

AGE 12 AND UP

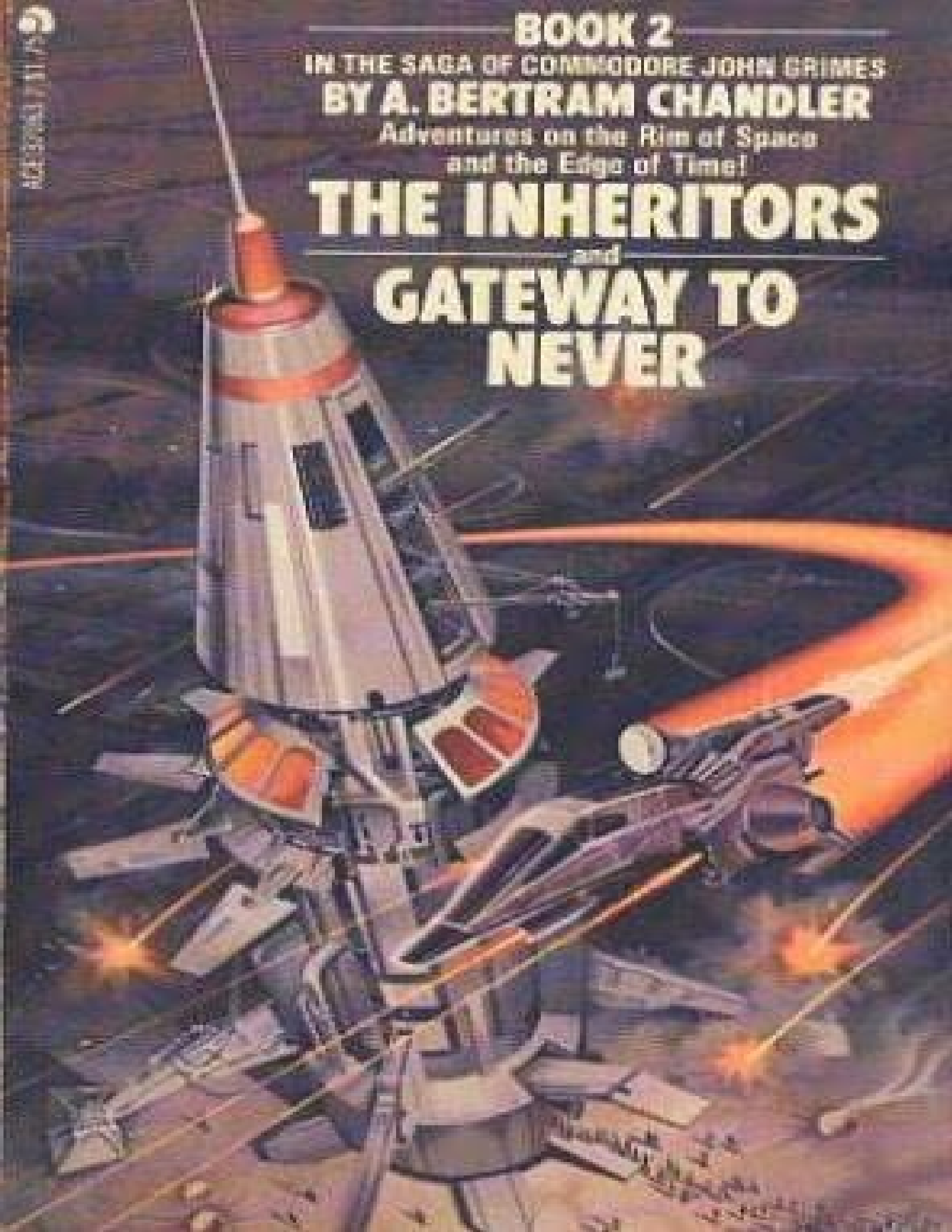
BOOK 2

IN THE SAGA OF COMMODORE JOHN GRIMES

BY A. BERTRAM CHANDLER

Adventures on the Rim of Space
and the Edge of Time!

THE INHERITORS
and
GATEWAY TO NEVER



THE INHERITORS
A. Bertram Chandler

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For my favorite aelurophobe

To: Flag Officer in Charge of Lindisfarne Base From: Drongo Kane

Subject: Piratical action by Lieutenant Commander John Grimes

Sir,

I regret to have to report that while my vessel was proceeding on her lawful occasions she was wantonly attacked by your Seeker, under the command of your Lieutenant Grimes. Commander Grimes not only used his armament to impede the embarkation of fare-paying passengers, subjecting them to a sleep gas barrage, but also fired upon Southerly Buster herself. Later he attempted to ram my ship after she had lifted off . . .

GRIMES IS AT IT AGAIN!

1

Grimes was on the carpet—neither for the first nor the last time.

He stood stiffly in front of the vast, highly polished desk behind which sat Admiral Buring, of the Federation's Survey Service. His prominent ears were angrily flushed but his rugged face was expressionless.

The admiral's pudgy hands played with the bulky folder that was before him. His face, smooth and heavy, was as expressionless as Grimes'. His voice was flat.

He said, "Commodore Damien warned me about you when you were transferred to my command. Not that any warning was necessary. For one so young you have achieved a considerable degree of notoriety." He paused expectantly, but Grimes said nothing. Buring continued, but now with a hint of feeling in his voice. "My masters—who, incidentally, are also yours—are far from amused at your latest antics. You know—you *should* know—that interference, especially by junior officers, in the internal affairs of any world whatsoever, regardless of the cultural or technological level of the planet in question, is not tolerated. I concede that there were extenuating circumstances, and that the new rulers of Sparta speak quite highly of you" The thick eyebrows, like furry, black caterpillars, arched incredulously. "Nonetheless . . . "

The silence was so thick as to be almost tangible. Grimes decided that it was incumbent upon himself to break it.

"Sir?"

"Nonetheless, Lieutenant Commander, your continued presence at Base is something of an embarrassment, especially since a party of VIPs, political VIPs at that, is due here very shortly. Some commission or other, touring the galaxy at the taxpayer's expense. I don't want you around so that politicians can ask you silly questions—to which, I have no doubt, you would give even sillier answers.

"Furthermore, this whole Spartan affair has blown up into a minor crisis in interplanetary politics. Both the Duchy of Waldegren and the Empire of Waverley are talking loudly about spheres of influence." The admiral allowed himself the suspicion of a smile. "In any sort of crisis, Grimes, there is one thing better than presence of mind"

"And that is, sir?" asked Grimes at last.

"Absence of body. Ha. So I'm doing you a good turn, sending you out in *Seeker*, on a Lost Colony hunt. There have been persistent rumors of one out in the Argo Sector. Go and find it—or get lost yourself. I'm easy."

"Maintenance, sir" said Grimes slowly. "Repairs . . . stores . . . manning"

"They're your business, Captain. No, I'm not promoting you, merely according you the courtesy title due to the commanding officer of a ship. You look after those no doubt boring details. And"—he made a major operation of looking at his watch—"I want you off Lindisfarne by sixteen-hundred hours local time tomorrow."

Grimes looked at his own watch. He had just seventeen hours, twelve minutes and forty-three seconds in which to ensure that his ship was, in all respects, ready for space. Maintenance, he knew, was well in hand. There were no crew deficiencies. Taking aboard essential stores would not occupy much time.

Even so . . .

"I'd better be getting on with it, sir," he said.

"You'd bloody well better. I'll send your orders down to you later."

Grimes put on his cap, saluted smartly and strode out of the admiral's office.

2

She was a survey ship rather than a warship, was *Seeker*. The Survey Service, in its first beginnings, had been just that—a survey service. But aliens being what they are—and humans being what *they* are—police work, on large and small scales, had tended to become more important than mere exploration and charting. The Survey Service, however, had not quite forgotten its original function. It maintained a few ships designed for peaceful rather than warlike pursuits, and *Seeker* was a member of this small squadron. Nonetheless, even she packed quite a wallop.

Lieutenant Commander John Grimes was her captain. His last assignment, during which he had stumbled upon a most peculiar Lost Colony, had been census taking. Now he had been actually sent out to *find* a Lost Colony. He suspected that *anything* might happen, and probably would. It wasn't that he was accident prone. He was just a catalyst.

Nothing had happened yet; after all, it was early in the voyage. He had lifted from Lindisfarne exactly on time, driving through the atmosphere smoothly and easily, maintaining his departure trajectory until he was clear of the Base Planet's Van Allens. Then, with the inertial drive shut down, the ship had been turned about her short axis until she was lined up, with due allowance for drift, on the target star. The Mannschenn Drive had been started, the inertial drive restarted—and passage was commenced.

Satisfied, he had filled and lit his pipe, and when it was going well had ordered, "Deep space routine, Mr. Saul." He had made his way to his quarters below and abaft the control room and then, ensconced in his easy chair, had opened the envelope containing his orders.

The first sheet of the bundle of papers had contained nothing startling. *You will proceed to the vicinity of the star Gamma Argo and conduct a preliminary survey of the planets in orbit about same, devoting especial attention to any of such bodies capable of supporting human life.* "Mphm . . ." he grunted. The rest of the page consisted of what he referred to as "the usual guff."

At the head of the next page was the sentence that brought an expression of interest to his face.

We have reason to believe that there is a humanoid—or possibly human—settlement on the fourth planet of this system. Should this settlement exist it is probable that it is a hitherto undiscovered Lost Colony. You are reminded that your duties are merely to conduct an investigation, and that you are not, repeat not, to interfere in the internal affairs of the colony.

"Mphm," grunted Grimes again. Noninterference was all very well, but at times it was hard to maintain one's status as a mildly interested spectator.

Appended hereto are reports from our agents at Port Llangowan, on Siluria, at Port Brrooun, on Drroomoorr, at Port Mackay, on Rob Roy, at Port Forinbras, on Elsinore, at . . .

"Mphm." The Intelligence Branch seemed to be earning its keep, for a change. Grimes turned to the first report and read:

From Agent X1783 (Commander, I.B.,F.S.S.)

Dated at Port Llangowan, May 5, Year 171 Silurian (17113157 TS)

To O.I.C. Intelligence, Federation's Survey Service, Port Woomera, Centralia, Earth.

Sir,

POSSIBLE LOST COLONY IN ARGO SECTOR

I have to report the possibility that there is a hitherto undiscovered Lost Colony in the Argo Sector, apparently on a planet in orbit about Gamma Argo.

It is my custom, whilst stationed on this world, to spend my evenings in the Red Dragon tavern, a hostelry that seems to be the favorite drinking place of whatever merchant spacemen are in port.

On the evening of May 3 several officers from the Dog Star Line's Pomeranian were lined up at the bar, and were joined there by officers of the same company's Corgi, newly berthed. As was to be expected, the personnel of the two vessels were old friends or acquaintances.

The table at which I was seated was too far from the bar for me to overhear the conversation, but I was able to make use of my Mark XVII recorder, playing the recording back later that night in the privacy of my lodgings. The spool has been sent to you under separate cover, but herewith is a suitably edited transcript of what was said, with everything of no importance—e.g. the usual friendly blasphemies, obscenities and petty company gossip—deleted.

First Mate of Pomeranian: And where the hell have you been hiding yourselves? You should have been in before us. I suppose that you got lost.

Second Mate of Corgi: I never get lost.

First Mate of Pomeranian: Like hell you don't. I remember when you got your sums wrong when we were together in the old Dalmatian, and we finished up off Hamlet instead of Macbeth . . . But what's twenty light-years between friends?

Second Mate of Corgi: I told you all that the computer was on the blink, but nobody would listen to me. As for this trip, we had to deviate.

First Mate of Corgi: Watch it, Peter!

Second Mate of Corgi: Why?

First Mate of Corgi: You know what the old man told us.

Second Mate of Corgi: Too bloody right I do. He's making his own report to the general manager, with copies every which way. Top Secret. For your eyes only. Destroy by fire before reading. He's wasted in the Dog Star Line. He should have been in the so-called Intelligence Branch of the clottish Survey Service.

First Mate of Pomeranian: What did happen?

First Mate of Corgi: Nothing much. Mannschenn Drive slightly on the blink, so we had to find a suitable planet on which to park our arse while we recalibrated.

Second Mate of Corgi: And what a planet! You know how I like sleek women . . .

First Mate of Corgi: Watch it, you stupid bastard!

Second Mate of Corgi: Who're you calling a bastard? You can sling your rank around aboard the bloody ship, but not here. If I'd had any sense I'd'a skinned out before the bitch lifted off. Morrowvia'll do me when I retire from the Dog Star Line! Or resign . . .

First Mate of Corgi: Or get fired—as you will be, unless you pipe down!

Second Mate of Corgi: You can't tell me . . .

First Mate of Corgi: I can, and I bloody well am telling you! Come on, finish your drink, and then back to the ship!

At this juncture there are sounds of a scuffle as Corgi's chief officer, a very big man, hustles his junior out of the Red Dragon.

Third Mate of Pomeranian: What the hell was all that about?

First Mate of Pomeranian: Search me.

The rest of the recorded conversation consists of idle and futile speculation by Pomeranian's officers as to the identity of the world landed upon by Corgi.

To date I have been unable to identify this planet myself. There is no Morrowvia listed in the catalogue, even when due allowance is made for variations in spelling. Also I have checked the Navy List, and found that the master of Corgi is not, and never has been, an officer in the FSS Reserve. None of his officers hold a Reserve commission. It may be assumed, therefore, that the master's report on the discovery of what appears to be a Lost Colony will be made only to his owners. Corgi, when she deviated, was bound from Darnstadt to Siluria. Her normal trajectory would have taken her within three light-years of Gamma Argo. The planetary system of Gamma Argo was surveyed in the early days of the Second Expansion, and no indigenous intelligent life was found on any of its worlds . . .

"Mphm . . ." Grimes refilled and relit his pipe. This was interesting reading.

He turned to the report from the agent at Port Brrooun. He, the shipping advisor to the Terran Consul, had been spending most of his free evenings in an establishment called the Beer Hive. Brrooun had been Corgi's next port of call after Llangowan. Her second officer had confined his troubles to a sympathetic Shaara drone. At Port Mackay, on Rob Roy, he had gotten fighting drunk on the local whiskey and had beaten up the chief officer and publicly abused the master. Normally such conduct would have led to his instant dismissal—but Captain Danzellan, Corgi, had been most reluctant to leave the objectionable young man behind, in the hands of the civil authorities. The Intelligence Officer at Port Mackay, although knowing nothing of the Lost Colony, had been intrigued by the failure of the master to rid himself of an obvious malcontent and had wondered what was behind it. His own theories, for what they were worth, included a Hanoverian plot against the Jacobean royal house of Waverley . . . It was from Port Fortinbras, on Elsinore, that the next really interesting report came. The agent there was a woman, and worked as a waitress in the Poor Yorick, a tavern famous for its funereal decor. The agent, too, was famous insofar as the Intelligence Branch of the Survey Service was concerned, being known as the Bug Queen. Her specialty was recorders printed into the labels on bottles.

Transcript of conversation between Harold Larsen, owner-manager of Larsen's Repair Yard, and Peter Dalquist, owner of Dalquist's Ship Chandlery:

Dalquist: An' how are things at the yard, Harald?

Larsen: Can't complain, Pete, can't complain. Southerly Buster's havin' a face lift.

Dalquist: Drongo Kane . . .

Larsen: You can say what you like about Drongo—but he always pays his bills . . .

Dalquist: Yeah. But he drives a hard bar gain first.

Larsen: You can say that again.

Dalquist: An' what is it this time? General maintenance? Survey?

Larsen: Modifications. He's havin' his cargo spaces converted into passenger accommodation—of a sort. An' you remember those two quick-firin' cannon I got off that derelict Waldegren gunboat? Drongo's havin' 'em mounted on the Buster.

Dalquist: But it ain't legal. Southerly Buster's a merchant ship.

Larsen: Drongo says that it is legal, an' that he's entitled to carry defensive armament Some o' the places he gets to, he needs it! But I checked up with me own legal eagles just to make sure that me own jets are clear. They assured me that Drongo's within his rights.

Dalquist: But quick-firin' cannon, when every man-o'-war is armed to the teeth with laser, misguided missiles an' only the Odd Gods of the Galaxy know what else! Doesn't make sense.

Larsen: Maybe it doesn't—but Drongo's got too much sense to take on a warship.

Dalquist: What if a warship takes on him?

Larsen: That's his worry.

Dalquist: But he must be thinkin' of fightin' somebody Any idea who it might be?

Larsen: I haven't a clue. All that I know is that his last port, before he came here, was Brrooun, on one o' the Shaara worlds. He told me—he'd had rather too much to drink himself—that he'd fed a couple of bottles of Scotch to a talkative drone. He said that he'll buy drinks for anybody—or anything—as long as he gets information in return. Anyhow, this drone told Drongo what he'd been told by the drunken second mate of a Dog Star tramp. .

Dalquist: Which was?

Larsen: Drongo certainly wasn't telling me, even though he'd had a skinful. He did mutter something about Lost Colonies, an' finders bein' keepers, an' about the Dog Star Line havin' to be manned by greyhounds if they wanted to get their dirty paws into this manger . . .

Dalquist: An' was that all?

Larsen: You said it. He clammed up.

Unfortunately Captain Kane and his officers, unlike the majority of spacemen visiting Port Fortin-bras, do not frequent the Poor Yorick, preferring the King Claudius. On the several occasions that I have been there as a customer, at the same times as Southerly Buster's personnel, I have been unable to learn anything of importance. Attempts made by myself to strike up an acquaintance with Captain Kane, his mates and his engineers have failed.

Grimes chuckled. He wondered what the Bug Queen looked like. It seemed obvious that she owed her success as an agent to her skill with electronic gadgetry rather than to her glamour. But Kane? Where did *he* come into the picture? The man was notorious—but, to date, had always managed to stay on the right side of the law.

But it was time that he, Grimes, put his senior officers into the picture.

3

They were all in Grimes's day cabin—his departmental heads and his senior scientific officers. There was Saul, the first lieutenant, a huge, gentle, very black man. There was Connery, chief engineer. The two officers in charge of communications were there—Timmins, the electronicist, and Hayakawa, the psionist. There were Doctors Tallis, Westover and Lazenby—biologist, geologist and ethologist respectively—all of whom held the rank of full commander. Forsby—physicist—had yet to gain his doctorate and was only a lieutenant. There were Lieutenant Pitcher, navigator, Lieutenant Stein, ship's surgeon and bio-chemist, and Captain Philby, officer in charge of *Seeker's* Marines.

Grimes, trying to look and to feel fatherly, surveyed his people. He was pleased to note that the *real* spacemen—with the exception of Hayakawa—looked the part. Ethnic origins and differentiation of skin pigmentation were canceled out, as it were, by the common uniform. With the exception of Maggie Lazenby the scientists looked their part. They were, of course, all in uniform—though it wasn't what they were wearing but how they were wearing it that mattered. To them uniform was just something to cover their nakedness, the more comfortably the better. And to them beards were merely the means whereby the bother of depilation could be avoided. The growths sprouting from the faces of Tallis, Westover and Forsby contrasted shockingly with the neat hirsute adornments sported by Connery and Stein. The only one of the scientists at whom it was a pleasure to look was Doctor Lazenby—slim, auburn-haired and wearing a skirt considerably less than regulation length.

Grimes looked at her.

She snapped, "Get on with it, John." (Everybody present knew that she was a privileged person.)

"Mphm," he grunted as he carefully filled his pipe. "Help yourselves to coffee—or to something stronger from the bar, if you'd rather." He waited until everybody was holding a glass or a cup, then said, "As you all know by this time, this is a Lost Colony expedition . . ."

Forsby raised his hand for attention. "Captain, forgive my ignorance, but I've only just joined the Survey Service. And I'm a physicist, not a historian. Just what *is* a Lost Colony?"

"Mphm," grunted Grimes again. He shot a dirty look at Maggie Lazenby as he heard her whispered "*Keep it short!*" He carefully lit his pipe. He said, "The majority of the so-called Lost Colonies date from the days of the Second Expansion, of the gaussjammers. The gaussjammers were interstellar ships that used the Ehrenhaft Drive. Cutting a long and involved story short, the Ehrenhaft generators produced a magnetic current—a current, not a field—and the ship in which they were mounted became, in effect, a huge magnetic particle, proceeding at a speed which could be regulated from a mere crawl to FTL along the 'tramlines,' the lines of magnetic force. This was all very well—but a severe magnetic storm could throw a gaussjammer light-years off course, very often into an unexplored and uncharted sector of the galaxy . . ."

"FTL?" demanded Forsby in a pained voice. "FTL?"

"A matter of semantics," Grimes told him airily. "You know, and I know, that faster-than-light speeds are impossible. With our Mannschenn Drive, for example, we cheat—by going astern in time as we're going ahead in space. The gaussjammers cheated too—by coexisting with themselves all along the lines of magnetic force that they were on. The main thing was—it worked. Anyhow, visualize a gaussjammer after a magnetic storm has tangled the lines of force like so much spaghetti *and* drained the micro-pile of all energy. The captain doesn't know where he is. But he has got power for his main engines."

"You said that the micro-pile was dead."

"Sure. But those ships ran to emergency generators—diesel generators. They churned out the electricity to drive the Ehrenhaft generators. The ship's biochemist knew the techniques for producing diesel fuel from whatever was available—even though it meant that all hands would be on short rations. So, for as long as she could, the ship either tried to make her way back to some known sector or to find a planet capable of being settled . . ."

"Analogous," contributed Maggie Lazenby, "to the colonization of many Pacific islands by Polynesians in Earth's remote past. But this colony that we're supposed to be looking for, John . . ."

"Yes. I was getting around to that. It's supposed to be in the Argo Sector. It was stumbled upon by a Dog Star Line ship that made a deviation to recalibrate her Mannschenn Drive controls. It won't be a Lost Colony for much longer."

"Why not?" asked Forsby.

"To begin with, the Dog Star Line people know about it. The Shaara know about it. *We* know about it. And Drongo Kane knows about it."

"Drongo Kane?" This was Forsby again, of course. "Who's he?"

Grimes sighed. He supposed that his physicist knew his own subject, but he seemed to know very little outside it. He turned his regard to his officers, said, "Tell him."

"Drongo Kane . . ." murmured Saul in his deep, rich voice. "Smuggler, gunrunner . . ."

"Pirate . . ." contributed Timmins.

"That was never proven," Grimes told him.

"Perhaps not, sir. But I was on watch—it was when I was a junior in *Scorpio*—when *Bremerhaven's* distress call came through."

"Mphm. As I recall it, *Bremerhaven's* own activities at the time were somewhat dubious . . ."

"Slaver . . ." said Saul.

"Somebody had to take the people off Ganda before the radiation from their sun fried them. Whatever ships were available had to be employed."

"But Kane was *paid* by the Duke of Waldegren for the people he carried in *Southerly Buster*."

"Just a fee," said Grimes, "or commission, or whatever, for the delivery of indentured labor."

"What about this bloody Lost Colony?" demanded Maggie Lazenby.

"We're supposed to find it." Grimes gestured toward the folder on his desk with the stem of his pipe. "I've had copies made of all the bumf that was given to me. It consists mainly of reports made by agents on quite a few worlds. Our man at Port Llangowan, on Siluria, recorded a conversation between officers of *Corgi* and *Pomeranian* in one of the local pubs. *Corgi* had found this world—which seems to be called Morrowvia—quite by chance. Our man at Port Brrooun, on Drroomoorr, recorded a conversation between the second mate of *Corgi* and a Shaara drone; once again Morrowvia was mentioned. The same young gentleman—the second mate, not the drone—got into trouble at Port Mackay on Rob Roy. Normally he'd have been emptied out there and then by *Corgi's* master—but keeping him on board must have been the lesser of two evils."

"Why?" asked Forsby.

"Because," Grimes told him patiently, "the master of *Corgi* didn't want word of a new world that could well be included in the Dog Star Line's economic empire spread all over the galaxy. Where was I? Yes. Our woman at Port Fortinbras, on Elsinore, recorded a conversation between the owner of a repair yard and the owner of a ship chandlery. The repair yard was doing some work on Drongo Kane's ship, *Southerly Buster*—the mounting of armament, among other things. Kane had told the owner of the yard something—not much, but something—about a Lost Colony found by a Dog Star tramp . . ."

"And what are *we* supposed to do, Captain?" asked Forsby. "Plant the Federation's flag, or something?"

