other, and mated, and sometimes slept with their unblinking eyes open and swiveling, they all faced toward the dome and never stopped throwing themselves against its flanks, there to hang scrabbling at the curve of the concrete, or doing more purposeful things.

Brendan looked out at them with his chest rising in deep swells. "I'd like to get out among you," he growled. "You'd kill me, but I'd like to get out among you." He took a long breath.

He triggered one of the dome's old batteries, and watched the shells howl into the heaving plain. Red fire flared, and the earth trembled, erupting. Wherever the shells struck, the animals were hurled aside...to lie stunned, to shake themselves with the shock of the explosions, and to stagger to their feet again.

"You wait," Brendan hissed, stopping the useless fire. "You wait 'til my Donel gets at you. You wait."

He shut the screen off, and crossed his office toward a door set into the bulkhead at his right. Behind it were the nursery controls, and, beyond those, behind yet another door which he did not touch, was the quarter-portion of the dome that housed the children, sealed off, more massively walled than any other part, and, in the center of its share of the dome surface, pierced by the only full-sized gateway to the world. It was an autonomous shelter-within-a-shelter, and even its interior walls were fantastically thick in case the dome itself were broken.

The controls covered one wall of their cubicle. He ignored the shrouded camera screens and the locked switch that would activate the gate. He passed on to the monitoring instruments, and read off the temperature and pressure, the percentages of the atmospheric components, and all the other things that had to be maintained at levels lethal to him so that the children could be comfortable. He put the old headphones awkwardly to his ears and listened to the sounds he heard in the nursery.

He opened one of the traps in the dome wall, and almost instantly there was an animal in it. He closed the outer end of the trap, opened the access into the nursery, and let the animal in. Then, for a few more moments, he listened to the children as they killed and ate it.

Later, as he made his way down the corridor, going home for the night, he passed Chaim Weber's doorway. He stopped and listened, and coming through the foot-thick steel and the concrete wall, he heard the Channukah prayer:

*"Baruch Ata Adonai, Eloheynu Melech Haolam, shehichiyanu vikiyimanu, vihigianu lazman hazeh..."*

"Blessed be The Lord," Brendan repeated softly to himself, "Our God, Lord of the Universe. Who has given us life, and is our strength, and has brought us this day."

He stopped and whispered, "this day," again, and went on.

His wife was waiting for him, just inside the door, and he grunted a greeting to her while he carefully worked the bolts. She said nothing until he had turned around again, and he looked

at her inquiringly.

"Sally?"

"You did it again," she said.

He nodded without special expression. "I did."

"Falconer's got the whole dome buzzing against you."

"All right."

She sighed angrily. "Did you have to threaten Lusic? He's only the representative of the previous generation. The one group inside the dome detached enough to be persuaded to back you up."

"One, I didn't threaten him. If he felt that way, it was only because he knew he was pushing me into a corner where I might turn dangerous. Two, anything he represents can't be worth much, if he can accuse me of bringing in a red herring and then can back down when I bring that selfsame herring back in a louder tone of voice. Three, it doesn't matter if anybody supports me. I'm in charge."

She set her mouth in a disgusted line. "You don't think much of yourself, do you?"

Brendan crossed the room. He sat down on the edge of the stone block that fitted into the join of floor and wall, and was his bed. Sitting that way, bent forward, with his shoulders against the curve of the overhead, he said, softly: "We've been married a long time, Sally. That can't be a fresh discovery you're making."

"It isn't."

"All right."

"You don't even care what I think of you, do you?"

"I care. I can't afford to pay any attention."

"You don't care. You don't care for one living soul besides yourself, and the only voice you'll listen to is that power- chant in your head. You married me because I was good breeding stock. You married me because, if you can't lead us outside, at least your son will be the biggest and best of his generation."

"Funny," Brendan said. "Lusic thinks I've been motivated by a fear of losing my pre-eminence. I wonder if your positions can be reconciled. And do you realize you're admitting I'm exactly what I say I am?"

She spat: "I hate you. I really do. I hope they pull you down before the nursery gate opens to the outside."

"If they pull me down, that'll be a sure bet. I changed over all the controls, several years ago. I'm the only man in this dome who can possibly work them."

"You *what!*"

"You heard me."

"They'll kill you when I tell them."

"You can think better than that, Sally. You're just saying something for the sake of making a belligerent noise. They don't dare kill me, and they'd be taking a very long chance in torturing me to a point where I'd tell them how the controls work. Longer than long, because there'd be no logic in my telling them and so passing my own death sentence. But I expected you to say something like that, because people do, when they're angry. That's why I never get angry. I've got a purpose in life. I'm going to see it attained. So you're not going to catch me in any mistakes."

"You're a monster."

"So I am. So are we all. Monsters with a purpose. And I'm the best monster of us all."

"They'll kill you the moment after you open that gate."

"No," he said slowly, "I don't think so. All the tension will be over then, and the kids will be doing their job."

"I'll kill you. I promise."

"I don't think you mean that. I think you're in love with me."

