

L. Ron Hubbard

BATTLEFIELD EARTH
A saga of the year 3000

1982

INTRODUCTION

Recently there came a period when I had little to do. This was novel in a life so crammed with busy years, and I decided to amuse myself by writing a novel that was pure science fiction.

In the hard-driven times between 1930 and 1950, I was a professional writer not simply because it was my job, but because I wanted to finance more serious researches. In those days there were few agencies pouring out large grants to independent workers. Despite what you might hear about Roosevelt "relief," those were depression years. One succeeded or one starved. One became a top-liner or a gutter bum. One had to work very hard at his craft or have no craft at all. It was a very challenging time for anyone who lived through it.

I have heard it said, as an intended slur, "He was a science fiction writer," and have heard it said of many. It brought me to realize that few people understand the role science fiction has played in the lives of Earth's whole population.

I have just read several standard books that attempt to define "science fiction" and to trace its history. There are many experts in this field, many controversial opinions.

Science fiction is favored with the most closely knit reading public that may exist, possibly the most dedicated of any genre. Devotees are called "fans," and the word has a special prestigious meaning in science fiction.

Few professional writers, even those in science fiction, have written very much on the character of "sf." They are usually too busy turning out the work itself to expound on what they have written. But there are many experts on this subject among both critics and fans, and they have a lot of worthwhile things to say.

However, many false impressions exist, both of the genre and of its writers. So when one states that he set out to write a work of pure science fiction, he had better state what definition he is using.

It will probably be best to return to the day in 1938 when I first entered this field, the day I met John W. Campbell, Jr., a day in the very dawn of what has come to be known as The Golden Age of science fiction. I was quite ignorant of the field and regarded it, in fact, a bit diffidently. I was not there of my own choice. I had been summoned to the vast old building on Seventh Avenue in dusty, dirty, old New York by the very top brass of Street and Smith publishing company - an executive named Black and another, F. Orlin Tremaine. Ordered there with me was another writer, Arthur J. Burks. In those days when the top brass of a publishing company - particularly one as old and prestigious as Street and Smith - "invited" a writer to visit, it was like being commanded to appear before the king or receiving a court summons. You arrived, you sat there obediently, and you spoke when you were spoken to.

We were both, Arthur J. Burks and I, top-line professionals in other writing fields. By the actual tabulation of A. B. Dick, which set advertising rates for publishing firms, either of our names appearing on a magazine cover would send the circulation rate skyrocketing, something like modern TV ratings.

The top brass came quickly to the point. They had recently started or acquired a magazine called Astounding Science Fiction. Other magazines were published by other houses, but Street and Smith was unhappy because its magazine was mainly publishing stories about machines and machinery. As publishers, its executives knew you had to have people in stories. They had called us in because, aside from our A. B. Dick rating as writers, we could write about real people. They knew we were busy and had other commitments. But would we be so kind as to write science fiction? We indicated we would.

They called in John W. Campbell, Jr., the editor of the magazine. He found himself looking at two adventure-story writers, and though adventure writers might be the aristocrats of the whole field and might have vast followings of their own, they were not science fiction writers. He resisted. In the first place, calling in top-liners would ruin his story budget due to their word rates. And in the second place, he had his own ideas of what science fiction was.

Campbell, who dominated the whole field of sf as its virtual czar until his death in 1971, was a huge man who had majored in physics at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and graduated from Duke University with a Bachelor of Sciences degree.

His idea of getting a story was to have some professor or scientist write it and then doctor it up and publish it. Perhaps that is a bit unkind, but it really was what he was doing. To fill his pages even he, who had considerable skill as a writer, was writing

stories for the magazine.

The top brass had to directly order Campbell to buy and to publish what we wrote for him. He was going to get people into his stories and get something going besides machines. I cannot tell you how many other writers were called in. I do not know. In all justice, it may have been Campbell himself who found them later on. But do not get the impression that Campbell was anything less than a master and a genius in his own right. Any of the stable of writers he collected during this Golden Age will tell you that. Campbell could listen. He could improve things. He could dream up little plot twists that were masterpieces. He well deserved the title that he gained and kept as the top editor and the dominant force that made science fiction as respectable as it became. Star Wars, the all-time box office record movie to date (exceeded only by its sequel), would never have happened if science fiction had not become as respectable as Campbell made it. More than that - Campbell played no small part in driving this society into the space age.

You had to actually work with Campbell to know where he was trying to go, what his idea was of this thing called "science fiction." I cannot give you any quotations from him; I can just tell you what I felt he was trying to do. In time we became friends. Over lunches and in his office and at his home on weekends - where his wife Dona kept things smooth - talk was always of stories but also of science. To say that Campbell considered science fiction as "prophecy" is an oversimplification. He had very exact ideas about it. Only about a tenth of my stories were written for the fields of science fiction and fantasy. I was what they called a high production writer, and these fields were just not big enough to take everything I could write. I gained my original reputation in other writing fields during the eight years before the Street and Smith interview.

Campbell, without saying too much about it, considered the bulk of the stories I gave him to be not science fiction but fantasy, an altogether different thing. Some of my stories he eagerly published as science fiction - among them Final Blackout. Many more, actually. I had, myself, somewhat of a science background, had done some pioneer work in rockets and liquid gases, but I was studying the branches of man's past knowledge at that time to see whether he had ever come up with anything valid. This, and a love of the ancient tales now called The Arabian Nights, led me to write quite a bit of fantasy. To handle this fantasy material, Campbell introduced another magazine, Unknown. As long as I was writing novels for it, it continued. But the war came and I and others went, and I think Unknown only lasted about forty months. Such novels were a bit hard to come by. And they were not really Campbell's strength.

So anyone seeking to say that science fiction is a branch of fantasy or an extension of it is unfortunately colliding with a time honored professional usage of terms. This is an age of mixed genres. I hear different forms of music mixed together like soup. I see so many different styles of dance tangled together into one "dance" that I wonder whether the choreographers really know the different genres of dance anymore. There is abroad today the concept that only conflict produces new things. Perhaps the philosopher Hegel introduced that, but he also said that war was necessary for the mental health of the people and a lot of other nonsense. If all new ideas have to spring from the conflict between old ones, one must deny that virgin ideas can be conceived.

So what would pure science fiction be?

It has been surmised that science fiction must come from an age where science exists. At the risk of raising dispute and outcry - which I have risked all my life and received but not been bothered by, and have gone on and done my job anyway - I wish to point out some things:

Science fiction does not come after the fact of a scientific discovery or development. It is the herald of possibility. It is the plea that someone should work on the future. Yet it is not prophecy. It is the dream that precedes the dawn when the inventor or scientist awakens and goes to his books or his lab saying, "I wonder whether I could make that dream come true in the world of real science."

You can go back to Lucian; second century A.D., or to Johannes Kepler (1571 - 1630) - who founded modern dynamical astronomy and who also wrote Somnium, an imaginary space flight to the moon - or to Mary Shelley and her Frankenstein, or to Poe or Verne or Wells and ponder whether this was really science fiction. Let us take an example: a man invents an eggbeater. A writer later writes a story about an eggbeater. He has not, thereby, written science fiction. Let us continue the example: a man writes a story about some metal that, when twiddled, beats an egg, but no such tool has ever before existed in fact. He has now written science fiction. Somebody else, a week or a hundred years later, reads the story and says, "Well, well. Maybe it could be done." And makes an eggbeater. But whether or not it was possible that twiddling two pieces of metal would beat eggs, or whether or not anybody ever did it afterward, the man still has written science fiction.

How do you look at this word "fiction?" It is a sort of homograph. In this case it means two different things. A professor of literature knows it means "a literary work whose content is produced by the imagination and is not necessarily based on fact; the category of literature comprising works of this kind, including novels, short stories, and plays." It is derived from the Latin *fiction*, a making, a fashioning, from *fictus*, past

participle of *fingere*, to touch, form, mold.

But when we join the word to "science" and get "science fiction," the word "fiction" acquires two meanings in the same use: 1) the science used in the story is at least partly fictional; and 2) any story is fiction. The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language defines science fiction as "fiction in which scientific developments and discoveries form an element of plot or background; especially a work of fiction based on prediction of future scientific possibilities."

So, by dictionary definition and a lot of discussions with Campbell and fellow writers of that time, science fiction has to do with the material universe and sciences; these can include economics, sociology, medicine, and suchlike, all of which have a material base. Then what is fantasy?

Well, believe me, if it were simply the application of vivid imagination, then a lot of economists and government people and such would be fully qualified authors! Applying the word "imaginative" to fantasy would be like calling an entire library "some words." Too simplistic, too general a term.

In these modern times many of the ingredients that make up "fantasy" as a type of fiction have vanished from the stage. You hardly even find them in encyclopedias anymore. These subjects were spiritualism, mythology, magic, divination, the supernatural, and many other fields of that type. None of them had anything really to do with the real universe. This does not necessarily mean that they never had any validity or that they will not again arise; it merely means that man, currently, has sunk into a materialistic binge. The bulk of these subjects consist of false data, but there probably never will come a time when all such phenomena are explained. The primary reason such a vast body of knowledge dropped from view is that material science has been undergoing a long series of successes. But I do notice that every time modern science thinks it is down to the nitty-gritty of it all, it runs into (and sometimes adopts) such things as the Egyptian myths that man came from mud, or something like that. But the only point I am trying to make here is that there is a whole body of phenomena that we cannot classify as "material." They are the nonmaterial, non universe subjects. And no matter how false many of the old ideas were, they still existed; who knows but what there might not be some validity in some bits of them. One would have to study these subjects to have a complete comprehension of all the knowledge and beliefs possible. I am not opening the door to someone's saying I believe in all these things: I am only saying that there is another realm besides dedicated - and even simpleminded - materialism.

"Fantasy," so far as literature is concerned, is defined in the dictionary as "literary or dramatic fiction characterized by highly fanciful or supernatural elements." Even that is a bit limited as a definition.

So fantasy could be called any fiction that takes up elements such as spiritualism, mythology, magic, divination, the supernatural, and so on. The Arabian Nights was a gathering together of the tales of many, many countries and civilizations - not just of Arabia as many believe. Its actual title was A Thousand and One Nights of Entertainment. It abounds with examples of fantasy fiction.

When you mix science fiction with fantasy you do not have a pure genre. The two are, to a professional, separate genres. I notice today there is a tendency to mingle them and then excuse the result by calling it "imaginative fiction." Actually they don't mix well: science fiction, to be credible, has to be based on some degree of plausibility; fantasy gives you no limits at all. Writing science fiction demands care on the part of the author; writing fantasy is as easy as strolling in the park. (In fantasy, a guy has no sword in his hand; bang, there's a magic sword in his hand.) This doesn't say one is better than the other. They are simply very different genres from a professional viewpoint.

But there is more to this: science fiction, particularly in its Golden Age, had a mission. I cannot, of course, speak for my friends of that period. But from Campbell and from "shooting the breeze" with other writers of the time, one got the very solid impression that they were doing a heavy job of beating the drum to get man to the stars. At the beginning of that time, science fiction was regarded as a sort of awful stepchild in the world of literature. But worse than that, science itself was not getting the attention or the grants or the government expenditures it should have received. There has to be a lot of public interest and demand before politicians shell out the financing necessary to get a subject whizzing.

Campbell's crew of writers were pretty stellar. They included very top-liner names. They improved the literary quality of the genre. And they began the boom of its broader popularity.

A year or so after The Golden Age began, I recall going into a major university's science department. I wanted some data on cytology for my own serious researches. I was given a courteous reception and was being given the references when I noticed that the room had been gradually filling up. And not with students but with professors and deans. It had been whispered around the offices who was in the biology department, and the next thing I knew, I was shaking a lot of hands held out below beaming faces. And what did they want

to know: What did I think of this story or that? And had I seen this or that writer lately? And how was Campbell?

They had a literature! Science fiction!

And they were proud of it!

For a while, before and after World War II, I was in rather steady association with the new era of scientists, the boys who built the bomb, who were beginning to get the feel of rockets. They were all science fiction buffs. And many of the hottest scientists around were also writing science fiction on the side.

In 1945 I attended a meeting of old scientist and science fiction friends. The meeting was at the home of my dear friend, the incomparable Bob Heinlein. And do you know what was their agenda? How to get man into space fast enough so that he would be distracted from further wars on Earth. And they were the lads who had the government ear and authority to do it! We are coming close to doing it. The scientists got man into space and they even had the Russians cooperating for a while.

One can't go on living a naive life believing that everything happens by accident, that events simply follow events, that there is a natural order of things and that everything will come out right somehow. That isn't science. That's fate, kismet, and we're back in the world of fantasy. No, things do get planned. The Golden Age of science fiction that began with Campbell and Astounding Science Fiction gathered enough public interest and readership to help push man into space. Today, you hear top scientists talking the way we used to talk in bull sessions so long ago.

Campbell did what he set out to do. So long as he had his first wife and others around him to remind him that science was for people, that it was no use to just send machines out for the sake of machines, that there was no point into going into space unless the mission had something to do with people, too, he kept winning. For he was a very brilliant man and a great and very patient editor. After he lost his first wife, Dona, in 1949 - she married George O. Smith - and after he no longer had a sounding-board who made him keep people in stories, and when he no longer had his old original writing crew around, he let his magazine slip back, and when it finally became named Analog, his reign was over. But The Golden Age had kicked it all into high gear. So Campbell won after all. When I started out to write this novel, I wanted to write pure science fiction. And not in the old tradition. Writing forms and styles have changed, so I had to bring myself up to date and modernize the styles and patterns. To show that science fiction is not science fiction because of a particular kind of plot, this novel contains practically every type of story there is - detective, spy, adventure, western, love, air war, you name it. All except fantasy; there is none of that. The term "science" also includes economics and sociology and medicine where these are related to material things. So they're in here, too.

In writing for magazines, the editors (because of magazine format) force one to write to exact lengths. I was always able to do that - it is a kind of knack. But this time I decided not to cut everything out and to just roll her as she rolled, so long as the pace kept up. So I may have wound up writing the biggest sf novel ever in terms of length. The experts - and there are lots of them to do so - can verify whether this is so.

Some of my readers may wonder that I did not include my own serious subjects in this book. It was with no thought of dismissal of them. It was just that I put on my professional writer's hat. I also did not want to give anybody the idea I was doing a press relations job for my other serious works.

There are those who will look at this book and say, "See? We told you he is just a science fiction writer!" Well, as one of the crew of writers that helped start man to the stars, I'm very proud of also being known as a science fiction writer. You have satellites out there, man has walked on the moon, you have probes going to the planets, don't you? Somebody had to dream the dream, and a lot of somebodies like those great writers of The Golden Age and later had to get an awful lot of people interested in it to make it true.

I hope you enjoy this novel. It is the only one I ever wrote just to amuse myself. It also celebrates my golden wedding with the muse. Fifty years a professional - 1930 - 1980.

And as an old pro I assure you that it is pure science fiction. No fantasy. Right on the rails of the genre. Science is for people. And so is science fiction.

Ready?

Stand by.

Blast off!

L. Ron Hubbard
October 1980

PART 1

"Man," said Terl, "is an endangered species."

The hairy paws of the Chamco brothers hung suspended above the broad keys of the laser-bash game. The cliffs of Char's eyebones drew down over his yellow orbs as he looked up in mystery. Even the steward, who had been padding quietly about picking up her saucepans, lumbered to a halt and stared.

Terl could not have produced a more profound effect had he thrown a meat-girl naked into the middle of the room.

The clear dome of the Intergalactic Mining Company employee recreation hall shone black around and above them, silvered at its crossbars by the pale glow of the Earth's single moon, half-full on this late summer night.

Terl lifted his large amber eyes from the tome that rested minutely in his massive claws and looked around the room. He was suddenly aware of the effect he had produced, and it amused him. Anything to relieve the humdrum monotony of a ten-year [Time, distance, and weight have been translated in all cases throughout this book to old Earth time, distance, and weight systems for the sake of uniformity and to prevent confusion in the various systems employed by the Psychlos. - Translator] duty tour in this gods-abandoned mining camp, way out here on the edge of a minor galaxy.

In an even more professorial voice, already deep and roaring enough, Terl repeated his thought. "Man is an endangered species."

Char glowered at him. "What in the name of diseased crap are you reading?"

Terl did not much care for his tone. After all, Char was simply one of several mine managers, but Terl was chief of minesite security. "I didn't read it. I thought it."

"You must've got it from somewhere," growled Char. "What is that book?"

Terl held it up so Char could see its back. It said, "General Report of Geological Minesites, Volume 250,369." Like all such books it was huge but printed on material that made it almost weightless, particularly on a low-gravity planet such as Earth, a triumph of design and manufacture that did not cut heavily into the payloads of freighters.

"Rughr," growled Char in disgust. "That must be two, three hundred Earth-years old. If you want to prowl around in books, I got an up-to-date general board of directors' report that says we're thirty-five freighters behind in bauxite deliveries."

The Chamco brothers looked at each other and then at their game to see where they had gotten to in shooting down the live mayflies in the air box. But Terl's next words distracted them again.

"Today," said Terl, brushing Char's push for work aside, "I got a sighting report from a recon drone that recorded only thirty-five men in that valley near that peak." Terl waved his paw westward toward the towering mountain range silhouetted by the moon.

"So?" said Char.

"So I dug up the books out of curiosity. There used to be hundreds in that valley. And furthermore," continued Terl with his professorial ways coming back, "there used to be thousands and thousands of them on this planet."

"You can't believe all you read," said Char heavily. "On my last duty tour - it was Arcturus IV -"

"This book," said Terl, lifting it impressively, "was compiled by the culture and ethnology department of the Intergalactic Mining Company."

The larger Chamco brother batted his eyebones. "I didn't know we had one."

Char sniffed. "It was disbanded more than a century ago. Useless waste of money. Yapping around about ecological impacts and junk like that." He shifted his bulk around to Terl.

"Is this some kind of scheme to explain a nonscheduled vacation? You're going to get your butt in a bind. I can see it, a pile of requisitions this high for breathe-gas tanks and scoutcraft. You won't get any of my workers."

"Turn off the juice," said Terl. "I only said that man -"

"I know what you said. But you got your appointment because you are clever. That's right, clever. Not intelligent. Clever. And I can see right through an excuse to go on a hunting expedition. What Psychlo in his right skull would bother with the things?"

The smaller Chamco brother grinned. "I get tired of just dig-dig-dig, ship-ship-ship.

Hunting might be fun. I didn't think anybody did it for -'

Char turned on him like a tank zeroing in on its prey. "Fun hunting those things! You ever see one?" He lurched to his feet and the floor creaked. He put his paw just above his belt. "They only come up to here! They got hardly any hair on them except their heads. They're a dirty white color like a slug. They're so brittle they break up when you try to put them in a pouch." He snarled in disgust and picked up a saucepan of kerbango. "They're so weak they couldn't pick this up without straining their guts. And they're not good eating." He tossed off the kerbango and made an earthquake shudder.

"You ever see one?" said the bigger Chamco brother.

Char sat down, the dome rumbled, and he handed the empty saucepan to the steward. "No," he said. "Not alive. I seen some bones in the shafts and I heard."