"Or something," said Maggie Lazenby. "You can rest assured of that."

Or something, thought Grimes.

4

As far as Grimes knew there was no real urgency—nonetheless he pushed *Seeker* along at her maximum safe velocity. This entailed acceleration slightly in excess of 1.5 G, with a temporal precession rate that did not quite, as Maggie Lazenby tartly put it, have all hands and the cook living backward. But Maggie had been born and reared on Arcadia, a relatively low gravity planet and, furthermore, disliked and distrusted the time-twisting Mannschenn Drive even more than the average spaceman or—woman. However, Lieutenant Brian Connery was an extremely competent engineer and well able to maintain the delicate balance between the ship's main drive units without remotely endangering either the vessel or her personnel.

Even so, Grimes suffered. *Seeker* had a mixed crew—and a ship, as Grimes was fond of saying, is not a Sunday School outing. On past voyages it had been tacitly assumed that Maggie was the captain's lady. On this voyage it was so assumed too—by everybody except one of the two people most intimately concerned. Grimes tried to play along with the assumption, but it was hopeless.

"I suppose," he said bitterly, after she had strongly resisted a quite determined pass, "that you're still hankering after that beefy lout, Brasidus or whatever his name was, on Sparta . . ."

"No," she told him, not quite truthfully. "No. It's just that I can't possibly join in your fun and games when I feel as though I weigh about fourteen times normal."

"Only one and a half times," he corrected her.

"It *feels* fourteen times. And it's the psychological effect that inhibits me."

Grimes slumped back in his chair, extending an arm to his open liquor cabinet.

"Lay off it!" she told him sharply.

"So I can't drink now."

"You will not drink now." Her manner softened. "Don't forget, John, that you're responsible for the ship and everybody aboard her . . ."

"Nothing can happen in deep space."

"Can't it?" Her fine eyebrows lifted slightly. "Can't it? After some of the stories I've heard, and after some of the stories you've told me yourself . . ."

"Mphm." He reached out again, but it was a half-hearted attempt.

"Things will work out, John," she said earnestly. "They always do, one way or the other . . ."

"Suppose it's the wrong way?"

"You'll survive. I'll survive. We'll survive." She quoted, half seriously, " 'Men have died, and worms have eaten 'em—but not for love . . . ' "

"Where's that from?" he asked, interested.

"Shakespeare. You trade school boys—you're quite impossible. You know nothing—*nothing*—outside your own field."

"I resent that," said Grimes. "At the Academy we had to do a course in Twentieth Century fiction . . ."

Again the eyebrows lifted. "You surprise me." And then she demanded incredulously, "What sort of fiction?"

"It was rather specialized. Science fiction, as a matter of fact. Some of those old buggers made very good guesses. Most of them, though, were way off the beam. Even so, it was fascinating."

"And still trade-school-oriented."

He shrugged. "Have it your way, Maggie. We're just Yahoos. But we do get our ships around." He paused, then delivered his own quotation. " 'Transportation is civilization.' "

"All right," she said at last. "Who wrote that?"

"Kipling."

"Kipling—and science fiction?"

"You should catch up on your own reading some time" The telephone buzzed sharply. He got up and went rapidly to the handset.

She remarked sweetly, "*Nothing* can happen in deep space"

"Captain here," said Grimes sharply.

Lieutenant Hayakawa's reedy voice drifted into the day cabin. "Hayakawa, Captain sir"

"Yes, Mr. Hayakawa?"

"I . . . am not certain. But I think I have detected psionic radiation—not close, but not too far distant."

"It is extremely unlikely," Grimes said, "that we are the only ship in this sector of space."

"I . . . I know, Captain. But—it is all vague, and the other telepath is maintaining a block . . . I . . . I tried at first to push through, and he knew that I was trying . . . Then, suddenly, I relaxed . . ."

Psionic judo . . . thought Grimes.

"Yes . . . You could call it that . . . But there is somebody aboard that ship who is thinking all the time about . . . Morrowvia . . ."

"Drongo Kane," said Grimes.

"No, Captain. Not Drongo Kane. This is a . . . young mind. Immature . . ."

"Mphm. Anything else?"

"Yes . . . He is thinking, too, of somebody called Tabitha . . ."

"And who's *she* when she's up and dressed?"

"She is not dressed . . . not as *he* remembers her."

"This," stated Maggie Lazenby, "is disgusting. I thought, in my innocence, that the Rhine Institute took a very dim view of any prying by its graduates into private thoughts. I was under the impression that telepathy was to be used *only* for instantaneous communications over astronomical distances."

"If every Rhine Institute graduate who broke the Institute's rules dropped dead right now," Grimes told her, "there'd be one helluva shortage of trained telepaths. In any case, the Institute allows some latitude to those of its people who're in the employ of a recognized law enforcement agency. The Federation's Survey Service is one such. Conversely, the Institute recognizes the right of any telepath, no matter by whom employed, to put up a telepathic block."

"I still don't like it. Any of it."

"Mr. Hayakawa," said Grimes into the telephone, "you heard all that?"

"Yes, Captain."

"And what are *your* views?"

In reply came a thin chuckle, then, "I try to be loyal, sir. To the Institute, to the Service, to my shipmates, to my captain. Sometimes it is hard to be loyal to everybody at once. But, also, I try to be loyal to myself."

"Putting it briefly," said Maggie Lazenby, "you know on which side your bread is buttered."

"Butter is an animal-derived food, Miss Commander, which I never touch."

"Mr. Hayakawa," asked Grimes, "do you hear anything further from the strange ship?"

"No, Captain. The block has been reestablished."

"Let me know when you do hear anything more." He punched buttons, then spoke again into the instrument. "Captain here, Mr. Timmins. Mr. Hayakawa has reported a vessel in our vicinity, apparently heading for Morrowvia. Have you picked anything up?"

"Just the normal commercial traffic, sir. A Shaara freighter, *Mmoorroomm*, Rob Roy to ZZrreemm. *Empress of Scotia*, Dunedin to Darnstadt. *Cutty Sark*, Carinthia to Lorn. *Schnauzer*, Siluria to Macbeth. And, according to Sector Plot, the following ships not fitted with Carlotti equipment: *Sundowner*, Aquarius to Faraway, *Rim Eland*, Elsinore to Ultimo . . ."

"Thank you." Then, speaking more to himself than to anybody else, "*Schnauzer* . . . Dog Star Line . . . cleared for Macbeth . . . She might finish up there eventually . . ."

He ignored Maggie's questioning look and went to his playmaster. As its name implied, the device provided entertainment, visual and audio—but this one, a standard fitting in the captain's quarters in all FSS ships, was also hooked up to the vessel's encyclopedia bank. "Get me Lloyd's Register," he ordered. "I want details *on Schnauzer*. Sirian ownership. Dog Star Line . . ."

The screen lit up, displaying the facsimile of a printed page.

Schnauzer—a new ship, small, exceptionally fast for a merchantman, defensively armed. (The Dog Star Line had long insisted that its vessels were capable of conducting their own defense on some of the trade routes where piracy still persisted.)

"Mphm," he grunted. Back at the telephone he ordered Timmins to send a coded message to the FSS agent at Port Llangowan, on Siluria, to ask the names of *Schnauzer's* personnel when she cleared outward.

He strongly suspected that the master would be Captain Danzellan.

"Master, Roger Danzellan," the Federation's man on Siluria replied eventually. "First mate, Oscar Eklund. Second mate, Francis Delamere. Third mate, Kathryn Daley. Chief engineer, Mannschenn Drive, Evan Jones. Chief engineer Interplanetary Drives, Ian Mackay. Juniors, H. Smith, B. Ostrog, H. Singh. Purser/catering officer, Glynis Trent . . ." The message went on to say that Captain Danzellan and Mr. Delamere had both been among *Corgi's* complement when she had last been at Port Llangowan. The last piece of information that it contained was that Francis Delamere was the nephew of the Dog Star Line's general manager.

So—obviously, the Dog Star people were interested in Morrowvia. On receiving the report from *Corgi's* master they had acted, and fast. A suitable ship had been shunted off her doubtlessly well-worn tramlines, and Danzellan had been transferred to her command. Probably he had not wished to have Delamere as one of his Officers—but Delamere had pull. Nepotism, as Grimes well knew, existed in the Survey Service. In a privately owned shipping company the climate would be even more suitable to its flourishing.

There was only one thing for Grimes to do—to pile on the Gs and the lumes, to get to Morrowvia before Danzellan. Fortunately, the merchant vessel was not fitted with a Mass Proximity Indicator—the Dog Star Line viewed new navigational aids with suspicion and never fitted them to its ships until their value was well proven. Sooner or later—sooner, Grimes hoped—*Seeker* would pick up *Schnauzer* in her screen and, shortly thereafter, would be able accurately to extrapolate her trajectory. *Schnauzer* would know nothing of *Seeker's* whereabouts or presence.

And Drongo Kane in his *Southerly Buster*? A coded request for information to the Bug Queen brought the news that he had lifted from Port Fortinbras, his refit completed, with a General Clearance. Such clearances were rarely issued. This one must have cost Kane plenty.

Grimes was spending more and more time in his control room. There was nothing that he could *do*—but he wanted to be on hand when *Schnauzer* was picked up. At last she was there—or *something* was there—an almost infinitesimal spark in the screen, at extreme range. Grimes watched, concealing his impatience, while his navigator, hunched over the big globe of utter darkness, delicately manipulated the controls set into the base of the screen. Slowly a glowing filament was extruded from the center of the sphere—*Seeker's* track. And then, from that barely visible spark just within the screen's limits, another filament was extended.

"Mphm," grunted Grimes.

The display was informative. Relatively speaking, *Schnauzer* was on *Seeker's* port beam, a little ahead of the beam actually, and steering a converging course. Morrowvia was out of range of the M.P.I., but there was little doubt that both ships were headed for the same destination.

"Have you an estimate of her speed yet, Mr. Pitcher?" asked Grimes.

"Only a rough one, sir," replied the tall, thin, almost white-haired young man. "Give me an hour, and . . ."

"Extrapolate now, if you will."

"Very good, sir."

Two beads of light appeared, one on each filament. "Twenty-four hours," said Pitcher. The range had closed slightly but the relative bearing was almost unaltered. "Forty-eight hours." The bearing was *changing*. "Seventy-two hours." *Schnauzer* was slightly, very slightly, abaft *Seeker's* beam. "Ninety-six hours." There was no doubt about it. At the moment *Seeker* had the heels of the Dog Star ship.

Grimes was relieved. He did not want to drive his ship any faster. An almost continuous sense of *déjà vu* is an uncanny thing to have to live with. The temporal precession field had not yet reached a dangerous intensity, but it had been increased to a highly uncomfortable one. Already there was a certain confusion when orders were given and received. Had they been made? Had they been acted upon?

Grimes waited for Pitcher to answer his question, then realized that he had not yet asked it. "Assuming," he said, "that your first estimate of *Schnauzer's* speed is correct, how much time do we have on Morrowvia before she arrives?"

"Sixty hours Standard, sir. Almost exactly two Morrowvian days."

Not long, thought Grimes. Not long at all for what he had to do. And not knowing what he had to do didn't help matters. He'd just have to make up the rules as he went along.

He said, "We'll maintain a continuous watch on the M.P.I. from now on. Let me know at once if there's any change in the situation, and if any more targets appear on the screen."

"Drongo Kane?" asked Saul.

"Yes, Mr. Saul. Drongo Kane."

The first lieutenant's eyes and teeth were very white in his black face as he smiled mirthlessly. He said, his deep voice little more than a whisper, "I hope that Drongo Kane is bound for Morrowvia, Captain."

"Why, Mr. Saul?" Grimes essayed a feeble jest. "Two's company, three's a crowd."

"Racial hatreds die very hard, Captain. To my people, for many, many years, 'slaver' has been an especially dirty word. Ganda, as you know, was colonized by my people . . . And some hundreds of them, rescued by Kane's *Southerly Buster* before their sun went nova, were sold by him to the Duke of Waldegren . . ."

"As I said before," Grimes told him, "they weren't *sold*. They entered the duke's service as indentured labor."

"Even so, sir, I would like to meet Captain Drongo Kane."

"It's just as well," said Grimes, "that he's not a reincarnation of Oliver Cromwell—if he were, Mr. Connery would be after his blood too . . ."

He regarded his first lieutenant dubiously. He was a good man, a good officer, and Grimes liked him personally. But if *Southerly Buster* made a landing on Morrowvia he would have to be watched carefully. And—who would watch the watchman? Grimes knew that if he wished to reach flag rank in the Service he would have to curb his propensity for taking sides.

"Mphm," he grunted. Then, "I'll leave Control in your capable hands, Mr. Saul. And keep a watchful eye on the M.P.I., Mr. Pitcher. I'm going down to have a few words with Hayakawa."

* * *

Lieutenant Hayakawa was on watch—but a psionic communications officer, as any one such will tell you, is *always* on watch. He was not, however, wearing the rig of the day. His grossly obese body was inadequately covered by a short kimono, gray silk with an embroidered design of improbable looking flowers. Scrolls, beautifully inscribed with Japanese ideographs, hung on the bulkheads, although space had been left for a single hologram, a picture of a strikingly symmetrical snow-capped mountain sharp against a blue sky. The deck was covered with a synthetic straw matting. In the air was the faint, sweet pungency of a burning joss stick.

Hayakawa got slowly and ponderously to his feet. "Captain san . . ." he murmured.

"Sit down, Mr. Hayakawa," ordered Grimes. The acceleration—now more than two Gs—was bad enough for him; it would be far, far worse for one of the telepath's build. He lowered himself to a pile of silk cushions. Not for the first time he regretted that Hayakawa had been allowed to break the regulations governing the furnishing of officers' cabins—but PCOs, trading upon their rarity, are privileged persons aboard any ship.

He settled down into a position approximating comfort—and then had to get up and shift the cushions and himself to another site. From the first one he had far too good a view of Hayakawa's psionic amplifier, the disembodied dog's brain suspended in its globe of cloudy nutrient fluid. The view of Mount Fujiyama was much more preferable.

He said, "We have *Schnauzer* on the M.P.I. now."

"I know, Captain."

"You would," remarked Grimes, but without rancor. "And you still haven't picked up any further . . . emanations from her?"

"No. Her PCO is Delwyn Hume. I have met him. He is a good man. What you called my judo technique worked just once with him. It will never work again." Then Hayakawa smiled fatly and sweetly. "But I have other news for you."

"Tell."

"*Southerly Buster*, Captain. Myra Bracegirdle is the CPO. *She* is good—but, of course, we are all good. Her screen is as tight as that maintained by Hume or myself. But . . ."

"She is emotional. During moments of stress her own thoughts seep through. She hates the *Buster's* mate. His name is Aloysius Dreebly. Now and again—often, in fact—he tries to force his attentions on her."

"Interesting," commented Grimes. He thought, *This is building up to one of those situations where everybody hates everybody. Mr. Saul hates Captain Kane, although he's never met him personally. Myra hates Aloysius. The way Maggie's been carrying on lately I'm beginning to think that she hates me. And I doubt very much if Captain Danzellan feels any great affection for Mr. Francis Delamere . . .* He grinned. *But Frankie loves Tabbie . . .*

He said, "And is *Southerly Buster* bound for Morrowvia?"

"I cannot say, Captain. But she is around. And just before you came in I 'heard' Myra Bracegirdle think, "Thank the gods there're only seven more days to go before we arrive! "

And that, Grimes told himself, means that she gets there at the same time as us . . .

He clambered laboriously to his feet, went to Hayakawa's telephone. He punched, first of all, for Lieutenant

Connery's quarters, but the engineering officer was not there. He called the engine room, and found him.

"Captain here, Chief. Can you squeeze out another half lume?"

"I can't." Connery's voice was sharp. "The governor's playing up, an' we're havin' to run the Drive on manual control. If I try to push her any more we'll finish up last Thursday in the middle of sweet fuck all!"

"Can't you fix the governor?"

"Not without stoppin' her an' shuttin' down. If you want to carry on, it'll have to wait until we get to Morrowvia."

"Carry on the way you're doing," said Grimes.

6

Seeker saw nothing at all of *Southerly Buster* until both vessels were in orbit about Morrowvia, just prior to landing. This was not surprising, as Drongo Kane's ship had been approaching the planet from the Shakespearian Sector, whilst Grimes had been coming in from Lindisfarne. The angle subtended by these points of origin was little short of 180°. Furthermore, once Morrowvia itself had come within MPI range the instrument, insofar as bodies of less than planetary mass were concerned, was practically useless. And radar had been useless until the shutting down of the time-space twisting interstellar drive.

There was *Seeker*, hanging in equatorial orbit three hundred miles up from the surface, and below her was Morrowvia, an Earth-type world, but unspoiled. There were blue seas and vast expanses of green prairie and forest land, yellow deserts and polar icecaps as dazzlingly white as the drifting cloud masses. There were snow-peaked mountain ranges, and long, winding rivers, on the banks of which, sparsely scattered, were what seemed to be towns and villages—but from a range of hundreds of miles, even with excellent telescopes, human habitations can look like natural formations, and natural formations like buildings, and telltale industrial smog was altogether lacking.

On the night hemisphere the evidence was more conclusive. There were clusters of lights, faint and yellowish. Said Grimes, "Where there's light there's life, intelligent life . . ."

"Not necessarily," Maggie Lazenby told him. "There are such things as volcanoes, you know . . ."

"On this hemisphere only? Come off it, Maggie."

"And there are such things as luminescent living organisms."

"So what we're seeing are glowworm colonies? And what about the reports from our agents on Siluria and Elsinore and Drroomoor? Would either the Dog Star Line or Drongo Kane be interested in glowworms?"

"They might be," she said. "They might be."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. It's high time, Commander Grimes, that you cured yourself of your habit of jumping to conclusions, that you adopted a scientific approach."

Grimes decided against making some cutting retort. The other officers in the control room were looking far too amused by the exchange. He grunted, then demanded of Lieutenant Saul, "Any sign yet of *Southerly Buster*, Number One?"

"No, sir. Perhaps Mr. Hayakawa . . ."

"I've already asked him. As far as his Peke's brain in aspic and he are concerned, the *Buster's* maintaining absolute psionic silence."

"Peke's brain?" asked Maggie.

"Can you think of any definitely *Japanese* dog at a second's notice?"

And then a voice came from the NST transceiver. It was a man's voice, harsh, yet not unpleasant, strongly accented. "*Southerly Buster* to Aero-Space Control. *Southerly Buster* to Aero-Space Control. Do you read me? Over."

"But there's not any Aero-Space Control here," announced Lieutenant Timmins. "We've already found that out."

"Kane knows that as well as we do," Grimes told him. "But, to judge by his record, he always maintains a facade of absolute legality in everything he does. This fits in."

"And I suppose," said Saul, "that he's already tried to establish communication with the local telepaths, if any, just as we did."

"Not necessarily. His PCO will have 'heard' our Mr. Hayakawa doing just that, and she'll have learned that Morrowvia is lousy with telepaths, but none of them trained . . . Oh, they *know* we're here, in a vague sort of way . . ."

"*Southerly Buster* to Aero-Space Control. *Southerly Buster* to Aero-Space Control. Do you read me? Over."

"There she is!" shouted Pitcher suddenly.

There she was, in the radar screen, a tiny yet bright blip. There she was, a new star lifting above the dark limb of the planet, a tiny planetoid reflecting the rays of Gamma Argo.

"If we can see her, she can see us," commented Grimes. He went to the transceiver, ordered, "Put me on to him, Mr. Timmins." He said sternly, "FSS *Seeker* to *Southerly Buster*. FSS *Seeker* to *Southerly Buster*. Come in, please, on audio-visual."

"Comin' in, *Seeker*, comin' in . . ." drawled the voice. There was a swirl of light and color in the little screen,

coalescing into a clear picture. Grimes and his officers looked into a control room not unlike their own—even to a weapons control console situated as it would have been in the nerve center of a warship. And this *Southerly Buster* was a merchantman . . . Drongo Kane calmly regarded Grimes from the screen—bleak yet not altogether humorless blue eyes under a thatch of straw colored hair, in a face that looked as though at some time it had been completely smashed and then reassembled not over carefully. He said, "I see you, *Seeker*. Can you see me?"

"I see you," snapped Grimes.

"Identify yourself, please, *Seeker*. Can't be too careful once you're off the beaten tracks, y'know."

"Grimes," said the owner of that name at last. "Lieutenant Commander in command of FSS *Seeker*, Survey Vessel."

"Pleased to meet you, Commander Grimes. An' what, may I ask, brings you out to this neck o' the woods?"

"You mayn't ask. That's Federation business, Captain Kane."

The pale eyebrows lifted in mock surprise. "So you know me, Commander! Well, well. Such is fame."

"Or notoriety . . ." murmured Maggie Lazenby.

"Did I hear the lady behind you say somethin'?" inquired Kane.

Grimes ignored this. "What are your intentions, Captain Kane?" he demanded.

"Well, now, that all depends, Commander Grimes. Nobody owns this world 'cepting its people. I've asked if I could make a landing, but got no reply. I s'pose you heard me. But nobody's told me not to land . . ."

"What are your intentions?" demanded Grimes again.

"Oh, to set the old *Buster's* arse down onto some-thin' safe an' solid. An' after that . . . Fossick around. See what we can buy or barter that's worth liftin'. There're some spacemen, Commander—an' I'm one of 'em—who have to *earn* their livin's . . ."

"It is my duty—and the way that I earn *my* living—to afford protection to all Federation citizens in deep space, interplanetary space, in planetary atmospheres and on planetary surfaces," said Grimes, with deliberate pomposity.

"You needn't put yourself out, Commander."

"I insist, Captain. After all, as you said, one can't be too careful when off the beaten track."

Kane's lips moved. Grimes was no lip-reader, but he would have been willing to bet a month's salary that grave doubts were being cast upon his legitimacy—and, were this a less tolerant day and age, his morals. "Suit yourself," said Kane aloud. "But you're only wastin' your time."

"I'm the best judge of that."

"Suit yourself," growled Kane again.

Meanwhile, *Seeker's* inertial drive had stammered into life and the ship was both slowing and lifting under the application of thrust, being driven into a powered, unnatural orbit so that *Southerly Buster* could pass beneath her.

"I thought you'd be landing first," complained Kane.

"After *you*, Captain," Grimes told him politely.

And just where would Kane be setting his ship down? If *Seeker* had arrived by herself Grimes would have adhered to orthodox Survey Service practice—a dawn landing at the terminator, with the full period of daylight for the initial exploration. And should it be considered safe to establish contact with the indigenes at once, a landing near to an obvious center of population.

Kane had never been an officer in the Survey Service, but he had done his share of exploring, had made first landings on planets upon which he had been the first man to set foot. Slowly, steadily *Southerly Buster* dropped through the atmosphere, with *Seeker* following a respectable distance astern. All *Seeker's* armament was ready for instant use; Grimes had no doubt that the other ship was in a similar state of readiness. *Corgi's* people had been hospitably treated on Morrowvia—but this was a large planet, probably divided among tribes or nations. Even though all its populace shared a common origin there had been time for divergence, for the generation of hostilities.

Down dropped *Southerly Buster*—down, down. Down dropped *Seeker*, her people alert for hostile action either from the ground or from the other ship. Grimes let Saul handle the pilotage; this was one of those occasions on which the captain needed to be able to look all ways at once.

Down dropped the two ships—down, down through the clear morning air. Kane's objective was becoming obvious—an expanse of level ground, clear of trees, that was almost an island, bounded to north, west and south by a winding river, to the east by a wooded hill. To north and west of it were villages, each with a sparse sprinkling of yellow lights still visible in the dawn twilight. It was the sort of landing place that Grimes would have selected for himself.

Then the viewscreen, with its high magnification, was no longer necessary, and the big binoculars on their universal mounting were no longer required. And the sun was up, at ground level, casting long shadows, pointing

out all the irregularities that could make the landing of a starship hazardous.

Kane was down first, setting *the Buster* neatly into the middle of a patch of green that, from the air at least, looked perfectly smooth. Saul looked up briefly from his controls to Grimes, complaining. "The bastard's picked the best place . . ."

"To the west of him . . ." Grimes said. "Almost on the river bank . . . It doesn't look too bad."

"It'll have to do, Captain," murmured the first lieutenant resignedly.

It had to do—and, as Grimes had said, it wasn't too bad.