"You think I love you?"

"Yes, I do."

She looked at him uncertainly. "Why do I?"

"I don't know. Love takes odd forms, under pressure. But it's still love. Though, of course, I don't know anything about it."

"You bastard, I hate you more than any man alive."

"You do."

"I--no...!" She began to cry. "Why do you have to be like this? Why can't you be what I want--what you can be?"

"I can't. Even though you love me." He sat in his dark corner, and his eyes brooded at her.

"And what do you feel?"

"I love you," he said. "What does that change?"

"Nothing," she said bitterly. "Absolutely nothing."

"All right, then."

She turned away in unbearable frustration, and her eyes rested on the dinner table, where

the animal haunch waited. "Eat your supper."

He got up, washed at the sink, went over to the table and broke open the joint on the roast. He gave her half, and they began to eat.

"Do you know about the slaughtering detail?" he asked her.

"What about it?"

"Do you know that two days ago, one of the animals deliberately came into the trap in the dome? That it had help?"

"How?"

"Another animal purposely stayed in the doorway, to jam it. I think they thought that if they did that, the killing block couldn't fall. I think they watched outside--perhaps for months--and thought it out. And it might have worked, but the killing block was built to fall regardless, and it killed them both. The slaughtering detail dragged the other one in through the doorway before any more could reach them. But suppose there'd been a third one, waiting directly outside? They'd have killed four men. And suppose, next time, they try to wedge the block? And then chip through the sides of the trap, which are only a few feet thick? Or suppose they invent tools with handles, for leverage, and begin cutting through in earnest?"

"The children will be out there before that happens."

Brendan nodded. "Yes. But we're running it narrow. Very narrow. This place would never hold up through another generation."

"What difference does it make? We've beaten them. Generation by generation, we've changed to meet them, while all they've done is learn a little. We've bred back, and mutated, and trained. We've got a science of genetics, we've got controlled radioactivity, gene selection, chromosome manipulation--all they've got is hate."

"Yes. And listen to it."

Grinding through the dome, the gnaw and chip came to them clearly.

They began to eat again, after one long moment.

Then she asked: "Is Donel all right?"

He looked up sharply. They had had this out a long time ago. "He's all right as far as I know." He was responsible for all of the children in the nursery, not just one in particular. He could not afford to get into the habit of discussing one any more than another. He could not afford to get into the habit of discussing any of them at all.

"You don't care about *him*, either, do you?" she said. "Or have you got some complicated excuse for that, too?"

He shook his head. "It's not complicated." He listened to the sound coming through the dome.

She looked at him with tears brimming in her eyes. He thought for an instant of the tragedy



inherent in the fact that they all of them knew how ugly they were--and that the tragedy did not exist, because somehow love did not know--and he was full of this thought when she said, like someone dying suddenly. "Why? Why, Sean?"

"Why?" She'd got a little way past his guard. "Because I'm the Captain, and because I'm the best, and there's no escaping the duty of being that. Because some things plainly must be done--not because there is anything sacred in plans made by people who are past, and gone, but because there is no other reason why we should have been born with the intelligence to discipline our emotions."

"How cut-and-dried you make it sound!"

"I told you it wasn't complicated. Only difficult."

The common rooms were in the center of the dome, full of relics: lighting systems designed for eyes different from theirs; ventilation ducts capped over, uncapped again, modified; furniture re-built times over; stuff that had once been stout enough to stand the wear of human use--too fragile to trust, now, against the unconscious brush of a hurried hip or the kick of a stumbling foot; doorways too narrow, aisles too cramped in the auditorium; everything not quite right.

Brendan called them there in the morning, and every man and woman in the dome came into the auditorium. They growled and talked restlessly--Falconer and Lusic and the rest were moving purposefully among them--and when Brendan came out on the stage, they rumbled in the red-lit gloom, the condensation mist swirling up about them. Brendan waited, his arms folded, until they were all there.

"Sit down," he said. He looked across the room, and saw Falconer and the others watching him carefully, gauging their moment. "Fools," Brendan muttered to himself. "If you were going to challenge me at all, you should have done it long ago." But they had let him cow them too long--they remembered how, as children, they had all been beaten by him--how he could rise to his feet with six or seven of them clinging to his back and arms, to pluck them off and throw them away from him. And how, for all their cleverness, they had never out-thought him. They had promised themselves this day--perhaps years ago, even then, they had planned his ripping-apart--but they had not dared to interfere with him until the dome's work was done. In spite of hate, and envy, and the fear that turns to murder. They knew who their best man was, and Brendan could see that most of them still had that well in mind. He searched the faces of the people, and where Falconer should have been able to put pure rage, he saw caution lurking with it, like a divided counsel.

He was not surprised. He had expected that--if there had been no hesitation in any man he looked at, it would have been for the first time in his life. But he had never pressed them as hard as he meant to do this morning. He would need every bit of a cautious thought, every slow response that lived among these people, or everything would go smash, and he with it.