"There were thousands of them once," said Terl, ignoring the mine manager. "Thousands! All over the place."

Char belched. "Shouldn't wonder they die off. They breathe this oxygen-nitrogen air."

Deadly stuff."

"I got a crack in my face mask yesterday," said the smaller Chamco brother. "For about thirty seconds I thought I wasn't going to make it. Bright lights bursting inside your skull. Deadly stuff. I really look forward to getting back home where you can walk around without a suit or mask, where the gravity gives you something to push against, where everything is a beautiful purple and there's not one bit of this green stuff. My papa used to tell me that if I wasn't a good Psychlo and if I didn't say sir-sir-sir to the right people, I'd wind up at a butt end of nowhere like this. He was right. I did. It's your shot, brother."

Char sat back and eyed Terl. "You ain't really going hunting for a man, are you?"

Terl looked at his book. He inserted one of his talons to keep his place and then thumped the volume against his knee.

"I think you're wrong," he mused. "There was something to these creatures. Before we came along, it says here, they had towns on every continent. They had flying machines and boats. They even appear to have fired off stuff into space."

"How do you know that wasn't some other race?" said Char. "How do you know it wasn't some lost colony of Psychlos?"

"No, it wasn't that," said Terl. "Psychlos can't breathe this air. It was man all right, just like the cultural guys researched. And right in our own histories, you know how it says we got here?"

"Ump," said Char.

"Man apparently sent out some kind of probe that gave full directions to the place, had pictures of man on it and everything. It got picked up by a Psychlo recon. And you know what?"

"Ump," said Char.

"The probe and the pictures were on a metal that was rare everywhere and worth a clanking fortune. And Intergalactic paid the Psychlo governors sixty trillion Galactic credits for the directions and the concession. One gas barrage and we were in business."

"Fairy tales, fairy tales," said Char. "Every planet I ever helped gut has some butt and crap story like that. Every one." He yawned his face into a huge cavern. "All that was hundreds, maybe thousands of years ago. You ever notice that the public relations department always puts their fairy tales so far back nobody can ever check them?"

"I'm going to go out and catch one of these things," said Terl.

"Not with any of my crews or equipment you ain't," said Char.

Terl heaved his mammoth bulk off the seat and crossed the creaking floor to the berthing hatch.

"You're as crazy as a nebula of crap," said Char.

The two Chamco brothers got back into their game and intently laser-blasted the entrapped mayflies into smoky puffs, one by one.

Char looked at the empty door. The security chief knew no Psychlo could go up into those mountains. Terl really was crazy. There was deadly uranium up there. But Terl, rumbling along a hallway to his room, did not consider himself crazy. He was being very clever as always. He had started the rumors so no questions would get out of hand when he began to put into motion the personal plans that would make him wealthy and powerful and, almost as important, dig him out of this accursed planet.

The man-things were the perfect answer. All he needed was just one and then he could get the others. His campaign had begun and begun very well, he thought.

He went to sleep gloating over how clever he was.

- 2 -

It was a good day for a funeral, only it seemed there wasn't going to be one.

Dark, stormy-looking clouds were creeping in from the west, shredded by the snow-speckled peaks, leaving only a few patches of blue sky showing.

Jonnie Goodboy Tyler stood beside his horse at the upper end of the wide mountain meadow and looked with discontent upon the sprawled and decaying village.

His father was dead and he ought to be properly buried. He hadn't died of the red blotches and there was no question of somebody else catching it. His bones had just crumbled away. So there was no excuse not to properly bury him. Yet there was no sign of anyone doing so.

Jonnie had gotten up in the dawn dark, determined to choke down his grief and go about his correct business. He had yelled up Windsplitter, the fastest of his several horses, put a cowhide rope on his nose, and gone down through the dangerous defiles to the lower plain and with a lot of hard riding and herding pushed five wild cattle back up to the mountain meadow. He had then bashed out the brains of the fattest of them and ordered his Aunt Ellen to push the barbecue fire together and get meat cooking.

Aunt Ellen hadn't cared for the orders. She had broken her sharpest rock, she said, and couldn't skin and cut the meat, and certain men hadn't dragged in any firewood lately. Jonnie Goodboy had stood very tall and looked at her. Among people who were average

height, Jonnie Goodboy stood half a head taller, a muscular six feet shining with the bronzed health of his twenty years. He had just stood there, wind tangling his corn-yellow hair and beard, looking at her with his ice-blue eyes. And Aunt Ellen had gone and found some wood and had put a stone to work, even though it was a very dull one. He could see her now, down there below him, wrapped in the smoke of slow roasting meat, busy. There ought to be more activity in the village, Jonnie thought. The last big funeral he had seen was when he was about five years old, when Smith the mayor had died. There had been songs and preaching and a feast and it had ended with a dance by moonlight. Mayor Smith had been put in a hole in the ground and the dirt filled in over him, and while the two cross-sticks of the marker were long since gone, it had been a proper respectful funeral. More recently they had just dumped the dead in the black rock gulch below the waterpool and let the coyotes clean them up.

Well, that wasn't the way you went about it, Jonnie told himself. Not with his father, anyway.

He spun on his heel and with one motion went aboard Windsplitter. The thump of his hard bare heel sent the horse down toward the courthouse.

He passed by the decayed ruins of cabins on the outskirts. Every year they caved in further. For a long time anybody needing a building log hadn't cut any trees: they had just stripped handy existing structures. But the logs in these cabins were so eaten up and rotted now, they hardly even served as firewood.

Windsplitter picked his way down the weed-grown track, walking watchfully to avoid stepping on ancient and newly discarded food bones and trash. He twitched his ear toward a distant wolf howl from up in a mountain glen.

The smell of new blood and the meat smoke must be pulling the wolves down, thought Jonnie, and he hefted his kill-club from where it dangled by a thong into his palm. He'd lately seen a wolf right down in the cabins, prowling around for bones, or maybe even a puppy or a child. Even a decade ago it wouldn't have happened. But every year there were fewer and fewer people.

Legend said that there had been a thousand in the valley, but Jonnie thought that was probably an exaggeration. There was plenty of food. The wide plains below the peaks were overrun with wild cattle, wild pigs, and bands of horses. The ranges above were alive with deer and goats. And even an unskilled hunter had no trouble getting food. There was plenty of water due to the melting snows and streams, and the little patches of vegetables would thrive if anybody planted and tended them.

No, it wasn't food. It was something else. Animals reproduced, it seemed, but man didn't. At least not to any extent. The death rate and the birth rate were unbalanced, with death the winner. Even when children were born they sometimes had only one eye or one lung or one hand and had to be left out in the icy night. Monsters were unwanted things. All life was overpowered by a fear of monsters.

Maybe it was this valley.

When he was seven he had asked his father about it. "But maybe people can't live in this place," he had said.

His father had looked at him wearily. "There were people in some other valleys, according to the legends. They're all gone, but there are still some of us."

He had not been convinced. Jonnie had said, "There's all those plains down there and they're full of animals. Why don't we go live there?"

Jonnies had always been a bit of a trial. Too smart, the elders had said. Always stirring things up. Questions, questions. And did he believe what he was told? Even by older men who knew a lot better? No. Not Jonnie Goodboy Tyler. But his father had not brought any of this up. He had just said wearily, "There's no timber down there to build cabins."

This hadn't explained anything, so Jonnie had said, "I bet I could find something down there to build a cabin with."

His father had knelt down, patient for once, and said, "You're a good boy, Jonnie. And your mother and I love you very much. But nobody could build anything that would keep out the monsters."

Monsters, monsters. All his life Jonnie had been hearing about the monsters. He'd never seen one. But he held his peace. The oldsters believed in monsters, so they believed in monsters.

But thinking of his father brought an unwelcome wetness to his eyes.

And he was almost unseated as his horse reared. A string of foot-long mountain rats had rushed headlong from a cabin and hit Windsplitter's legs.

What you get for dreaming, Jonnie snapped to himself. He put Windsplitter's four hoofs back down on the path and drummed him forward the last few yards to the courthouse.

Chrissie was standing there, her leg being hugged as always by her younger sister. Jonnie Goodboy ignored her and looked at the courthouse. The old, old building was the only one to have a stone foundation and stone floor. Somebody had said it was a thousand

years old, and though Jonnie didn't believe it, the place sure looked it. Even its seventeenth roof was as sway-backed as an overpacked horse. There wasn't a log in the upper structure that wasn't gaping with worm holes. The windows were mainly caved in like eyeholes in a rotted skull. The stone walkway close to it was worn half afoot deep by the bare horny feet of scores of generations of villagers coming here to be tried and punished in the olden days when somebody had cared. In his lifetime Jonnie had never seen a trial, or a town meeting for that matter.

"Parson Staffor is inside," said Chrissie. She was a slight girl, very pretty, about eighteen. She had large black eyes in strange contrast to her corn-silk hair. She had wrapped around herself a doeskin, really tight, and it showed her breasts and a lot of bare leg.

Her little sister, Pattie, a budding copy of the older girl, looked bright-eyed and interested. "Is there going to be a real funeral, Jonnie?"

Jonnie didn't answer. He slid off Windsplitter in a graceful single motion. He handed the lead rope to Pattie, who ecstatically uncoiled herself from Chrissie's leg and snatched at it. At seven Pattie had no parents and little enough of a home, and her sun rose and set only on Jonnie's proud orders.

"Is there going to be meat and a burying in a hole in the ground and everything?" demanded Pattie.

Jonnie started through the courthouse door, paying no heed to the hand Chrissie put out to touch his arm.

Parson Staffor lay sprawled on a mound of dirty grass, mouth open in snores, flies buzzing about. Jonnie stirred him with his foot.

Parson Staffor had seen better days. Once he had been fat and inclined to pomposity. But that was before he had begun to chew locoweed - to ease his toothaches, he said. He was gaunt now, dried up, nearly toothless, seamed with inlaid grime. Some wads of weed lay on the stones beside his mouldy bed.

As the toe prodded him again, Staffor opened his eyes and rubbed some of the scum out of them in alarm. Then he saw it was Jonnie Goodboy Tyler, and he fell back without interest.

"Get up," said Jonnie.

"That's this generation," muttered the parson. "No respect for their elders. Rushing off to the bushes, fornicating, grabbing the best meat pieces."

"Get up," said Jonnie. "You are going to give a funeral."

"A funeral?" moaned Staffor.

"With meat and sermons and dancing."

"Who is dead?"

"You know quite well who's dead. You were there at the end."

"Oh, yes. Your father. A good man. Yes, a good man. Well, maybe he was your father."

Jonnie suddenly looked a little dangerous. He was standing there at ease, but he was wearing the skin of a puma that he himself had slain and he had his kill-club on a wrist thong. The club seemed to jump of its own volition into his palm.

Parson Staffor abruptly sat up. "Now don't take it wrong, Jonnie. It's just that things are a little mixed up these days, you know. Your mother had three husbands one time and another, and there being no real ceremonies these days -"

"You better get up," said Jonnie.

Staffor clawed for the corner of an ancient, scarred bench and pulled himself upright. He began to tie the deerskin he usually wore, and obviously had worn far too long, using a frayed wovengrass rope. "My memory isn't so good these days, Jonnie. One time I could remember all kinds of things. Legends, marriage ceremonies, hunt blessings, even family quarrels." He was looking around for some fresh locoweed.

"When the sun is straight up," said Jonnie, "you're going to call the whole village together at the old graveyard and you're -"

"Who's going to dig the hole? There has to be a hole, you know, for a proper funeral."

"I'll dig the hole," said Jonnie.

Staffor had found some fresh locoweed and began to gum it. He looked relieved. "Well, I'm glad the town doesn't have to dig the hole. Horns, but this stuff is green. You said meat. Who is going to kill and cook it?"

"That's all taken care of."

Staffor nodded and then abruptly saw more work ahead. "Who's going to assemble the people?"

"I'll ask Pattie to tell them."

Staffor looked at him reproachfully. "Then there's nothing for me to do until straight-up. Why'd you wake me up?" He threw himself back down on the dirty grass and sourly watched Jonnie walk out of the ancient room.

into the remains of the dance fire.

Chrissie lay on her stomach beside him, idly shredding the seeds from a large sunflower between her very white teeth. She looked up at Jonnie from time to time, a little puzzled but not unduly so. She had never seen him cry before, even as a little boy. She knew he had loved his father. But Jonnie was usually so tall and grand, even cold. Could it be that under that good-looking, almost pretty face he felt emotions for her, too? It was something to speculate about. She knew very well how she felt about Jonnie. If anything happened to Jonnie she would throw herself off the cliff where they sometimes herded wild cattle to their death an easy way to kill them. Life without Jonnie Goodboy would not only not be worth living, it would be completely unbearable. Maybe Jonnie did care about her. The tears showed something.

Pattie had no such troubles. She had not only stuffed herself with roast meat, she had also stuffed herself with the wild strawberries that had been served by the heap. And then during the dancing she had run and run and run with two or three little boys and then come back to eat some more. She was sleeping so heavily she looked like a mound of rags.

Jonnie blamed himself. He had tried to tell his father, not just when he was seven, but many times thereafter, that something was wrong with this place. Places were not all the same. Jonnie had been - was - sure of it. Why did the pigs and horses and cattle in the plains have little pigs and horses and cattle so numerously and so continuously? Yes, and why were there more and more wolves and coyotes and pumas and birds up in the higher ranges, and fewer and fewer men?

The villagers had been quite happy with the funeral, especially since Jonnie and a couple of others had done most of the work.

Jonnie had not been happy with it at all. It wasn't good enough.

They had gathered at sun straight-up on the knoll above the village where some said the graveyard had been. The markers were all gone. Maybe it had been a graveyard. When Jonnie had toiled - naked so as not to stain his puma-skin cloak and doe britches - in the morning sun, he had dug into something that might have been an old grave. At least there was a bone in it that could have been human.

The villagers had come slouching around and there had been a wait while Pattie tore back to the courthouse and awakened Parson Staffor again. Only twenty-five of them had assembled. The others had said they were tired and asked for any food to be brought back to them.

Then there had been an argument about the shape of the grave hole. Jonnie had dug it oblong so the body could lie level, but when Staffor arrived he said it should be straight up and down, that graves were dug straight up and down because you could get more bodies into a graveyard that way. When Jonnie pointed out that there weren't any burials these days and there was plenty of room, Staffor told him off in front of everybody.

"You're too smart," Staffor rapped at him. "When we had even half a council they used to remark on it. Every few council meetings, some prank of yours would come up. You'd ridden to the high ridge and killed a goat. You'd gone clear up Highpeak and gotten lost in a blizzard and found your way back, you said, by following the downslope of the ground. Too smart. Who else trained six horses? Everybody knows graves should be straight up and down."

But they had buried his father lying flat anyway, because nobody else had wanted to do more digging and the sun was now past straight-up and it was getting hot.

Jonnie hadn't dared suggest what he really wanted to do. There would have been a riot. He had wanted to put his father in the cave of the ancient gods, far up at the top of the dark canyon, a savage cleft in the side of the tallest peak. When he was twelve he had strayed up there, more trying out a pony than going someplace. But the way up the canyon had been very flat and inviting. He had gone for miles and miles and miles and then he had been abruptly halted by giant, vertical doors. They were of some kind of metal, heavily corroded. One couldn't see them from above or even from the canyon rims. They were absolutely huge. They went up and up.

He had gotten off his pony and climbed over the rubble in front of them and simply stared. He had walked all around in circles and then come back and stared some more. After a while he had gotten brave and had walked up to them. But push as he might, he couldn't open them. Then he had found a latch-like bar and he had pried it off and it fell, just missing his foot. Rusted but very heavy.

He had braced his shoulder against one door, sure that it was a door, and pushed and pushed. But his twelve-year-old shoulder and weight hadn't had much effect on it.

Then he had taken the fallen bar and begun to pry it into the slight crack, and after a few minutes he had gotten a purchase with it.

There had been a horrible groaning sound that almost stood his hair up straight, and he dropped the bar and ran for the pony.

Once he was mounted, his fright ebbed a bit. Maybe it was just a sound caused by the rusted hinges. Maybe it wasn't a monster.

He had gone back and worked some more with the bar, and sure enough it was just the door groaning on the pins that held it.

An awful smell had come out of the cracked opening. The smell itself had made him afraid. A little light had been let in and he peeked inside.

A long flight of steps led down, remarkably even steps. And they would have been very neat, except . . .

The steps were covered by skeletons tumbled every which way. Skeletons in strips of clothing - clothing like he had never seen.

Bits of metal, some bright, had fallen among the bones.

He ran away again, but this time not as far as the pony. He had suddenly realized he would need proof.

Bracing his nerve to a pitch he had seldom before achieved, he went back and gingerly stepped inside and picked up one of the bits of metal. It had a pretty design, a bird with flying wings holding arrows in its claws, quite bright.

His heart almost stopped when the skull he had removed it from tipped sideways and went to powder before his very gaze, as though it reproached him with its gaping eyes for his robbery and then expired.

The pony had been in a white-coat lather when he pulled up in the village.

For two whole days he said nothing, wondering how best to ask his questions. Previous experience in asking questions had made him cautious.

Mayor Duncan was still alive at that time. Jonnie had sat quietly beside him until the big man was properly stuffed with venison and was quiet except for a few belches.

"That big tomb," Jonnie had said abruptly.

"What big what?" Mayor Duncan had snorted.

"The place up the dark canyon where they used to put the dead people. "

"What place?"

Jonnie had taken out the bright bird badge and shown it to Mayor Duncan.

Duncan had looked at it, twisting his head this way and that, twisting the badge this way and that.

Parson Staffor, brighter in those days, had reached across the fire in a sudden swoop and grabbed the badge.

The ensuing interrogation had not been pleasant: about young boys who went to places that were forbidden and got everybody in trouble and didn't listen at conferences where they had to learn legends and were too smart anyway.

Mayor Duncan, however, had himself been curious and finally pinned Parson Staffor into recounting an applicable legend.

"A tomb of the old gods," the parson had finally said. "Nobody has been there in living memory - small boys do not count. But it was said to exist by my great-grandfather when he was still alive - and he lived a long time. The gods used to come into these mountains and they buried the great men in huge caverns. When the lightning flashed on Highpeak, it was because the gods had come to bury a great man from over the water."

"Once there were thousands and thousands living in big villages a hundred times the size of this one. These villages were to the east, and it is said there is the remains of one straight east where thousands lived. And the place was flat except for some hills. And when a great man died there the gods brought him to the tomb of the gods."

Parson Staffor had shaken the badge. "This was placed on the foreheads of the great when they were laid to rest in the great tomb of the gods. And that's what it is, and ancient law says that nobody is supposed to go there and everybody had better stay away from there forever - especially little boys." And he had put the badge in his pouch, and that was the last Jonnie ever saw of it. After all, Staffor was a holy man and in charge of holy things.

Nevertheless, Jonnie thought his father should have been buried in the tomb of the gods. Jonnie had never been back there again and thought of it only when he saw lightning hit Highpeak.

But he wished he had buried his father there.

"Are you worried?" asked Chrissie.

Jonnie looked down at her, his reverie broken. The dying fire wove a reddish sheen into her hair and sparked in her dark eyes.

"It's my fault," said Jonnie.