Only one recoil cylinder in the tripod landing gear was burst when *Seeker* touched the ground, and there was no other damage.

This was not the occasion for full dress uniforms, with fore-and-aft hat, decorations, ceremonial sword and all the other trimmings. This was an occasion for comfortable shorts-and-shirt, with heavy boots and functional sidearms.

So attired, Grimes marched down *Seeker's* ramp, followed by Captain Philby, the Marine officer, and a squad of his space soldiers. Maggie Lazenby and the other scientists had wished to accompany him, but he had issued strict orders that nobody excepting himself and the Marines was to leave the ship until such time as the situation had been clarified. And this clarification depended upon the local inhabitants as well as upon Drongo Kane. Meanwhile, Grimes had said, no foolish risks were to be taken.

As he marched toward the towering hulk of *Southerly Buster* he regretted his decision to land to the west of that ship; he had put himself at a disadvantage. The light of the still-low sun was blinding, making it difficult for his men and him to avoid the lavish scattering of quartzite boulders that protruded through the short, coarse grass. And it made it impossible to see if Drongo Kane had any weapons aimed at him and his party. Probably he had—but *Seeker's* main armament was trained upon Kane's ship and ready to blow her off the face of the planet at the slightest provocation.

It was a little better once he and the Marines were in the shadow of the other ship. Grimes's eyes adjusted themselves and he stared upward at the blunt, metallic spire as he walked toward it. *Defensively armed!* he thought scornfully. Those two famous quick-firing cannon reported by the Bug Queen were merely an addition to what the *Buster* already had. Even so, in terms of laser and missiles, *Seeker* had the edge on her.

Southerly Buster's ramp was down. At the foot of it an officer was standing, a skeletal figure attired in gray coveralls with shoulder-boards carrying first mate's braid. The man was capless, and bald, and the wrinkled skin of his face was yellow, almost matching the long teeth that he showed when he smiled at the men from *Seeker*.

"Commander Grimes?" he asked in an overly ingratiating voice.

"Mr. Dreebly?" countered Grimes.

"Aloysius Dreebly, sir, at your service."

And so this, thought Grimes, was Aloysius Dreebly. Small wonder that Myra Bracegirdle, *Southerly Buster's* PCO, hated him. He matched his name—as people with ugly names so very often do. They, as it were, grow to fit the labels that misguided parents bestow upon them at birth. *And this Dreebly*, Grimes continued thinking, *I wouldn't trust him behind me. He'd either kiss my arse or stab me in the back—or both.*

"And will you come aboard, Commander? Captain Kane is waiting for you."

"Certainly, Mr. Dreebly. Lead the way, please."

"Oh, sir, I'm afraid I cannot allow these other men aboard the ship . . ."

"And I'm afraid that I can't board unless I have an escort of my own people. Captain Philby!"

"Sir!"

The young Marine officer had his pistol out, pointing at Dreebly. His sergeant and the six privates held their rifles at the ready.

"But, sir . . . what are you thinking of? This is *piracy!*"

"Hardly, Mr. Dreebly. All the way from our ship to yours we were tracked by the muzzle of one of your quick-firers. Surely you will allow us to show *our* teeth."

"Let the bastards aboard, Dreebly!" boomed Kane's voice from a loudspeaker. "But put your guns away first, Commander. I don't expect my guests to check in their pocket artillery at the door—but, on the other hand, I take a dim view if it's waved in my face."

At a word from Grimes Philby reholstered his pistol, the Marines slung their machine rifles. Dreebly shambled up the ramp to the after airlock, followed by the party from *Seeker*. Inside the compartment, Grimes looked about him curiously. He had been expecting something squalid—but, at first glance at least, this seemed to be a reasonably well-kept ship. There was a distinct absence of Survey Service spit-and-polish—but such is found only in vessels where there is a superfluity of ratings to do the spitting and polishing. There was shabbiness—but everything looked to be in excellent working order.

The elevator from the stern to the control room would accommodate only four men. Grimes decided to take Philby and one private with him, told the captain to tell his sergeant and the remaining Marines to stand guard in the airlock and at the foot of the ramp. (The Marines were apt to sulk if anybody but one of their own officers gave them a direct order.) Dreebly led the way into the cage and, as soon as the others were standing there with him, pressed a

button.

She was quite a hunk of ship, this *Southerly Buster*, thought Grimes, as they slid rapidly upward, deck after deck. She had probably started life as an Interstellar Transport Commission's *Gamma Class* cargo liner but, under successive ownership, had been modified and remodified many times. A vessel this size, even with a minimal crew, would be expensive to run. Whatever Kane's activities were, they must show a profit.

The cage came to a gentle halt. "This way, please, gentlemen," said Dreebly. He led the way into a short alleyway, to a door with a sign, captain, written above it. The door opened, admitting them into a spacious day cabin. Drongo Kane rose from an easy chair to greet them, but did not offer to shake hands.

He was as tall as his lanky bean pole of a mate, but there was a little more flesh on his bones. He moved with a decisive sort of grace, like an efficient hunting animal. He wasted no time on courtesies.

"Well, Commander Grimes?" he demanded.

"Captain Kane, I thought that we might combine forces . . ."

"Did you, now? You've very kindly seen me down to the surface in one piece—not that I needed you—an' now you can go and play soldiers off by yourself, somewhere."

Grimes's prominent ears flamed. He was aware that Captain Philby and the Marine were looking at him, were thinking, *What's the old man going to say (or do) now?* Well, what was the old man (Grimes) going to say (or do) now?

He said, "I represent the Federation, Captain."

"An' this planet, Commander, is not a Federated World."

"Yet," said Grimes.

"If ever," said Kane.

"I was sent here by the Federation . . ." Grimes began again.

"To claim this planet—possibly against the wishes of its people?"

"To conduct a survey."

"Then conduct your survey. I'm not stoppin' you."

"But I'm responsible for your safety, and that of your ship, Captain. You're a citizen of Austral, a Federated World, and your vessel's port of registry is Port Southern, on that planet."

"I don't need any snotty nosed Space Scouts to see me across the road."

"Maybe you don't, Captain Kane—but you're here, and I'm here, and I am obliged to carry out my duties to the best of my ability."

"Cor stiffen the bleedin' crows!" swore Kane disgustedly. Then, to somebody who had come in silently and was standing behind Grimes, "Yes, Myra?"

Grimes turned. So this was the Myra Bracegirdle of whom Hayakawa had talked. She was a tall girl, but thin rather than slender (this *Southerly Buster* must be a poor feeding ship), her face with its too prominent bones, too wide mouth and too big, dark eyes framed by silky blonde hair.

She said, "A word with you, Captain. Alone."

"Oh, don't worry about the Space Scouts, Myra. They're here to look after us. We have no secrets from *them*."

"*They* are on the way here, Captain. They saw the ships land. They have heard about spaceships, of course, but have never seen one . . ."

And what about Corgi? Grimes asked himself. *But she could have landed on the other side of the world from here.*

He said, "Captain Kane, do you mind if I call my ship?"

"Go ahead, Commander. This is Liberty Hall; you can spit on the mat and call the cat a bastard."

But as Grimes was raising his wrist transceiver to his mouth it buzzed sharply, then Saul's voice issued from the little instrument. "First lieutenant here, Captain. Mr. Hayakawa reports that parties of natives are approaching the landing site from both villages."

"I'll be right back," said Grimes.

"Don't let me keep you," said Kane. "Mr. Dreebly, please show these gentlemen off the premises."

"Oh, Captain," Grimes said, pausing in the doorway, "I shall take a very dim view if you act in a hostile manner toward the natives."

"And what if they act in a hostile manner toward me?"

"That," said Grimes, "will be different."

8

Grimes did not hurry back to his own ship, neither did he dawdle. He would have liked to have hurried, but was aware that Kane would be watching him. He walked at a moderately brisk pace, with Philby at his side and the other Marines marching after them.

"Sir," asked Philby, "do you think they'll be hostile?"

"*Corgi's* crew didn't find them so, Captain Philby. But she landed on another part of the planet, among different people. We'll just have to play it by ear . . ."

"A show of force . . ." murmured the young officer, as though he were looking forward to it.

And he was, thought Grimes. He was. He glanced at Philby's face—young, unlined, features, save for the strong chin, indeterminate. A Marine Corps recruiting poster face . . . There was no vice in it—neither was there any sensitivity, or imagination. It was the face of a man who could have written those famous lines—and without ironical intention: *Whatever happens, we have got The Maxim gun—and they have not.*

"Don't forget," said Grimes, "that this is *their* world, and that we're interlopers."

"Yes, sir, but we're civilized. Aren't we?"

"Mphm."

"And these people, out of the mainstream for so long, need to be taught the Federation's way of life . . ."

Was Philby joking? No, Grimes decided, he was not. He said mildly, "The Federation's way of life as exemplified by whom? By the crew of *Seeker*? By Captain Drongo Kane and *his* crew? Or by Captain Danzellan and *Corgi's* or *Schnauzer's* people? Kane and Danzellan are Federation citizens, just as we are."

"Yes, sir. I suppose so. But . . ."

"But we have the superior fire power. Not all that superior. From what we saw aboard *Southerly Buster* I'd say she packs the wallop of a young battleship. And I should imagine that *Schnauzer* could show her teeth if she had to."

"What are your orders, sir?" asked Philby stiffly, obviously regretting having initiated the conversation.

"Just keep handy while I meet the natives. Better call another half dozen of your men down. Have your weapons ready—but not too obviously."

"With your permission, sir." Philby raised his wrist transceiver to his mouth. "Mr. Saul? Captain Philby here. Would you mind telling Corporal Smithers to detail six men for EVA? Yes, number three battle equipment. Over."

Then Grimes gave his orders. "Mr. Saul, Captain here. Do as Captain Philby says. And ask Dr. Lazenby if she'll join me at the after airlock. Yes. At once. All other officers and all ratings, with the exception of the six Marines, to remain on board. Yes, main and secondary armament to remain in a condition of readiness."

He heard the sergeant, who was a pace or two behind him, whisper something to one of the Marines about a show of force. He smiled to himself. He was not showing the force at his disposal—but it was nice to know that it was handy.

He beckoned Maggie down from the open airlock door. She walked gracefully down the ramp, despite the fact that she was hung around with all manner of equipment—cameras, recorders, even a sketch block and stylus.

She said, "We've had a good look at them through the control room telescope and binoculars. They seem to be human . . ."

"Are they armed?"

"Some are carrying spears, and a few have longbows . . ."

The additional Marines clattered down the ramp. Grimes looked at the automatic weapons they carried and hoped that they would not be used. He was pleased to see that each man had a couple of sleep gas grenades at his belt, and that one of them was carrying extra respirators; these he handed out to Grimes, Philby and to the other members of the party that had gone to *Southerly Buster*.

There was activity just by the boarding ramp of that ship, too. Grimes borrowed Maggie's binoculars, saw that Kane, Dreebly and three more men had come outside and that a folding table had been set up. The wares spread upon it glittered in the strong sunlight. Trade goods, Grimes decided. Bright, pretty baubles . . . And did he hope to buy a territory, a continent, a planet, even, for a string of glass beads? Why not? Things as strange had happened in Man's long history.

The first of the party of natives, that from the north, was now in sight from ground level. They moved with catlike smoothness over the grass, threading their way around the outcropping boulders. There were twenty of them—ten males and ten females. *Ten men and ten women*, Grimes corrected himself. Six men, carrying long spears, were in the lead, advancing in open order. Then came the women, eight of whom carried bows and who had quivers

of arrows slung over their shoulders. This appeared to be their only clothing. The remaining four men brought up the rear.

Humans, thought Grimes, studying them through Maggie's glasses. Exceptionally handsome humans. That all of them were unclothed was no indication of their cultural level—naturism was the rule rather than the exception on several highly civilized planets, such as Arcadia. Their skins varied in color from pale gold to a dark brown, the hair of their heads and their body hair—which was normally distributed—was of a variety of colors, black, white, gray, brown, a coppery gold Grimes focused his attention on a girl. The short hair of her head was parti-colored, stripes of darker and lighter gray alternating. The effect was odd, but not unpleasing. He grunted. There was something odd about her eyes, too. But this offshoot of humanity, cut off from the main stem for generations, must have tended to grow apart from the generality of humankind.

The natives came to a halt by *Southerly Buster's* ramp. The men stood aside to let two of the women, the two who carried no weapons, advance slowly to where Drongo Kane was standing by his table of trade goods. These two women were a little taller, a little larger than their companions, but no less graceful. They wore an air of maturity, but they were no less beautiful. They were talking to Kane and he seemed to be having no trouble understanding them, and they seemed to be having no trouble in understanding him.

"Here they come, sir," said Philby. "*Our* lot."

Grimes lowered the glasses, turned to face the visitors. This was a smaller party, only six people. Once again there was an equal division of the sexes.

Their leader, flanked by a spearman on either side of her, advanced slowly to where Grimes, with Maggie Lazenby beside him, was standing. Grimes saluted with a flourish—and a part of his mind stood back and laughed wryly at his according this courtesy to a naked savage. But a savage she was not. Savages tend to be dirty, unkempt; she was fastidiously clean. Her short hair was snowy, gleaming white, her lustrous skin was brown, the lips of her generous mouth a red that seemed natural rather than the result of applied cosmetics. The overall effect was definitely erotic. Grimes heard one of the Marines whistle, heard another whisper, "Buy that one for me, Daddy" "He could not blame either of them—but felt definitely censorious when Maggie murmured, "And you can buy either—or both—of her boyfriends for me"

The two men were tall. Both were golden skinned; one had orange-colored hair, the other was black-haired. Of their essential maleness there was no doubt. Each, however, was built more on the lines of an Apollo than a Hercules, and each moved with a fluid grace as pronounced as that with which the woman walked.

To her, not at all reluctantly, Grimes returned his attention. He knew that the slow inspection that he was making was not mannerly, but he could not help himself. He told himself that it was his duty, as captain of a survey ship, to make such an inspection. Her eyes, he saw, were a peculiar greenish-yellow, and the tips of her ears were pointed. Her cheekbones were prominent, more so than the firm chin. His regard shifted slowly downward. Beneath each full but firm breast there was a rudimentary nipple. But she was human, human—even though the bare feet, which should have been long and slender, were oddly chubby.

She was human when she spoke. She said, "Welcome to Morrowvia." The accent was strange (of course) and the timbre of her voice held a quality that was hard to define.

"Thank you," replied Grimes. Then, "And whom do I have the honor of addressing?" The words, he realized as soon as he gave them utterance, were too formal, too far removed from everyday speech. But she understood them. Evidently the vocabulary had not become impoverished during the long years between first settlement and rediscovery.

She said simply, "My name is Maya. I am the queen."

So I'm saved the trouble of saying, "Take me to your leader," Grimes thought smugly. *Drongo must be doing his dickering with some very minor court official* He asked suavely, "And what is the name of your country, Your Majesty? Is it, too, called Morrowvia?"

Puzzle lines creased her rather broad face. And then she smiled. Her teeth were very white and looked sharp, the teeth of a carnivore rather than of an omnivore. She said, "You do not understand. The captain of the ship called *Corgi* made the same mistake when he landed at Melbourne, many kilometers from here. I have been told that he called the Queen of Melbourne 'Your Majesty.' He explained, later, that this is a title given to queens on your world, or worlds" She added modestly, yet not without a touch of pride, "I am the elected Queen of Cambridge, the town to the south of where you have landed."

"Melbourne . . ." echoed Grimes. "Cambridge . . ." But it made sense. Homesick colonists have always perpetuated the names of their home towns.

"*He—Morrow—*left us a book, a big book, in which he had written all the names that we are to use for our towns" Maya went on.

Yes, it made sense all right. It was all too probable that the people of a Lost Colony would deviate from the human norm—but if they still spoke a recognizable major Earth language, and if their centers of population were named after Earth cities, whoever rediscovered them would have no doubt as to their essential humanity.

"Then what shall I call you," asked Grimes, "if 'Your Majesty' is not correct?"

"Maya," she told him. "And I shall call you . . ."

"Commander Grimes," he said firmly. It was not that he would at all object to being on given name terms with this rather gorgeous creature—but not in front of his subordinates. "Have you a second name, Maya?" he asked.

"Yes, Commander Grimes. It is Smith."

Maya Smith, thought Grimes, a little wildly. *Maya Smith, the Queen of Cambridge . . . And not a rag to cover her, not even any Crown Jewels . . . And escorted by henchmen and henchwomen armed to the teeth with spears and bows and arrows . . .*

Spears and bows and arrows . . . they could be just as lethal as more sophisticated weaponry. Grimes looked away hastily from the Queen of Cambridge to her people, saw, with relief, that there was no immediate cause for worry. The Morrowvians were not using the time-honored technique of enthusiastic fraternization, of close, ostensibly friendly contact that would make the snatching of guns from their owners' hands all too easy when the time came. There was a certain stand-offishness about them, in fact, an avoidance of too close physical proximity. Some of the Marines, to judge by the way that they were looking at the native women, would have wished it otherwise—but Philby and his sergeant were keeping a watchful eye both on their men and on the visitors.

Grimes felt free to continue his conversation with Maya. He gestured toward *Southerly Buster*, where the people from the other village were still clustered about Kane and his officers. "And your friend . . . what is she called?"

"She is no friend of mine. That *cat!*"

"But who is she?"

"Her name is Sabrina. She is the Queen of Oxford ." The woman turned away from Grimes, stared toward Kane's vessel and the activity around her boarding ramp. She said, in a rather hurt voice, "The other ship has brought gifts for the people. Did you bring no gifts?"

"Mphm," Grimes grunted. He thought, *There must be something in my storerooms that she'd fancy . . .* He said, "We did not know what you would like. Perhaps you would care to come on board, to take refreshments with us. Then we shall be able to discuss matters."

Maggie Lazenby snorted delicately.

"Thank you, Commander Grimes," said Maya Smith. "And my people?"

"They may come aboard too. But I must request that they leave their weapons outside."

She looked at him in some amazement. "But we never bring weapons into another person's home. They are for hunting, and for defense. There will be nothing to hunt in your ship—and surely we shall not need to defend ourselves against anything!"

You have been away from the mainstream of civilization a long time! thought Grimes.

He called the first lieutenant on his wrist transceiver to warn him to prepare to receive guests, then led the way up the ramp, into the ship.

9

The Survey Service has procedures laid down for practically everything, and as long as you stick to them you will not go far wrong. Grimes didn't need to consult the handbook titled *Procedures For Entertaining Alien Potentates*. He had entertained Alien Potentates before. Insofar as the milking of such beings of useful information was concerned he had conformed to the good old principle—candy is dandy, but licker is quicker. Of course, it was at times rather hard to decide what constituted either candy or liquor for some of the more exotic life forms

The majority of the natives had been shown into the wardroom, there to be entertained by the first lieutenant and—with the exception of Maggie Lazenby—the senior scientific officers. In his own day cabin Grimes had Maya Smith, the two men who constituted her bodyguard, and Maggie. He knew that it was foolish of him to feel ill at ease sitting there, making polite conversation with a naked woman and two naked men. Maggie took the situation for granted, of course—but her upbringing had been different from his. On Arcadia, the planet of her birth and upbringing, clothing was worn only when the weather was cold enough to justify the inconvenience.

"Tea, Maya?" asked Grimes. "Coffee?"

"What's tea?" she asked him. "What's coffee?"

"What do you drink usually?" he asked.

"Water, of course," she told him.

"And on special occasions?"

"Water."

"Mphm." He got up, opened his liquor cabinet. The light inside it was reflected brightly from the labels of bottles, from polished glasses.

Maya said, "How pretty!"

"Perhaps you would like to try . . . What would you like to try?"

"Angels' Tears," she said.

So she could read as well as speak Anglic. Grimes set out five liqueur glasses on the counter, uncorked the tall, beautifully proportioned bottle and filled them. He handed one to Maya, then served Maggie, then the two men. He lifted the remaining glass, said, "Here's mud in your eye!" and sipped. Maya sipped. The two men sipped. Maya spat like an angry cat. The men looked as though they would have liked to do the same, but they were too overawed by their unfamiliar surroundings.

"Firewater!" ejaculated the Morrowvian woman at last.

Grimes wondered what the distillers on Altairia would think if they could hear their most prized product so denigrated. This liqueur was almost pure alcohol—but it was smooth, smooth, and the cunning blend of spices used for flavoring could never be duplicated off the planet of its origin. Then he remembered a girl he had known on Dunsinane. He had not minded buying her expensive drinks, but he had been shocked by the way in which she misused them. The ending of what promised to be a beautiful friendship had come when she had poured Angels' Tears over a dish of ice cream

He said, "Perhaps this drink is a little strong to those who are not accustomed to it. But there is a way of making it less . . . fiery." He pressed the button, and in seconds a stewardess was in the cabin. The girl blushed furiously when she saw the nudity of the two Morrowvian men, but she tried hard to ignore their presence.

"Jennifer," said Grimes, "bring three dishes of ice cream."

"What flavor, sir?"

What flavor ice cream had that girl used for her appalling concoction? "Chocolate," said Grimes. "Very good, sir."

She was not gone long. Grimes took the tray from her when she returned; he was afraid that she might drop it when attempting to serve the naked bodyguards. He set it down on the table, then took Maya's glass from her. He poured the contents over one of the dishes of ice cream, handed it to her. "Now try it," he said.

She ignored the spoon. She raised the dish in her two hands to mouth level. Her pink tongue flickered out. There was a very delicate slurping sound. Then she said to her bodyguards, "Thomas, William—this is *good!*"

"I'm glad you like it," said Grimes, handing their portions to the two men. Then—"The same again?"

"If I may," replied Maya politely.

Alcohol, even when mixed with ice cream, is a good lubricant of the vocal cords. Maya, after her second helping, became talkative. More than merely talkative . . . she became affectionate. She tended to rub up against Grimes whenever he gave her the opportunity. He would have found her advances far more welcome if Maggie had

not been watching amusedly, if the two bodyguards had not been present. Not that the bodyguards seemed to mind what their mistress was doing; were it not for her inhibiting presence they would have behaved toward Maggie Lazenby as she, Maya, was behaving toward Grimes

"Such a long time . . ." gushed Maya. "Such a long, long time We knew we came from the stars, in a big ship Not *us*, of course, but our first fathers and mothers We hoped that some time some other ship would come from the stars But it's been a long, long time

"And then, after the ship called *Corgi* came, we thought that the next ships would land at Melbourne, and that it'd be *years* before we saw one The Queen of Melbourne, they say, now has a cold box to keep her meat and her water in, and she has books, *new* books, about all sorts of marvelous things And what are *you* giving *me*, Commander Grimes?"

I know what I'd like to give you, he thought. The close proximity of smooth, warm woman-flesh was putting ideas into his head. He said, trying to keep the conversation under control, "You have books?"

"'Course we have books—but we can't make any new ones. Every town has a copy of *The History*; it was printed and printed and printed, years ago, when the machines were still working"

"The *History*?" asked Grimes.

"Yes. *The History*. All about Earth, and the first flights away from Earth, and the last voyage of the *Lode Cougar*"

"The ship that brought you here?"

"Of course. You don't suppose we *walked*, do you?"

"Hardly. But tell me, how do you get about your world? Do you walk, or ride, or fly?"

"There were machines once, for riding and flying, but they wore out. We walk now. Everywhere. The Messengers are the long walkers."

"I suppose that you have to maintain a messenger service for the business of government."

"What business?" She pulled away from Grimes, stood tall and erect. It was a pity that she spoiled the effect by wavering lightly. "What government? *I* am the government."

"But surely," Grimes persisted, "you must have some planetary authority in overall charge. Or national authorities"

"But why?" she asked. "But why? I look after the affairs of my town, Sabrina looks after the affairs of *her* town, and so on. Who can tell me how much meat is to be dried or salted before the onset of winter? Who can tell me how the town's children are to be brought up? *I* am the government, of my own town. What else is needed?"

"It seems to work, this system of theirs . . ." commented Maggie Lazenby.

"'Course it works. Too many people in one town—then start new town."

"But," persisted Grimes, "there's more to government than mayoral duties—or queenly duties. Public health, for example"

"Every town has its doctor, to give medicine, set broken bones and so on"

Grimes looked appealingly at Maggie. She looked back at him, and shrugged. So he plodded on, unassisted. "But you must have a capital city"

Maya said, "We have. But it does not rule us. We rule ourselves. It is built around the landing place of the *Lode Cougar*. The machines are there, although they have not worked for *years*. There are the records—but all we need to know is in *The History*"

"And the name of this city?"