He turned his head fleetingly, and even that, he knew, was dangerous. But he had to see if Sally was still there, poised to one side of the stage, looking at him blankly. He turned back to the crowd.

"All right. Today's the day. The kids're going out as soon as I'm through here."

Sally had told him this morning not to call them together--to just go and do it. But they would have been out in the corridors, waiting. He would have had to brush by them. One touch--one

contact of flesh to flesh, and one of them might have tried to prove the mortality he found in Sean Brendan.

"I want you in your homes. I want your doors shut. I want the corridor compartments closed tight." He looked at them, and in spite of the death he saw rising among them like a tide, he could not let it go at that. "I want you to do that," he said in a softer voice than any of them had ever heard from him. "Please."

It was the hint of weakness they needed. He knew that when he gave it to them.

"Sean!" Sally cried.

And the auditorium reverberated to the formless roar that drowned her voice with its cough. They came toward him with their hands high, baying, and Sally clapped her hands to her ears.

Brendan stood, wiped his hand over his eyes, turned, and jumped. He was across the stage in two springs, his toenails gashing the floor, and he spun Sally around with a hand that held its iron clutch on her arm. He swept a row of seats into the feet of the closest ones, and pushed Sally through the side door to the main corridor. He snatched up the welding gun he had left there, and slashed across door and frame with it, but they were barely started in their run toward his office before he heard the hasty weld snap open and the corridor boom with the sound of the rebounding door. Claws clicked and scratched on the floor behind him, and bodies thudded from the far wall, flung by momentum and the weight of the pack behind them. There would be trampled corpses in the auditorium, he knew, in the path between the door and the mob's main body.

Sally tugged at the locked door to the next section of corridor. Brendan turned and played the welder's name in the distorted faces nearest him. Sally got the door open, and he threw her beyond it. They forced it shut again behind them, and this time his weld was more careful but that was broken, too, before they were through the next compartment, and now there would be people in the parallel corridors, racing to cut them off--racing, and howling. The animals outside must be hearing it...must be wondering...

He turned the two of them into a side corridor, and did not stop to use the welder. The mob might bypass an open door...and they would need to be able to get to their homes...

They were running along the dome's inside curve, now, in a section where the dome should have been braced--it hadn't been done--and he cursed Falconer for a spiteful ass while their feet scattered the slimy puddles and they tripped over the concrete forms that had been thrown down carelessly.

"All right," Brendan growled to himself and to Falconer, "all right, you'll think about that when the time comes."

They reached the corridor section that fronted on his office, and there were teeth and claws to meet them. Brendan hewed through the knot of people, and now it was too late to worry whether he killed them or not. Sally was running blood down her shoulder and back, and his own cheek had been ripped back by a throat-slash that missed. He swallowed gulps of his own blood, and spat it out as he worked toward his door, and with murder and mutilation he cleared the way for himself and the mother of his boy, until he had her safe inside, and the edge of the door sealed all around. Then he could stop, and see the terrible wound in Sally's side, and realize the bones of his leg were dripping and jagged as they thrust out through

the flesh.

"Didn't I tell you?" he reproached her as he went to his knees beside her where she lay on the floor. "I told you to go straight here, instead of to the auditorium." He pressed his hands to her side, and sobbed at the thick well of her blood over his gnarled fingers with the tufts of sopping fur caught in their claws. "Damn you for loving me!"

She twitched her lips in a rueful smile, and shook her head slightly. "Go let Donel out," she whispered.

They were hammering on the office door. And there were cutting torches available, just as much as welders. He turned and made his way to the control cubicle, half-dragging himself. He pulled the lever that would open the gates, once the gate motors were started, and, pulling aside the panels on cabinets that should have had nothing to do with it, he went through the complicated series of switchings that diverted power from the dome pile into those motors.

The plain's mud had piled against the base of the gate, and the hinges were old. The motors strained to push it aside, and the dome thrummed with their effort. The lighting coils dimmed, and outside his office door, Brendan could hear a great sigh. He pulled the listening earphones to his skull, and heard the children shout. Then he smiled with his ruined mouth, and pulled himself back into his office, to the outside viewscreen, and turned it on. He got Sally and propped her up. "Look," he mumbled. "Look at our son."

There was blurred combat on the plain, and death on that morning, and no pity for the animals. He watched, and it was quicker than he could ever have imagined.

"Which one is Donel?" Sally whispered.

"I don't know," he said. "Not since the children almost killed me when they were four; you should have heard Donel shouting when he tore my respirator away by accident--he was playing with me, Sally--and saw me flop like a fish for air I could breathe, and saw my blood when another one touched my throat. I got away from them that time, but I never dared go back in after they searched out the camera lenses and smashed them. They *knew*, then--they knew we were in here, and they knew we didn't belong on their world."

*And Falconer's kind would have gassed them, or simply re-mixed their air...they would have, after a while, no matter what...I know how many times I almost did...*

There was a new sound echoing through the dome. "Now they don't need us to let them out, anymore." There was a quick, sharp, deep hammering from outside--mechanical, purposeful, tireless. "That...that may be Donel now."