Chrissie smiled and shook her head. Nothing could be Jonnie's fault.

"Yes, it is," said Jonnie. "There's something wrong with this place. My father's bones . . . in the last year they just crumbled like that skeleton's in the tomb of the gods."

"The tomb of the what?" said Chrissie idly. If Jonnie wanted to talk nonsense it was all right with her. At least he was talking to her.

"I should have buried him there. He was a great man. He taught me a lot of things - how to braid grass-rope, how to wait for a puma to crouch before you stepped aside and hit him as he sprang: they can't turn in mid-air, you know. How to cut hide into strips . . ."

"Jonnie, you aren't guilty of anything."

"It was a bad funeral. "

"Jonnlie, it's the only funeral I remember."

"No, it was not a good funeral. Staffor didn't preach a funeral sermon. "

"He talked. I didn't listen because I was helping gather strawberries, but I know he talked. Did he say something bad?"

"No. Only it didn't apply."

"Well, what did he say, Jonnlie?"

"Oh, you know, all that stuff about god being angry with the people. Everybody knows that legend. I can quote it myself."

"Quote it."

Jonnlie sniffed a little impatiently. But she was interested and it made him feel a little better.

"And then there came a day when god was wroth. And wearied he was of the fornicating and pleasure dallying of the people. And he did cause a wondrous cloud to come and everywhere it struck; the anger of god snuffed out the breath and breathing of ninety-nine out of a hundred men. And disaster lay upon the land and plagues and epidemics rolled and smote the unholy, and when it was done the wicked were gone and only the holy and righteous, the true children of the lord, remained upon the stark and bloodied field. But god even then was not sure and so he tested them. He sent monsters upon them to drive them to the hills and secret places, and lo the monsters hunted them and made them less and less until at last all men remaining were the only holy, the only blessed, the only sure righteous upon Earth. Hey man!"'

"Oh, that one. You say it very nicely, Jonnlie."

"It's my fault," said Jonnlie morosely. "I should have made my father listen. There is something wrong with this place. I am certain that if he had listened and we moved elsewhere, he would be alive today. I feel it!"

"Where else is there?"

"There's that whole great plain out there. Weeks of riding on it, I am sure. And they say man once lived in a big village out there."

"Oh, no, Jonnlie. The monsters."

"I've never seen a monster."

"You've seen the shiny flashing things that sail overhead every few days."

"Oh, those. The sun and moon sail overhead too. So do the stars. And even shooting stars."

Chrissie was frightened suddenly. "Jonnlie, you're not going to do something?"

"I am. With first light I am going to ride out and see if there really was a big village in the plains."

Chrissie felt her heart contract. She looked up at his determined profile. It was as though she was sinking down, down into the earth, as though she lay in today's grave.

"Please, Jonnlie. "

"No, I'm going."

"Jonnlie, I'll go with you."

"No, you stay here." He thought fast, something to deter her. "I may be gone for a whole year."

Water got into her sight. "What will I do if you don't come back?"

"I'll come back."

"Jonnlie, if you don't come back in a year, I'll come looking for you." Jonnlie frowned. He scented blackmail.

"Jonnlie, if you're leaving, you see those stars up there? When they come back to the same place next year and you haven't returned, I will come looking."

"You'd be killed out in the plains. The pigs, the wild cattle... "

"Jonnlie, that is what I will do. I swear it, Jonnlie."

"You think I'd just wander off and never return?"

"That's what I will do, Jonnlie. You can go. But that's what I will do."

- 5 -

The first dawn light was painting Highpeak rose. It was going to be a beautiful day. Jonnlie Goodboy was completing the packing of a lead horse. Windsplitter was sidling about, biting at the grass but not really eating. He had his eye on Jonnlie. They were obviously going somewhere, and Windsplitter was not going to be left out.

Some wisps of smoke were coming from the breakfast fire of the Jimson family nearby. They were roasting a dog. Yesterday at the funeral feast nearly a score of dogs had gotten into an idiot fight. There had been plenty of bones and meat as well. But the pack had gotten into a fight and a big brindle had been killed. Looked like the Jimson family would have meat all day.

Jonnlie was trying to keep his mind on petty details. And off Chrissie and Pattie, who were standing there watching him quietly.

Brown Limper Staffor was also there, idling about in the background. He had a clubfoot

and should have been killed at birth, but he was the only child the Staffors had ever had, and Staffor was parson after all. Maybe mayor, too, since there wasn't any now. There was no affection whatever between Jonnie and Brown Limper. During the funeral dancing, Brown had sat on the sidelines making sneering remarks about the dancing, about the funeral, about the meat, about the strawberries. But when he had made a remark about Jonnie's father - "Maybe never had a bone in the right place," - Jonnie had hit him a backhand cuff. Made Jonnie ashamed of himself, hitting a cripple.

Brown Limper stood crookedly, a faint blue bruise on his cheek, watching Jonnie get ready, wishes of bad luck written all over him. Two other boys of similar age - there were only five in the whole village who were in their late teens - wandered up and asked Brown what was going on. Brown shrugged.

Jonnie kept his mind carefully on his business. He was probably taking too much, but he didn't know what he'd run into. Nobody knew. In the two buckskin sacks he was roping on either side of the lead horse he had flint stones for fire, rat's nests for tinder, bundles of cut thongs, some sharp-edged rocks that were sometimes hard to find and cut indifferently well, three spare kill-clubs - one heavy enough to crush a bear's skull just in case - some warm robes that didn't stink very much, a couple of buckskins for spare clothes...

He gave a start. He hadn't realized Chrissie had come within a foot of him. He hoped he wouldn't have to talk.

Blackmail, that's what it was - plain as possible and all bad. If she'd said she would kill herself if he didn't come back, well, one could have put that down to girl vaporings. But threatening to follow him in a year put another shadow on it entirely. It meant he would have to be cautious. He'd have to be careful not to get himself killed. It was one thing to worry about his own life; he didn't care a snap for risk or danger. But the thought of Chrissie going down on the plains if he didn't come back made him snow-cold at the pit of his stomach. She'd be gored or mauled or eaten alive and every agonizing second of it would be Jonnie's fault. She had effectively committed him to caution and care just what she intended.

She was holding something out to him. Two somethings. One was a large bone needle with a thong hole in it, and the other was a skin awl. Both were worn and polished and valuable. "They were mama's," said Chrissie.

"I don't need anything."

"No, you have them."

"I won't need them!"

"If you lose your clothes," she wailed, "how are you going to sew?"

The crowd had thickened. Jonnie didn't need any outbursts. He snatched the needle and awl out of her hand and unlashed the neck of a sack and dropped them in, made sure they hadn't missed and dropped out, and then relashed the sack.

Chrissie stood more quietly. Jonnie turned and faced her. He was a little bit shocked. There wasn't even a smudge of color in her face. She looked like she hadn't slept and had tick fever as well.

Jonnie's resolution wavered. Then beyond Chrissie he saw Brown Limper tittering and talking behind his hand to Petie Thommso.

Jonnie's face went tight. He grabbed Chrissie and kissed her hard. It was as though he had taken a board from an irrigation trough; the tears went down her cheeks.

"Now look," said Jonnie. "Don't you follow me!"

She made a careful effort to control her voice. "If you don't come back in a year, I will. By all the gods on Highpeak, Jonnie. "

He looked at her. Then he beckoned to Windsplitter, who sidled over. With one smooth spring he mounted, the lead rope of the other horse gripped in his hand.

"You can have my other four horses," said Jonnie to Chrissie. "Don't eat them; they're trained." He paused. "Unless you get awful hungry, of course, like in the winter."

Chrissie hung on to his leg for a moment and then she stepped back and sagged.

Jonnie thumped Windsplitter with a heel and they moved off. This was going to be no wild free ride to adventure. This was going to be a tiptoe scout with care. Chrissie had seen to that!

At the entrance to the defile he looked back. About fifteen people were still standing there watching him go. They all looked dejected. He used a heel signal to make Windsplitter rear and waved his hand. They all waved back with sudden animation.

Then Jonnie was gone down the dark canyon trail to the wide and unknown plains.

The rest of the people drifted off. Chrissie still stood there, hoping with a wild crazy hope that he would ride into sight, returning.

Pattie tugged at her leg. "Chrissie. Chrissie, will he come back?"

Chrissie's voice was very low, her eyes like ashes in a dead fire. "Goodbye," she whispered.

Terl belched. It was a polite way to attract attention, but the belch didn't make much impression through the whine and howl of machines in the transport department maintenance dome.

Zzt's concentration on his work became more marked. Minesite 16's transport chief had little use for the security head. Every time a tool or a car or fuel turned up missing - or something was broken - it got attention from security.

Three crashed cars were strewn about in various stages of reassembly, one of them very messy with splotches of green Psychlo blood in the interior upholstery. The big drills that dangled from the ceiling rails pointed sharp beaks this way and that, idling in their programming. Lathes with nothing in their jaws spun waiting for something to twist and shave. Belts snarled and slapped at each other.

Terl watched the surprisingly nimble talons of Zzt disassemble the small concentric shells of a high-speed jet engine. Terl had hoped to detect a small tremble or two in Zzt's paws - if the transport chief's conscience was bothering him it would be much easier to do business. There was no tremble.

Zzt finished the disassembly and threw the last ring on the bench. His yellow orbs contracted as he looked at Terl. "Well? What have I done now?"

Terl lumbered closer and looked around. "Where are your maintenance men?"

"We're fifteen mechanics under complement. They were transferred to operations over the last month. I know it and you know it. So why are you here?"

As chief of security, Terl had learned through experience not to be very straightforward. If he simply asked for a manual reconnaissance plane, the transport chief would demand the emergency voucher, not get it, and say "No transport." And there were no emergencies for security on this dull planet. Not real ones. In hundreds of years of operation, there had not been the slightest security threat to Intergalactic Mining operations here. A dull security scene, and consequently the chief of that department was not considered very important. Apparent threats had to be manufactured with guile as their sole ingredient.

"I've been investigating a suspicion of conspiracy to sabotage transport," said Terl. "Kept me busy for the last three weeks." He eased his bulk back against a wrecked car. "Don't lean on that recon. You'll dent its wing."

Terl decided it was better to be friendly and rumbled over to a stool at the bench where Zzt was working. "Confidentially, Zzt, I've had an idea that could get us some outside personnel. I'm working on it, and that's why I need a manual recon."

Zzt batted his eyebones and sat down on another stool, which creaked despairingly under his thousand-pound bulk.

"This planet," said Terl confidingly, "used to have a sentient race on it."

"What race was that?" asked Zzt suspiciously.

"Man," said Terl.

Zzt looked at him searchingly. A security officer was never noted for his sense of humor. Some had been known to bait and entrap and then file charges. But Zzt couldn't help himself. His mouthbones started to stretch, and even though he sought to control them, they spread and suddenly his laugh exploded in Terl's face. Zzt hastily got it under control and turned back to his bench to resume work.

"Anything else on your mind?" asked Zzt, as an afterthought.

This was not going well, thought Terl. Well, that's what happened when you were frank. It just didn't mix with security.

"This suspicion of conspiracy to sabotage transport," said Terl as he looked around at the wrecked cars with half-lowered eyebones, "could reach to high places."

Zzt threw down a wrench with a clang. A low snarl rumbled in him. He sat there, staring in front of him. He was thinking.

"What do you really want?" he asked at last. "A recon plane. For five or six days."

Zzt got up and yanked a transport schedule clipboard off the wall and studied it. He could hear Terl almost purring.

"You see this schedule?" said Zzt, pushing it under Terl's nose.

"Well, yes."

"Do you see where it has six drone recons assigned to security?"

"Of course."

"And do you see where this has been going on for -" Zzt peeled back sheet after sheet, "- blast! For centuries I suppose."

"Have to keep a minesite planet under surveillance," said Terl complacently.

"Under surveillance for what?" said Zzt. "Every scrap of ore was spotted and estimated long before your and my living memory. There's nothing out there but mammals. Air organisms."

"There might be a hostile landing."

"Here?" sneered Zzt. "Company probes in outer space would detect it ages before it ever arrived here. Terl, transport has to fuel and maintain and recondition those drones two and three times a year. You know and I know the company is on an economy wave. Tell you what."

Terl waited sourly to be told.

"If you will let us cancel those recon drones, I'll put a triwheel ground cycle at your disposal for a limited time."

Terl let out a small shrill scream.

Zzt amended his bargain. "A ground car at your disposal when ordered."

Terl lumbered over to the crashed vehicle that had blood on its seats. "Wonder if this was caused by faulty maintenance."

Zzt stood there, unrelenting. The crash had been caused by too much kerbang on duty.

"One recon drone programmed to cover the whole planet once a month," said Zzt. "One ground car at your permanent disposal."

Terl looked at the other wrecks but couldn't think of anything. These investigations were done and dead. Teach him to close investigations!

He wandered back to Zzt. "One drone recon programmed to cover the whole planet once a month. One armored and firepower ground car at permanent disposal with no questions on ammunition, breathe-gas, or fuel requisitions."

Zzt took the forms from the bench drawer and made them out. He shoved the papers and clipboard at Terl.

As he signed, Terl thought to himself that this transport chief really ought to be looked into. Maybe for ore robbery!

Zzt took the papers back and removed from the switchboard the combination keycard of the oldest and rattiest ground car that was gathering dust in the garage dome. He coupled it with a coupon book for ammo, another for breathe-gas, and another for fuel.

The deal would never actually become part of recorded history as a deal, for the dates of the orders were carefully not coincident. Neither suspected that they had just materially altered the future of the planet. And not for the better of Intergalactic. But that is sometimes the way with large commercial companies.

When Terl had left to get his Mark II (armored, firepower) ground car, Zzt thought to himself that it was wonderful what lies executives told just to be able to go hunting. Kill-mad they all were. Machine kill-mad, too, from the jam-ups he had to repair. What a story! Man a sentient race indeed! He laughed and got back to work.

- 7 -

Jonnie Goodboy Tyler galloped free across the vast ocean of grass, Windsplitter exuberantly stretching his legs, the lead horse rollicking along behind.

What a day. Blue sky and the wind a cooling freshness on his face.

Now two days out, he had come down from the mountains, through the foothills, and into the vastest plain he had ever imagined. He could still see the tiniest tip of Highpeak behind him, and with the sun it kept him true on course and reassured him that he could find his way home whenever he wanted.

Total security! The herds of wild cattle were many, but he had been living with those all his life. A few wolves, but what were wolves? No bear, no puma so far. Why, in all reverence to the gods, did anybody ever stay cooped up in the mountains?

And monsters - what monsters? Phagh! Crazy tales!

Even that shiny, floating cylinder that had gone overhead every few days the whole of his life was overdue down here. It had come from west to east with the regularity of every other heavenly body, but even it seemed to have stopped. On his present course he would have seen it.

In short, Jonnie Goodboy Tyler was suffering from a bad case of overconfidence. And the first disaster that hit him had to do with pigs.

Pigs were usually easy to kill - if you were a bit nimble and watched out for charges of the boars. And a small suckling pig was exactly what one could use for supper.

Right there ahead of him, clear in the late-afternoon light, was a compact herd of pigs out in the open. There were big ones and small ones, but they were all fat.

Jonnie pulled Windsplitter to a halt and slid off. The wind was not quite right, a bit too downwind to the pigs. They'd smell him if he approached directly.

With a bent-knee run, he brought himself silently around them until the wind was at right angles.

He stopped and hefted his club. The tall grass was nearly to his waist.

The pigs were rooting around a shallow depression in the plain, where water stood in the wet months, making a temporary marsh. There must be roots to be had there, Jonnie supposed. There were dozens of pigs, every one with his snout down.

With a crouching gait, staying below the grass tops, Jonnie went forward closing the distance yard by yard.

Only a few feet separated him now from the outermost fringe of pigs. Silently he rose until his eyes were just above the level of the grass. A small porker was only three arm-spans from him, an easy throw.

"Here's for supper," breathed Jonnie and heaved his kill-club straight and true at the head of the pig.

Dead on, a direct hit. The pig let out an earsplitter and dropped. But that wasn't all that happened. Instant confusion roared. Hidden from Jonnie by the tall grass and slightly behind him and to his right, a five-hundred-pound boar who had become tired of eating had lain down for a nap. The squeal of the hit pig acted like a whip on the whole herd, and away they went in an instant charge, straight upwind at Jonnie's horses. For the big boar, to see was to charge. Jonnie felt like he had been struck by a mountain avalanche. He was knocked flat and squashed in instants so close together they felt like one. He rolled. But the whole sky over him was filled with boar belly. He didn't see but he sensed the teeth and tusks trying to find him. He rolled again, the savage squeals mixing with the roaring pound of the blood in his ears. Once more he rolled and this time he saw daylight and a back. In the blink of an eye he was on the boar's back. He reached an arm across the throat. The boar spun around and around like a bucking horse. Jonnie's arm tightened until he could feel his sinews crack. And then the boar, strangled, dropped into a limp, jerking pile. Jonnie unloaded quickly and backed up. The boar was gasping its breath back. It lurched to unsteady feet, and, seeing no opponent, staggered off. Jonnie went over and picked up the small pig, keeping an eye on the departing boar. But the boar, although it cast about and made small convulsive charges, still couldn't see anybody, and after a bit it trotted in the direction the herd had taken, following the trampled grass. There was no herd in sight. And there were no horses! No horses! Jonnie stood there with the dead pig. He had no sharp rock to cut it. He had no flints to start a fire and roast it. And he had no horses. It might be worse. He looked at his legs, expecting to see tusk gashes. But he found none. His back and face ached a bit from the collision of the charge and his own collision with the ground, but that was all. Mentally kicking himself, more ashamed than scared, he made off in the direction of the trail of crushed grass. After a while his depression wore off a bit, to be replaced by optimism. He began to whistle a call. The horses would not have just gone on running in front of the pigs. They would have veered off somewhere. Just as darkness was falling he spotted Windsplitter calmly cropping grass. The horse looked up with a "Where have you been?" and then, with a plainly mischievous grin, as though he had intended to all the time, came over and bumped Jonnie with his muzzle. It took another ten minutes of anxious casting about to locate the lead horse and the packs. Jonnie went back a short way to a little spring they'd passed and made camp. There he made himself a belt and a pouch, and into the latter he put tinder and a flint and some small, sharp-edged stones. He put a stronger thong on the big kill-club and fastened it to the belt. He wasn't going to be caught empty-handed a second time in this vast prairie. No indeed. That night he dreamed of Chrissie being strangled by pigs, Chrissie mauled by bears, Chrissie crushed to a pulp under stampeding hoofs while he stood helpless in the sky where the spirits go, unable to do a damned thing.

- 8 -

The "Great Village" where "thousands had lived" was obviously another one of those myths, like monsters. But he would look for it nonetheless. By the half-light of the yellowing dawn, Jonnie was again trotting eastward. The plain was changing. There were some features about it that didn't seem usual, such as those mounds. Jonnie detoured from his way into the sun to look at one of them. He stopped, leaning forward with a hand braced on Windsplitter's shoulder, to study the place. It was a little sort of hill, but it had a hole in the side. A rectangular hole. Otherwise the mound was all covered with dirt and grass. Some freak of nature? A window opening? He slid off his horse and approached it. He walked around it. Then he paced it out. It was about thirty-five paces long and ten paces wide. Hah! Maybe the mound was rectangular too! An old, splintered stump stood to one side and Jonnie appropriated a jagged piece of it. He approached the window and, using the scrap of wood, began to push away the grass edges. It surprised him that he seemed to be digging not in earth but in loose sand. When he got the lower part of the rectangle cleared, he could get right up to it and look

into it.