"Ballarat."

So Morrow—presumably he had been master of *Lode Cougar*—was an Australian. There was a Ballarat, on Earth, not far from Port Woomera.

"And how do we get to Ballarat?" asked Grimes.

"It is many, many days' walk"

"I wasn't thinking of walking."

"The exercise wouldn't do you any harm," Maggie told him.

"In my house there is a map"

The telephone buzzed sharply. Grimes answered it. Saul's deep voice came from the speaker, "Captain, our orbital spy eyes have reported the arrival of another ship. Mr. Hayakawa says that it is *Schnauzer*."

So—*Schnauzer* had arrived, earlier than expected. Presumably Captain Danzellan's PCO had picked up indications that other vessels were bound for Morrowvia. And presumably he would make his landing in the same location that he had used before, in *Corgi*. Where was it again? Melbourne. Grimes tried to remember his Australian

geography. The Ballarat on Earth wasn't far from Melbourne. He hoped that this would also be the case on this planet, so that he could kill two birds with one stone.

Lieutenant Saul could look after the shop in his, Grimes's, absence.

Somebody would have to keep an eye on Drongo Kane.

10

Grimes would have liked to have been able to fly at once to Melbourne, to be there and waiting when *Schnauzer* arrived. But there was so much to be done first—the delegation of authority, the pinnacle to be readied and stocked for an absence from the mother ship of indefinite duration and, last but not least, to determine the location of Captain Danzellan's arrival point with accuracy. The orbiting spy eyes would do this, of course—provided that *Schnauzer* was not using some device to render their data erroneous. She was not a warship—but it was safe to assume that she was fitted with electronic equipment not usually found aboard a merchantman.

So, early in the afternoon, Grimes and Maggie Lazenby accompanied Maya and her people back to their town. Fortunately their intake of fortified ice cream had slowed the Morrowvians down, otherwise Grimes would have found it hard to keep up with them. Even so, he was soon sweating in his tropical uniform, and his bare knees were scratched by the long, spiky grass that grew on the bank of the river, and he had managed to twist his right ankle quite painfully shortly after the departure from *Seeker* . . .

Lethargic though they were, the Morrowvians made good time. Their bare skins, Grimes noted enviously seemed proof against the razor-edged grass blades—or it could be that they, somehow, avoided painful contact. And Maggie, once they were out of sight of the ship, removed her uniform shirt and gave it to Grimes to carry. She was as unself-conscious in her semi-nudity as the natives were in their complete nakedness. Grimes wished that he dare follow her example, but he did not have the advantage of her upbringing.

There was one welcome halt on the way. One of the bow-women called out, and pointed to a swirl that broke the otherwise placid surface of the slow-flowing river. She unhitched a coil of line from the belt that encircled her slim waist, bent the end of it to a viciously barbed arrow. She let fly, the line snaking out behind the missile. When it hit there was a mad, explosive flurry as a creature about half the size of a full grown man leaped clear of the water. Two of the men dropped their spears, grabbed the line by its few remaining coils. Slowly, with odd growling grunts, they hauled it in, playing the aquatic creature like an angler playing a fish, towing it to a stretch of bank where the shore shelved gently to a sandy beach.

Grimes and Maggie watched as the thing was landed—she busy with her camera.

"Salmon," announced Maya. "It is good eating."

"*Salmon?*" thought Grimes. It was like no salmon that he had ever seen. It was, he supposed, some kind of fish, or some kind of ichthyoid, although it looked more like a scaly seal than anything else. But what it was called made sense. Long, long ago somebody—Morrow?—had said, "Give *everything* Earth names—and then, when this world is rediscovered, nobody will doubt that we're an Earth colony."

A slash from a vicious looking knife killed the beast, and it was slung from a spear and carried by two of the men. The journey continued.

* * *

They reached the town at last. It was a neat assemblage of low, adobe buildings, well spaced along dirt streets, with trees, each a vivid explosion of emerald foliage and crimson blossom, growing between the houses. Maya's house (palace?) was a little larger than the others, and atop a tall post just outside the main entrance was a gleaming five pointed star, wrought from silvery metal.

There were people in the streets, men, women and children. They were curious, but not obtrusively so. They were remarkably quiet, except for a group of youngsters playing some sort of ball game. These did not even pause in their sport as the queen and her guests passed them.

It was delightfully cool inside Maya's house. The small windows were unglazed, but those facing the sun were screened with matting, cutting out the glare while admitting the breeze. The room into which she took Grimes and Maggie was large, sparsely furnished. There was a big, solid table, a half dozen square, sturdy chairs. On one wall was a map of the planet, drawn to Mercator projection. The seas were tinted blue, the land masses either green or brown except in the polar regions, where they were white.

Maya walked slowly to this map. Her fingers stabbed at it. "This," she said, "is the River Thames. It flows into the Atlantic Ocean. Here, on this wide bend, is Cambridge . . ."

"Mphm." *And this Cambridge,* thought Grimes, *is about in the middle of a continent, an island continent that straggles untidily over much of the equatorial belt, called—of all names!—England . . . And where the hell is Melbourne?* He studied the map closely. There was a North Australia, another island continent, roughly rectangular, in the northern hemisphere. And there was a River Yarra. His right forefinger traced its winding course from the sea, from the Indian Ocean, to the contour lines that marked the foothills of the Dandenongs. Yes, here was Melbourne.

And to the north of it, still on the river, was Ballarat.

He asked, "How do your people cross the seas, Maya? You said that all the machines, including the flying machines, had broken down years ago."

"There are machines *and* machines, Commander Grimes. We have the wind, and we have balloons, and we have sailing boats. The balloons can go only with the wind, of course, but the sailing boats—what is the expression?—can beat to windward . . ." Then she said abruptly, "I am a poor hostess. You must be thirsty . . ."

Not as thirsty as you must be, thought Grimes, *after gorging yourself on that horrid mixture.*

"I could use a drink, Maya," said Maggie.

The Morrowvian woman went to the shelved cupboard where pottery, brightly and pleasingly glazed, was stacked. She took out six shallow bowls, set them on the table. Then she took down a stoppered pitcher that was hanging on the wall. This was not glazed, and its porous sides were bedewed with moisture. She poured from this into three of the bowls. The remaining vessels she filled with food from a deep dish that she extracted from the depths of a primitive refrigerator, a large unglazed earthenware box standing in a small bath of water. She used her hands to transfer cubes of white flesh from the dish to the bowls. There was no sign of any knives, forks or spoons.

She lifted her bowl of water to her mouth. She grinned and said "Here's mud in your eye!" She *lapped* the liquid, a little noisily. Grimes and Maggie drank more conventionally. The water was pleasantly cool, had a faint vegetable tang to it. Probably it was safe enough—but, in any case, all of *Seeker's* people had been given wide spectrum antibiotic shots before landing.

Maya, using one hand only, quite delicately helped herself to food from her bowl. Without hesitation Maggie followed suit. Her fine eyebrows arched in surprised appreciation. Grimes took a cautious sample. This, he decided after the first nibble, was *good*. It reminded him of a dish that he had enjoyed during his last leave on Earth, part of which he had spent in Mexico. This had been fish—raw, but seasoned, and marinated in the juice of freshly squeezed limes. He would have liked some more, but it would be a long time, he feared, before he would be able properly to relax and enjoy whatever social amenities this planet afforded.

Maggie, having followed Maya's example in licking her hands clean, had unslung one of her cameras, was pointing it at the map. She explained, "We have to have a copy of this, so that we can find our way to Melbourne."

"It will not be necessary. I can send a Messenger with you. But I warn you, it is a long journey, unless you go in your ship."

"We shall not go in the ship, Maya," Grimes told her. "But we shall not be walking, either. We shall use a pinnace, a relatively small flying boat."

"I have never flown," said Maya wistfully. "Not even in a balloon. Do you think that I . . .?"

"Why not?" said Grimes. *Why not?* he thought. *She'll be able to introduce me to her sister queen in Melbourne.*

"When do we leave?" she asked him.

"In the morning, as soon after sunrise as possible." That would be a good time; Melbourne was only a degree or so west of Cambridge. The flight would be made in daylight, and arrival would be well before sunset.

She said, "You will excuse me. I must make arrangements for my deputy to run affairs during my absence."

"I must do likewise," said Grimes.

They looked at each other gravely, both monarchs of a small kingdom, both with the cares of state heavy on their shoulders. It was unkind of Maggie to spoil the effect by snickering.

"I shall send an escort with you," said Maya.

"It is not necessary. All we have to do is to follow the river."

"But wolves have been reported along the river bank . . ."

And if the "wolves" of Morrowvia bore the same relationship to Terran wolves as did the Morrowvian "salmon" to Terran salmon, Grimes didn't want to meet them. He said so to Maya.

So he and Maggie, escorted by four spearmen and two bow-women, walked back to the ship. The members of the escort were too awestricken by the visitors from Outside to talk unless spoken to, and after ten minutes or so of very heavy going no attempt was made at conversation.

11

Grimes did not get much sleep that night.

He did not want to leave his ship until he was reasonably sure that the situation was under control. Drongo Kane was the main problem. Just what were his intentions? *Southerly Buster* had been kept under close observation from *Seeker*, and all the activity around her airlock had been filmed. Highly sensitive long-range microphones had been trained upon her—but Kane had set up some small noise-making machine that produced a continuous *whup, whup, whup* . . . Hayakawa, disregarding the Rhine Institute code of ethics, had tried to pry, but Myra Bracegirdle, Kane's PCO, was maintaining an unbreakable block over the minds of all the *Buster's* personnel. He had then tried to pick up the thoughts of the people in the town of Oxford, with little more success.

Grimes studied the film that had been made. He watched, on the screen, Kane talking amicably with Sabrina, the Queen of Oxford. He seemed to be laying on the charm with a trowel, and the Morrowvian woman was lapping it up. She smiled smugly when Drongo hung a scintillating string of synthetic diamonds about her neck, and her chubby hand went up to stroke the huge ruby that formed the pendant of the necklace, that glowed with crimson fire between her ample, golden-skinned breasts. She looked, thought Grimes, like a sleek cat that had got its nose into the cream. If it had not been for that annoying *whup, whup, whup* he would have heard her purring. It was shortly after her acceptance of this gift that Kane took her into the ship. Dreebly and two others—a little, fat man who, to judge by his braid, was the second mate and a cadaverous blonde in catering officer's uniform—remained by the table, handing out cheap jewelry, hand mirrors, pocket knives (a bad guess, thought Grimes amusedly, in this nudist culture), pairs of scissors and (always a sure way of buying goodwill) a quite good selection of children's toys. But it was the books that were in the greatest demand. The lens of one of the cameras that had been used zoomed in to a close-up of the display. Their covers were brightly-colored, eye-catching. They were, every one of them, handouts from the Tourist Bureaus of the more glamorous worlds of the galaxy.

Did Kane intend opening a travel agency on this world? It was possible, Grimes conceded. After all, the man was a shipowner. And his ship, according to the report from Elsinore, had been modified to suit her for the carriage of passengers.

"I don't like the looks of this, Captain," said the first lieutenant.

"What don't you like about it, Mr. Saul?" asked Grimes.

"I still remember what he did on Ganda."

"He can hardly do the same here. These people aren't being evacuated from their world before it's destroyed. They're quite happy here. In any case, the Gandans were skilled workmen, technicians. These people, so far as I can see, are little better than savages. *Nice savages*, I admit, but . . ."

"Forgive me for saying so, Captain, but you're very simple, aren't you?"

Grimes's prominent ears reddened. He demanded sharply, "What do you mean, Mr. Saul?"

"You've seen even more of these people than I have, sir. Have you seen an ugly man or woman?"

"No," admitted Grimes.

"And there are worlds where beautiful women are in great demand . . ."

"And there are the quite stringent laws prohibiting the traffic in human merchandise," said Grimes.

"Kane is bound to find some loophole," insisted Saul. "Just as he did on Ganda." Then his racial bitterness found utterance. "After all, he's a *white* man."

Grimes sighed. He wished, as he had wished before, that Saul would forget the color of his skin. He said tiredly, "All right, all right—Whitey's to blame for *everything*. But, from my reading of history, I seem to remember that it was the fat black kings on the west coast of Africa who sold their own people to the white slave traders . . ."

"Just as that fat yellow queen whom Kane entertained will sell her people to the white slave trader."

"I wouldn't call her *fat* . . ." objected Grimes, trying to bring the conversation to a lighter level.

"Just pleasantly plump, dearie," said Maggie Lazenby. "But, as you say, Drongo won't be able to pull off a coup like the Gandan effort twice running. And even if he makes a deal with some non-Federated world, *he's* still a Federation citizen and subject to Federation law."

"Yes, Commander Lazenby," agreed Saul dubiously. "But I don't trust him."

"Who does?" said Grimes. "During my absence you'll just have to watch him, Mr. Saul, like a cat watching a mouse." He added, "Like a black cat watching a white mouse."

"A white rat, you mean," grumbled Saul.

12

Before sunrise the pinnacle was ready.

Grimes was taking with him Pitcher, the navigator, Ensign Billard who, as well as being assistant communications officer (electronic), was a qualified atmosphere pilot, and Commander Maggie Lazenby. All of them carried sidearms. The pinnacle, too, was armed, being fitted with a laser cannon and two 20 mm machine guns.

Just as the sun was coming up, Grimes, Pitcher, Billard and Maggie stood outside the ship, watching as the small craft, its inertial drive muttering irritably, was eased out of its bay high on the ship's side, maneuvered down to the ground. It landed rather clumsily. Saul stepped out of the pilot's cabin and saluted with rather less than his usual snap. (He had been up, working, all night.) He said, "She's all yours, Captain."

"Thank you, Number One." Grimes looked at his watch, the one that had been adjusted to keep Morrowvian time. "Mphm. Time Maya was here."

"And here she is," said Maggie. "Enter the Queen of Cambridge, singing and dancing . . ."

Maya was not singing and dancing, but she looked well rested, alert, and as though she were looking forward to the outing. She was escorted by a half a dozen bow-women and a like number of spearmen, two of whom were carrying a large basket between them. Curiously, Grimes looked into the basket. There were bowls of the raw fish that he had enjoyed the previous day, other bowls of what looked like dried meat. He looked away hastily. All that he had been able to manage for breakfast was a large cup of black coffee.

Maya looked with interest at the pinnacle. "How does this thing fly?" she asked. "I don't see any wings or gasbag . . ."

"Inertial drive," Grimes told her briefly. "No, I'm sorry, but I can't explain it at this hour of the morning." He turned to Saul. "All right, Number One. I'm getting the show on the road. I leave *Seeker* in your capable hands. Don't do anything you couldn't do riding a bicycle."

"What is a bicycle?" asked Maya.

"Remind me to bring you one some time . . ." He visualized the tall, lush, naked woman astride such a machine and felt more than a little happier.

Pitcher and Billard clambered into the pinnacle. They stood in the open doorway and took the hamper of Maya's provisions as the two Morrowvian spearmen handed it up to them. Then, Maggie, disdaining the offer of a helping hand from Grimes, mounted the short ladder into the doorway. Grimes, however, was courteously able to assist Maya to board. He glared coldly at Saul when he noticed the sardonic look on the first lieutenant's face. Then he boarded himself.

Pitcher, with a chart made from Maggie's photographs, and young Mr. Billard occupied the forward compartment. Grimes sat with Maggie and Maya in the after cabin. As soon as the women were comfortable—although Maya was sitting on the edge of her seat like a young girl at her very first party—Grimes ordered, "Take her up."

"Take her up, sir," acknowledged Billard smartly. He was little more than a boy and inclined to take himself seriously, but he was able and conscientious. The noise of the restarted inertial drive was little more, at first, than a distant whisper. The pinnacle lifted so gently that there was no sense of motion; even Grimes was surprised to see the sleek hull of *Seeker* sliding past and downward beyond the viewports. She ascended vertically, and then her passengers were able to look out and down at the two ships—*Southerly Buster's* people were sleeping in; there were no signs of life around her—at the winding river, at the little towns spaced along its banks.

Maya ran from one side to the other of the small cabin. There was rather much of her in these confined quarters. "Oh, look!" she said, pointing. "There's *Cambridge!* Doesn't it look *small* from up here! And that town on the next bend is Kingston, and there's Richmond . . . And there's the weekly cargo wherry, there, with the sail . . ."

Grimes could not appreciate the distant view as it was obscured by Maya's breasts, but he did not complain.

"Sir," called Pitcher, "do you want us to steer a compass course, or shall we navigate from landmark to landmark? That way we shall not put on much distance."

"From landmark to landmark," said Grimes. "We may as well enjoy the scenery."

"You look as though you're doing that right now," commented Maggie.

"Would you mind getting back to your seat, Maya?" asked Grimes. "We shall be accelerating soon, and you may lose your balance . . ."

"Make sure you don't lose yours . . ." Maggie murmured.

The irregular beat of the inertial drive was louder now, and its vibration noticeable. The pinnacle turned in a

wide arc, and then the landing site was astern of them, and the two, tall ships were dwindling to the size of toys. Ahead of them, and a little to starboard, was a snowcapped mountain, Ben Nevis. Below them was a wide prairie over which surged a great herd of duncolored beasts. "Bison," said Maya, adding that these animals constituted the main meat supply of her people. She offered strips of dried flesh from her basket to Grimes and Maggie, much as a Terran woman would offer chocolates. Grimes took one and chewed it dubiously. It wasn't bad, but it would not worry him much if he never tasted any more of it.

He took a pair of binoculars from their rack and stared down at the so-called bison. From almost directly above them he could not get much of an idea of their general appearance—but he knew that the Terran animals of that name had never run to six legs, whereas these brutes did.

The gleaming peak of Ben Nevis hung in their starboard viewports for long seconds, then dropped slowly astern. The pinnacle, now, was following the course of another river, the Mersey, and Maya was pointing out the towns along its meandering length. "Yes, that must be Lancaster . . . I visited there two years ago, and I remember that thickly wooded hill just by it . . . Most of the people living along the Mersey banks are Cordwainers . . ."

"Cordwainers?" asked Grimes, thinking that she must be referring to some odd trade.

"It is their name, just as Smith is the name of most of us along the Thames . . ."

"And what names, how many names, do you have on this world?" asked Maggie.

"There's Smith, of course. And Wells. And Morrow. And Cordwainer. That's all."

"Probably only four male survivors when *Lode Cougar* got here," said Grimes. "And polygamous marriages . . ."

"Chester," announced Maya, pointing to another town. "Brighton, and the shipbuilding yards . . . That schooner looks almost finished . . . Manchester, *I think* . . . Oh, this is the way to travel! It took me weeks, many weeks, when I did it by foot and by wherry!"

"And why do you travel?" asked Maggie.

"Why do *you* travel?" the other woman countered. "To . . . to see new things, new people."

"And what new things have you seen?"

"Oh, the workshops at Manchester. You must have noticed the smoke as we flew over them. They smelt metal there, after they've dug the ore from the ground. They say that for years and years, before the process was discovered, we had to use scraps of metal from the ship to tip our spears and arrows."

"And so your weapons are made from this iron—I suppose it's iron—from Manchester?" asked Maggie.

"Yes."

"And what do you buy it with? What do you barter for it?"

"The salmon are caught only in the Thames. Their pickled flesh is a great delicacy."

"And tell me," Maggie went on, "don't some of you Smiths and Morrows and Wellses and Cordwainers get the idea, sometimes, that there are other ways of getting goods besides barter?"

"There are no other ways, Commander Maggie."

"On some worlds there are. Just suppose, Maya . . . just suppose that it's been a bad year for salmon. Just suppose that you need a stock of new weapons and have nothing to give in exchange for them. Just suppose that you lead a party of spearmen and archers to, say, Oxford, to take the people by surprise and to take their bows and spears by force . . ."

"Are you mad?" demanded Maya. "That would be impossible. It is not . . . human to intrude where one is not wanted. As for . . . *fighting* . . . that is not human either. Oh, we fight the wolves, but only to protect ourselves from them. We fight the eagles when we have to. But to fight each other . . . unthinkable!"

"But you must fight sometimes," said Maggie.

"Yes. But we are ashamed of it afterward. Our young men, perhaps, over a woman. Sometimes two women will quarrel, and use their claws. Oh, we have all read *The History*. We know that human beings have fought each other, and with weapons that would make our spears and bows look like toys. But we *could* not." There was a long silence, broken when she asked timidly, "And can you?"

"I'm afraid we can," Grimes told her. "And I'm afraid that we do. Your world has no soldiers or policemen, but yours is an exceptional world . . ."

"And are *you* a soldier, Commander Grimes?"

"Don't insult me, Maya. I'm a spaceman, although I am an officer in a fighting service. I suppose that you could call me a policeman of sorts . . ."

"The policeman's lot is not a happy one . . ." quoted Maggie solemnly.

"Mphm. Nobody press-ganged me into the Survey Service."

Then they were approaching the coast, the mouth of the river and the port town of Liverpool. North they swept, running low over the glittering sea, deviating from their course to pass close to a large schooner, deviating again to make rings around a huge, unwieldy balloon, hovering over a fleet of small fishing craft whose crews were hauling in nets alive with a silvery catch, whose men stared upward in wonder at the alien flying machine.

Pitcher called back from the pilot's cabin, "We're setting course for the mouth of the Yarra, sir—if you're agreeable."

"I'm agreeable, Mr. Pitcher. You can put her on automatic and we'll have lunch."

Maya enjoyed the chicken sandwiches that had been packed for them, and Pitcher and Billard waxed enthusiastic over the spiced fish that she handed around.

13

It was an uneventful flight northward over the ocean. They sighted no traffic save for a large schooner beating laboriously to windward; the Morrowvians, Grimes learned from Maya, were not a sea-minded people, taking to the water only from necessity and never for recreation.

As the pinnacle drove steadily onward Maya, with occasional encouragement from Grimes and Maggie, talked. Once she got going she reminded Grimes of a Siamese cat he had once known, a beast even more talkative than the generality of its breed. So she talked, and Grimes and Maggie and Pitcher and Billard listened, and every so often Maggie would have to put a fresh spool in her recorder.

This Morrowvia was an odd sort of a planet—odd insofar as the population was concerned. The people were neither unintelligent nor illiterate, but they had fallen surprisingly far from the technological levels of the founders of the colony—and, even more surprisingly, the fall had been arrested at a stage well above primitive savagery. On so many worlds similarly settled the regression to Man's primitive beginnings had been horridly complete.

So there was Morrowvia, with a scattered population of ten million, give or take a few hundreds of thousands, all of them living in small towns, and all these towns with good old Terran names. There was no agriculture, save for the cultivation of herbs used medicinally and for the flavoring of food. Meat was obtained by hunting, although halfhearted attempts had been made at the domestication of the so-called bison and a few of the local flying creatures, more reptilian than anything else, the flesh and the eggs of which were palatable. The reason why more had not been done along these lines was that hunting was a way of life.

There was some industry—the mining and smelting of metals, the manufacture of weapons and such few tools as were required, shipbuilding. Should more ever be required, said Maya, the library at Ballarat would furnish full instructions for doing everything, for making anything at all.

Government? There was, said the Morrowvian woman, government of a sort. Each town was autonomous, however, and each was ruled—although "ruled" was hardly the correct word—by an elected queen. No, there were no kings. (Maya had read *The History* and knew what kings were.) It was only natural that women, who were in charge of their own homes, should elect a woman to be in overall charge of an assemblage of homes. It was only natural that the men should be occupied with male pursuits such as hunting and fishing—although women, the younger ones especially, enjoyed the hunt as much as the men did. And it was only natural that men should employ the spear as their main weapon, while women favored the bow.

No, there were no women engaged in heavy industry, although they did work at such trades as the manufacture of cordage and what little cloth was used. And women tended the herb gardens.

Maya confirmed that there were only four families—although "tribes" would be the better word—on Morrowvia. There were Smiths, Cordwainers, Morrows and Wellses. There was intermarriage between the tribes, and in such cases the husband took his wife's surname, which was passed on, also, to the children of such unions. It was not quite a matriarchal society, but it was not far from it.

Grimes steered the conversation on to the subject of communications. There had been radio—but many generations ago. It had never been required—"After all," said Maya reasonably enough, "if I die and my people elect a new queen it is of no real concern to anybody except themselves. There is no need for the entire planet to be informed within seconds of the event."—and transmitters and receivers had been allowed to fall into desuetude. There was a loosely organized system of postmen—men and women qualified by powers of endurance and fleetness of foot—but these carried only letters and very light articles of merchandise. Heavier articles were transported in the slow wherries, up and down the rivers—which meant that a consignment of goods would often have to be shipped along the two long sides of a triangle rather than over the short, overland side.

There was a more or less—rather less than more—regular service by schooner between the island continents. The seamen, Grimes gathered, were a race apart, males and females too incompetent to get by ashore—or, if not incompetent, too antisocial. Seafaring was a profession utterly devoid of either glamor or standing. Grimes was rather shocked when he heard this. He regarded himself as being in a direct line of descent from the seamen and explorers of Earth's past, and was of the opinion that ships, ships of any kind, were the finest flower of human civilization.

The airmen—the balloonists—were much more highly thought of, though the service they provided was even more unreliable than that rendered by the sailors. Some of the airmen, Maya said, were wanting to fit their clumsy, unmaneuverable craft with engines—but Morrow (he must have been quite a man, this Morrow, thought Grimes) had warned his people, shortly before his death, of the overuse of machinery.

He had said (Maya quoted), "I am leaving you a good world. The land, the air and the sea are clean. Your own

wastes go back into the soil and render it more fertile. The wastes of the machines will pollute everything—the sky, the sea and the very ground you walk upon. Beware of the machine. It pretends to be a good servant—but the wages that it exacts are far too high."

"A machine brought you—your ancestors—here," pointed out Grimes.

"If that machine had worked properly we should not be here," said Maya. She smiled. "The breaking down of the machine was our good luck."

"Mphm." But this was a *good* world. It could be improved—and what planet could not? But would the reintroduction of machinery improve it? The reintroduction not only of machinery but of the servants of the machine, that peculiar breed of men who have sold their souls to false gods of steam and steel, of metal and burning oil, who tend, more and more, to degrade humanity to the status of slaves, to elevate the mindless automata to the status of masters.

Even so . . . what was that quotation he had used in a recent conversation with Maggie? "Transportation is civilization."

More efficient transportation, communications in general, would improve Morrowvia. He said as much. He argued, "Suppose there's some sort of natural catastrophe . . . a hurricane, say, or a fire, or a flood . . . If you had radio again, or efficient aircraft, the survivors could call for help, almost at once, and the help would not be long in reaching them."

"But why?" Maya asked. "But why? Why should *they* call for help, and why should *we* answer? Or why should *we* call for help, and why should *they* answer? We—how shall I put it? We go our ways, all of us, with neither help or hindrance, from anybody. We . . . cope. If disaster strikes, it is *our* disaster. We should not wish any interference from outsiders."

"A passion for privacy," remarked Maggie, "carried to extremes."

"Privacy is our way of life," Maya told her. "It is a good way of life."

Grimes had been wondering how soon it would be before the pair of them clashed; now the clash had come. They glared at each other, the two handsome women, one naked, the other in her too-skimpy uniform, somehow alike—and yet very unlike each other. Claws were being unsheathed.

And then young Billard called out from the forward compartment. "Land on the radar, sir! Looks like the coastline, at four hundred kilometers!"

Rather thankfully Grimes got up and went into the pilot's cabin. He looked into the screen of the radarscope, then studied the chart that had been made from the original survey data and from Maggie's photographs of that quite accurate wall map in Maya's "palace." Yes, that looked like Port Phillip Bay, with the mighty Yarra flowing into it from the north. He thought, *North Australia*, here we come! Then, with an affection of the Terran Australian accent, *Norstrylia, here we come!*

That corruption of words rang a faint but disturbing bell in his mind—but he had, as and from now, more important things to think about.

He said to the navigator, "A very nice landfall, Mr. Pitcher," and to Billard, "Better put her back on manual. And keep her as she's going."

Maya was by his side, looking with pleased wonderment at the glowing picture in the radar screen. Grimes thought, *I wish she wouldn't rub up against me so much. Not in front of Pitcher and Billard, anyhow. And not in front of Maggie, especially.*

It was summer in the northern hemisphere, and when the pinnacle arrived over Melbourne, having followed the winding course of the Yarra to the foothills of the Dandenongs, there were still half a dozen hours of daylight left. The town, as were all the towns, was a small one; Grimes estimated that its population would run to about four thousand people. As they made the approach he studied it through powerful binoculars. It was neatly laid out, and the houses seemed to be of wooden construction, with thatched roofs. Beyond the town, on a conveniently sited patch of level, tree-free ground, towered the unmistakable metal steeple of a starship. There was only one ship that it could be.

Suddenly the pinnacle's transceiver came to life. "*Schnauzer* calling strange aircraft. *Schnauzer* calling strange aircraft. Do you read me?"

"I read you," replied Grimes laconically.

"Identify yourself, please."

"*Schnauzer*, this is Number One Pinnacle of FSS *Seeker*. Over."

There was a silence. Then, "You may land by me, Number One Pinnacle."

Grimes looked at Pitcher and Billard. They looked back at him. He raised an eyebrow sardonically. Pitcher said, "Uncommonly decent of him, sir, to give permission to land . . ."

"Mphm. I suppose he was here first—although I don't think that planting a shipping company's flag makes a territorial claim legally valid."

"They could rename this world Pomerania . . ." suggested Pitcher.

"Or Alsatia . . ." contributed Billard.

"Or NewPekin . . ." continued Pitcher. "Or some other son-of-a-bitching name . . ."

"Or Dogpatch," said Grimes, with an air of finality. And then, into the microphone, an edge of sarcasm to his voice. "Thank you, *Schnauzer*. I am coming in."

Acting on his captain's instructions Billard brought the pinnacle low over the town. People stared up at them—some in the by now familiar state of nudity, some clothed. Those who were dressed were wearing uniform, obviously personnel from the Dog Star ship. The small craft almost grazed the peaked, thatched roofs, then settled down gently fifty meters to the west of *Schnauzer*, on the side from which her boarding ramp was extended.

"Well," remarked Maggie, "we're here. I don't notice any red carpet out for us. What do we do now?"

"We disembark," Grimes told her. "There'll be no need to leave anybody aboard; the officers of major shipping companies are usually quite law-abiding people." *Ususally*, he thought, *but not always*. He remembered suddenly the almost piratical exploits of one Captain Craven, the master of *Delta Orionis*, to which he, Grimes, had been an accessory.

"What about Drongo Kane?" asked Maggie.

"You can hardly call *him* a major shipping company," said Grimes.

Three men were walking slowly down the merchant ship's ramp. In the lead was a bareheaded, yellow-haired giant, heavily muscled. Following him was a tall and slender, too slender, young man. Finally—last ashore and first to board—was a portly gentleman, clothed in dignity and respectability as well as in master's uniform. All of them wore sidearms. Grimes frowned. As a naval officer he did not like to see merchant officers going about armed to the teeth—but he knew that the Dog Star Line held quite strong views on the desirability of the ability of its ships and its personnel to defend themselves.

The door of the pinnacle opened and the short ladder extended itself to the grassy ground. Grimes buckled on his belt with the holstered pistol, put on his cap and, ignoring the steps, jumped out of the small craft. He turned to assist Maggie but she ignored his hand, jumped also. Maya followed her, leaping down with feline grace. Pitcher was next, then Billard, who spoiled the effect by tripping and sprawling untidily.

Schnauzer's master had taken leading place now, and was advancing slowly, with his two officers a couple of paces to the rear. Unlike them he was not wearing the comfortable, utilitarian gray shorts, shirt and stockings but a white uniform, with tunic and long trousers—but portly men look their best in clothing that conceals most of the body.

He acknowledged Grimes's salute stiffly, while his rather protuberant brown eyes flickered over the young man's insignia of rank. He said, in a rather reedy voice, "Good afternoon, Commander." Then, "You are the commanding officer of *Seeker*?"

"Yes, Captain. Lieutenant Commander Grimes. And you, sir, are Captain Roger Danzellan, and the two

gentlemen with you are Mr. Oscar Eklund, chief officer, and Mr. Francis Delamere, second officer."

"How right you are, Commander. I realize that there is no need for me to introduce myself and my people. But as a mere merchant captain I do not have the resources of an Intelligence Service to draw upon"

Grimes took the hint and introduced Maggie, Maya, Pitcher and Billard.

"And now, Commander," asked Danzellan, "what can I do for you?"

"If you would, sir, you can tell me what you are doing here."

"Trade, Commander, trade. This is a competitive galaxy, although you ladies and gentlemen in the Survey Service may not find it so. My employers are not in business for the state of their health"

"Aren't they?" inquired Maggie. "I would have thought that the state of their *financial* health was their main concern."

"A point well taken, Commander Lazenby. Anyhow, the Dog Star Line is always ready and willing to expand its sphere of operations. When a Dog Star ship, *Corgi*—but I imagine that you know all about *that*—stumbled upon this world, quite by chance, the reports made by her master, myself were read with great interest by the Board of Directors. It was realized that we, as it were, have one foot well inside the door. It was decided to strike the iron while it is hot. Do you read me, Commander Grimes?"

"Loud and clear, Captain Danzellan. But tell me, what sort of trade do you hope to establish with the people of Morrow via?"

"There are manufactured goods from a score of planets on our established routes for which there will be a demand here. For example, I have in my hold a large consignment of solar-powered refrigerators, and one of solar cookers. On the occasion of my first visit here a refrigerator was left with the, er, Queen of Melbourne. I was pleased to discover on my return that it is still working well, and even more pleased to learn that other, er, queens have seen it, and that still others have heard about it"

"You will remember, Commander Grimes," said Maya, "that I told you about the cold box."

"So even this lady, from Cambridge, many miles from here, has heard about it."

"Mphm. But how are the people going to pay the freight on these quite unnecessary luxuries—and for the luxuries themselves?"

"Unnecessary luxuries, Commander? I put it to you—would *you* be prepared to sip your pre-prandial pink gin without an ice cube to make it more potable? Do *you* enjoy lukewarm beer?"

"Frankly, no, Captain. But—the question of payment"

"These are sordid details, Commander. But I have no doubt that something will be worked out."

"No doubt at all," commented Maggie Lazenby. "When people want something badly enough they find some way of paying for it."

"In a nutshell, Commander Lazenby. In a nutshell." Danzellan beamed upon her benignly. Then, "I am sorry that I cannot ask you aboard my ship, but we are rather cramped for space. In a merchant vessel carrying capacity for money-earning cargo is of greater importance than luxurious accommodation for personnel."

"I understand," said Grimes. Such merchant vessels as he had been aboard housed their officers in far greater comfort than did the Survey Service. He went on, "Maya, here, wishes to pay her respects to her sister queen. We will accompany her."

"I'll show you the way, Commander," volunteered Mr. Delamere eagerly.

Danzellan frowned at his second officer and the young man wilted visibly. Then the captain relented. "All right," he said. "You may take the party from *Seeker* to Queen Lilian's palace." He added sternly, "See that they don't get lost."

Delamere led the way from the landing site to the town, walking fast. He did not pause when he took the party past a survey team from *Schnauzer*, busily engaged with tapes, rods and theodolite, working under the direction of a young woman with third officer's braid on her shoulderboards. He acknowledged her wave absently. Watching the surveyors was a large group of children, with a smaller number of adults. These people, Grimes saw, were very similar to those whom he had encountered at *Seeker's* landing place—well formed, beautiful rather than merely handsome. He was interested to note, however, that here the rudimentary nipples below the true breasts were the exception rather than the rule, whereas among Maya's people almost every woman—as she herself—was so furnished.

The dirt roads between the houses were level and tidy. The wooden buildings were well spaced and these, unlike those in Cambridge, had glazed windows—but, probably, the winters on this continent would be relatively severe. There was an amplitude of trees and flowering shrubs in every open space.

Lilian's palace was larger than the other houses. It had, like Maya's a tall staff standing outside its main entrance, a pole surmounted by a star fabricated from glittering metal rods. Also, in the full light of the westering sun, there stood just outside the door a metallic box, mounted on small wheels. Grimes had seen such contraptions before; this was the famous sun-powered refrigerator.

A tall woman came out to meet them. Her skin was creamy; the hair of her head and body was a glowing orange color. She said to Maya, "Welcome, sister. My house is yours."

"Thank you, sister," replied Maya. Then, "We have corresponded, but I did not think that we should ever meet."

"You are . . . ?"

"Maya, from Cambridge, Lilian."

"I know of you, Maya. Now I have the pleasure of knowing you."

"Lilian . . ." said Delamere.

"Yes, Francis?"

"How is Tabitha?"

"She is well, Francis."

"Can I see her, Lilian?"

"It will be well if you do not, Francis. Unless you are willing to abide by our customs."

The young man looked desperately unhappy. His long nose quivered like that of a timid rabbit. He said, "But you know . . ."

"What do I know, Francis? Only what I am told. Only what I see with my own eyes." (*And those green eyes, thought Grimes, will see plenty.*)

"Lilian," Maya said, "I have brought friends with me."

"So I see." The woman was regarding the people from *Seeker* with a certain lack of enthusiasm. Her attitude seemed to be, *If you've seen one stranger from beyond the stars, you've seen them all.*

"Lilian, this is Commander Grimes, captain of the ship called *Seeker*. The lady is Commander Maggie Lazenby. The gentlemen are Lieutenant Pitcher and Ensign Billard."

Grimes saluted. Lilian Morrow inclined her head gravely, then said, "Be pleased to enter."

They followed her into the palace. Inside it was very like Maya's official residence, the big wall map being the most prominent decoration on a wall of the room into which she led them. She saw them seated, then excused herself and went back outside. While she was gone Grimes asked Delamere, "Who is Tabitha, Mr. Delamere?"

The second mate flushed angrily and snapped, "None of your business, Commander." Then, obviously regretting his display of temper, he muttered sulkily, "She's Lilian's daughter. I . . . I met her when I was here before, in *Corgi*. Now her mother won't let me see her again unless . . ."

"Unless what?" prompted Maggie. "Unless what, Francis?"

That's right, thought Grimes. Turn on the womanly charm and sympathy.

Delamere was about to answer when Lilian returned. She was carrying a tray on which was a rather lopsided jug of iced water, a dish of some greenish looking flesh cut into cubes, glass drinking bowls. She filled a bowl for each of them from the jug.

The water was refreshing, the meat tasted how Grimes imagined that the flesh of a snake would taste. He supposed—he hoped—that it was non-poisonous. Maya seemed to be enjoying it.

"And now, Commander Grimes," asked Lilian, after they had all sipped and nibbled, "what do you here?"

"I represent the Federation, Lilian . . ."

"Just as Captain Danzellan represents the Dog Star Line. Captain Danzellan hopes to make money—and Morrow warned us about *that*—for his employers and himself. And what do *you* hope to make for yourself and your employers?"

"We are here to help you, Lilian."

"Do we need any help, Commander Grimes?"

"The Survey Service, Lilian, is like a police force. You know what a police force is. You have read The History. We protect people from those who would exploit them, rob them, even."

"Have we asked for protection?"

"You may do so."

"But we have not done so."

"Yet."

"Lilian knows that she has nothing to fear from us," said Delamere, more than a little smugly.

"Indeed, Francis?" The look that she gave him drove him back into sullen silence. Then she addressed Grimes again. "Commander Grimes, the relationship established between ourselves and Captain Danzellan is, on the whole, a friendly one. Captain Danzellan, in exchange for certain concessions, will bring us goods that we cannot make for ourselves. Before anything is decided, however, it will be necessary to convene a Council of Queens. I, of course, speak only for Melbourne—but Morrow foresaw that a time would come when matters affecting the entire continent, the entire world, even, would have to be discussed. Word has gone to my sisters of Ballarat, Alice, Darwin, Sydney, Perth, Brisbane—but there is no need for me to recite to you the names of all the towns of North Australia—that decisions affecting us all must soon be made. It is fortunate that our sister of Cambridge is with us; she will be able to report to her own people on what we are doing."

"These concessions . . ." began Grimes.

"They are none of *your* business, Commander."

Grimes looked appealingly at Maggie. She was supposed to know what made people tick. She was supposed to know which button to push to get which results. She looked back at him blandly.

Damn the woman! thought Grimes. *Damn all women.* He floundered on, "But perhaps I should be able to advise you . . ."

"We do not need your advice, Commander."

"Mphm." Grimes fished his battered pipe from his pocket, filled it, lit it.

"Please!" said Lilian sharply, "do not smoke that filthy thing in here!"

"So your great ancestor warned you about smoking . . ."

"He did so. He warned us about all the vices and unpleasant habits of the men who, eventually, would make contact with us."

"Oh, well," muttered Grimes at last. Then, "I suppose that there is no objection to our visiting Ballarat, to look at your library, your records . . ."

"That is a matter for the Queen of Ballarat."

And there isn't any radio, thought Grimes, *and there aren't any telephones, and I'm damned if I'll ask Her Majesty here to send a messenger.* He said, "Thank you for your hospitality, Lilian. And now, if you will excuse us, we'll get back to our pinnacle and set up camp for the night."

She said, "You are excused. And you have my permission to sleep on the outskirts of the town."

"Shall we set up a tent for you, Maya? Grimes asked.

"Thank you, no. Lilian and I have so much to talk about."

"Can I see Tabitha?" pleaded Delamere.

"No, Francis. You may not."

Schnauzer's second officer got reluctantly to his feet. He mumbled, "Are you ready, Commander? I'm getting back to my ship."

He led the way out of the palace and back to the landing site, although his services as a guide were hardly necessary. *Schnauzer*, dwarfing the trees that grew around the grassy field, stuck up like a sore thumb.

* * *

Back at the pinnacle Grimes, Pitcher and Billard unloaded their camping gear, with Maggie watching and, at times, criticizing. The little air compressor swiftly inflated the four small sleeping tents, the larger one that would combine the functions of mess-room and galley. Then Billard went to the nearby stream for two buckets of water. A sterilizing tablet was dropped into each one, more as a matter of routine than anything else. If the broad spectrum

antibiotic shots administered aboard *Seeker* had not been effective it would have been obvious by now. The battery-powered cooker was set up, and in a short time a pot of savory stew, prepared from dehydrated ingredients, was simmering and water was boiling for coffee.

The four of them sat around the collapsible table waiting until the meal was ready.

Grimes said, "What do you make of it, Maggie?"

"Make of what?" she countered.

"The whole setup."

She replied thoughtfully. "There's something *odd* about this world. In the case of Sparta there were all sorts of historical analogies to draw upon—here, there aren't. And how shall I put it? Like this, perhaps. The Morrowvians rather resent the violation of their privacy, but realize that there's nothing much that they can do about it. They certainly aren't mechanically minded, and distrust of the machine has been bred into them—but they do appreciate that the machine can contribute greatly to their comfort. I imagine that Danzellan's 'cold boxes' will be *very* popular As for their attitude toward ourselves—there's distrust again, but I think that they are prepared to like us as individuals. Maya, for example, has taken quite a shine to you. I've been expecting to see you raped at any tick of the clock"

"Mphm."

"You could do worse, I suppose—though whether or not she could is another matter"

"Ha, ha," chuckled Pitcher politely.

"Hah. Hah," growled Grimes, inhibiting any further mirth on the part of his subordinates.

"Anyhow, as far as behavior goes they do tend to deviate widely from the norm. The *human* norm, that is"

"What do you mean?" asked Grimes.

"I rather wish that I knew, myself," she told him.

16

Grimes had Pitcher work out the local time of sunrise, then saw to it that everybody had his watch alarm set accordingly. Before retiring he called Saul aboard *Seeker*—his wrist transceiver was hooked up to the much more powerful set in the pinnace—and listened to his first lieutenant's report of the day's activities. Mr. Saul had little to tell him. Maya's people had made considerable inroads into the ship's supply of ice cream. Sabrina's people had been coming and going around *Southerly Buster* all day, but neither Sabrina nor Captain Kane had put in an appearance. Saul seemed to be shocked by this circumstance. Grimes shrugged. Drongo's morals—or lack of them—were none of his concern.

Or were they?

Grimes then told Saul, in detail, of his own doings of the day, of his plans for the morrow. He signed off, undressed, wriggled into his sleeping bag. Seconds after he had switched off his portable light he was soundly asleep.

The shrilling of the alarm woke him just as the almost level rays of the rising sun were striking through the translucent walls of his tent. He got up, went outside into the fresh, cool morning, sniffed appreciatively the tangy scent of dew-wet grass. Somewhere something that probably was nothing at all like a bird was sounding a series of bell-like notes. There were as yet no signs of life around *Schnauzer*, although the first thin, blue drift of smoke from cooking fires was wreathing around the thatched rooftops of Melbourne.

Grimes walked down to the river to make his toilet. He was joined there by Pitcher and Billard. The water was too cold for the three men to linger long over their ablutions, although the heat of the sun was pleasant on their naked bodies. As they were walking back to the camp Maggie passed them on her way to her own morning swim. She told them that she had made coffee.

Soon the four of them were seated round the table in the mess tent to a breakfast of reconstituted scrambled egg and more coffee. Rather surprisingly they were joined there by Maya. The Morrowvian woman put out a dainty hand and scooped up a small sample of the mess on Grimes's plate, tasted it. She complained, "I don't like this."

"Frankly, neither do I," admitted Grimes, "but it's the best we can offer." He masticated and swallowed glumly. "And what can we do for you this morning?"

She said, "I am coming with you."

"Good. Do you know the Queen of Ballarat?"

"I know of her. And Lilian has given me a letter of introduction." With her free hand she tapped the small bag of woven straw that she was carrying.

"Then let's get cracking," said Grimes.

While Maggie, with Maya assisting rather ineffectually, washed the breakfast things Grimes, with Pitcher and Billard doing most of the work, struck and stowed the sleeping tents. Then the furniture and other gear from the mess tent was loaded aboard the pinnace, and finally the mess tent itself was deflated and folded and packed with the other gear.

From the pinnace Grimes called *Seeker*, told Saul that he was getting under way. While he was doing so Billard started the inertial drive, and within seconds the small craft was lifting vertically. As she drew level with *Schnauzer's* control room Grimes could see figures standing behind the big viewports. He picked up his binoculars for a better look. Yes, there was the portly figure of Captain Danzellan, and with him was Eklund, his mate.

"Take her south for a start, sir?" asked Pitcher. "And then, once we're out of *Schnauzer's* sight, we can bring her round on the course for Ballarat . . ."

"No," decided Grimes. The same idea had occurred to him—but Lilian knew his destination, and she was at least on speaking terms with Danzellan and his officers. In any case—as compared with Drongo Kane—the Dog Star people were goodies, and if anything went badly wrong they would be in a position to offer immediate help. "No," he said again. "Head straight for Ballarat."

* * *

Ballarat was different from the other towns that they had seen. It was dominated by a towering structure, a great hulk of metal, pitted and weathered yet still gleaming dully in the morning sunlight. It was like no ship that Grimes or his officers had ever seen—although they had seen pictures and models of such ships in the astronomical museum at the Academy. It was a typical gaussjammer of the days of the Second Expansion, a peg-top-shaped hull with its wide end uppermost, buttressed by flimsy looking fins. To land her here, not far from the magnetic equator, her captain must have been a spaceman of no mean order—or must have been actuated by desperation. It could well

have been that his passengers and crew were so weakened by starvation that a safe landing, sliding down the vertical lines of force in the planet's solar regions, would have been safe for the ship only, not for her personnel. Only the very hardy can survive the rigors of an arctic climate.

Hard by the ship was a long, low building. As seen from the air it seemed to be mainly of wooden construction, although it was roofed with sheets of gray metal. No doubt there had been cannibalization; no doubt many nonessential bulkheads and the like were missing from the gaussjammer's internal structure.

Billard brought the pinnace in low over the town. There were people in the streets, mainly women and children. They looked upward and pointed. Some of them waved. And then, quite suddenly, a smoky fire was lit in a wide plaza to the east of the gaussjammer. It was a signal, obviously. The tall streamer of smoke rose vertically into the still air.

"That's where we land," said Grimes. "Take her down, please, Mr. Billard."

"Aye, aye, sir!"

Quietly, without any fuss or bother, they landed. Even before the door was open, even before the last mutterings of the inertial drive had faded into silence, they heard the drums, a rhythmic thud and rattle, an oddly militaristic sound.