The mound was hollow.

He backed up and looked at his horses and then around at the countryside. There wasn't anything menacing there.

He bent over and started to crawl into the mound.

And the window bit him!

He straightened right up and looked at his wrist.

It was bleeding.

It wasn't a bad cut. It was that he was cut at all that startled him.

Very carefully he looked at the window.

It had teeth!

Well, maybe they weren't teeth. They were dull-bright and had a lot of colors in them and they stood all around the outside edges of the frame. He pulled one of them out - they were very loose. He took a bit of thong from his belt and tried it.

Wonder of wonders, the tooth readily cut the thong, far better than the best rock edge. Hey, he thought, delighted, look what I got! And with the greatest care - for the things did bite unless you were careful to remove the splinters, big and small, from the frame and stacked them neatly. He went to his pack and got a piece of buckskin and wrapped them up. Valuable! You could cut and skin and scrape something wonderful with these things. Some kind of rock. Or this mound was the skull of some strange beast and these were the remains of its teeth. Wonderful!

When he had them all and they were carefully stowed in his pack - except one nice bit he put in his belt pouch - he returned to the task of entering the mound.

There was nothing to bite him now and he climbed through the rectangle. There wasn't any pit. The level of the inside seemed to be a bit higher than the outside ground.

A sudden flurry startled him half out of his wits. But it was just a bird that had a nest in here, and it left through the window with a rustle of wings. Once outside, it found a place to sit and began to scold and scold.

Jonnie fumbled his way through the dimness. There wasn't much there, mainly rust. But there had been things there; he could tell from the rust piles and wall marks.

Walls? Yes, the place had walls. They were of some sort of rough stone or something, very evenly fitted together in big square blocks.

Yes, these were walls. No animal made anything like this.

And no animal made anything like this tray. It must have been part of something else, now turned to reddish powder. At the bottom of the powder were some circular discs about as big as three thumbnails. And at the bottom of the pile of discs was one that was almost bright.

Jonnie picked it up and turned it over. He caught his breath.

He moved over to the window where there was better light. There could be no mistake.

It was the big bird with spread wings and arrows gripped in its claws.

The same sign he had found in the tomb.

He stood in quivering excitement for a bit and then calmed down. He had it now. The mystery was solved. And he went back out the window and showed Windsplitter.

"God house," said Jonnie. "This is where they stayed while waiting to take great men up to the tomb. Pretty, isn't it?"

Windsplitter finished chewing a mouthful of grass and gave Jonnie a shove in the chest. It was time they were going.

Jonnie put the disc in his belt pouch. Well, it was no Great Village, but it proved definitely that there were things to find out here in the plains. Walls, imagine that. Those gods could build walls.

The bird stopped scolding in some relief as Jonnie mounted up and moved away. It looked after the little cavalcade and then, with a couple more criticisms, went back inside the ancient ruin.

- 9 -

Terl was as happy as a baby Psychlo on a diet of straight kerbango. Although it was late in the day, he was on his way!

He steered the Mark II ground car down the ramp, through the atmosphere port, and into the open air.

There was a warning plaque on the ledge in front of the driver's seat:

BATTLE READINESS MUST BE OBSERVED AT ALL TIMES!

Although this tank is compression contained, personal face masks and independent breathing systems must be kept in place. Personal and unauthorized battle use prohibited. (signed) Political Department, Intergalactic Mining Company, Vice-Director Szot.

Terl grinned at the sign. In the absence of political officers - on a planet where there was no indigenous politics - and in the absence of a war department - on a planet that had nothing to war against - the chief of security covered both those functions. That this old battle car existed on the planet at all meant that it must be very, very old and

in addition must have gotten there as a result of fixed allocations of vehicles to company stations. Clerks in Planet 1, Galaxy 1 offices were not always well advised when they wrote their endless directives and orders to the far-flung outposts of the commercial empire. Terl threw his personal face mask and tank onto the gunner's seat beside him and rubbed a thankful paw over his craggy face.

What a lark! The old car ran like a well-greased digger. Small, not more than thirty feet long and ten feet high, it skimmed above the ground like a low-flying wingless bird. Cunning mathematics had contoured it so that every exterior surface would make a hostile projectile glance off at an angle. Missile-proof glass slots gave a fine view of the terrain. Even the blast muzzles of its artillery were cleverly recessed. The interior upholstery, though worn and cracked in places, was a beautiful soothing shade of purple. Terl felt good. He had five days of jet fuel and breathe-gas and five days of rations in their ten-pound packs. He had cleaned up every scrap of paper in his baskets and had started no new "emergencies." He had a "borrowed" shaft analysis picto-recorder that would take great pictures when put to other uses. And he was on his way!

A break in the dull life of a security chief on a planet without insecurities. A planet that wasn't likely to produce many opportunities for an ambitious security chief to get promotion and advancement.

It had been a gut blow when they ordered him to Earth. He wondered at once what he had done, whom he had accidentally insulted, whose bad side he had gotten on, but they assured him that none of these was the case. He was young. A Psychlo had a life span of about 190 years, and Terl had been only 39 when he had been appointed. It was pointed out to him that few ever became security chiefs at such a tender age. It would show in his record that he had been one. And when he came back from the duty tour, they would see. Plums, like planets you could breathe on, went to older Psychlos.

He had not been fooled, really. Nobody in security personnel pool, Planet 1, Galaxy 1 had wanted anything at all to do with this post. He could hear the future assignment interview now.

"Last post?"

"Earth."

"Where?"

"Earth, rim star, third planet, secondary galaxy 16."

"Oh. What did you accomplish on that post?"

"It's all in the record."

"Yes, but there's nothing in the record."

"There must be something. Let me see it."

"No, no. Confidential company record."

And then the final horror: "Employee Terl, it just happens that we have an opening in another rim star system, Galaxy 32. It's a quiet place, no indigenous life and no atmosphere at all"

Or even worse: "Employee Terl, Intergalactic has been dropping for some time on the exchange and we have orders to economize. I'm afraid your record doesn't recommend continued employment. Don't call us. We'll call you."

He already had a bit of scribble on the wall. A month ago he'd received word that his tour of duty had been extended and there was no mention of his relief. A little bit of horror had touched him, a vision of a 190-year-old Terl tottering around on this same planet, long forgotten by friends and family, ending his days in a dome-crazy stupor, lowered into a slit-trench grave, and ticked off the roster by a clerk who kept the records neat - but didn't know a single face on them.

Such questionable fates required action - big action.

There were better daydreams: waiting in a big entrance hall, uniformed ushers at attention but one of them whispering to another, "Who's that?" And the other, "Don't you know? That's Terl." And the big doors opening - "The president of the company is waiting to thank you, sir. Please come this way. . . ."

According to the mine surveys there was an ancient highway to the north of here. Terl flipped the ground car onto auto and spread out a big map. There it was, running east and west. And west was where he wanted to go. It would be busted up and overgrown, maybe even hard to spot. But it would have no steep grades and it would run squarely up into the mountains. Terl had drawn a big circle around the target meadow.

There was the "highway" ahead.

He threw the controls to manual and fumbled a bit. He hadn't driven one of these things since security school years ago, and his uncertain control made the car yaw.

He zoomed up the side embankment of the road and yanked back the throttles and pawed the brakes. The car slammed to earth in a geysering puff of dust, square in the center of the highway. It was a pretty jolting stop but not bad, not bad. He'd get better at it.

He picked up his face mask and tank and donned them. Then he hit the decompression button so the tanks would recontain the breathe-gas without waste. There was a momentary vacuum, a trifle uncomfortable on the hearing bones, and then with a sigh, the outside air entered the cab.

Terl swung open the top hatch and stood up on the seat, the tank creaking and shuddering under his repositioned weight. The wind felt cool outside the borders of his face mask. He gazed around with some distaste. This sure was wide country. And empty. The only sound was the whisper of wind in the grass. And the sound of silence, vast silence. Even a far-off bird call made the silence heavier.

The earth was tan and brown. The grass and occasional shrubs were green. The sky was an expansive blue, speckled with white puffs of clouds. A strange country. People on home planet wouldn't believe it. No purple anywhere.

With a sudden inspiration Terl reached down into the car and grabbed the picto-recorder. He aimed it in a sweeping circle, letting it grind away. He'd send his folks a spool of this. Then they'd believe him when he said it was one horns-awful of a planet and maybe sympathize with him.

"My daily view," he said into the recorder as he finished the sweep. The words rumbled through his mask, sounding sad.

There was something purple. Straight west there were some mountains and they looked purple. He put the picto-recorder down and grinned at the mountains so far away. This was better than he thought. No wonder men lived up in the mountains. They were purple. Maybe the men were a bit sentient after all. He hoped so, but not with any great confidence; he was probably optimistic. But it gave some substance to his nebulous plans.

Still looking westward, he suddenly caught sight of a landscape feature between himself and the mountains: a distant skyline silhouetted against the declining sun. He shifted a lever on his face mask glass to get magnification. The skyline leaped closer. Yes, he was right. There was a ruined city. Fuzzy and broken but the buildings still very tall. And quite extensive.

The wind fluttered his mine map as he looked at it. The ancient highway ran straight west into it. Reaching down, he took a massive tome off the pile he had on the rear crew seat and opened it to a marked place. There was an insert drawing on the page - some cultural artist had sketched it a few centuries ago.

The company had used air-breathing Chinkos for cultural posts on planets where there was air. The Chinkos had come from Galaxy 2, beings as tall as Psychlos but thread-thin and delicate. They were an old race, and the Psychlos didn't like to admit they had learned what they knew of cultural arts from them. But they had been easy to transport, despite breathing air and being feather-light. And they were cheap. Alas, they were no more, not even in Galaxy 2, having initiated a strike of all things. Intergalactic had wiped them out. But that was long after the culture and ethnology department had been terminated on Earth. Terl had never seen a Chinko. Remarkable beings, drawing pictures like this.

Colorful too. Why would anybody draw something?

He compared the distant skyline to the sketch. Aside from a bit of blunting and crumbling in the ensuing years, they were the same.

The text said, "To eastward of the mountains lies the ruin of a man-city, remarkably well preserved. It was man-called 'Denver.' It is not as aesthetically advanced as those in the middle or eastern part of the continent. The usual miniature doors have little or no ornamentation. The interiors are no more than slightly oversized dollhouses. Utility rather than artistry seems to have been the overall architectural purpose. There are three cathedrals, which were apparently devoted to the worship of different heathen gods, showing that the culture was not monosectarian even though it may have been dominated by priesthoods. One god, 'bank,' seems to have been more general in worship. There was a man-library remarkably well stocked with books. The department sealed some of the library rooms after removing to archives the only important volumes - those on mining. As no ore bodies were evident under the foundations and no valuable ore materials were employed by the indigenous population in its construction, the man-city remains in a remarkable state of preservation, aided in part by the dry climate. The cost of further restoration is being requisitioned."

Terl laughed to himself. No wonder the culture and ethnology department had been phased out on this planet, if it was applying for credits to reconstruct man-cities! He could hear the counterblast from the directors now. They'd fair put a shaft through the heads of such arty types.

Well, it was data he might use in his plans. Who knew?

He got back to the business at hand. There was the highway stretching out. He was right in the middle of it. It was a couple of hundred feet wide at this point and it could be clearly discerned. It probably had two or three feet of sand on top of it, but the growing grass was uniform and the shrubs to either side, not being able to put down roots directly on it, defined between their two edge rows a straight course.

Terl took another look around. There were some cattle, a small herd of horses in the distance. Nothing worth shooting - since no Psychlo could eat meat of that metabolism - nothing dangerous enough to offer sport. It was luxurious to have time to think about hunting and even to be equipped for it - and even more luxurious not to do it! He had a bigger game going anyway.

He dropped down into the driver's seat and punched the buttons to close the top. The

unbreathable air exhausted from the cab and was replaced by proper gas. He took off his face mask, contrary to regulations, and dropped it on the gunner's seat. The purple interior was a relief to his nerves.

This confounded planet! It even looked bad through the purple tint of in the windscreens. He glanced again at the map. Now was the time for some luck. He knew he couldn't go up into the mountains themselves due to the uranium the recon drones always indicated in that area. But the recon drones also reported that these man-things sometimes came down to the mountain foothills, which were safe enough.

Terl thought over his plans again. They were beautiful plans. Personal wealth, personal power. The recon drones had told him more than others knew. The scans had pointed out a vein of almost solid gold, uncovered by a landslide after Intergalactic surveys were finalized. A delicious, fabulously rich vein of gold in plain sight, a vein about which the company was ignorant - since the landslide was recent and Terl had destroyed the records. A joke on Zzt to propose no more recon drones over the area!

The uranium count in that area of the mountains was formidable and so no Psychlo could mine it. Even a few bits of uranium-dust could explode Psychlo breathe-gas.

Terl smiled at his own genius. All he needed was a man-thing and then a few more man-things. They could mine it, and to blast with uranium. Somehow he would get the gold off the planet and home, and he had ideas about how he could do that too. Then wealth and power! And no more of this place!

All the security chief had to do was keep others from suspecting what he was really doing, to advertise quite other reasons. But Terl was an expert at that.

If he were truly lucky he could catch a man-thing this side of the meadow. He did not have too much time to lie in wait. He felt lucky.

The sun was very low, thanks to his late start. He'd lie up in that man-city for the night, sleeping in the car.

He sent the Mark II skimming along the ancient highway.

- 10 -

A skyline!

Jonnie Goodboy Tyler pulled up with a yank so sudden he startled Windsplitter into a rear.

There it was, straight east. It wasn't hills or mountains. It wasn't some trick of the eye. It was sharp and rectangular.

He had been so unconvinced.

When he had left the ancient ruin, he found a very easy way to travel. It was almost as if the ruin with the window had once had a broad path leading to it.

There were shrubs on the right and shrubs on the left, two rows about two hundred feet apart that dwindled eastward into the distance. Underfoot there was fairly even grass. You had to watch it a bit because there were shallow gullies in places. When you looked down between these little gullies, there was something gray-white. Jonnie had inspected it with care. He had gotten down and dug at the edges of such a crack and it seemed that the gray-white stuff was continuous.

Just like the inner walls of the ruin.

Maybe it was a wall of the ancients, fallen over sideways. But no, it would have cracked as it fell.

Outside the courthouse at home, level stones had been laid as pavement. But who wanted a pavement two hundred feet wide? And hours journey long? For what?

This big path had not been used for a long time. If it was a path. It went between hillocks that had been sliced into and it went across water courses - although it was pretty irregular and broken in these.

He had been excited for a while, but then he got used to it and devoted his attention mainly to keeping Windsplitter from tripping in the little gullies.

When he was a little boy, one of the families had had a wheeled cart they hauled firewood in, and he had been told that once there had been a lot of carts, even one that was pulled by a mare. Well, you could sure roll a cart on this wide turf. And roll it fast and far.

But as to the Great Village, he was coming to believe as the afternoon wore on that somebody had probably seen that god house back there and multiplied it in his imagination.

And then suddenly there it was!

But was it?

He put Windsplitter up to a trot regardless of the little gullies. In the clear air the skyline wasn't coming his way very fast. It even appeared to be receding.

He stopped. Maybe it was a trick of the eye after all. But no, the lines it made were up and down and flat on top and there was an awful lot of it.

It wasn't hills or mountains. Only building sides could be that regular.

He started up again, more sedately, remembering now to be careful. And after a while he

could see that he was getting closer.

The sun was coming down and he wasn't there yet. The prospect of entering that place in the dark was definitely not cheering. Who knew what it might be full of? Ghosts? Gods? People?

Monsters? Ah, no. Not monsters. They were just the stuff mamas frightened their kids to sleep with.

He pulled off the path where it crossed a stream and made camp. He warmed up some of his roasted pork and then cut it with one of the sharp, shiny things he had taken out of the window.

My, he marveled, imagine anything cutting like that. It would make life a real pleasure. You had to watch it not to cut your own fingers, as he had already done twice, slightly. Maybe you could bed the cutting edge in wood or something for a handle. Then you would really have something.

After supper he built up his fire to keep the wolves off - a couple were sitting over there now, amber-eyed in the reflected firelight and looking hungry.

"Run away," shouted Jonnie, "or I'll be wearing your hides." But the wolves just sat there.

Windsplitter and the lead horse didn't want to go away from the fire. The wolves made them nervous. So Jonnie picked up a couple of rocks, fist-sized, from the nearby stream bed.

He wasn't interested in hunting wolves, but his horses had to find grass.

He threw a pork bone about ten feet beyond the fire and in the direction of the wolves. Big rangy things they were. One slunk forward, belly low, snarling to reach the pork bone. In a moment the wolf's attention would be fixed on the bone.

Jonnies arm blurred. The far wolf caught the rock squarely between his eyes.

Jonnies arm blurred again. The near wolf didn't jump in time and he too was a dead wolf.

Jonnies said to Windsplitter, "I got to do all the work, is that it?" And he walked over to the far wolf and hauled the carcass to the fire. Then he dragged the closer one in. Nope, neither one had a pelt worth taking at this time of the year. And they had ticks too.

"Go on and eat," he told the horses.

He built up the fire again, just in case the wolves had friends, and rolled up his robes. Tomorrow was going to be the day.

- 11 -

Jonnies approached the Great Village cautiously -

He was up before first light, and the yellow dawn found him in the outskirts of the place, peering, halting, looking closer at the strange sights, nervous.

Sand lay over everything, and grass and even scrub grew in the wide paths between the buildings.

He gave a start every time a rabbit or a rat came tearing out of the ancient structures, disturbed by his footfalls. Even though the hoofs were muffled by the grass and sand, the silence of the place was so intense that any disturbance of it seemed overloud.

He had never heard an echo before to notice it. The return of sound caused him a great deal of worry. For a little while he thought there must be another horse walking in the distance. But at last he worked it out.

He hit his wrist kill-club against the one in his belt and promptly heard the same sound repeated softly like a mockery. He waited but no further mock occurred. Then he hit the clubs together again and the same sound returned. He decided it didn't happen unless he did it first.

He looked about him. To both his left and his right were the tall remains of buildings, very tall indeed. Pitted by wind erosion, discolored by endless centuries of weather, they still stood, flat and even and imposing. Astonishing. Whoever could build such things? Gods, perhaps?

He eyed the massive size of the building blocks. No man could lift one by himself.

Jonnies sat his horse in the middle of what must have been the main path of the "Great Village." He frowned, straining to comprehend the building of such a place. Many men? But how could they reach so high?

He concentrated laboriously. Gradually he could conceive that if one built up steps of logs, and if many, many men put ropes around a block, and if they carried it up the steps and then took the steps away, they might have done it. Marvelous, dizzy, and dangerous. But it was possible.