"Mphm?" grunted Grimes dubiously. He turned to Maya. "Are you sure the natives are friendly?"

She did not catch the allusion. "Of course," she said stiffly. "*Everybody* on Morrowvia is friendly. A queen is received courteously by her sister queens wherever she may go."

"I'm not a queen," said Grimes. "I'm not a king, even"

"The way you carry on sometimes, aboard your ship, I'm inclined to doubt the validity of that last statement," remarked Maggie Lazenby.

"Open up, sir?" asked Billard.

"Mphm. Yes. But nobody is to go outside—except myself—until I give the word. And you'd better have the twenty millimeters ready for use, Mr. Pitcher."

He belted on his pistols—one projectile, one laser—then set his cap firmly on his head. Maya said, "I am coming with you."

Grimes said, "I'm not in the habit of hiding behind a woman's skirts."

"What skirts?" asked Maggie Lazenby. Then, "Don't be silly, John. Maya's obviously one of *them*. When they see her with you they'll know that you're friendly."

It made sense.

Grimes jumped down from the open door to the packed earth of the plaza, clapping each hand to a pistol butt as soon as he was on the ground. Maya followed him. They stood there, listening to the rhythmic *tap-tappity-tap* that was, with every second, louder and louder.

And then a woman—a girl—appeared from around the end of the long, low building. She was naked save for polished high boots and a crimson sash, and was carrying a flag on a staff, a black flag with a stylized great cat, in gold, rampant over a compass rose. Behind her marched the drummers, also girls, and behind them a woman with a silver sash and with a silver crown set on her silvery hair. She was followed by six men, with spears, six female archers, and by six more men, each of whom carried what was obviously an automatic rifle of archaic design.

Abruptly the drums fell silent and the drummers divided their ranks to let the queen pass through. She advanced steadily, followed by her standard bearer. Her skin was black and gleaming, but there was no hint of negroid ancestry in her regular features. Apart from the absence of rudimentary nipples she was what Grimes was coming to consider a typical Morrowvian woman.

Grimes saluted.

The standard bearer dipped her flag.

The queen smiled sweetly and said, "I, Janine Morrow, welcome you to Ballarat—the landing place of *Lode Cougar* and of our forebears. I welcome you, spaceman, and I welcome you, sister."

"Thank you," said Grimes. (Should he call this definitely regal female "Your Majesty" or not?)

"Thank you, Janine," said Maya. "I am Maya, of Cambridge."

"Thank you, Janine," said Grimes. "I am John Grimes, of the Federation Survey Service ship *Seeker*."

Grimes called the others down from the pinnace and introductions were made. Then Janine led the way to her palace, which was the long, low building hard by the ancient spaceship. In a room like the other rooms in which they had been similarly entertained there was the ritual sharing of food and water, during which the Queen of Ballarat read the letter that Maya had brought. Grimes was about to get a glimpse of it during her perusal; the paper was coarse-textured and gray rather than white, and the words had been scrawled upon it with a blunt pencil.

Janine said, "Lilian is favored. Twice she has been visited by Captain Danzellan, and now Commander Grimes is calling on her."

"Now Commander Grimes is calling on *you*," Maya pointed out.

"And so he is." Janine smiled sweetly, her teeth very white and her lips very red in her dark brown face. "And so he is. But what brings you to Ballarat, Commander Grimes? Do you have gifts for me?"

"I shall have gifts for you—but I have nothing at the moment. You will appreciate that we cannot carry much in a small craft such as my pinnace."

"That is true," agreed Janine. "But every time that Captain Danzellan has wished to look for information in the museum or the library he has brought me something." She gestured toward one of the walls where a new-looking clock, with a brightly gleaming metal case, was hanging. "That is a *good* clock—far better than the old one with its dangling weights. This one does not have a spring even—just a power cell which Captain Danzellan tells me will be good for centuries."

"From the way that you greeted us," said Grimes, "I thought that you were pleased to see visitors from the home world of your ancestors."

"But I am, I am! Too, it pleases me to try to—what is the word?—to reconstruct the old rituals. I have studied The History, as have we all. Also, I have access to records which my sisters elsewhere have not. I received you as important visitors must be received on Earth . . ."

"Mphm."

"I am sorry that I could not fire a salute, but we have no big guns. In any case, the supply of ammunition for our rifles is limited."

"You did very nicely," said Grimes.

"Bring on the marching girls . . ." muttered Maggie.

Grimes, surreptitiously, had eased his watch off his wrist. The instrument was almost new; he had purchased it from the commissary just prior to departure from Lindisfarne. He said, "Perhaps you will accept this, Janine. It is a personal timekeeper."

"Just what I've always wanted," she said, pleased.

"I take it, then," said Grimes, "that you are the custodian of the books, the records, the . . ."

"Of everything," she told him proudly. "Perhaps, while Maya and I have a gossip, you would care to be shown around?"

"We should," said Grimes.

* * *

Their guide was the young woman who had carried the banner. Her name was Lisa Morrow. She vouchsafed the information that it was usually she who conducted visiting queens from other towns through the palace, but that it was the first time that she had been responsible for a party of outworlders. She did not seem to be greatly impressed by the honor, or even to regard it as such.

The palace was more than a palace. It was a library, and it was a museum. They were taken first of all into the Earth Room, a huge chamber devoted to Earth as it had been when *Lode Cougar* had lifted from Port Woomera on her last voyage. This had been the overcrowded planet dominated, in its northern and southern hemispheres respectively, by the short-lived Russian and Australian Empires.

Lode Cougar, concluded Grimes, had carried a lot of junk—but even in the days of the Third Expansion a ticket out to the stars was very often a one-way ticket; it was even more so in the days of the First and Second Expansions. Those first colonists had been so reluctant to break every tie with their home world.

Here, in the Earth Room, were maps and photographs, reproductions of famous works of art, even files of newspapers and magazines. These latter had been chemically treated to make the paper impervious to normal wear and tear, but now were practically unreadable—and Lisa Morrow took good care her charges did not, as they would have loved to have done, leaf through them. Grimes could make out the headlines on the front page of one of the

papers, The Australian. "*Lode Tiger* missing, feared lost." No doubt the same paper had carried similar headlines regarding *Lode Cougar*. This had been long before the days of trained telepaths or the time-and-space-twisting Carlotti Communications System, but the established colonies had maintained a reasonably fast mail service with Earth. Grimes had read somewhere that it had taken less time for a letter to get from Port Southern, on Austral, to Sydney, in Australia, than it did to get through the post offices at either end. This state of affairs had persisted until the introduction of Carlotti radio transmission of all correspondence.

There were books, too—*real* books, properly bound, although with very thin, lightweight covers and paper. There were shelves of *How To* volumes. House building, boat building, aircraft building . . . mining, smelting, casting . . . navigation . . . surveying . . . Useful, Grimes supposed, if you did not, as you were supposed to do, finish up at an established colony but, instead, made a forced landing on a hitherto undiscovered world.

There was fiction—but, in spite of their age, these books looked almost fresh from the printers. Grimes had suspected that the Morrowvians were oddly lacking in imagination. Anything factual—such as the famous History—they would read, or any book that would aid them to acquire necessary skills. But the products of the storyteller's art left them cold. This attitude was not uncommon, of course, but it seemed more pronounced here than elsewhere. What books had Danzellan given to Lilian on the occasion of his first visit? Grimes asked Lisa the question.

She told him, "One by a man called Blenkinshop on first aid. And one about the fisheries on a world called Atlantia. We are having copies made for the library."

"So you have a printing press?"

"Yes, Commander Grimes. It is used only when a book is almost worn out or when there is something new that has to be printed."

"Is it hand operated?"

"No. We have an engine, driven by steam. Shall I show it to you now, or would you rather see the *Lode Cougar* room?"

"The *Lode Cougar* room," Grimes told her.

This adjoined the Earth Room, but was not as large. It contained relics of the ship herself. There were cargo manifests, log books, crew and passenger lists. There was a large photograph of the *Cougar's* officers taken at Port Woomera, presumably shortly prior to lift-off. It was typical of this sort of portraiture, whatever the day and age. The captain, his senior officers on either side of him, was seated in the front row, his arms folded across his chest (as were the arms of the others) to show the braid on his sleeves. Standing behind the row of seated seniors were the juniors. Grimes stopped to read the legend below the photograph.

The captain's name was not, as he had expected that it would be, Morrow. (But in an emergency, such as a forced landing on an unexplored world, anybody at all is liable to come to the fore.) The name of Morrow was not among those of the officers. A passenger, then? Examination of the ship's passenger list would supply the answer.

Lisa was pointing to a shelf of volumes. "And these," she was saying, "were Morrow's own books . . ."

Grimes paused on his way to the display cases in which the ship's documents were housed. Books told one so much about their owner's makeup. His eye swept over the fiction titles. He realized, with pleased surprise, that he had read most of them, when he was a cadet at the Academy. Early Twentieth Century—and even late Nineteenth Century—science fiction aboard a starship! But it was no more absurd than to find the same science fiction required reading for future officers of a navy whose ships, even though they had yet to penetrate to The Hub, fared out to The Rim. *The Planet Buyer* . . . that had been good, as he remembered it. *The Island Of* . . .

His wrist transceiver was buzzing. He raised the instrument to his mouth. "Captain!" Saul's voice was urgent. "Captain, I would have called you before, but we've been having transmitter trouble. Drongo Kane left in his pinnace at first light this morning, heading north. He's got Sabrina with him and three of his own people, all armed."

"You heard that?" Grimes demanded of his officers.

They nodded.

"Thank you for your attention," Grimes said to Lisa, "but we must get back to our pinnace."

"Is Drongo Kane a friend of yours, that you are so eager to greet him?" she asked innocently, and looked bewildered when Grimes replied, "That'd be the sunny Friday!"

Grimes paused briefly in the room where Janine was still gossiping with Maya. As he entered he heard Maya ask, "And how do *you* deal with the problem of the uncontrollable adolescent?"

He said, "Excuse me, ladies. I've just received word that Drongo Kane is on his way here . . ."

"Drongo Kane?" asked Janine, arching her silver brows.

"The captain of a ship called the *Southerly Buster*," Maya told her. "A *most* generous man."

"Goodie goodie," exclaimed her sister queen. She looked rather pointedly at Danzellan's gleaming clock on the wall, then at Grimes's watch that was strapped around her slim, brown wrist.

"Perhaps he'll give you an egg timer . . ." suggested Maggie Lazenby.

"What is that?" asked Janine.

"It's not important," said Grimes impatiently. "Excuse us, please."

He led the way out of the palace, to where his pinnacle was grounded in the middle of the plaza, looking like a huge, stranded silver fish. He looked up at the clear sky. Yes—there, far to the southward, was a tiny speck, a dark dot against the blueness that expanded as he watched. Then he was aware that the two queens had followed him outside.

"Is that Drongo Kane?" asked Janine.

"I think it is," he replied.

"Then I must prepare a proper reception," she said and walked rapidly back to her palace. Maya stayed with Grimes.

She said, "Janine prides herself on doing things properly."

"If she were doing things properly," Grimes told her, "she would have a battery of ground to air missiles standing by."

"You must be joking!" she exclaimed, shocked.

"Have our own armament in readiness, sir?" asked the navigator.

"Mphm. I was joking, Mr. Pitcher. But it will do no harm to have the twenty millimeters cocked and ready."

Two women were building another fire in the brazier that had served Grimes for a beacon. One of them produced a large box of oversized matches from the pouch that she wore slung from her shoulder, lit the kindling. Almost immediately the column of gray smoke was climbing skyward.

Kane's pinnacle was audible now as well as visible, the irregular beat of its inertial drive competing with the more rhythmic efforts of Janine's drummers, warming up behind the palace. It was coming in fast, and it seemed that it would overshoot the plaza. But Kane—presumably it was he at the controls—brought the craft to a spectacular, shuddering halt when it was almost directly over *Seeker's* pinnacle, applying maximum reverse thrust. That would not, thought Grimes disapprovingly, do his engines any good—but he, himself, had often been guilty of similar showmanship.

Oddly enough no crowd had gathered—but no crowd had gathered to greet Grimes. There were only a few deliberately uninterested bystanders, and they were mainly children. On no other world had Grimes seen such a fanatical respect for privacy.

Drongo Kane was dropping down now—not fast, yet not with extreme caution. His vertical thrust made odd patterns in the dust as the pinnacle descended, not unlike those made in an accumulation of iron filings by a magnetic field. When there was little more than the thickness of a coat of paint between his landing gear and the ground he checked his descent, then cut his drive.

The door in the side of the pinnacle opened. Drongo Kane stood in the opening. He was rigged up in a uniform that was like the full dress of the Survey Service—with improvements. An elaborate gold cockade ornamented his cocked hat, and his sword belt was golden, as was the scabbard. A score of decorations blazed over the left breast of his frock coat. Grimes thought he recognized the Iron Cross of Waldegren, the Golden Wings of the Hallichek Hegemony. Anybody who was highly regarded by those two governments would be *persona non grata* in decent society.

Kane jumped lightly to the ground, seemingly unhampered by his finery. He extended a hand to help Sabrina from the pinnacle. Jewels glittered on her smooth, golden skin, and a coronet ablaze with emeralds was set on her head. She was inclined to teeter a little in her unaccustomed, high-heeled sandals.

"Cor stone me Aunt Fanny up a gum tree!" whispered Maggie.

"Captain Kane is *generous*," murmured Maya.

"Mphm," grunted Grimes.

Inside the pinnace two of Kane's officers—and they were dressed only in their drab working uniforms—were setting up some sort of machine, an affair of polished brass, just within the doorway. Grimes stared at it in amazement and horror.

"Captain Kane," he shouted, "I forbid you to terrorize these people!"

Kane grinned cheerfully. "Keep your hair on, Commander! Nobody's goin' to terrorize anybody. Don't you recognize a salutin' cannon when you see one? Sabrina, here, has told me that this Queen Janine is a stickler for etiquette" Then his eyes widened as, to the rattle of drums, the procession emerged from around the corner of the palace. He licked his lips as he stared at the high-stepping girl with the *Lode Cougar* flag—that sash and those boots—especially the boots—did something for her. He muttered to himself, "And you can say *that* again!"

With a last ruffle of drums Janine and her entourage came to a halt. Kane drew himself to attention and saluted grandly. "Fire one!" snapped somebody inside the pinnace. The brass cannon boomed, making a noise disproportionate to its size. "Fire two!" Again there was the gout of orange flame, the billowing of dirty white smoke. "Fire three!"

At first it looked as though the spearmen, archers and riflemen would either turn and run—or loose their weapons off against the spacemen—but Janine snapped a sharp order and, drawing herself up proudly, stood her ground.

"Fire four!" *Boom!*

"Fire five!"

Janine was enjoying the show. So was Kane. Sabrina, at his side, winced every time the gun was fired, but tried to look as though this sort of thing was an everyday occurrence. Maya whispered urgently to Grimes, "This noise . . . can't you make him stop it?"

"Fire nine!" *Boom!*

"Fire ten!"

Janine's bodyguard had recovered their composure now and were standing at stiff attention, and there was a certain envy evident in the expressions on the faces of the drummer girls—but the standard bearer spoiled the effect when the drifting fumes of the burning black powder sent her into a fit of sneezing.

"Fire sixteen!" *Boom!*

Surely not, thought Grimes dazedly. *Surely not. A twenty-one gun salute for somebody who, even though she is called a queen, is no more than the mayor of a small town*

"Fire twenty!" *Boom!*

"Fire twenty-one!" *Boom!*

"A lesson," remarked Maggie, "on how to win friends and influence people"

"He certainly influenced me!" said Grimes.

Kane, accompanied by Sabrina, marched to where Janine was standing. He saluted again. Janine nodded to him regally. The standard bearer, recovered from her sneezing fit, dipped her flag toward him. The spearmen and riflemen presented arms. Grimes watched all this a little enviously. He was sorry that Maya had not briefed him regarding Janine's love of ceremonial, as obviously Sabrina had briefed Kane. But it could be that Kane knew Sabrina far better than he, Grimes, knew Maya. There are more things to do in a shared bed than talking—but talking in bed is quite a common practice

"Shall I fire a burst from the twenty millimeters," asked Pitcher wistfully, "just to show that we can make a noise too?"

"No," Grimes said sternly.

"Sir," called Billard, "here comes another pinnace!"

Danzellan's arrival on the scene was anticlimactic. When he came in to a landing the queen, together with Kane, Sabrina and two of *Southerly Buster's* officers carrying a large chest of trade goods, had returned to her palace and was staying there.

19

Captain Danzellan was in a bad temper.

He demanded, "Commander Grimes, why didn't you tell me that Drongo Kane was on this planet? I learned it, only by chance, from Lilian after you had left Melbourne—and then my radio officer monitored the conversation you had with your first lieutenant . . ."

"To begin with," said Grimes tartly, "you didn't ask me. In any case, I gained the impression that you wanted nothing at all to do with me or my people." He was warming up nicely. "Furthermore, sir, I must draw your attention to the fact that the monitoring of Survey Service signals is illegal, and that you are liable to a heavy fine, and that your radio officer may have his certificate dealt with."

Danzellan was not awed. "A space lawyer!" he sneered.

"Yes, Captain. And a space policeman."

"Then why don't you arrest Kane?"

"What for?" asked Grimes. "He has broken no laws—Federation or local. I can neither arrest him nor order him off Morrowvia."

"Commander Grimes, I am paid to look after my owners' interests. I cannot do so properly while this man Kane is running around loose, corrupting the natives. To be frank, if you were not here I should feel justified in taking the law into my hands. Since you *are* here—I appeal to you, as a citizen of the Federation, for protection."

"Captain Danzellan, Captain Kane is cooking up some sort of deal with the natives. He, like you, is a shipmaster. *You* represent your owners, Kane is an owner. You allege that he is corrupting the natives and imply that he is queering your pitch. Meanwhile, *I* am wondering if whatever sort of deal *you* are cooking up will corrupt the natives . . ."

"Of course not!" snorted Danzellan. "The Dog Star Line will always have their best interests at heart!"

"And the best interests of the management and shareholders . . .?" put in Maggie.

Danzellan smiled in a fatherly way. "Naturally, Commander Lazenby. After all, we are businessmen."

"Mphm," Grimes grunted. He said, "Kane is a businessman too."

"But I was here first, Commander Grimes."

"*Lode Cougar* was here first, Captain Danzellan. Get this straight, sir—unless or until either you or Captain Kane steps out of line I am merely here as an observer."

"Then may I suggest, sir, that you start doing some observing? That is what I intend to do. I am going to call on Janine, now, to see if I can find out what line of goods Kane is peddling."

"I'll come with you," Grimes told him. "Maggie, you'd better come too. And you, Maya, if you wouldn't mind. Mr. Pitcher and Mr. Billard—stay by the pinnacle."

The two men and the two women walked across the plaza to the main entrance of the palace. Four natives were standing in the doorway, spearmen of Janine's ceremonial bodyguard. They held their weapons not threateningly but so as to bar ingress.

"Let me pass!" huffed Danzellan.

"The queen insists on privacy," said one of the men.

"But I know Janine. We are good friends."

"The queen said, sir, that she and Captain Kane and her other guests were not to be disturbed."

Grimes nodded to Maya. Possibly she would be admitted while the offworlders were not. The Morrowvian woman walked forward until her breasts were pressing against the haft of one of the spears. She said indignantly, "You know who I am. Let me in!"

The spearman grinned. His teeth were sharp and very white. He said, "I am sorry, lady, but I cannot. Janine mentioned you especially."

"And what did she say?" demanded Maya.

"Do you really want to know, lady?" The man was enjoying this.

"Yes!"

"She said, lady, 'Don't let Commander Grimes or any other foreigners in here while I am in conference. And the same applies to that cat from Cambridge.'"

"Cat from Cambridge . . ." muttered Maya indignantly. "You can tell Janine that should she ever visit *my* town she will not be received hospitably."

"Well, Commander Grimes," asked Danzellan, "what are you doing about this?"

"What can I do?" countered Grimes irritably.

"We can talk things over," suggested Maggie Lazenby.

"Talk, talk!" sneered Danzellan, "while that damned pirate is raping a planet!"

"It's all that we can do at the moment," Grimes told him. "I suggest that we return to our pinnace. And I suggest that you, sir, do some talking."

"All right," said the shipmaster at last.

* * *

"The Dog Star Line's interest in this world will bring nothing but good to the people," stated Danzellan.

"Mphm," grunted Grimes skeptically.

"But it is so, Commander. If we are allowed to run things our way the planet will remain virtually unspoiled. There will be no pollution of the air, the soil or the seas. Unless the Morrowvians so desire it—and I do not think they will—there will be no development of heavy industries. The small luxuries that we shall bring in will demand power, of course—but solar power will be ample for their requirements."

"It all sounds very nice," admitted Grimes, "but what do your employers get out of it?"

"Oh, they'll make a profit—but not from the Morrowvians."

"From whom, then?"

"From passengers. Tourists. As you know, we have been, for many years, primarily freight carriers—but there is no reason why we should not break into the passenger trade, the tourist trade specifically. Trans-Galactic Clippers have been doing very nicely at it for some years now. But TG has the game sewn up insofar as the worlds on their itinerary are concerned.

"Now we, the Dog Star Line, have a new planet of our very own. We can build our own hotels and vacation camps, we can run cruises over the tropical seas in big schooners that we shall build and man—already recruiting for their crews is being opened on Atlantia." He smiled sympathetically at Maya. "I'm afraid that's necessary, my dear. Your people aren't very sea-minded."

"And you think that this scheme will work?" asked Grimes, interested.

"Why shouldn't it work, Commander? The advertising need only be truthful. Think of the posters, the brochures with photographs of all the beautiful, naked women—and, come to that, of the equally beautiful naked men. Visit Morrowvia—and shed your clothing, your cares, your inhibitions! Why, it'll have Arcadia licked to a frazzle!"

Maggie looked very coldly at Captain Danzellan. She said, "Arcadia is not a holiday resort for the idle rich, nor does it wish to be one. Our naturism is a way of life, not an advertising gimmick."

"Are you an Arcadian, Commander Lazenby? But what you said about naturism being a way of life on Arcadia applies equally well to Morrowvia. And we, the Dog Star Line, will do nothing to destroy that way of life. I have studied history, and I know how very often a superior race, a supposedly superior race, has ruined a simple people by forcing upon them unnecessary and unsuitable clothing. We shall not make that mistake."

"No, you won't," said Maggie. "It might affect your profits."

Grimes said, "I still think, Captain Danzellan, that you will ruin this world, whether or not you force the women into Mother Hubbards and the men into shirts and trousers."

Danzellan shrugged. "There's ruin *and* ruin, Commander Grimes. Which is the lesser of two evils—a flourishing tourist trade, or the introduction of heavy industry? Come to that—will the tourist trade be an evil?"

"And the tourists will *pay*?" asked Maya. "They will bring us things like the sun-powered cold boxes, and the clocks and the watches, and jewels like the ones that Captain Kane gave to Sabrina? Not that *I* want jewels," she added virtuously, "but I should like a cold box, and a clock that does not have to have the weights wound up every night."

"Maya is talking sense," said Danzellan.

"Yes, I am talking sense. You people have so many things to make life comfortable that we cannot make for ourselves, that we should not care to go to the trouble of making for ourselves. If offworlders are willing to pay for the pleasure of breathing our air, basking in our sunshine—then let them pay!"

"And there," said Danzellan smugly, "you have the attitude of a typical Morrowvian."

"But she's so simple," expostulated Grimes. "Her people are so simple."

Before Maya could answer Maggie stepped in. She said, "Perhaps not so simple, John. Apart from anything else, they have The History and Morrow's dictums to guide them. Too, there's an odd streak in their makeup . . . I wish I knew . . ."

"I wish I knew what Kane was up to," said Danzellan.

"Don't we all," agreed Grimes.

20

They sat in the main cabin of *Seeker's* pinnace—talking, smoking (even Maya tried one of Maggie's cigarillos and said that she liked it) and waiting for something to happen. Danzellan was in touch with his own ship by his wrist transceiver and also, of course, with Mr. Delamere, who had piloted *Schnauzer's* boat to Ballarat and was remaining inside the craft. Grimes used the pinnace's radio to tell Mr. Saul what had happened so far and, meanwhile, all transceivers not otherwise in use were tuned to a variety of wavebands, in the hope that Drongo Kane's messages (if any) to *Southerly Buster* could be monitored.