Satisfied that it didn't need gods or monsters to have made this place, and therefore very relieved, he continued his exploration.

He wondered whether some odd kind of tree had grown along this path. He got down and looked at the stump of one. It was hard and jagged. It had been hollow and it was deep in the strange rock. It wasn't wood. It was a reddish metal, and when you scraped away the red powder, underneath was black. He looked up and down both sides of the wide path. The

placing of these things was very precise. Although he couldn't figure out what they were for, it was obvious that, like buildings, they were placed objects.

The innumerable windows surrounded him, seeming to stare back at him. The morning sun had come now and it shone into those that faced it. Here and there were vast surfaces of the shiny stuff he had collected from the mound on the plain. It was not clear; it was whitish and bluish like the cataracts on an old man's eyes. But there were whole sheets of it in some places. He began to realize it was some kind of covering, perhaps to keep out the cold and heat and yet let in light. People at home sometimes did that, using the tissue of animal stomachs. But those who had built the Great Village had access to some kind of rock or hard substance that came in sheets. They must have been very clever people.

He saw a great yawning doorway ahead of him. The doors had fallen away and lay there half-buried in the sand. The inside of the building gaped darkly.

Jonnie walked his horse through the door and looked about in the dimness. Debris was scattered all about, rotted and decayed beyond identification. But a waist-high series of platforms stood; they were of a remarkably white stone that had bluish veins in it. He leaned down from his horse and stared at the walls behind them. There were heavy, heavy doors set into it, two of them ajar, one of them wide open. Big wheels of still bright metal were inset into them.

Jonnie stepped to the platforms of white stone and dropped to the other side. Cautiously he approached the open niche.

There were shelves, and on the shelves, tangled with rotted remains of some kind of sacking, were mounds and mounds and mounds of discs. Some were a dull gray, almost tarnished away, but one pile was bright yellow.

Jonnie picked up a disc. It was as wide across as two fingernails and remarkably heavy. He turned it over and his eyes bugged.

Here was that bird again! Talons gripping a bundle of arrows. Hastily he pawed into the other mounds, looking at disc after disc. Most of them had a bird on one side. The face of a man, the faces of different men, were on the other.

Face of a man!

And some of them had women on them.

This was not a god symbol. This was a man symbol.

The bird with the arrows belonged to man!

The shock of it sent him reeling. He supported himself against the wall of the niche for minutes. He felt his head buzzing with the readjustment of ideas.

These doors to the niches were man-made. The Great Village was man-made. The doors of the tomb in the mountains were of similar material even if larger.

The tomb was not a god tomb. The mound out on the plain was also man-made.

Man had once built things - he was certain of it.

And it would take many men to make this Great Village. Therefore there must have been many men at one time.

He rode his horse out of the place in a deep daze. His most basic ideas and values had suffered severe shifts and it took a lot of getting used to. What legends were true?

Which ones were false?

There was the legend of the Great Village and here it was. Man had obviously made it and had lived here in forgotten times.

Maybe the legend of god getting angry with man and wiping him out was true. And maybe it wasn't. Maybe it had just been a big storm.

He looked around the paths and buildings. There was no evidence of a storm: the buildings were still standing. Many even had that strange thin sheeting in the windows. There were no bodies about, but from a time so long ago, bones wouldn't last.

And then he saw a structure that had its doors firmly closed and sheets of metal fastened where the windows should be, and looking closer, he saw that a huge metal clamp sealed the place. He got down and inspected the clamp.

It was of a different age than the village: there was no tarnish on it at all. It was old, but not that old.

Something or someone at some time had pushed aside the sand in front of the doors. It was grass-grown sand but it had been disturbed.

Jonnie frowned. This building was not like the rest. It was in a fair state of preservation. Somebody had put metal sheets on the windows and the metal was quite different from any in the rest of the town: it showed no signs of corrosion.

Somebody had given this building special treatment.

He backed up to get a better overall view. It was indeed a different kind of building. Fewer windows. Block solid.

As an experienced tracker, Jonnie studied the time differences here. Long, long after the "village" had been abandoned, somebody had made access to this place, made a path, even dug a path in and out of the doors and then fastened the doors thoroughly. But even that had been a long time ago.

Curious, he scanned the front facade. One of the metal window covers was loose. It was

higher than his head so he stood on his horse and pried at it. It gave a little bit. Encouraged, he shoved the handle of his kill-club into the crack, and with a protesting whine the cover suddenly sprang loose, startling Windsplitter, who moved off. Jonnie held on to the ledge, his feet dangling.

He pulled himself up. The transparent sheeting under the cover was still in place. He took his kill-club and managed to hit it.

The crash and tinkle of the stuff as it fell was shockingly loud in this quiet place. Experienced now with the cutting quality of this stuff, Jonnie hung on to the ledge with one arm and cleaned up the jagged bits from one side of the frame and dusted off the ledge.

He pulled himself through.

The place was so dark that it took quite a while to see anything. Light was coming through in thin cracks where other windows remained covered. At length his eyes adjusted and he dropped cautiously down into the huge room. Now that he was not blocking the window's light he could see quite well.

Dust and sand were only a filmy cover over things. There were tables and tables and tables and chairs and chairs and chairs, all marshaled in orderly rows. But they were not the interesting things.

Almost every wall was covered with shelving. The stacks of shelves even protruded out into the room. Somebody had covered them with a sheeting you could see through. Something lay under the sheeting on every shelf.

Jonnies approached cautiously. He carefully removed the fastenings to the sheeting and looked behind it.

Queer, thick rectangles stood on these shelves. Rows of them. At first he thought it was all one piece and then he found that one could remove a single rectangle. He took one off the shelf.

It almost fell to pieces in his hands!

Awkwardly, he juggled to hold it together and then succeeded. What a strange object! It was a box that wasn't a box. The covers slid sideways away from each other, enclosing a packet of thin, remarkably thin slices that had black marks on them, lots of little, tiny black marks all in orderly rows. What a strange object! How complicated!

He put the first one back on the shelf and took a second, smaller one. It too fell open. Jonnie found himself staring at a picture.

It didn't have depth. At first it seemed to, but his finger told him it was just a flat plane. The object there was a big red circle, much bigger than a strawberry, much smoother. It had a stem. And alongside it there was a black tent with a crossbar in the middle of it.

He turned the sheet. There was a picture of a bee. No bee was ever that big, but this was certainly a bee. It too looked three-dimensional until his finger told him it wasn't. And a black thing beside it had two bulges on it.

Jonnies turned another sheet. There was a cat - a small cat, to be sure, but it was definitely a cat. And it had a curved black thing beside it like a new moon.

A few pages later there was a picture of a fox. And beside it was a black pole with two flags coming off it.

Suddenly a quiver went through Jonnie. He held his breath. He grabbed the first object he had taken and pried it open again. There was the tent. There was the bee's black mark. Yes - and there was the pole with two flags.

He held the two rectangles, his head in a whirl. He stared at them.

There was a meaning here. Foxes? Bees? Cats? Tents, bulges, new moons?

These things had meanings in them!

But about what? Animals? Weather?

He could sort all that out later. He crowded the two rectangles into his belt pouch.

Anything that was connected to weather and animals had value. Rectangles with meaning in them. The idea made bright lights pop in your skull.

He replaced the protective sheet, went back out the window, replaced the metal covering as well as he could, and whistled Windsplitter over, dropping down to the horse's back. Jonnie looked around him expansively. Who knew what things of enormous value were in the Great Village? He felt rich, excited.

There was no reason at all for his people to stay cooped up there in the mountains. Here was shelter and to spare. Here was firewood growing in the streets. Here were rooms and rooms and rooms!

And come to think of it, he felt better since he had been away from the mountain meadow. Better physically.

And it hadn't taken a year - actually just a few days.

He gathered up the lead rope of his pack horse and they trotted briskly along the wide paths toward the eastern part of the Great Village.

Although his eyes were busy taking it all in, his mind was engrossed in organizing a migration from the mountains down to this place: what he would have to pick up for evidence to convince them; what he was going to say to Staffor; how they could transport

their goods . . . maybe build a cart? Maybe there were carts right here in the Great Village. He could round up some horses. These piles of red dust he saw along either side of the wide paths from time to time might once have been carts of a sort. It was hard to figure out what shape they had really had, they were so caved in. The impression of a wheel. Sheets of translucent rock. No, they hadn't been horse carts, or had they? He began to look at such objects more closely. And then he saw the insect.

- 12 -

It was very bright daylight now. And there it sat. There could be no mistaking it. Alien.

Surely it must be an insect. Only cockroaches looked like that. Or beetles. No, cockroaches.

But there were no cockroaches that big. Not thirty feet long and ten feet high and maybe twelve feet side to side.

A horrible brown color. And smooth.

Jonnie had stopped, the lead horse bunched up behind. The thing was sitting squarely in the middle of the wide path. It seemed to have two eyes in front, slitted. There was nothing like this on the plains or in the mountains, and he had seen nothing like it in the Great Village center. It looked new, with very little dust on it, and shiny.

He felt it was alive. There was something about it. Yes, alive. Not inanimate metal but a living thing. Then he saw what made him think so.

There had been a slight rocking motion. Something moved behind the slitted eyes.

Jonnie, making no sudden movements, turned Windsplitter and, pulling the lead horse, began to move away in the direction from which he had approached. He had already noted that these paths were mostly rectangular and that you could go all the way around a group of buildings and come back to the same place.

There was open country to the east, not very far. He would go down a side path and then circle back and get out into the plains. Hopefully he could outrun it. If it moved.

There was an earsplitting roar!

Jonnie glanced back in terror. The thing rose up three feet above the ground. Dust flew from below it. It began to inch forward. It was alive!

He put Windsplitter into a gallop straight down the street. He passed one corner path, two. The thing was falling behind. It was now two corners back.

He swerved Windsplitter up a side path, yanking the lead horse with him. They reached another corner and again he turned. Up ahead were two tall buildings. He'd keep going and reach the open country. He'd make it.

And then suddenly there was a sheet of flame. Ahead of him the right-hand building exploded apart. Its top slid slowly down and into the street ahead, blocking it.

Spattered with dust, Jonnie hauled up short.

He could hear the roaring of the thing somewhere beyond the rubble. He listened, holding his breath. The position of the roar was changing. It was shifting to the right.

He traced it with his ears. It was going on down the other street. Now it was level with him. Now it was getting behind him.

The thing had somehow blocked the street ahead of him and then gone on, planning to come up behind him.

He was trapped.

Jonnie looked at the smoking mound of fresh rubble ahead of him. It rose twenty feet above the pavement, a steep barricade.

There was no panic in him now. He slowed the hard pounding of his heart. The thing to do was wait until the monster was right in the street behind him - then go over that barricade.

He sidled Windsplitter back to get a good run.

The thing was roaring down the side path behind him. Now it was turning. He glanced back.

There it was, wisps of smoke coming out of its nostrils.

Jonnie put the heel to Windsplitter. He yanked on the lead rope.

"EEYAH!" shouted Jonnie:

The horses sprinted at the barricade. Rough and full of loose stones. Dangerous.

Up they scrambled. Rubble slid. Pray the gods no broken legs.

Up they went.

They hit the top. One glance back showed the thing rolling up to the very bottom of the barricade.

Jonnie sent the horses down in a turmoil of tumbling debris.

They hit the street before them at a run and kept running.

The walls racketed with the thunder of their run. Jonnie swerved through a checkerboard of paths, edging to the open country.

He could not hear the roaring thing now over the powerful thud of the running hoofs.

Further and further. The buildings were thinning. He saw open country between two structures to his right and skidded down off the embankment and raced for freedom.

As soon as he had free running space everywhere but toward the town, he slowed. Windsplitter and the lead horse were blowing and puffing. He walked them until they caught their breath, casting his eyes restlessly up and down the edges of the town behind them.

Then he caught the roaring again. He strained his eyes, watching.

There it was!

It slid out from among the buildings and started straight toward him.

He put the horses up to a trot.

The thing was closing the distance.

He put the horses up to a run.

The thing not only closed the distance but started to pass him.

Jonnie swerved at right angles.

The thing banked into a turn and flashed by him, went well ahead, turned and blocked his way.

Jonnie pulled up. There it was, ugly, roaring, gleaming.

He turned around and began to run away from it.

It let out a blasting roar, scorched by him and again stopped, blocking his way.

Jonnie's face tightened into determination.

He took his biggest kill-club from his belt. He put the thong solidly on his wrist. He cast off the lead horse.

Walking Windsplitter, he went up ahead of the thing. It didn't move. He went about a hundred feet in front of the thing. It didn't move. He carefully spotted the position of a slitted eye.

He began to whirl the kill-club. It swooshed in the air.

He put a heel to Windsplitter and they raced straight at the thing.

The kill-club, carried with the full speed of the running horse, whooshed down straight at the slitted eye.

The crash of impact was deafening.

Jonnie slowed beyond the thing. It had not moved.

He trotted Windsplitter back to the original position, a hundred feet in front of the thing. He turned and made ready for a second run.

The lead horse came up behind him to its habitual place. Jonnie glanced at it and then back at the thing. He calculated the distance and the run to strike at the other slitted eye.

He touched a heel. Windsplitter plunged forward.

And then a great gout of yellow bloomed out from between the eyes. Jonnie was struck a blow like all the winds of Highpeak rolled into one.

Windsplitter caught the full force of it. Up into the air went horse and rider. Down they came with a shuddering crash against the earth.

- 13 -

Terl didn't know what he was looking at.

He had bunked down in the car in the outskirts. He had the old Chinko map of the ancient city, but he had no curiosity about it.

With a few shots of kerbango, he had eased himself off into sleep, intending to be gone with the dawn, through the city and into the mountains. Senseless, even risky, to go on in the dark.

The car, however, had grown hot with the morning sun before he awoke. And now he stared out at an odd thing in the street before him. Maybe it had been the footfalls that had awakened him.

He didn't know what it was. He had seen horses - they were always falling down mine shafts. But he had never before seen a horse with two heads.

That's right. Two heads. One in front and one in the middle.

And a second animal of similar sort behind. Only this one only had a second body in the middle, as if the second head was bent down out of sight.

He batted his eyebones. He shifted over into the driver's seat and stared more intently through the armored windshield.

The two beasts had now turned around and were walking the other way, so Terl started up and began to follow.

It became apparent to him at once that the beasts knew he was after them. He took a hasty look at his ancient street map, thinking he could flash around a couple of blocks and head them off.

But instead it was the beasts who turned.

Terl saw they would dead-end and knew they would circle a block. It was elementary indeed to handle that.

He glanced again at his map and spotted the right buildings to make a barricade.

The firepower of the old Mark II was not very heavy but it was surely enough for that. He adjusted the force lever with a fumbling and inexperienced paw and steered the tank into

position. He hit the fire button.

The resulting explosion was extremely satisfactory. A whole building tipped over to make a barricade.

He jockeyed his throttle and wheeled around and went down the street, turned, and sure enough! There they were. He had his quarry trapped.

Then he sat with slack jawbones to see the beasts go straight up over the smoking rubble and vanish from view.

Terl sat there for a minute or two. Was this any part of what he was trying to accomplish? He was puzzled by the beasts but they didn't have anything to do with the business he was in.

Oh, well. He had lots of time, and hunting was hunting after all. He pushed a button and fired off an antenna capsule set to hover three hundred feet up and then turned on his picture screen.

Sure enough, there were the beasts, tearing along, zigzagging around blocks. He watched their progress while he ate some breakfast. That done, he took a small shot of kerbang, engaged the drive train, and following the picture was soon out in open country with his quarry in plain sight.

He raced around in front and blocked them. They turned. He did it again.

What were they? The second beast still had his head down, but the one in the lead definitely had two heads. Terl decided he had better not talk about this in the recreation room. They'd roast him.

He watched with curiosity when the beast in the front stopped, took a stick out of his belt, and began a run at him. His curiosity turned to amazement. The thing was going to attack him. Incredible!

The crash of the club against the windshield was deafening. His earbones rang with the assault. And that wasn't all. There was an immediate atmosphere sizzle.

A wave of dizziness hit Terl. Bright lights popped in his skull. Air! Air was getting into the cab!

This old Mark II had seen better days. The supposedly armored windscreens had come loose in its mounts. Terl gaped at it in disbelief. The side gasket had given way!

He panicked. Then his eye caught the sign about face masks and he hastily snatched the mask and flask of breathe-gas off the gunner's seat and snapped it over his face, opening the valve. He inhaled deeply and the dizziness lessened. He took three deep breaths to clean the damned air out of his lungs.

Terl stared anew at the strange beast. It was lining up for another run!

His paws fumbled with the firepower. He wanted no recoil of the blast blowing back through the opened windscreens and he pulled the force lever low to "stun." He hoped it was enough.

The beast started the run. Terl hit the fire button.

It was enough all right. The ions sizzled and glared. The beasts were slammed back, lifted clean off the ground. They fell.

Terl watched intently to make sure they kept on lying where they had fallen. Good! They did.

He let out a shuddering sigh into his mask, winding down. And then he sat up straight in new amazement. He had thought, when they were hit, that he was dealing with two four-legged beasts. But lying on the ground they had come apart!

Terl swung a side door wide and crawled out. He checked his belt gun and then rumbled over to the game he had hit.

Three beasts, maybe four!

The two four-legged beasts were two. On the one behind, a bundle of something had fallen apart. That maybe made three. The nearer one definitely was two different beasts.

What a confusion!

He shook his head, trying to clear it. The effects of air were not wearing off fast enough: little bright sparks were still popping in front of his eyes.

He lumbered over to the more distant one, pushing the tall grass away. It was a horse. He had seen plenty of horses; the plains were full of them. But this horse had had a bundle tied on its back. Simple as that. The bundle had come loose. He kicked it. It wasn't anything alive, just some skins, some animal hides, and nonsense bits of other things. He walked back toward the tank through the high grass.

The other thing was also a horse. And over to the right where it had fallen clear . . . Terl pushed back the grass. Well, luck of the gold nebula! It was a man.

The Psychlo turned the man over. What a small, puny body! Hair on the face and head but nowhere else. Two arms, two legs. White-brown skin.

Terl was unwilling to admit that Char's description fitted. In fact, he resented the fact that it did come close and promptly rejected it.

The chest was moving - only slightly, true - but it was still alive. Terl felt fortunate indeed. His excursion was successful without his even going up into the mountains.

He picked the man up with one paw and went back to the tank, throwing the man into the gunner's seat, which engulfed it. Then he set to work repairing the windscreens gasket

with some perma-stick. The whole side of the glass had been dislodged, and although the glass itself was not even scratched, that had been quite a blow. He looked down at the small body swallowed in the seat. A fluke. It was the age of this tank, the brittleness of its gaskets. Sure was a ratty car; he'd find something wrong and put it in Zzt's records - misplaced parts or something. He went over the other gaskets, the doors, and the other screen. They seemed all right, if brittle. Well, he wasn't going underwater and there would surely be no more attacks from things like that.

Terl stood up on the driver's seat and looked all around the horizon. All clear. No more of these beasts.

He banged down the top and settled himself. His paw hit the compression change, and the hiss of air exhausting from the cab and the gurgle of breathe-gas entering was welcome. His face mask was sweaty in the growing heat of the day and he hated the thing. Oh, for a proper-atmosphere planet, a planet with right gravity, with purple trees -

The man-thing went into a sudden convulsion.