At last Kane's voice sounded from Maggie's transceiver. He said simply, "Blackbird." The reply was almost immediate. "Pinnacle to Captain. Blackbird." Then, "Pinnacle to *Southerly Buster*. Blackbird." Finally, faintly, "*Southerly Buster* to pinnacle. Acknowledge Blackbird."

"Blackbird?" echoed Grimes.

"I don't like it," said Maggie. "I don't like it. That word rings some sort of a bell . . ."

"Captain to *Seeker*," said Grimes into the microphone of the main transceiver. "Captain to *Seeker*. Do you read me?"

"Loud and clear, Captain."

"That you, Mr. Saul? Keep your eyes open for any activities around *Southerly Buster*. Kane has just sent a message to his ship. It must be a code. Just one word. Blackbird."

"Blackbird . . ." repeated Saul. Then, "Have I your permission to use force?"

"What are you talking about, Saul?"

"Operation Blackbird, Captain. Didn't you know that blackbirding was a euphemism for slave trading?"

"He's right . . ." whispered Maggie. "And there are worlds where women such as these would fetch a good price—some of the Waldegren mining colonies, for example . . ."

Grimes was thinking rapidly. If he departed at once it would be all of seven hours before he was back aboard *Seeker*. In seven hours a lot could happen. Saul, as second in command, was in full charge of the ship until her captain's return. Saul, normally, was a most reliable officer—but could Saul, with all his racial prejudices and bitternesses, be trusted to deal with the situation that was developing? Kane would scream to high heaven if a single shot were fired at his precious *Southerly Buster*, and he would not be the first pirate to have friends in high places—although heaven would not be one of them. Even so, if Kane were about to do something illegal he would have to be stopped.

The situation, Grimes realized, was made to order for Drongo Kane. *Seeker's* captain was hours away from his ship—and so was *Southerly Buster's* captain, but it didn't matter. The obnoxious Mr. Dreebly could embark the passengers, quote and unquote, and then lift ship into orbit, where Kane's pinnace could rendezvous with her. And once the Morrowvians were aboard the *Buster* she would be virtually untouchable insofar as hostile action by *Seeker* was concerned.

"Mr. Saul," ordered Grimes, "do all you can to prevent the natives from boarding *Southerly Buster*. Do not use arms unless there is absolutely no alternative. I am returning at once." He turned to Danzellan. "You heard all of that, Captain?"

"Of course, Commander."

"Good. Then I'll ask you to keep an eye on Drongo Kane for me."

"I'll do that, with pleasure." Maggie said, "I'll stay with Captain Danzellan, John. I want to have another look at *Lode Cougar's* records—if Janine will condescend to let me back into her palace after Kane has left. I have an idea that what I find may have some bearing on this situation. If it's what I'm afraid it might be—then be careful. Be bloody careful."

"I'll try," said Grimes.

"You always do, but . . ." She followed Danzellan as the shipmaster returned to his own pinnace.

Pitcher asked, "Take her up, sir?"

"Yes, Mr. Pitcher. And flog your horses. Put her on a direct Great Circle; we've no time for sightseeing."

While the navigator busied himself with charts and instruments Billard did his best to make the pinnace behave like a guided missile.

* * *

They wasted no time, screaming southward high over the countryside, over the sea. Maya was awed, a little frightened, even, and sat there in silence. Pitcher and Billard exchanged occasional monosyllables, while Grimes

stuck to the transceiver. Timmins, the senior radio officer, was at the other end. He reported, "*Southerly Buster* seems to be ready for immediate lift-off, sir. All ports, have for the main airlock, have been sealed." Then, a little later, "Two officers have left the ship and are walking toward the town of Oxford. Mr. Saul and Captain Philby have followed them, with six Marines." Later still, "Mr. Saul reports that the way was barred to him and his party by a dozen spearmen and a dozen archers. He is returning to the ship. I'll put him on to you as soon as he's here."

Grimes studied Saul's face in the tiny screen. The man was struggling to repress his smoldering fury. "Captain," he said, "these damned people don't *want* to be helped. They were there on the river bank, with the spears and bows and arrows, and some damned woman, the deputy queen she said she was, ordered me back. She said, "We don't want you and the likes of you here. Captain Kane warned Sabrina about you."

"So."

"So what are your instructions, Captain?"

"Get a boat out, to keep a watch over the town and to report what the people are doing. Have *Seeker* in a state of instant readiness for lift-off . . ."

"I've already given the orders, sir. But the armament . . ."

"I've already told you not to go firing guns off indiscriminately. But . . . mpm. Have the belts for the sixty millimeters loaded with sleep gas shells. And if you use 'em—and you'll have to justify their use to me—make bloody sure that you don't *hit* anybody. Understood?"

"Understood, Captain."

"Good. Then keep me informed."

Grimes turned to Maya. "Can *you* tell me," he asked, what is going on?"

"I don't know. We have always kept ourselves to ourselves, Sabrina and I. We have never been close friends. We have never been friends. But Captain Kane gave many gifts to Sabrina's people. There were books, with beautiful pictures of other worlds, with accounts of other worlds. There were . . . catalogues, giving details of all the goods that may be purchased on other worlds . . ."

"First Lieutenant to Captain." It was Saul again. "Number Three boat is in position over Oxford. We are trying to get a picture to you."

And there, on the screen, was the picture of the town as seen from the air. The boat was hanging almost directly over the central plaza and transmitting a magnified image. The two men from *Southerly Buster*, being clothed, were easily identifiable.

They were busily marshaling about two hundred Morrowvians into an orderly column. Even from above it was obvious that they were all women. To one side of the plaza a half dozen light handcarts had been loaded with possessions—cushions, pieces of pottery, longbows and quivers of arrows. One of Kane's men went to inspect the cart that was loaded with weapons, called a woman to him and was obviously telling her that these would have to be left. Then whoever was in charge of the boat got a long-range microphone working.

"I'm sorry, Peggy. These will have to be left behind."

"But the girls must have them, Bill. What will they do for sport on Caribbea if they have no bows?"

Caribbea? wondered Grimes. Probably it was the most glamorous world depicted in the brochures that Kane had distributed—but Essen would be a more likely destination for this shipment of female slaves.

"You can't use bows and arrows underwater," explained the man Bill patiently. "In the seas of Caribbea they use spear guns."

"But we don't *like* water. None of us likes water. Nobody will *make* us go into the water, will they?"

There's not much water on Essen, thought Grimes. *Only enough for washing and drinking—not that those Waldegren miners wash much, and they don't believe in diluting their schnapps . . .*

"Nobody will *make* you do anything," lied Bill.

His companion called to him, "Dump that junk, and we'll get the show on the road!"

"Our ETA, Mr. Pitcher?" asked Grimes.

"We're doing the best we can, sir, but we can't make it before nineteen-hundred Local—another four and a half hours."

"Mr. Saul, do you read me?"

"Sir?"

"Lay a barrage of sleep gas on the bank of the river as soon as that column from Oxford gets under way."

"Very good, sir."

"And be *careful*."

"Of course, sir." Saul's voice was hurt.

"Let me know as soon as you open fire, and give me a picture if you can."

"Very good sir." Grimes could almost read the first lieutenant's thoughts: *Get off my back, Whitey!*

It is not only the black races who hate slavery, thought Grimes, and it is not only the black races who've been enslaved. But what the hell is Kane playing at? Pressing ahead with his blackbirding under the very nose of a Survey Service ship . . . He's always prided himself on being able to keep just on the right side of the law.

He said, "Get me Mr. Hayakawa, please."

"Yes, Captain?" asked the psionicist at last. His picture did not appear on the screen; that was being reserved for the transmissions from the lookout boat. "Yes, Captain?"

"Mr. Hayakawa, I know that your opposite number aboard the *Buster* is maintaining a block, but have you been able to pick up *anything*?"

"Yes, Captain. A few minutes ago there were stray thoughts from the mate of *Southerly Buster*. They ran like this, 'And the beauty of it is that the stupid Space Scouts can't touch us!' "

"That remains to be seen, Mr. Hayakawa," said Grimes. "That remains to be seen."

21

The trouble with radio as a means of communication is that anybody can listen. Grimes, in his later conversations with his ship, had employed a scrambler. He did not know whether or not *Southerly Buster* ran to a descrambling device. Apparently she did not. Dreebly appeared to be proceeding with his embarkation procedure as planned.

In an orderly march the two hundred young women streamed out of Oxford, a score of spearmen at the head of the column, another twenty male warriors bringing up the rear, behind the carts laden with small possessions. Kane's two men were in the lead. Grimes, remembering the general layout of the country, knew that once the van of the procession passed a low, tree-crowned hill it would be in the field of fire of *Seeker's* guns. With an effort he restrained himself from taking over the fire control from Saul. He knew that a direct hit from a nonlethal gas shell can kill just as surely—and messily—as one from a high explosive projectile. But Saul was on the spot, and he was not. All he could do was to watch the marchers proceeding slowly along the bank of the winding river.

He heard Saul say quietly, "Bearing one hundred and seventy-five true. Range three thousand. Shoot."

"Bearing one hundred and seventy-five. Range three thousand. *Fire!*"

Even over the radio the hammering of the heavy automatics was deafening. Watching the screen Grimes saw a neat seam of explosions stitched across the line of advance of the Morrowvian women, saw the billowing clouds of greenish vapor pouring from each bursting shell.

"Traverse, traverse! Now—ladder!"

Nice gunnery, thought Grimes. Saul was boxing his targets in with the gas shells.

A new voice came from the transceiver. It was Dreebly's. "*Southerly Buster* to *Seeker*. What the hell are you playing at?"

"*Seeker* to *Southerly Buster*. What the hell are *you* playing at?"

Grimes decided that he had better intervene; Mr. Saul was not in a diplomatic mood. He said quietly, "Commander Grimes to *Southerly Buster*. What is the nature of your complaint, please?"

Dreebly spluttered, then, "What is the nature of my complaint, you ask? Some butterfly-brained ape aboard your ship is firing off guns. There're shells whistling past our control room."

"Routine weekly practice shoot, Mr. Dreebly," said Grimes. "Don't worry; we never hit anything unless we want to."

"But you're firing toward Oxford!"

"Are we? But our range setting is well short of the town."

"I know what you're firing at, Commander Grimes. You've a boat up, spotting for you!"

"What am I firing at, Mr. Dreebly?"

"Pah! You make me sick!" Dreebly broke off the conversation. Grimes returned his attention to the screen. The gas was slowly thinning, and through its translucent veil he could see the untidily sprawling figures of the Morrowvians—and of Kane's two officers.

Maya demanded, "You haven't killed them? You haven't killed them?"

"Of course not!" Grimes told her. "They'll wake in a few hours' time, without even a headache. I've just put them to sleep, that's all . . ."

Mean while Timmins had succeeded in tuning in to the conversation between Dreebly and Kane. Kane was saying, "Get them aboard, and then get off-planet! Yes, I *know* they can't walk—but you've ground cars, haven't you? And there are respirators in the stores. Pull your finger out, Dreebly, and get cracking! What do you think I pay you for?"

Saul was back on the air. "Sir, you heard all that. What do I do now?"

I could answer that question a lot more easily, thought Grimes, *if I knew that Kane was breaking Federation law. But he seems to have the idea that he is not . . .*

"What do I do now?" repeated Saul.

"Mphm. Carry on with your practice shoot, Mr. Saul. Use H.E. Chew up the ground between *Southerly Buster* and the . . . er . . . intending emigrants."

"Emigrants! *The slaves*, you mean, Captain."

"They aren't slaves yet. Just make a mess of the terrain so that it's impassable to Kane's ground cars."

"But he's got boats, sir. He can use them."

"He has two boats—a pinnace, which is still at Ballarat, and one lifeboat. The lifeboat is just big enough for his

crew. It will take it a long time to ferry two hundred people—especially as they will have to be lifted aboard it, and lifted off."

"I see, sir . . . But what if *Southerly Buster* fires at us?"

"They won't dare, Mr. Saul. At least, I hope they won't. If they do—if they do—it is your duty to take every possible measure for the protection of *Seeker*."

No, he thought, Kane won't open fire, or order his mate to do so. Apart from anything else, he's the injured, innocent citizen and I'm the big, bad, gun-toting villain. I'm not happy about things at all, at all. But I must stop him.

Meanwhile, he wished that he were back aboard his ship. He *liked* guns. He knew that this was childish of him, and that it was high time that mankind outgrew its love for noisy pyrotechnics. He knew that a gun pleads to be pointed at something—and then begs to have its trigger pulled. He hoped that Saul would remain content merely to wreck havoc on the landscape.

22

Saul wreaked havoc on the landscape. Grimes, watching on his screen, thought, relishing the play on words, *He's wrecking the landscape*. What had been grassland was now a crater-pitted desolation over which drifted acrid fumes, and the copses had been reduced to jagged, blackened stumps.

Kane came on the air. His voice, despite the fact that it had been relayed through at least two stations, was loud and clear. He said, "Commander Grimes, this is Captain Kane. My mate tells me that your first lieutenant's runnin' amok."

"Running amok, Captain Kane? What do you mean?"

"He's shootin' off his guns—*your* guns—like a madman. Wastin' the taxpayer's money. He's interferin' with the embarkation of my passengers."

"Passengers, Captain Kane?"

"Yeah. Passengers. I own me own ship, an' if I decide to go into the passenger trade, that's my business."

"I'm sure it is, Captain. I'm sorry that my arrangements clashed with yours, but we were due for a practice shoot"

"Oh, you were, were you? An' did you promulgate a warnin'?"

"Unfortunately the facilities for so doing don't exist on this planet."

"Listen, Grimes, keep your nose out of my business or you'll get it bloodied."

"I'm inclined to think, Kane, that your business is *my* business. I represent the Federation"

"An' the Federation is supposed to encourage honest trade, not interfere with it."

"*Honest* trade?"

"You heard me. Honest *and* legal."

"All right, Kane. I have your word for it—for what it's worth. Where are you taking those women?"

"It's no concern of yours, Grimes. But it's only natural that after generations of isolation they'll want to see new worlds."

"Mphm. And how are they paying their fares? You never impressed me as being a philanthropic institution."

Kane laughed. "Have you never heard of *Travel Now, Pay Later*? TG Clippers do a lot of business that way, an' so does Cluster Lines."

"But these people don't have money."

"There're more important things in life than money—not that I can think of any right now."

Grimes realized that he was being talked into a corner. He said firmly, "I have to know where you intend taking your . . . er . . . passengers."

"I've already told you that it's none of your business."

"Would it be . . . Essen?"

"I'm not sayin' that is is—but what if it is Essen?"

"All right, Captain Kane. *If* you don't mind, I'll just assume that it is Essen. There'd be a good market there for women, wouldn't there? And Federation law definitely prohibits any kind of traffic in human beings."

"Yeah. It does. I know the law as well as you do, Commander. Probably better. An' I'm tellin' you flat that I'm breakin' no laws. So I'll be greatly obliged if you'll tell your Jimmy The One to get out of *my* mate's hair."

"I'm sorry, Captain Kane, but I just can't take your word for it."

"No, you wouldn't, would you? We couldn't have a spick-an'-span Survey Service commander takin' the word of Drongo Kane, a poor, honest workin' stiff, master of a scruffy little star tramp, could we? Oh, no. But I'll tell you this. One of your own officers, that Commander Maggie Lazenby, is in Janine's palace now, an' that stuffed shirt Danzellan is with her. Janine's lettin' 'em look at the secret records, the ones that she showed me. I'm not kiddin' you, Grimes. She'll tell you that you can't touch me."

"That remains to be seen, Captain Kane."

"Why don't you call her now?"

"Why not?" agreed Grimes tiredly. He got on to Timmins, ordered him to arrange a hookup. After a few minutes Maggie's voice came through the speaker of the pinnacle's transceiver.

"Commander Lazenby here, *Seeker*."

"Stand by, please, Commander Lazenby. I'm putting you through to the captain."

"Captain here," said Grimes.

"Yes, John?"

"I've been talking with Captain Kane . . ."

"Yes. I know. He's just come into the Records Room."

"He assures me that whatever he's doing is quite legal, and that you'll bear him out."

"Yes, but . . . I've just unearthed some very old records . . . And from what Captain Danzellan tells me . . ."

"She says yes," put in Kane. "An' until the law is changed, if it ever is . . ."

"I said yes, *but* . . ." insisted Maggie.

"And if Tabitha is not lying . . ." contributed Danzellan.

"She said *yes!*" snapped Kane, his customary drawl forgotten.

"Maggie!" said Grimes forcibly. "Report, at once, in detail what you have discovered."

But there was no report. Kane used his wrist transceiver to jam the signals from those worn by Maggie and Danzellan, and before either or both of them could take any action the far more powerful transceiver of Kane's pinnace blocked all further transmissions from Ballarat.

23

Yes . . . *but*.

Yes . . . *but*.

But *what*?

Meanwhile, Mr. Saul had made the terrain between the landing site and Oxford quite impassable to any ground vehicle, and would have to be restrained before he blew away all *Seeker's* 60 mm ammunition. Grimes told the first lieutenant to cease fire, at once.

But what loophole in Federation law had Kane discovered? What possible means of stopping that loophole had Maggie discovered? Where did Francis Delamere's local girlfriend, Tabitha, come into it?

Grimes decided that *Southerly Buster's* lift-off from Morrowvia must be, at the very least, delayed. Could he stop the *Buster's* boat from ferrying, a dozen or so at a time, the unconscious women to the ship? Yes, he could—but only at grave risk to the boat's passengers. Embarkation would have to be allowed to continue; by the time that it was complete he, Grimes, would be back aboard *Seeker* and would be able to take full charge.

Seeker's cannon were silent now, and *Southerly Buster's* one remaining boat had nosed cautiously out of its bay and was flying to where the victims of the gas shell barrage were sprawled in the long grass. *Seeker's* boat transmitted pictures of all that was going on. The small craft from the *Buster* dropped to a landing among the sleeping bodies and two men, wearing respirators, scrambled out of it. Working fast, they dragged fifteen of the women into the boat, careless of any abrasions or contusions they might inflict. They were equally careless with their two anesthetized mates—but that was no excuse. Kane's men were clothed and the risk of painful damage to their skins was so much less.

"Do I have to watch this, Captain?" the first lieutenant was raging.

"I'm afraid you have to, Mr. Saul," Grimes told him. "Of course, if you can think of any way of stopping it without hurting any innocent people . . ."

Saul did not reply.

The first load was carried to *Southerly Buster*, the boat landing at the foot of the boarding ramp. Its passengers were dragged out and dumped on the ground, and almost immediately the boat began its return journey. Meanwhile a cargo hatch had been opened high on the side of the ship and the arm of a crane swung out. A net was lowered and the women, together with the two unconscious men, were piled into it, swiftly hoisted up an inboard. It was obvious that Kane was blessed with an efficient second-in-command.

Seeker's boat followed the one from *Southerly Buster* back to her loading site. There was a repetition of the callously efficient handling of the unknowing passengers—and then another, and then another.

But Grimes's pinnace had crossed the coastline now, was rushing inland. Grimes hoped to be back aboard *Seeker* before *Southerly Buster's* embarkation was completed, although he could not hope to make it before sunset. Dusk was sweeping over the countryside as the two ships came into view, Kane's vessel towering brightly in the harsh glare of working lights. Saul had the hatch of the pinnace's bay open and waiting, and Billard expertly jockeyed the craft into the opening. Grimes was out through the door and running up to the control room before the pinnace had settled to her chocks. He found Saul staring sullenly out of a viewport.

"That's the last boatload," said the first lieutenant morosely. "Recall our boat, sir?"

"Do just that, Mr. Saul. I want the ship buttoned up for lift-off."

"Yes . . ." Saul gestured toward the *Buster*. "She's buttoning up."

The boom of the crane was withdrawn, the cargo hatch was shut. *Southerly Buster's* boat lifted from the ground where she had discharged her last load, nosed up the mother ship's side to her bay. The ramp folded up and inward. The airlock door slid shut. Faintly there came the clangor of starting machinery, the unmistakable broken rhythm of the inertial drive.

Grimes ordered, "Use your sixty millimeters again, Mr. Saul. Tracer, time fused. I want every shell bursting directly over her—not too close, but close enough so they can hear the shrapnel rattling around their control room."

"Aye, sir!"

The automatics rattled deafeningly, the tracer streaked out from the muzzles in a flat trajectory, the bursting shells were spectacular orange flowers briefly blossoming against the dark sky.

Not at all surprisingly Dreebly's voice came screaming from the transceiver. "Stop firing! Stop firing, you idiots, before you hurt somebody!"

"Then shut down your engines!" commanded Grimes. "I am grounding you."

"By what authority? You have no authority here. This is not a Federated world."

"Shut down your engines!"

"I refuse."

Dreebly did more than merely refuse. Winking points of blue flame appeared from a turret on *Southerly Buster's* side. The streams of tracer from the two ships intersected, forming a lethal arch. Freakishly there were explosions at its apex as time-and impact-fused projectiles came into violent contact with each other—but the majority of *Seeker's* shells still burst over *Southerly Buster*, and those from the *Buster's* guns burst directly over *Seeker*.

"The bastard's hosepiping!" exclaimed Saul.

Yes, Dreebly was hosepiping, slowly and deliberately lowering the trajectory of his stream of fire. Would he have the nerve to fire at rather than over a Federation ship? Grimes knew that *he* did not have the nerve to fire directly at *Southerly Buster*. Should he do so there would inevitably be casualties—and those casualties might well be among the *Buster's* innocent passengers.

He said to Saul, "Cease fire."

"But, sir, I could put that turret out of action . . ."

"I said, cease fire."

Seeker's hammering guns fell silent. There was a last burst from the *Buster's* automatics, a last noisy rattle of shrapnel around *Seeker's* control room. From the transceiver came Dreebly's taunting voice, "Chicken!"

"She's lifting," said Pitcher.

"She's lifting," echoed Saul disgustedly.

"Secure all," ordered Grimes, hurrying to the pilot's chair. "Secure all! There will be no further warning!"

He heard the coded shrilling of the alarms as he belted himself in. He checked the telltale lights on the control panel before him. By the time that the inertial drive was ready to lift *Seeker* clear of the ground *Southerly Buster* would be beyond pursuit range.

Was everything secure? It would be just too bad if it wasn't. The trained spacemen he could trust to obey orders promptly, the scientists were a different kettle of fish. But he couldn't afford to worry about them now, could not afford to indulge in the archaic, time-consuming, regulation ritual of the countdown.

He pushed the button for full emergency rocket power—and almost immediately tons of reaction mass exploded from the *Venturis* in incandescent steam. The giant hand of acceleration slammed him deep down into the padding of his seat. *Seeker* was lifting. *Seeker* was up and away, shooting skyward like a shell fired from some gigantic cannon. She overtook the slow-climbing *Southerly Buster*, roared past her as though she were standing still, left her well astern.

On the console the telltale light of the inertial drive was now glowing green. Grimes cut his rockets and the ship dropped sickening until the I.D. took hold, then brought up with a jar. She shuddered in every member as Grimes applied lateral thrust, as she lurched sideways across the sky. Pitcher, who had realized what the captain was trying to do, was doing, had stationed himself by the radar. "A little more, sir," he called. "Easy, now, easy . . ." Then, "hold her at that!"

"Hold her!" repeated Grimes.

The ship shuddered and groaned again, but he was holding her in position relative to the ground below, to the still-climbing *Southerly Buster*. Then—slowly, but not so slowly as to conceal his intentions—he reduced vertical thrust. Dreebly tried, but in vain, to wriggle past *Seeker*. Grimes anticipated every move. (Later he learned that Hayakawa had been feeding him information, that Myra Bracegirdle, loyal rather to her sex than to her ship, had worked with and not against her fellow telepath.) It seemed that he could not go wrong—and every time that Dreebly attempted a lateral shift *Southerly Buster* fell victim to the parallelogram of forces, inevitably lost altitude.

At last it was obvious to Mr. Dreebly that he had only two choices. Either he could return to the surface, or he could commit suicide by crushing his control room and everybody in it against *Seeker's* far less vulnerable stern. He was not in a suicidal mood.

Grimes could not resist the temptation. He called for a microphone and for a hookup to the *Buster's* transceiver. He said just one word, and that with insufferable smugness.