Terl drew back, alarmed. It was turning blue and jerking about. The last thing he wanted was a raving mad animal inside the cab.

Hastily he adjusted his face mask, reversed the compression, and kicked open the side door. With one bat of his paw he knocked the thing back out onto the grass.

Terl sat there watching it. He was afraid his plans were going up in a puff. The thing must have been more heavily affected by the stun blast than he knew. Crap, they were weak!

He opened the cab top and looked over at one of the horses.

He could see its sides moving. It was breathing and wasn't in any convulsion. It was even recovering. Well, a horse was a horse, and a man might be . . .

He suddenly got it. The man-thing couldn't breathe breathe-gas. The bluish color was fading; the convulsions had stopped. The chest was panting as the thing gulped in air. That gave Terl a problem. Blast if he was going to ride back to the minesite in a face mask.

He got out of the car and went to the farther horse. It was recovering, too. The sacks were lying near it. Terl rummaged through one and came up with some thongs.

He went back and picked up the man-thing and slammed it up on top of the car. He arranged it so its arms stuck out to each side. Tying piece after piece of thong together he made a long rope. He tied one end to one wrist of the thing, passed the rope under the car - grunting a bit as he lifted it up to do so - and tied the other wrist. He yanked it good and tight. Then he pushed at the man-thing experimentally to see whether it would fall off.

Very good. He threw the sacks onto the gunner's seat and got in, closed up, and restarted the atmosphere change.

The nearest horse was lifting its head, struggling to get up. Aside from surface blood boils caused by the stun gun, it seemed to be all right, which meant that the man-thing would probably recover.

Terl stretched his jawbones in a grin. Well, it was coming out all right after all. He started up the car, turned it, and headed back toward the minesite.

PART 2

- 1 -

Terl was all efficiency, great plans bubbling in his cavernous skull.

The old Chinkos had had a sort of zoo outside the compound, and despite the years that had intervened since the Chinkos were terminated here, the cages were still there.

There was one in particular that was just right. It had a dirt floor and a cement pool, and netting of heavy mesh strung all around it. They had had some bears there that they said they were studying, and although the bears had died after a while, they had never escaped.

Terl dumped the new beast into the cage. The thing was still only semiconscious, getting over the shock of breathe-gas most likely. Terl looked at it lying there and then looked around. This had to be just right, all precautions taken.

The cage door had a lock on it. It was open to the sky and there was no netting over the top - what bear could climb a thirty-foot set of bars?

But there was a possibility that this new beast might tamper with the cage door. It wasn't probable. But the door didn't have a good lock on it.

Terl had dumped the bags in the cage, having no place else to put them. And the long thong rope he had used was lying on the bags.

He decided it would be wise to tie the beast up. He passed the thong around the neck of the thing and tied it there with a simple rigger knot and tied the other end to a bar. He stood back and checked things again. It was fine. He went out and closed the cage door. He'd have to put a better lock on it. But it would do just now.

Satisfied with himself, Terl ran the car into the garage and went to his office.

There was not much to do. A few dispatches, just forms, no emergencies. Terl finished up and sat back. What a dull place. Ah, well, he had started wheels rolling to get off it, to get back home.

He decided he had better go out and see how the man-thing was getting along. He picked up his breathe-mask, put a new cartridge into it, and went out through the offices. There were a lot of empty desks these days. There were only three secretarial-type Psychlos there, and they didn't pay much attention to him.

Outside the compound, he reached the gate of the cage. He stopped, his eyebones rattling. The thing was clear over to the gate!

He went in with a growl, picked the thing up, and put it into its original place. It had untied the knot.

Terl looked at it. Plainly it was terrified of him. And why not? It only came up to his belt buckle and was about a tenth of his weight.

Terl put the thong back around its neck. Being a mining company worker, accustomed to rigs and slings, Terl knew his knots. So this time he tied a double-rigger knot. That would hold it!

Cheerful once more, Terl went to the garage and got a water hose and began to wash down the Mark II. As he worked, he turned over various plans and approaches in his head. They all depended on that man-thing out there.

On a sudden hunch, he went back outside to look into the cage. The thing was standing inside the door!

Terl crossly barged in, carried it back to its original position, and stared at the rope. It had untied a double-rigger knot.

With fast-working paws, Terl fixed that. He put the rope around its neck and tied it with a bucket-hoist knot.

The thing looked at him. It was making some funny noises as if it could talk.

Terl walked out, fastened the door, and got out of sight. He wasn't a security chief for nothing. From a vantage point behind a building, he levered his face mask glass to telephoto and observed.

The thing, in no time at all, untied the complex bucket-hoist knot!

Terl rumbled back before it could get to the door. He went in, plucked the thing up, and put it back on the far side of the cage.

He wound the rope around and around its neck and then tied it with a double-bucket knot so complex that only a veteran rigger could loosen it.

Once more he went off to an unseen distance.

Again believing itself unobserved, what was the thing doing now?

It reached into a pouch it was wearing, took out something bright, and cut the rope!

Terl rumbled off to the garage and rummaged about through centuries of castoffs and debris until he found a piece of flexi-rope, a welding torch, a welding power cartridge, and a short strip of metal.

When he got back, the thing was over by the door again, trying to climb the thirty-foot bars.

Terl did a very thorough job. He made a collar out of the metal and welded it hotly around the neck. He welded the flexi-rope to the collar and welded the other end into a ring, hooking the ring over a bar thirty feet above the dirt floor of the cage.

He stood back. The thing was grimacing and trying to hold the collar away from its neck, for it was still hot.

That'll hold it, Terl told himself.

But he hadn't finished. He wasn't a security chief for nothing. He went back to his office storeroom and broke out two button cameras, checked them, and switched them to the wavelength of his office viewer.

Then he went back to the cage and put one button camera way up in the bars, pointing down, and put the other one out at a distance where it could view the exterior.

The thing was pointing at its mouth and making sounds. Who knew what that meant?

Only now did Terl feel relaxed.

That night he sat smugly in the employee recreation room, responding to no questions, quietly drinking his kerbango in a very self-satisfied way.

- 2 -

Jonnie Goodboy Tyler stared in despair at his packs across the yard.

The sun was hot.

The collar on his burned neck hurt.

His throat was parched with thirst. And he felt hungry.

In those packs, just inside the cage door, there was a pig bladder of water. There was some cooked pork, if it hadn't spoiled. And there were hides he could rig for shade.

At first he had just been trying to get out.

The very idea of being caged made him feel ill. Sicker even than the lack of water and food.

It was all so unknown. The last he really remembered was starting to charge the insect and being blown into the air. Then this. No, wait. There was something after he was first stunned.

He had started to come to, lying on something soft and smooth. He had seemed to be inside the insect. He had seen a huge something next to him. And then there was a sensation like breathing fire straight into his lungs that pulled every nerve short and threw him into a convulsion.

There was another glimpse of an occurrence. He had flickeringly regained consciousness for a few moments. He seemed to be tied to the top of the insect speeding across the plain. And then the back of his head bumped and the next he knew he was in here - in this cage!

He put it together. He had hurt the insect, but not fatally. It had eaten him, but then spit him up. It had carried him on its back to its lair.

But the real shock was the monster.

It was true, he knew now, that he had always been "too smart." He had doubted his elders. He had doubted the Great Village and there it had been. He had doubted the monsters and here one was.

When he had come to and found himself looking up at that thing, his head had reeled. He felt himself literally bending the bars behind him to get away. A monster!

Eight or nine feet tall, maybe more. About three and a half feet wide. Two arms. Two legs.

A shiny substance for a face and a long tube from the chin down to the chest.

Glowing amber eyes behind the shiny front plate.

The ground shook as it approached. A thousand pounds? Maybe more.

Huge booted feet dented the earth.

And it had furry paws and long talons.

He had been certain it was going to eat him right then. But it hadn't. It had tied him up like a dog.

There was something strange about this monster's perceptions. Every time he had tried to get untied and out of the cage, the monster had shown up again. As though it could see when it wasn't around to see.

Possibly those little spheres had had something to do with it. The monster held them in its paws like small detachable eyes. One was up there now, glittering, way up in the corner of the cage. Like a little eye. The other one was out there stuck onto a nearby building side.

But the monster had caught him trying to get out before it planted those eyes.

What was this place? There was a constant rumble from somewhere, a muted roar similar to the one the insect had made. The thought of more of those insects chilled him.

There was a big stone basin in the middle of the cage, a few feet deep with steps up one side. Lots of sand was in the bottom of it. A grave? A place to roast meat? No, there were no charred sticks or ashes in it.

So there were monsters. When he stood in front of it, his face was just above the level of its belt buckle. Belt buckle? Yes, a shiny thing that held a belt together. It suddenly dawned on Jonnie that the monster was wearing a covering that wasn't its own skin. A slippery, shiny purple substance. It wasn't its own hide. Like clothes you'd cut out of a hide. Pants. A coat. A collar. It wore clothes.

Ornaments on the collar. And a device of some sort on the belt buckle. That device was stamped on his mind's eye, right now. It was a picture of ground on which stood small square blocks. Vertical shafts were going up from the square blocks. Out of the shafts seemed to be coming clouds of smoke, and smoke in curls lay all over the top of the picture. The idea of clouds of smoke stirred some memory in him, but he was too hungry and too thirsty and too hot to wrestle with it.

The ground under him began to shake in measured tread. He knew what this was.

The monster came to the door. It was carrying something. It came in and loomed over him. It threw down into the dirt some soft, gooey sticks of something. Then it just stood there.

Jonnie looked at the sticks. They weren't like anything he had ever seen.

The monster made motions, pointing from the sticks to his face. That failing, the monster took up a stick and squashed it against Jonnie's mouth, saying something in a rumbling roaring voice. A command.

Jonnie got it. This was supposed to be food.

He worked a bit of it around in his mouth and then swallowed it.

Abruptly and immediately he was violently ill. He felt like his whole stomach was going to rush back out of his mouth. Before he could control them, his limbs went into the beginning of a convulsion.

He spat. Too thirsty to have much saliva, he tried to get rid of the stuff, all of it, every bit of it, every tiny piece of the acid taste of it.

The monster just backed up and stood there staring at him.

"Water," pleaded Jonnie, getting control of his shaking limbs and voice. "Please. Water." Anything to wash this horrible stuff out.

He pointed to his mouth. "Water."

The monster just went on standing there. The eyes back of the faceplate were slitted, glowing with an eerie fire.

Jonnie composed himself stoically. It was wrong to look weak and beg. There was such a thing as pride. He drew his face into stillness.

The monster leaned over and checked the collar and the flexi-rope, turned around and went back out, closed the gate with a firm clang, wired it shut and left.

The evening shadows were growing long.

Jonnie looked at his packs by the gate. They might as well be on the top of Highpeak! A cloak of misery settled over him. He had to assume Windsplitter was gravely injured or dead. And he had to assume that in a few days he himself probably would die of thirst or hunger.

Twilight came.

And then with a shock he realized Chrissie's promise to find him would wind up in her certain death. He caved in.

The little bright eye, up in the corner of the cage, stared down unwinkingly.

- 3 -

The following day, Terl probed around the disused quarters of the old Chinkos. It was unpleasant work. The quarters were outside the pressurized Psychlo domes of the minesite and he had to wear a breathe-mask. The Chinkos were air-breathers. And while the quarters had been sealed off, a few hundred years of neglect and weather leaks had left their marks.

There were rows and rows of bookcases. Lines and lines of filing cabinets full of notes. Old scarred desks, rickety and frail to begin with, collapsing into themselves. Piles of junk in lockers. And everything filmed over with white dust. Good thing he didn't have to breathe it.

What funny beings the Chinkos had been. They were the Intergalactic Mining Company's answer to some protests by more warlike and able worlds that mining was wrecking planetary ecologies. And, the company being plush and profitable at that time, some knothead of a director in Intergalactic's main office had created the culture and ethnology department, or C and E. Maybe it was originally named the ecological department, but Chinkos could paint, and some Intergalactic director's wear-the-claws wife had begun to make a private fortune selling Chinko work on other planets and got the name changed. There was very little that didn't show up in the secret files of the security department.

It was the strike the Chinkos had invented, not the corruption, that caused the final wipeout. Corruption at director level was very paws-off for security. A strike was not. But the Chinkos here had been gone long before that, and this place looked it. What, after all, was worth culturing on this planet? There weren't enough indigenous populations left to bother with. And who had cared anyway? But like any bureaucracy, the Chinkos had been busy. Look at those hundreds of yards of cabinets and books.

Terl was looking for a manual on the feeding habits of man. Surely these busy Chinkos had studied that.

He pawed and pawed. He opened and flipped hundreds of indexes. He got down and poked into lockers. And while he got a very good idea of what there was in these rambling offices and lockers, he couldn't find one single thing about what man ate. He found what bears ate. He found what mountain goats ate. He even found a treatise, scholarly composed, printed and reeking with wasted expense, on what some beast known as a "whale" ate, a treatise that ended up laughably enough with the fact that the beast was totally extinct. Terl stood in the middle of the place, disgusted. No wonder the company had phased out C and E on Earth. Imagine roaring around, burning up fuel, keeping a whole book-manufacturing plant steaming like a digger shovel, wearing out eyesight

It wasn't all in vain, though. He had learned from the aged and yellowed map he now gripped in his hand that there were a few other groups of men left on this planet. At least there had been a few hundred years ago.

Some were in a place the Chinkos called "Alps." Several dozen, in fact. There had been about fifteen up in the ice belt the Chinkos called "North Pole" and "Canada." There had been an unestimated number at a place called "Scotland" and there had been some in "Scandinavia." And also in a place called "Colorado."

This was the first time he had seen the Chinko name for this central minesite area.

"Colorado." He looked at the map with some amusement. "Rocky Mountains." "Pike's Peak." Funny Chinko names. The Chinkos always did their work in painfully severe Psychlo, faithful to their ore. But they had had funny imaginations.

This was getting him no place, however, although it was good to know, for the sake of his planning, that there had been a few more men around.

He would have to rely on what he should have relied on in the first place - security. The techniques of security. He would put them to work.

He walked out and closed the door behind him and stared around at this non-Psychlo alien world. The old Chinko offices, barracks, and zoo were up on the high hill back of the minesite. Close by but higher. The arrogant bastards. One could see all around from this place. One could see the ore transshipment platform as well as the freighter assembly field; the place didn't look very busy down there. Intergalactic would be sending some sizzlers down the line unless quotas were met. He hoped he wouldn't have too many investigations ordered by the home office.

Blue sky. Yellow sun. Green trees. And the wind that tugged at him full of air. How he hated this place.

The thought of staying made him grit his fangs.

Well, what do you expect in an alien world?

He'd finish that investigation ordered about a lost tractor and then put his tried-and-true security technology to work on that man-thing.

That was the only way out of this hellhole.

- 4 -

Jonnie watched the monster.

Thirsty, hungry, and with no hope, he felt adrift in a sea of unknowns.

The thing had come into the cage, its footsteps shaking the earth, and had stood there for some time just looking at him, small glints of light in its amber eyes. Then it had begun to putter around.

Right now it was testing the bars, shaking them, apparently verifying that they were firm. Satisfied, it rumbled all around the perimeter inspecting the dirt.

It stood for a while looking at the sticks it had tried to make Jonnie eat. Jonnie had pushed them as far away as possible since they had a bad, pungent smell. The monster counted them. Aha! It could count.

It spent some time examining the collar and rope. And then it did a very strange thing. It unhooked the rope's far end from the bar top. Jonnie held his breath. Maybe he could get to his packs.

But the monster now hooked the rope on a nearby bar. He dropped a loop over the bar indifferently and then moved off to the door.

It spent some time at the door, rewinding the wires that kept it closed, and did not seem to notice that when it turned its back on the door, one of the wires sprang free.

The monster rumbled off toward the compound and disappeared.

Lightheaded with thirst and hunger, Jonnie felt he was having delusions. He was afraid to hope. But there it was: the rope could be removed, and the gate fastening might be loose enough to open.

He made very sure the monster was really gone.

Then he acted.

With a flip of the rope he got the far end off the bar.

Hastily he wrapped the length around his body to get it out of his way and tucked the end into his belt.

He dove for his packs.

With shaking hands he ripped them open. Some of his hope died. The water bladder had burst, probably from the earlier impact, and there was only dampness there. The pork, wrapped in hide that retained the sun's heat, was very spoiled, and he knew better than to eat it.

He looked at the door. He would try.

Grabbing a kill-club and rope from the pack and checking his belt pouch for flints, Jonnie crept to the door.

No sign of the monster.

The wires of the fastening were awfully big. But age had weakened them. Even so they tore and bruised his hands as he feverishly sought to open them.

Then they were open!

He pushed against the door.

In seconds he was sprinting through the shrubs and gullies to the northwest.

Keeping low, taking advantage of every bit of cover so as to remain hidden from the compound, he nevertheless went fast.

He had to find water. His tongue was swollen, his lips cracked.

He had to find food. He felt the lightheaded unreality that came with the beginnings of starvation.

Then he had to get back to the mountains. He had to stop Chrissie.

Jonnie went a mile. He examined his backtrail. Nothing. He listened. No sound of the insect, no feel of monster feet shaking the earth.

He ran two miles. He stopped and listened again. Still nothing. Hope flared within him.

Ahead he could see greenery, a patch jutting out of a gully, a sign of water.

His breath hoarse and rattling in his chest, he made the edge of the gully.

No scene could be more heartwarming. A speck of blue and white. The cheerful burble of a

small brook running through the trees.

Jonnie lunged forward and a moment later plunged his head into the incalculably precious water.

He knew better than to drink too much. He just kept rinsing his mouth. For minutes he plunged his head and chest in and out of the stream, letting the water soak in. Gone was the taste of that terrible gooey stick. The freshness and cleanliness of the brook were almost as joyful as its wetness.

He drank a few cautious swallows and then sank back, catching his breath. The day looked brighter.

The backtrail was still quiet. The monster might not discover he was gone for hours. Hope surged again.

Far off to the northwest, just a little bit above the curve of the plain, were the mountains. Home.

Jonnie looked around him. There was an old rickety shack on the other side of the stream bed, the roof sunk down to its foundation.

Food was his concern now.

He took more swallows of water and stood up. He hefted his kill-club and walked through the stream toward the ancient shack.

While running, he had seen no game. Perhaps it was cleared out in the vicinity of the compound. But he didn't need big game. A rabbit would do. He had better take care of this fast and keep going.

Something moved in the shack. He crept forward, silent.

In a scurry several big rats raced out of the shack. Jonnie had started his throw and then stopped. Only in the dreariest of a starving winter would one eat rats.

But he had no time and he saw no rabbits.

He picked up a rock and threw it against the shack. Two more rats streamed out and he threw his kill-club straight and true.

A moment later he was holding a dead rat in his hand, a big one. Did he dare light a fire? No, no time for that. Raw rat? Ugh.

He took a piece of the sharp, clear stuff from his pouch and stepped back to the stream. He cleaned and washed the rat.

Hunger or no hunger, it took some doing to bite into the raw rat meat. Almost gagging, he chewed and swallowed. Well, it was food.

He ate very slowly so that he wouldn't get any sicker than he felt at eating raw rat.

Then he drank some more water.

He wrapped a last piece of the rat in a scrap of hide and put it in his pouch. He kicked some sand over the debris he had left.

He stood up straight and looked at the distant mountains. He took a deep breath, bracing himself to start again on his run.

There was a low whistle in the air and something fell over him.

He rolled.

It was a net.

He couldn't get free.

The more he tried to get out of it, the more tangled up he became. He stared wildly around.

Through an opening he saw the truth.

The monster, without haste, was moving forward out of the trees, taking in the slack of the rope to which the net was attached.

The thing exhibited no emotion. It moved as though it had all the time in the world.

It wrapped Jonnie up in the net and tucked the whole bundle under its arm and then began to rumble along back toward the compound.

- 5 -

Terl, fiddling with forms at his desk, felt very cheerful.

Things were working out fine, just fine. Security techniques were always best. Always. He now knew exactly what he had wanted to know: the thing drank water and drank it by plunging its head and shoulders into a stream or pond. And more importantly, it ate raw rat.

This made things very easy. If there was any animal available near the compound, it was rat.

He guessed he could teach the old Chinkos a thing or two. It was elementary to let the man-thing loose and elementary to keep him under surveillance with a flying scope. It was, of course, a little trying to be out in the open wearing a breathe-mask and yet make speed over the ground. That man-thing didn't run very fast compared to a Psychlo, but it had been a bit of an exertion. It was hard to exert oneself while wearing a breathe-mask. But he hadn't lost his skill in casting nets, old-fashioned though it might be. He hadn't wanted to use a stun gun again: the thing seemed frail and went into convulsions.

Well, he was learning.

He began to wonder how many raw rats a day the thing had to consume. But he could find that out easily.

He looked with boredom at the report before him. The lost tractor had been found along with its Psychlo driver at the bottom of a two-mile-deep mine shaft. They ate up a lot of personnel these days. There'd be a yowl from the main office about replacement costs. Then he cheered up. This fitted very well into his plans.

He checked around to make sure he had no more work to do and put his desk in order for the end of day.

Terl went over to a cabinet and took out the smallest blast gun he could find. He put a charge cartridge in it and set it to minimum power.

He took some rags and cleaned up his face mask and put a new cartridge in it.

Then he went outside.

Not a hundred yards north of the compound he saw his first rat. With the accuracy that had won him an honored place on his school shoot team, even though the thing was in streaking motion, he blew its head off.

Fifty feet farther, another rat leaped out of a culvert and he decapitated it in midair. He paced off the distance. Forty-two Psychlo paces. No, he hadn't lost his touch. Silly things to be hunting, but it still took a master's touch.

Two. That would be good enough to start with.

Terl looked around at the hateful day. Yellow, blue, and green. Well, he'd get quit of this.

Feeling very cheerful, he rumbled up the hill to the old zoo.

His mouthbones stretched in a grin. There was the man-thing crouched down at the far side of the cage, glaring at him. Glaring at him? Yes, it was true. It was the first time Terl had noticed it had emotions.

And what else had it been doing?

It had gotten to the packs - he remembered the thing clutching at them when he had returned it to the cage yesterday - and it was now sitting on them. It had been doing something else. It had been looking down at a couple of books. Books? Now where the crap nebula had it gotten books? Didn't seem possible it could have gotten into the old Chinko quarters. The collar, the rope were all secure. He'd investigate that in due course. The thing was still here, which was what was important.

Terl advanced, smiling behind his mask. He held up the two dead rats and then tossed them to the man-thing.

It didn't jump hungrily at them. It seemed to withdraw. Well, gratitude wasn't something you found in animals. No matter. Terl wasn't after gratitude from this thing.

Terl went over to the old cement bear pool. It didn't seem to be cracked. He traced the piping. The piping seemed to be all right.

He went outside the cage and fumbled around in the undergrowth, looking for the valves, and finally found one. He turned it. Hard to do with a valve that old. He was afraid his great strength would just twist the top off.

From the nearby garage he got some penetrating oil and went back and worked the valve over. Finally he got it open. Nothing happened.

Terl traced the old water system to a tank the Chinkos had built. He shook his head over the crudity of it. It had a pump but the charge cartridge was long expended. He freed up the pump and put a new cartridge in it. Intergalactic was never one for innovations, thank the stars. The cartridges the pump needed were the same ones still in use.

He got the pump whirring but no water came. Finally he found the pond. The old pipe was simply not in the water, so with one stamp of his boot he put it back in.

Up at the tank the water began to run in. And down in the cage the pool began to fill swiftly. Terl grinned to himself. A mining man could always handle fluids. And here too he hadn't lost his touch.

He went back into the cage. The big center pool was filling rapidly. It was muddy and swirling since it had been full of sand. But it was wet water!

The pool filled up to the top and slopped over, spilling across the floor of the cage. The man-thing was hastily picking up its things and jamming them into the bars to escape the inundation.

Terl went back outside and shut off the valve. He let the tank on the hill fill and then shut that off.

The cage was practically awash. But the water was draining off through the bars. Good enough.

Terl slopped over to the man-thing. It was clinging to the bars to keep out of the water. It had the hides way up, jammed over the cross braces. To keep them dry? It was holding on to the books with one hand.

Terl looked around. Everything was in order now. So he had better look into these books. He started to take them out of its hand but it held on. With some impatience, Terl smashed at its wrist and caught the two books as they fell.

They were man-books.

Puzzled, Terl leafed through them. Now where could this thing have picked up man-books?

He drew his eyebones together, thinking.

Ali, the Chinko guidebook! There had been a library in that town. Well, maybe this animal had lived in that town.

But books? This was better and better. Maybe, like the Chinkos had said, these animals could grasp meaning. Terl could not read the man-characters but they obviously were readable.

This first one here must be a child's primer. The other one was some kind of child's story. Beginner books.

The animal was looking stoically away in another direction. It was useless, of course, to try to talk to it -

Terl halted his thought in mid-blink.

Better and better for his plans! It had been talking! He remembered now. What he had thought were growls and squawks like you get from any animal had been reminiscent of words!

And here were books!

He made the thing look at him by turning its head. Terl pointed to the book and then at the thing's head.

It gave no sign of understanding.

Terl pushed the book up close to its face and pointed at its mouth. No sign of recognition occurred in the eyes.

It either wasn't going to read or it couldn't read.

He experimented some more. If these things could actually talk and read, then his plans were sure winners. He turned the pages in front of its face. No, no sign of recognition. But it had books in its possession. It had books, but it couldn't read. Maybe it had them for the pictures. Ah, success. Terl showed it a picture of a bee and there was a flicker of interest and recognition. He showed it the picture of the fox and again that flick of recognition. He took the other book with pages of solid print. No sign of recognition. Got it. He put the small books in his breast pocket.

Terl knew what to do. He knew every piece of everything in the old Chinko quarters and that included man-language discs. They had never written up what man ate but they had gone to enormous trouble with man-language. Typically Chinko. Miss the essentials and soar off into the stratosphere.

He knew tomorrow's program. Better and better.

Terl checked the collar, checked the rope, securely locked up the cage, and left.

- 6 -

It had been a damp, cold, thoroughly miserable night.

Jonnie had clung to the bars for hours, loath to sit down or even step down. Mud was everywhere. The gush of water had taken the sand and dirt in the pool and spread it all over the cage and the dirt of the floor had avidly soaked it up. The mud became ankle deep.

But at last, exhausted, he had given in and slept lying in the mud.

Midmorning sun was drying it somewhat. The two dead rats had floated away out of reach and Jonnie didn't care.

Already dehydrated from his previous experience, he felt the hot sun increase his thirst. He looked at the muddy pool, contaminated with slime from the cage. He could not bring himself to drink it.

He was sitting miserably against the bars when the monster appeared.

It stopped outside the door and looked in. It was carrying some metallic object in its paws. It looked at the mud and for the moment Jonnie thought it might realize he couldn't go on sitting and sleeping in the mud.

It went away.

Just as Jonnie believed it would not come back, it reappeared. This time it was still carrying the metal object, but it was also carrying a huge rickety table and an enormous chair.

The thing made tricky work getting through the door with all that load, a door too small for it in the first place. But it came on in and put the table down. Then it put the metal object on the table.

Jonnie had at first believed that the huge chair was for him. But he was quickly disabused. The monster put the chair down at the side of the table and sat down on it: the legs of it sunk perilously into the mud.

It indicated the mysterious object. Then it took the two books out of its pocket and threw them on the table. Jonnie reached for them. He had not thought he would ever see them again and he had begun to make out of them a kind of sense.

The monster cuffed his hand and pointed at the object. It waved a paw across the top of the books in a kind of negative motion and pointed again at the object.

There was a sack on the back of the object and it had discs in it about the diameter of two hands.

The monster took out one of the discs and looked at it. It had a hole in the middle with squiggles around it. The monster put the disc on top of the machine. There was a rod there that fitted into the middle of the disc.

Jonnie was extremely suspicious, his hand bruised from the cuff. Anything this monster was up to would be devious, treacherous, and dangerous. That had been adequately proved. The game was to bide one's time, watch, and learn - and out of that possibly wrest freedom.

The monster now pointed to two windows on the front of the object. Then it pointed to a single lever that stuck out from the front of it.

The monster pushed the lever down.

Jonnie's eyes went round. He backed up.

The object talked!

Clear as a bell, it had said, "Excuse me . . ."

The monster pulled the lever up and it stopped talking.

Jonnie drew back further. The monster clouted him between the shoulder blades and drove him up to the table so hard the edgy hit his throat. The monster raised a cautionary finger at him.

It shoved the lever up, and by standing on tiptoe Jonnie could see that the disc went backward from the way it had gone.

The monster pulled the lever down again. The object said, "Excuse me, but I am. . ." The monster centered the lever and the machine stopped. Then it pushed the lever up and the machine went backward again.

Jonnie tried to look under the machine and back of it. The thing wasn't alive, surely. It didn't have ears or a nose or a mouth. Yes, it did have a mouth. A circle low down in front of it. But the mouth didn't move. Sound just came out of it. And it was talking Jonnie's language!

The monster pushed the lever down again and the object said, "Excuse me, but I am your. . ." This time Jonnie saw that some odd squiggles had been showing up in the top window and a strange face in the lower window.

Once more the monster pushed the lever up and the disc on top went backward. Then the monster centered the lever. It pointed a talon at Jonnie's head and then at the object. Jonnie noticed then that the monster had been moving the lever off center, all positions to the left. The monster now moved the lever all the way over to the right and down, and different squiggles appeared but the same picture showed, and the machine said something in some strange tongue.

The monster backed it up and put the lever in the left-right center and down. Different squiggles, same lower picture, but an entirely different set of sounds.

Behind the face mask the monster seemed to smile. It repeated the last maneuver again and pointed to itself. Jonnie suddenly understood that that was the monster's language.

Jonnie's interest was immediate, intense, and flaming.

He reached up and pushed the monster's paw away. It was hard to reach because the table was so high and big, but Jonnie made nothing of that.

He moved the lever up and to the left. Then he moved it down.

The machine said, "Excuse me, but I am your instructor . . ." Then Jonnie did the same operation in the right-hand position and it said something that was language but strange. Then he did it in the center position and it spoke again in the language of the Psychlos. The monster was looking at him closely, even suspiciously. It bent way over and peered back into Jonnie's face. The flickering, amber eyes slitted. Then it made a doubtful motion toward the machine as though it would pick it up and carry it off.

Jonnie slapped the huge hands away and fastened again on the lever. He put it in the left track and let it roll.

"Excuse me," the machine said, "but I am your instructor if you will forgive such arrogance. I do not have the honor to be a Psychlo. I am but a lowly Chinko." The face in the bottom window bowed twice and put a hand over its eyes.

"I am Joga Stenko, Junior Assistant Language Slave in the Language Division of the Department of Culture and Ethnology, Planet Earth." Squiggles were running rapidly in the upper window.

"Forgive my presumption, but this is a course of study in reading and speaking the man-languages of English and Swedish.

"On the left-hand track of the record, I hope you will have no trouble in finding English. On the right-hand track you will find the same text in Swedish. On the center track the same text is in Psychlo, the Noble Language of Conquerors.

"The written equivalent in each case appears in the upper window and suitable pictures appear in the lower window.

"You will pardon my humble pretensions of learnedness. All wisdom abides in the Governors of Psychlo and one of their major companies, the great and mighty Intergalactic Mining Company, on which let there be profit!"

Jonnie centered the lever. He was breathing hard. The language was stilted, oddly pronounced, and many of the words he did not know. But he grasped it.

He looked more closely at the object. He frowned, concentrating heavily. And then he grasped that it was a machine, a not-live thing. That meant that the insect had been not live either.

Jonnie looked at the monster. Why was this thing doing this? What fresh dangers and privations did it have in mind? There was no kindness in those amber eyes. They were like a wolf's eyes seen in firelight.

The monster pointed toward the machine and Jonnie pulled the lever down to the left.

"Excuse me," it said, "but we will begin with the necessary alphabet. The first letter is A. Look at the upper window." Jonnie did and saw the marks.

"A . . . pronounced ay. Its sound is also a as in "pat,' ay as in "pay,' ay as in "care,' ah as in "father.' Look at it well, excuse me please, so you can always recognize it. The next letter of the alphabet is B. Look at the window. It always has the sound of b as in bat"

The monster batted his hand up and opened the primer to the first page. It tapped a talon on A.

Jonnie had already made the connection. Language could be written and read. And this machine was going to teach him how to do it. He centered the lever and pulled it down and there it was evidently spouting an alphabet in Psychlo. The little face in the lower window was showing mouth formations to say the sounds. He swung the lever over to the right and it was saying an alphabet in . . . Swedish?

The monster stood up, looking the four feet down to Jonnie. It took two dead rats from its pocket and dangled them in front of Jonnie.

What was this? A reward? It made Jonnie feel like a dog being trained. He didn't take them.

The monster made a sort of shrugging motion and said something. Jonnie couldn't understand the words. But when the monster reached over to pick up the machine, he knew what they must have been. Something like, "Lesson's over for the day."

Jonnie instantly pushed the arms away from the machine. He moved over defiantly and stood there, blocking the reach. He wasn't sure what would happen, if he'd be batted halfway across the cage. But he stood there.

So did the monster. Head on one side, then the other.

The monster roared. Jonnie did not flinch. The monster roared some more and Jonnie divined, with relief, that it was laughing.

The monster's belt buckle, showing the clouds of smoke in the sky, was a few inches below Jonnie's eyes. It connected with the ancient legend that told of the end of Jonnie's race. The laughter beat at Jonnie's ears, a growling thunder of mockery.

The monster turned around and went out, still laughing as it locked the gate.

There was bitterness and determination on Jonnie's face. He had to know more. Much more. Then he could act.

The machine was still on the table.

Jonnie reached for the lever.

- 7 -

The summer heat dried out the mud.

White clouds spotted the skies above the cage.

But Jonnie had no time for them. His whole concentration was on the teaching machine. He had gotten the huge chair shifted around and by lifting the seat height with folded skins, he could hunch over the table, close facing the old Chinko who, in the picture, fawned in an agony of politeness as he taught.

Mastering the alphabet in English was quite a trick. But mastering it in Psychlo was even worse. Far far easier to trail game by its signs and know, almost to the minute, how long ago it had passed and what it was doing. These signs and symbols were fixed deathless on a screen and the meanings that they gave were unbelievably complex.

In a week, he thought he had it. He had begun to hope. He had even commenced to believe that it was easy. "B is for Bats, Z is for Zoo, H is for Hats and Y is for You." And by going over the same text in Psychlo, the Bats, Zoos, Hats and Yous became (a little incomprehensibly) Pens, Shovels, Kerbango and Females. But when he finally grasped, under the Chinko's groveling tutelage, that Psychlo words for Hats, Zoos and Bats would start with different letters, he knew he had it.

He at length could lie back and rattle off the alphabet in English. Then he could, with a bit of squinting, sit up and rattle off the Psychlo alphabet in Psychlo. And with all the different nuances of how they sounded.

Jonnie knew he mustn't take too long at this. The diet of raw meat would eventually do him in; he was close to semi-starvation since he could barely bring himself to eat it. The monster would come and watch him a little while each day. While he was there, Jonnie was silent. He knew he must sound funny while he drilled. And the monster's laughter made the back of his hair stand up. So he would be very quiet under that scrutiny from outside the cage.

It was a mistake. The monster's eyebones behind the breathe-mask plate were coming closer and closer together with a growing frown.

The triumph of the alphabet was short-lived. At the end of it, the monster, one beautiful bright day, yanked open the door of the cage and came roaring in like a storm!

It yelled at Jonnie for minutes on end, the cage bars shaking. Jonnie expected a cuff but he didn't cringe when the monster's paw snaked out.

But it was reaching for the machine, not Jonnie. It yanked the lever down into a second stage that Jonnie had never suspected.

A whole new set of pictures and sounds leaped out!

The old Chinko said, in English, "I am sorry, honored student and forgive my arrogance, but we will now begin the drill of progressive cross-association of objects, symbols and words."

And there was a new sequence of pictures! The sound for H, the picture of H began to follow one another at a slow interval. Then the Psychlo letter that had an H-like sound began to repeat, in sound and picture. And then they went faster and faster until they were an almost indistinguishable blur!

Jonnie was so astonished he did not realize the monster had left.

Here was a new thing. The lever was so big and resistive he had not realized that all this lurked just beyond another thrust of pressure.

Well, if a little push DOWN would do that, what happened with a little push UP?

He tried it.

It almost blew his head off.

It took him quite a space of travel of the sun-made bar shadows to get brave enough to try it again.

Same thing!

It almost knocked him off the chair.

Holding back, he stared at the thing suspiciously.

What was it that came out of it?

Sunlight?

He tried it again and let it hit his hand.

Warm.

Tingling.

Carefully staying off to the side, he saw that pictures were appearing in the frames. And he heard, in the weirdest way, sort of with his head, not his ears, "Beneath the level of your consciousness, the alphabet will now go in. A,B,C. . . ."

What was this? Was he "hearing" through his hand? No, that couldn't be! He wasn't hearing at all except for that meadowlark.

Soundless somethings were coming from the MACHINE!

He moved a little further back. The impression was less. He moved closer: he felt that his brains were frying.

"Now we will do the same sounds in Psychlo"

Jonnie went over to the furthest extension of his chain and sat down against the wall.

He thought and thought about it.

He grasped at last that the cross-association drill of symbols, sounds and words was to get him very fast and then faster and faster so he did not have to grope for what he had been taught but would be able to use it without hesitation.

But this shaft of "sunlight" coming out of the machine?

He got braver. He went back and found a disc that must be very advanced and put it on.

Bracing himself, he grimly pushed the lever all the way up.

Suddenly he KNEW that if all three sides of a triangle were equal, all its enclosed three angles were also equal.

He backed up. Never mind what a triangle was or an angle, he now KNEW.

He went back and sat down against the wall. Suddenly he reached out with his finger and drew in the dust a three pointed shape. He poked a finger at each inside bend. He said, wonderingly, "They're equal."

Equal what?

Equal each other.

So what?

Maybe it was valuable.

Jonnie gazed at the machine. It could teach him in the ordinary way. It could teach him by speeding the lesson up. And it could teach him very smoothly and instantly with a beam of "sunlight."

Abruptly an unholy joy began to light his face.

Alphabet? He had to learn the whole civilization of the Psychlos!

Did that monster realize why he wanted it?

Life became a long parade of discs, stacks of discs. Every hour not needed for sleep was spent at the table - with straight picture learning, with progressively speeding cross-association, with the piercing beams of "sunlight."

Half-starved, his sleep was restless. Nightmares of dead Psychlos were intertwined with

raw rats chasing mechanical horses that flew. And the discs went round and round. But Jonnie kept on, kept on cramming years of education into weeks and months. There was so MUCH to know! He had to grasp it ALL! And with only one goal in mind: vengeance for the destruction of his race! Could he learn enough fast enough to accomplish his purpose?

- 8 -

Terl had felt smug right up to the moment he received the summons from the Planetary Director. He was nervous now, waiting for the appointment to occur. The weeks had fled on, the summer fading into the chill of autumn. The man-animal was doing well. Its every waking moment seemed to be spent crowded up against the Chinko language and technical instruction machine. It hadn't begun to talk yet, but of course it was just an animal and stupid. It hadn't even grasped the principle of progressive speed cross-association until it had been shown. And it didn't even have enough sense to stand squarely in front of the instantaneous conceptual knowledge transmitter. Didn't it realize you had to get the full wave impulse to get it through your skull bones? Stupid. It would take months at this rate to get an education! But what could you expect of an animal that lived on raw rat! Still, sometimes when he went in the cage, Terl had looked into those strange blue eyes and had seen danger. No matter. Terl had decided that if the animal proved dangerous, he could simply use it to get things started, and then at the first sign it was getting out of hand it could be vaporized fast enough. One button push on a hand-blaster. Zip-bang, no man-animal. Very easily handled.

Yes, things had been going very well until this summons.

Such things made one nervous. There was no telling what the Planetary Director might have found out, no telling what tales some employee might have carried to him. A security chief was ordinarily not much consulted. In fact, by a devious chain of command, a security chief was not directly under the Planetary Director on all points. This made Terl feel better. In fact, there had been cases where a security chief had removed a Planetary Director - cases involving corruption. But still, the Planetary Director remained the administrative head and was the one who filed reports, reports that could transfer one, or continue one on post.

The summons had come late the night before and Terl had not slept very well. He had tumbled around in his bed, imagining conversations. At one time he had actually gotten up and combed through his office files wondering what he had on the Planetary Director, just in case. That he couldn't recall or find anything depressed him. Terl only felt operational when he had big leverage in terms of potential blackmail.

It was almost with relief that he saw the appointment time arrive and he rumbled into the office of the top Psychlo.

Numph, Planetary Director of Earth, was old. Rumor had it that he was a discard from the Central Company Directorate. Not for corruption, but just for bumbling incompetence. And he had been sent as far away as they could send him. An unimportant post, a rim star in a remote galaxy, a perfect place to send someone and forget him.

Numph was sitting at his upholstered desk, looking out through the pressure dome at the distant transshipment center. He was gnawing absently on a corner of a file folder.

Terl approached watchfully. Numph's executive uniform was neat. His fur, turning blue, was impeccably combed and in place. He didn't look particularly upset, though his amber eyes were introverted.

Numph didn't look up. "Sit down," he said absently.

"I come in response to your summons, Your Planetship."

The old Psychlo turned to his desk. He looked wearily at Terl. "That's obvious." He didn't much care for Terl, but he didn't dislike him either. It was the same with all these executives, definitely not first team. Not like the old days, other planets, other posts, better staffs.

"We're not showing a profit," said Numph. He threw the folder down on his desk. Two kerbango saucepans rattled, but he did not offer any.

"I should imagine this planet is getting mined out," said Terl.

"That's not it. There's plenty of deep-down ore to keep us going for centuries. Besides, that's the concern of the engineers, not security."

Terl didn't care to feel rebuked. "I've heard that there's an economic depression in a lot of the company's markets, that prices are down."

"That could be. But that's the concern of the economics department at the home office, not security."

This second rebuke made Terl a bit restless. His chair groaned alarmingly under his bulk. Numph pulled the folder to him and fiddled with it. Then he looked wearily at Terl.

"It's costs," said Numph.

"Costs," said Terl, getting his own back a bit, "has to do with accounting, not security."

Numph looked at him for several seconds. He couldn't make up his mind whether Terl was being insolent. He decided to ignore it. He threw the folder back down.

"Mutiny is," said Numph.

Terl stiffened. "Where's the mutiny?" Not the slightest rumor of it had reached him. What was going on here? Did Numph have his own intelligence system that bypassed Terl?

"It hasn't occurred yet," said Numph. "But when I announce the pay cuts and drop all bonuses, there's liable to be one."

Terl shuddered and leaned forward. This affected him in more ways than one.

Numph tossed the folder at him. "Personnel costs. We have three thousand seven hundred nineteen employees on this planet scattered over five active minesites and three exploratory sites. That includes landing field personnel, freighter crews, and the transshipment force. At an average pay of thirty thousand Galactic credits a year, that's C111,570,000. Food, quarters, and breathe-gas is averaged at fifteen thousand credits each; comes to C55,785,000. The total is C167,355,000. Add to that the bonuses and transport and we have nearly exceeded the value of our output. That doesn't count wear and tear, and it doesn't count expansion."

Terl had been dimly aware of this and in fact had used it as an argument - a false one - in furthering his own personal plan.

He did not think the time was ripe to spring his project. But he had not anticipated that the powerful and rich Intergalactic Company would go so far as to cut pay and wipe out bonuses. While this affected him directly, he was far more interested in his own plan of personal wealth and power.

Was it time to open up a new phase in his own scheme? The animal was actually doing pretty well. It probably could be trained for the elementary digging venture. It could be used to recruit other animals. He was pretty well convinced it could do the necessary mining, dangerous though it was.

Stripping that vein out of the blizzard - torn, sheer cliff would be quite a trick and might be fatal to some of the animals involved. But who cared about that? Besides, the moment the stuff was gotten out, the animals would have to be vaporized so the secret could never leak.

"We could increase our output," said Terl, fencing in toward his target.

"No, no, no," said Numph. "That's pretty impossible." He sighed. "We're limited on personnel."

That was cream to Terl's earbones.

"You're right," said Terl, heading Numph further into the trap. "Unless we solve it, it will lead straight into mutiny."

Numph nodded glumly.

"In a mutiny," said Terl, "the first ones the workers vaporize are the executives."

Again Numph nodded, but this time there was a flicker of fear in the depths of his amber eyes.

"I'm working on it," said Terl. It was premature and he hadn't intended to spring it, but the time was now. "If we could give them hope that the cuts weren't permanent and if we imported no new personnel, the threat of mutiny would be reduced."

"True, true," said Numph. "We are already not bringing in any additional or new personnel. But at the same time our installations are working very hard, and there's already some grumbling."

"Agreed," said Terl. He plunged. "But what would you say if I told you that right this minute I was working on a project to halve our work force within two years?"

"I'd say it would be a miracle."

That was what Terl liked to hear. Plaudits from one and all in the home office would be his yet.

Numph was looking almost eager.

"No Psychlo," said Terl, "likes this planet. We can't go outside without wearing masks -" "Which increases costs in breathe-gas," said Numph.

"- and what we need is a work force of air-breathers that can do elementary machine operation."

Numph sank back, doubt hitting him. "If you're thinking of... what was their name . . . Chinkos, they were all wiped out ages back."

"Not Chinkos. And I congratulate Your Planetship on his knowledge of company history. Not Chinkos. There is a potential local supply."

"Where?"

"I am not going to say any more about it right now, but I want to report that I am making progress and that it is very hopeful."

"Who are these people?"

"Well, actually, they are not "people," as you would say. But there are sentient beings on this planet."

"They think? They talk?"

"They are very manually adept."

Numph pondered this. "They talk? You can communicate with them?"

"Yes," said Terl, biting off a bit more than he really knew. "They talk." "There's a bird down on the lower continent can talk. A mine director there sent one. It could swear in Psychlo. Somebody didn't replace the air cartridge in its dome and it died. " He frowned. "But a bird isn't manually -" "No, no, no," said Terl, cutting off the bumbling. "These are little short things, two arms, two legs -" "Monkeys! Terl, you can't be serious -" "No, not monkeys. Monkeys could never operate a machine. I am talking about man." Numph looked at him for several seconds. Then he said, "But there are only a very few of them left, even if they could do what you say." "True, true," said Terl. "They have been listed as an endangered species." "A what?" "A species that is about to become extinct." "But a few like that would not resolve our -" "Your Planetship, I will be frank. I have not counted how many there are left -" "But nobody has even seen one for ages. Terl . . ." "The recon drones have noted them. There were thirty-four right up in those mountains you see there. And they exist on other continents in greater numbers. I have reason to believe that if I were given facilities I could round up several thousand." "Ah, well. Facilities . . . expense. . . ." "No, no. No real expense. I have been engaged on an economy program. I have even reduced the number of recon drones. They breed fast if given a chance -" "But if nobody has even seen one . . . what functions could they replace?" "Exterior machine operators. Over seventy-five percent of our personnel is tied up in just that. Tractors, loading rigs. It's not skilled operation." "Oh, I don't know, Terl. If nobody has even seen one -" "I have one." "What?" "Right here. In the zoo cages near the compound. I went out and captured one - took a bit of doing, but I made it. I was rated high in marksmanship at the school, you know." Numph puzzled over it. "Yes . . . I did hear some rumor there was a strange animal out in the zoo, as you call it. Somebody, one of the mine directors, I think . . . yes, Char it was, laughing about it." "It's no laughing matter if it affects pay and profits," glowered Terl. "True. Very true. Char always was a fool. So you have an animal under testing that could replace personnel. Well, well. Remarkable." "Now," said Terl, "if you will give me a blanket requisition on transport -" "Oh, well. Is there any chance of seeing this animal? You know, to see what it could do. The death benefits we have to pay on equipment accidents would themselves tip the profit-loss scale if they didn't exist. Or were minimized. There's also machine damage potential. Yes, the home office doesn't like machine damage." "I've only had it a few weeks and it will take a little time to train it on a machine. But yes, I think I could arrange for you to see what it could do." "Fine. Just get it ready and let me know. You say you're training it? You know it is illegal to teach an inferior race metallurgy or battle tactics. You aren't doing that, are you?" "No, no, no. Just machine operation. The push-pull of buttons and levers is all. Have to teach it to talk to be able to give it orders. I'll arrange for a demonstration when it's ready. Now if you could just give me a blanket requisition -" "When I've seen the test there will be time enough," said Numph. Terl had risen out of his chair, the prepared sheets of requisitions half out of his pocket. He put them back. He'd have to think of some other way - but he was good at that. The meeting had come off pretty well. He was not feeling too bad. And then Numph dropped the mine bucket on him. "Terl," said Numph. "I certainly appreciate this backup. Just the other day there was a dispatch from home office about your continued tour of duty here. They plan in advance, you know. But in this case they needed a security chief with field experience on home planet. I'm thankful I turned it down. I recommended you for another ten-year tour of duty." "I had only two years left to run," gagged Terl. "I know, I know. But good security chiefs are valuable. It will do your record no harm to show you are in demand." Terl made it to the door. Standing in the passageway he felt horribly ill. He had trapped himself, trapped himself right here on this cursed planet! The glittering vein of gold lay in the mountains. His plans were going well in all other ways. It would take perhaps two years to get those forbidden riches, and the end of this duty tour would have been a personal triumph. Even the man-thing was shaping up. Everything had been running so well. And now ten years more! Diseased crap, he couldn't stand that!

Leverage. He had to have leverage on Numph. Big leverage.

- 9 -

The explosion had been sharp and loud. Completely unlike the dull roar that every five days regularly shook the cage and compound.

With some skill and agility, Jonnie had found that he could go up the bars, using a cage corner, and, bracing himself there, look far and wide across the plains to the mountains and down on the domed compound of the Psychlos. Feet braced against the crossbars, he could almost relax in this precarious position.

Winter had come. The mountains for some time now had been white. But today they were invisible under white-gray skies.

To the east of the compound there lay a curious huge platform. It was surrounded by widely spaced poles and wires. It had a flooring that was bright and shiny, some sort of metal. At its southern edge there was a domed structure from which Psychlos came and went. At the northern side of it was a different kind of field, a field where strange, cylindrical craft arrived and departed.

The craft would land with a cloud of dust. Their sides would open and rock and chunks of things would spill out and the vessel would rise again into the air and fly away, dwindling to nothingness beyond the horizon.

The dumped material would be pushed onto a belt that ran between towers, carrying the load over to the huge area of bright and shiny flooring.

Through the days, craft after craft would come, and by the fifth day there would be an enormous pile of material mounded up on the platform.

It was then that the most mysterious thing would occur. At exactly the same time of the day, exactly every fifth day, there would be a humming. The material on the platform would glow briefly. Then there would be a roar like a low thunderclap. And the material would vanish!

It was this one feature, of all the mysteries that surrounded him on his post at the top of the bars, that riveted his attention.

Where did it go? There it would be, a small mountain of material. And then - hum-roar-bang - it would be gone. Nothing ever reappeared on that shiny platform. The material was brought in by those flying objects, taken over by the belt. And there it vanished.

Jonnies had seen it happen often enough now that he could predict the minute, hour, and day. He knew the dome to the south would light up, the wires around the platform would vibrate and hum, and then roar-bang, the piled material would be gone.

But that wasn't what had happened down there today. One of the machines that pushed the material onto the belt had blown up. A swarm of Psychlos were down there around it now. They were doing something with the driver. And a couple more were putting out a fire on the machine itself.

The machines had big blades in front and were covered with a transparent dome where the driver sat. But the dome was off that one now, apparently blown off.

A squat vehicle came up. The driver had been stretched out on the ground. They now put the body in a basket and put it into the squat vehicle, which was driven away.

Another machine with a blade came over and pushed the damaged vehicle off to one side out of the way, and then went back to pushing material onto the belt. The Psychlos went back to their machines and the dome.

An accident of some sort, thought Jonnie. He hung there for a while but nothing else was going on.

Yes, there was. His cage bars were trembling. But this was near to hand and ordinary. It was footsteps of the Psychlo who kept him caged. Jonnie slid down to the floor.

The monster came to the door and unfastened it and entered. He glared at Jonnie.

The monster was quite unpredictable of late. He seemed calm one time and ruffled and impatient the next.

Right now he was very impatient. He made a savage gesture at Jonnie and then at the language machine.

Jonnies took a deep breath. Every waking hour for months he had been at that machine, working, working, working. But he had never spoken a word to the monster.

He did so now. In Psychlo, Jonnie said, "Broke."

The monster looked at him curiously. Then it went over to the machine and pushed down the lever. It didn't work. The monster shot a glare at Jonnie as though Jonnie had broken it and then picked the machine up and looked under it. That was quite a feat in Jonnie's eyes, for he himself couldn't budge it an inch on the table.

The machine had just quit that morning, shortly before the explosion. Jonnie moved closer to see what the monster was doing. It removed a small plate in the bottom and a little button dropped out. The monster read some numbers on the button and then laid the machine on its side and left the cage.

He came back shortly with another button, put it in the same place, and put the plate back on. He righted the machine and touched the lever. The disc turned and the machine

said, "Forgive me, but addition and subtraction. . ." And the monster put it in neutral. The monster pointed a talon at Jonnie and then urgently back at the machine. Jonnie plunged again. In Psychlo he said, "Know all those.. Need new records." The monster looked at the thick original sheaf of recordings, hundreds of hours of them. It looked at Jonnie. Its face was grim back of its face mask. Jonnie was not sure he wasn't going to get knocked halfway across the cage. Then the monster seemed to make up its mind.

It yanked the pack of discs out of the back of the machine and left. Shortly it returned with a new, thicker stack of discs and shoved them into the storage compartment of the machine. It took the old disc off and put the next sequentially numbered one on. Then it pointed at Jonnie and back at the machine. Plainly, Jonnie was supposed to get to work and get to work now.

Jonnie took a deep breath. In Psychlo he said, "Man does not live on raw rat meat and dirty water."

The monster just stood there staring at him. Then it sat down in the chair and looked at him some more.

- 10 -

Terl knew leverage when he saw it.

As a veteran security officer, he depended on leverage at every turn. And advantage. And blackmail. A method of forcing, compliance.

And now it was turned around. This man-thing had sensed that it had leverage.

He sat there studying the man-thing. Did it have any inkling of the plans? No, of course not. Possibly he had been too insistent, day after day, so that this thing sensed he wanted something of it.

Possibly he had been too indulgent. He had gone to the trouble every day or two to go out and shoot rats for it. And earlier, hadn't he gotten it water? And look at all the cunning and difficulty of establishing what it ate.

Here it stood, brave and strong, telling him it didn't eat that. Terl looked at it more closely. Well, not brave and strong. It looked pretty sickly, really. It had a worn robe around it and yet it was almost blue with the coldness of the day. He glanced over at the pond. It was frozen over, dirt and all.

He looked around further. The cage wasn't as dirty as it might have been. The thing evidently buried its jobs.

"Animal," said Terl, "you had better get to work if you know what is good for you."

Bluster sometimes made it even when one didn't have leverage.

"The winter weather," said Jonnie in Psychlo, "is bad for the machine. At night and in rain or snow I keep it covered with a deerhide from my pack. But the dampness is not good for it. It is becoming tarnished."

Terl almost laughed. It was so funny to hear this animal actually speaking Psychlo. True, there was some accent, probably Chinko. No, maybe not Chinko, since all the polite phrases, the "forgive-mes" and "pardon-mes" Terl had heard when he checked the records, were not there. Terl had never met a Chinko since they were all dead, but he had met a lot of subject races on other planets and they were carefully servile in their speech. As they should be.

"Animal," said Terl, "you may know the words but you do not understand a proper attitude. Shall I demonstrate?"

Jonnie could have been launched on a flight to the bars with one sweep of those huge paws.

He drew himself up. "My name is not "animal.' It is Jonnie Goodboy Tyler."

Terl absolutely gaped at him. The effrontery. The bald gall of this thing!

He hit him.

The collar almost broke Jonnie's neck as the rope brought him up short.

Terl stalked out of the cage and slammed the door. The ground shook like an earthquake as he stamped away.

He had almost reached the outer door of the compound when he stopped. He stood there, thinking.

Terl looked at the gray-white world, felt the cold glass of his face mask cutting his gaze. Blast this stinking planet.

He turned around and walked back to the cage. He opened the door and went over to the man-thing. He picked it up, wiped the blood off its neck with a handful of snow, and then put it standing in front of the table.

"My name," said Terl, "is Terl. Now what were we talking about?" He knew leverage when he saw it.

But never in their association thereafter did he ever address Jonnie as anything other than "animal." A Psychlo after all could not ignore the fact that his was the dominant race. The greatest race in all universes. And this man-thing - ugh.