"Chicken!"

Slowly the two ships dropped through the night—*Southerly Buster* cowed and inferior. Apart from that one taunt there had been no exchange of signals. Slowly they dropped, the defeated Dreebly and the overconfident Grimes.

It was this overconfidence that led, at the finish, to disaster. Just before Dreebly's landing Grimes miscalculated, and his stern made brief contact with the *Buster's* stem, doing her no great damage but throwing her

off balance. With all his faults, Dreebly was a superb shiphandler. He fought to correct the topple, and had he not been inhibited by the ominous bulk of the other vessel hanging immediately above his control room he might well have done so. *Southerly Buster's* fall was not completely catastrophic, but it was a fall, nonetheless. Visibly shuddering, she tilted, further and further, until her long axis was parallel to the ground.

It was then that Dreebly lost control, and there was a tinny crash as she dropped the last half meter.

24

It was, Grimes admitted glumly, quite a mess. Just how big a mess it was depended upon the legality or otherwise of his actions, the illegality or otherwise of Kane's operations. Legalities and illegalities notwithstanding, he was obliged to give assistance to the damaged—the wrecked—ship.

She was not a total write-off, although on a world with no repair yards it would be months before she could be made spaceworthy; she would probably have to be towed off-planet to somewhere where there were facilities. (And who would have to pay the bill? Kane would certainly take legal action against the Federation.)

Fortunately everybody aboard *Southerly Buster* had escaped serious injury, although the unfortunate women from Oxford, who had just been recovering consciousness at the time of the crash, were badly bruised and shaken. Them Grimes sent back to their town in *Seeker's* boats.

He said to Saul, "I've done enough damage for one day. I'm turning in—for what's left of the night."

"The report to Base, sir . . ."

Grimes told him coarsely what he could do to the report, then, "It will have to wait, Number One. I don't want to stick my neck out in writing until I have a few more facts."

"But you put down an attempt at slave trading, sir."

"Mphm. I hope so. I sincerely hope so. But I'm afraid that the bastard Drongo has some dirty big ace up his sleeve. Oh, well. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. I'm getting some shut-eye. Good night, Number One."

"Good night, sir."

Grimes went up to his quarters. He paused briefly in his day cabin, poured himself a stiff drink, downed it in one swallow. He felt a little better. He went through into his bedroom, and stiffened with astonishment in the doorway, Maya was there, curled up on the bed, her back to him. She was snoring gently—and then immediately was wide awake, rolling over to face him.

"Maya . . ." he said reprovingly.

"I had to sleep somewhere, John," she told him, even more reprovingly. "And you seemed to have quite forgotten all about me."

"Of course I hadn't," he lied.

"Of course you had," she stated, without rancor. "But you had much more important things on your mind." She was off the bed now and was sagging enticingly against him. She said, in a very small voice, "And I was frightened . . ."

The scent of her was disturbing. It was not unpleasant but it was strange—yet somehow familiar. It was most definitely female. He said, "But you can't sleep here . . ."

"But I have been sleeping here, John . . ." (So, she had begun to use his first name, too.) She pleaded, "Let me stay . . ."

"But . . ."

Her hands, with their strangely short fingers, were playing with the seal-seam of his shirt, opening the garment. They were soft and caressing on the skin of his back, but her nails were very sharp. The sensation was stimulating rather than painful. He could feel her erect nipples against his chest. She pleaded again, "Let me stay . . ." Against his conscious will his arms went about her. He lowered his head and his lips down to hers. Oddly, at first she did not seem to understand the significance of this, and then she responded avidly. All of her body was against him, and all of his body was vividly aware of it. He walked her slowly backward toward the bed, her legs moving in time with his. Through the thin material of his snorts he could feel the heat of her thighs. She collapsed slowly, almost bonelessly, onto the nest that she had made for herself with pillows and cushions. He let her pull him down beside her, made no attempt to stop her as she removed the last of his clothing. (For a woman who had never worn a garment in her life she was learning fast.)

Their mating was short, savage—and to Grimes strangely unsatisfying. What should have been there for him was not there; the tenderness that he had come to expect on such occasions was altogether lacking. There was not even the illusion of love; this had been no more than a brief, animal coupling.

But she, he thought rather bitterly, *is not complaining*.

She was not complaining.

She, immediately after the orgasmic conclusion of the act, was drifting into sleep, snuggled up against him.

She was purring.

Dog tired, his nerves on edge after a sleepless night, Grimes stood in his control room and watched Drongo Kane come roaring in from the northward. He had been expecting Kane; Mr. Timmins had monitored the radio signals exchanged by Mr. Dreebly and his irate captain. He was expecting Maggie, too, but not for at least another hour. She had told him that Captain Danzellan was bringing her back to *Seeker*. She had refused to tell him what it was that she has discovered in the ancient records kept in Janine's palace, saying, "It will keep."

"Damn it all!" he had exploded, "I shall have Kane to deal with. And if what I suspect is true, legally I won't have a leg to stand on. Not unless you can pull a rabbit out of the hat."

"Not a rabbit," she told him. "Most definitely not a *rabbit*."

And that was all that he could get from her.

He had made use of the ship's memory bank encyclopedia facilities. In a Survey Service vessel these, of course, were continually kept up to date. He learned that although a committee was considering revisal, or even repeal, of the Non-Citizen Act this piece of legislation was still law. As far as he could see the act applied most specifically to the natives of Morrowvia—and that left him well and truly up the well known creek, without a paddle.

And here was Kane, dropping down from the morning sky, a man who knew Federation law so well that he could always bend it without actually breaking it. Here was Kane, a shipmaster *and* a shipowner who had learned that his vessel had been as good as (as bad as) wrecked by the officious actions of a relatively junior Survey Service officer. Here was Kane, more than a little annoyed about the frustration of his highly profitable activities.

Here was Kane.

Southerly Buster's pinnace slammed down alongside the parent ship in a flurry of dust and small debris. The door opened and Kane jumped out. He was no longer wearing his gaudy finery but had changed into utilitarian gray coveralls. Sabrina, still aglitter with jewelry, appeared in the doorway but Kane, irritably, motioned her back inside.

Dreebly, his head bandaged, came out of the ship. He stood there, drooping, while Kane obviously gave him a merciless dressing down. Then, slowly, the two men walked all around the crippled hulk, with the mate pointing out details of exterior damage. Grimes already knew what the damage was like inside—the Mannschenn Drive torn from its housing, the hydroponics tanks a stinking mess of shattered plastic and shredded greenery, most of the control room instruments inoperable if not completely ruined.

Saul came to stand by his captain's side. They watched as Kane and Dreebly clambered into the near-wreck through an amidships cargo hatch. The first lieutenant said happily, "You certainly put paid to *his* account, sir."

Grimes said, not so happily, "I only hope that he doesn't put paid to mine . . ."

"But, sir, the man's a blackbirder, a slave trader! You've wrecked his ship—but that was the only way that you could stop the commission of a crime."

"Strong measures, Mr. Saul—especially if there were no crime being committed."

"But he fired on us, sir."

"At, not on. And we fired at him first."

"But he still hasn't a leg to stand on . . ."

"Hasn't he? I've checked up on the Non-Citizen Act. I'm afraid that the Morrowvians do not qualify for citizenship. They have no rights whatsoever."

"I don't see it, sir. They're backward, I suppose—but they're as human as you or I."

"They're not," Grimes told him. "They're not, and that's the bloody trouble. What do you know of the Non-Citizen Act, Mr. Saul?"

"Not much, sir. But I can check up on it."

"Don't bother. I'll fill you in. That particular piece of legislation dates back to the bad old days when, briefly, the genetic engineers had far too much say. Although they were concerned primarily with the life sciences their outlook was that of engineers. You know, as well as I do, the peculiarities of the engineering outlook. If human beings and machines can't work together with maximum efficiency—then modify the human to suit the machine, not the other way round. A planet, like a house, is a machine for living in. If it is not suited to its intending occupants—then modify the occupants to fit. Then the generic engineers took things further. They manufactured, in their laboratories, androids—beings of synthetic flesh and blood that were, in effect, artificial men and women. Then they made 'underpeople'; the word was coined by a Twentieth Century science fiction writer called Cordwainer Smith and later, much later, used in actual fact. These underpeople were even less human than the androids, their very appearance making obvious their animal origins. They could not interbreed with true humans any more than the

androids could—but they could breed, although they could not crossbreed. Put it this way—a dogman could mate with a dogwoman and fertilize her, or a catman with a catwoman. Only dogs—or ex-dogs—with dogs. Only cats—or ex-cats—with cats.

"Then there was the Android Revolt on Dancy. There was the virtual take-over of Tallis by the underpeople, although without bloodshed. The Federation Government put its foot down with a firm hand. No more androids were to be manufactured. No more underpeople were to be bred. All existing androids and underpeople were deprived of citizenship. And so on.

"It was quite some time before I realized the nature of the situation here, on Morrowvia. Kane, somehow, twigged it long before I did. But, last night, the final pieces of the jigsaw puzzle fell into place with a quite deafening *click!* I should have seen it before. There are so many clues . . ."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"You did the science fiction course at the Academy, Mr. Saul."

"But I never cared for that wild stuff. I can't remember much of it."

"You must remember some of it. Anyhow, we all assumed that this planet was named after the captain of *Lode Cougar*. But I saw some of the records in the museum at Ballarat. Morrow was not *Lodge Cougar's* master, neither was he one of her officers. He must have been one of the passengers—and a genetic engineer. I don't know yet how many survivors there were of *Lode Cougar's* original complement when she landed, although Commander Lazenby will no doubt be able to tell us. I don't think that there could have been many. I don't think that there were any women of childbearing age among them. But, like all the ships of her period, she carried banks of fertilized ova—both human and animal. Perhaps the human ova had been destroyed somehow—or perhaps Morrow just didn't want to use them. Perhaps the ova of all the usual useful animals—with no exception—had been somehow destroyed—or perhaps Morrow was an aelurophile. I rather think that he was. He was also a science fiction addict—there are shelves of his books on display in the museum at Ballarat. He also had a rather warped sense of humor. The clues that he left!"

"What clues, sir?" asked Saul.

"In the names he gave—to the continent where *Lode Cougar* landed, to the four families that he . . . founded, to the planet itself. The planet of Doctor Morrow . . . the island of Doctor Moreau . . ."

"You're way beyond me, sir."

"Mr. Saul, Mr. Saul, you should have read that Twentieth Century rubbish while you had the chance. One of Morrow's books was *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, by a writer called Wells. Wells' Doctor Moreau was a rather mad scientist who converted animals into imitation humans by crude surgical means. Morrow . . . Moreau . . . see the connection? And one of the four family names on Morrowvia is Wells, another is Morrow.

"Another book was *The Planet Buyer*, by Cordwainer Smith. It was Cordwainer Smith who invented the underpeople. One of his favorite planets—he wrote, of course, before men had landed on Earth's moon—was Old North Australia, shortened to Norstrilia. So Morrow called the continent on which he landed North Australia, and made Cordwainer and Smith the other two family names.

"Meanwhile, he was having fun. He was breeding a people to fit in with all his own pet ideas. Evidently he disapproved of the nudity taboo, just as Commander Lazenby's people do on Arcadia. His political ideas bordered on anarchism. Possibly he was an anarchist. I seem to recall from my reading of history that there was quite a powerful, or influential, Anarchist Party on Earth, in both hemispheres, at the time of the Second Expansion. It worked underground, and it contributed to the decline and fall of the Russian Empire. And we see here the results of Morrow's ideas. Utterly unselfconscious nudism, no central government, no monetary system . . ."

"It's a pity that this Lost Colony was ever discovered. Its people are more human than many who are officially so—but they have no rights whatsoever."

There was a silence, then Saul said, "We, our people, know what it was like . . ." Grimes looked at him rather nastily so he hastily changed the subject. "But tell me, sir, what did you mean when you said that the pieces of the puzzle fell into place last night?"

"You've served in *Pathfinder*, with Captain Lewis," said Grimes. "So have I. You know his taste in pets. You know how obvious it is, once you step inboard through the airlock . . ."

"Well, since you ask, my quarters stink of *cat*."

26

Maya joined the two men in the control room. She looked as though she had slept well. She glanced incuriously through the viewports at the disabled *Southerly Buster*, then said plaintively, "I'm hungry . . ."

Go down to the galley and see if the cook can find you some fish heads . . . thought Grimes—and then despised himself for thinking it. He said, "Mr. Saul, would you mind taking Maya to the wardroom for breakfast?"

"But what does she *eat*, sir?" asked the first lieutenant desperately.

"I'll try anything, everything," she said sweetly, "until I find something I like."

Grimes watched her as she followed Saul out of the control room. There should have been, he thought, a tail ornamenting those shapely buttocks. A nice, furry, striped tail . . . He shrugged.

The officer of the watch reported, "Sir, an unidentified craft is approaching from the north."

"That will be *Schnauzer's* pinnacle," said Grimes. He went to the transceiver, selected the most probable waveband. "Commander Grimes to Captain Danzellan. Do you read me? Over."

"Loud and clear, Commander. Danzellan here. My ETA your landing site is thirty minutes Standard, twenty-four minutes Local, from now. I have your Commander Lazenby with me. Over."

"Thank you, Captain Danzellan." Should he ask to speak with Maggie? No. She had made no attempt to speak with him. And Grimes was in a misogynistic mood. *Women! Cats!*

He returned to the viewport. He passed the time by mentally composing the sort of report—or complaint—that he would write if he were Drongo Kane.

To: Flag Officer in Charge of Lindisfarne Base

From: Drongo Kane, master and owner of s/s Southerly Buster

Subject: Piratical action by Lieutenant Commander John Grimes, Captain of ESS Seeker.

Sir,

I regret to have to report that while my vessel was proceeding on her lawful occasions she was wantonly attacked by your Seeker, under the command of your Lieutenant Commander Grimes. Commander Grimes not only used his armament to impede the embarkation of fare-paying passengers, subjecting them to a sleep gas barrage, but also fired upon Southerly Buster herself. Later he attempted to ram my ship after she had lifted off, and only the superlative skill of my chief officer, who was in charge of the vessel at the time, averted a collision. Although contact between the two ships was avoided contact with the ground was not. As a result of this, Southerly Buster sustained severe structural damage . . .

"Pinnacle in sight visually, sir," reported the O. O. W.

"Thank you, Mr. Giles."

Danzellan came in more slowly and cautiously than Kane had done, but he wasted no time, setting his craft down at the foot of *Seeker's* ramp. Grimes watched *Schnauzer's* master get out, then help Maggie Lazenby to the ground. He told Giles to telephone down to the airlock sentry, instructing the man to inform Captain Danzellan and Maggie that he would be waiting for them in his quarters. He went down to his day cabin, hastily shutting the door between it and his bedroom. The smell of cat was still strong.

He found and filled his foulest pipe, lit it. When Danzellan and Maggie came in he was wreathed in an acrid, blue smog.

"What a fug!" she exclaimed.

The intercom telephone buzzed. It was the O.O.W. calling. "Sir, Captain Kane and his chief officer are at the airlock. They wish to speak to you."

"Send them up," said Grimes.

"What in the universe have you been *doing*, Commander?" asked Danzellan. "Fighting a small war?"

"Or not so small," commented Maggie.

"I," Grimes told them bitterly, "was attempting to prevent the commission of a crime. Only it seems that slave trading is not a crime, insofar as this bloody world is concerned."

"The underpeople . . ." said Maggie softly. "Underpeople—and the still unrepealed Non-Citizen Act . . . But how did you find out? It took me hours after I was able to get my paws on the records . . ."

"I added two and two," Grimes told her, "and came up with three point nine recurring. All the clues are so obvious. Rudimentary nipples, paw-like hands and feet, the way in which the people eat and drink, and the use of 'cat' as a term of opprobrium when, apart from the Morrowvians themselves, there isn't a single animal of Terran origin on the planet . . ."

Danzellan grinned. "I see what you mean. I've been known to refer to particularly stupid officers as 'pathetic apes.'"

"Those same points had *me* puzzled," admitted Maggie. "But I'm surprised that *you* noticed them."

"And Morrow's books," went on Grimes. "*The Island of Doctor Moreau*. The Cordwainer Smith novels. The names of the four families—Wells, Morrow, Cordwainer and Smith. And North Australia . . ."

"You're losing me there," admitted Maggie.

A junior officer knocked at the door. "Captain Kane to see you, sir. And Mr. Dreebly."

Kane blew into the room like the violent storm after which his ship was named. He blustered, "I'll have your stripes for this, Grimes! As soon as your bloody admiral hears my story he'll bust you right down to Spaceman Sixteenth Class—unless he decides to shoot you first!"

"Slave trading," said Grimes, "is prohibited by Federation law."

"Yeah. It is. But, Mr. Commander Grimes, such laws exist only for the protection of Federation citizens. The Morrowvians are non-citizens."

"How do you make that out?"

"How do I make that out? Because they're under-people, Commander—which means that they have the same status as androids, which means that they have no bloody status at all. They're no more than cattle—with the accent on the first syllable!" He laughed briefly at his own play on words, turned to glare at Dreebly when he essayed a snicker. "The only protection they can claim is that of the S.P.C.A.—and there's no branch of that society on Morrowvia!"

Grimes looked at Maggie appealingly. She flashed him a fleeting smile of encouragement. He looked at Danzellan. The portly shipmaster winked at him.

"Slavery," said Grimes firmly, "is still a crime, ethically if not legally."

"So is piracy, Grimes. Ethically *and* legally."

"I seem to recall past occasions in your own career . . ."

"We're not talking about them. We're talking about *this* occasion in *your* career. The unprovoked attack upon an innocent merchantman. To begin with, Grimes, you can place your artificers at my disposal. *If* they make a good job I just might tone my report to your bosses down a little." He laughed lightly. "A stiff note on paper, instead of a stiff note on cardboard . . ."

"Mphm," grunted Grimes thoughtfully.

"In fact, Commander," went on Kane, speaking quite quietly now, his exaggerated accent gone, "I think that you could help me considerably . . ."

And Kane, thought Grimes, owes his survival to the number of friends he has in high places. And Kane is an opportunist. For all he knows I might be an admiral myself one day. He's debating with himself, "Shall I put the boot in, or shall I let bygones be bygones?" Too, he's probably not quite sure if he is altogether in the right, legally speaking . . .

"Don't trust him, Commander," said Danzellan.

"Keep your nose out of this!" snarled Kane.

"I discovered this planet," stated Danzellan. "The Dog Star Line . . ."

". . . can go and cock its leg against a lamp post," Kane finished the sentence.

"Gentlemen," said Grimes soothingly. "Gentlemen . . ."

"I can't see any round here," remarked Maggie.

"You shut up for a start," he told her. But he realized that her flippancy had broken the tension.

"What do you say, Commander?" persisted Kane. "You have a workshop, and skilled technicians . . . Get the old *Buster* back into commission for me and you can write your own report to your superiors." He grinned. "After all, I'm just a semiliterate tramp skipper. Paperwork's beyond my capabilities."

"And what about me?" asked Danzellan interestedly.

"The Dog Star Line's big enough to look after itself, Captain, as I have no doubt that it will. My own activities, for quite some time, anyhow, will be confined to this continent of New England. You," he said generously, "can have North Australia."

"Thank you, Captain. I appreciate the gesture. But I feel obliged to tell you that my employers are not quite the soul-less bastards that they have often been alleged to be. They would not wish to share a planet with a slaver. Not," he added, "that it will ever come to that."

"So you're pulling out?" asked Kane.

"No."

"I warn you, Captain Danzellan, that if you or your people try to make things awkward for me, I shall make things even more awkward for the Dog Star Line. They'll finish up by buying me out, at my price. It will not be a low one." He turned to Grimes. "And what do you say, Commander, to my proposition to you?"

"No," said Grimes. "No, repeat no."

"You'll be sorry. My report—and it's a damning one—has already been written. My Carlotti transmitter is quite powerful, and will be able to raise the Lindisfarne Base station with ease. You'd better have your letter of resignation ready."

He turned to go.

"Hold your horses," said Maggie sweetly. "Hold your horses, Captain Kane. I haven't said my party piece yet."

She said, "You'd better all sit down and make yourselves comfortable, as this is quite a long story. You, John, just read the very beginnings of it. You, Captain Kane, read enough to convince you that slaving activities, with Federation law as it stands at present, would be quite legal. And I was able to do more research than either of you.

"The story of *Lode Cougar* is not, in its early stages, an unusual one. There was the gaussjammer, lifting from Port Woomera, bound for the newly established colony on Austral—*your* home world, Captain Kane. As well as the intending colonists she carried cargo, among which was a shipment of fertilized ova. Dogs were required on Austral, and cats, to deal with the numerous indigenous vermin. There were cattle too, of course, and horses—oh, all the usual. And there were human ova, just in case the ship got thrown off course by a magnetic storm and had to start a new colony from scratch, in some utterly uncharted sector of the galaxy. Quite a number of colonies were started that way.

"*Lode Cougar* was unlucky—as so many of the old gaussjammers were. A magnetic storm threw her thousands of light-years off course. Her navigators were unable to determine her position. Her pile was dead, and her only source of power was her diesel generators. The engineers kept these running—which meant that the ship's biochemist was having to produce fuel for the jennies rather than food for the crew and passengers.

"But all they could do was to stand on and stand on, from likely star to likely star, pulling their belts ever tighter, finding that some suns had no planetary systems, that other suns had worlds in orbit about them utterly incapable of supporting any kind of life, let alone life as we know it.

"Almost inevitably there was a mutiny. It came about when a gang of starving passengers was caught foraging in the cargo spaces—the *refrigerated cargo spaces*. Is it cannibalism when you gorge yourself on fertilized human ova? A rather doubtful legal point . . . Anyhow, the master of the *Cougar* decided that it was cannibalism, and ordered the offenders shot. In the consequent flareup there was rather too much shooting and then an orgy of *real* cannibalism . . . Things went from bad to worse after that, especially since the captain, his senior officers and most of the more responsible passengers were killed. Among the survivors was a professional genetic engineer, a Dr. Edward Morrow. He wrote despairingly in his private journal, 'Will this voyage never end? Men and women are behaving like wild beasts. No, I must not say that, because my fellow passengers are worse than beasts. No decent animal could ever sink to such depths.' That passage sticks in my memory. It explains so much. Sometime later he wrote that the ship was approaching yet another sun, and that Bastable, the liner's third officer, hoped that it would run to a habitable planet. 'If it does not,' Morrow wrote, 'that is the finish of us. Soon there will be only one survivor, gnawing the last shreds of human flesh from the last bone.'

"*Lode Cougar* cautiously approached the world that was still to be named. It looked to be habitable. There was a meeting of crew and passengers—what was left of them—and Bastable told them that the landing would have to be made in high magnetic latitudes, for the obvious reason. The others told Bastable that the landing would have to be made in some region with a hospitable climate; nobody was in fit condition to undertake a long trek over ice fields. Bastable acceded to their demands, after a long argument. Had he not been the only man capable of handling the ship he would have been murdered there and then.

"He got her down, as we know. He got her down, in one piece. The experience shattered him. He went to his quarters immediately after the landing, got out the bottle of alcohol that he had been jealously hoarding, and drank himself into insensibility. In his weakened condition—like all the rest he was more than half starved—it killed him. Regarding his death, Morrow made more unkind remarks in his journal about the human race.

"With the very few survivors a colony of sorts could have been started, might possibly have survived. There were ten men—nine of them, including Morrow, passengers, one of them a junior engineer. There were six women, four of them young. Morrow persuaded his companions that they would have a far better chance if they had underpeople to work for them. The only ova that had survived the trouble were those of cats—but Morrow was expert in his profession. With the aid of the engineer he was able to set up incubators and then—all that was required was in the ship's cargo—a fully equipped laboratory.

"He wrote again in his journal, 'The first batch is progressing nicely, in spite of the acceleration. I feel . . . paternal. I ask myself, why should these, my children, be *underpeople*! I can make them more truly human than the hairless apes that may, one day, infest this new world . . .'

"Regarding the deaths of his fellow *Lode Cougar* survivors he says very little. One suspects that he knew more than he wrote about the food poisoning that killed Mary Little, Sarah Grant and Delia James. One wonders if Douglass Carrick fell off that cliff, or was pushed. And how did Susan Pettifer and William Hume come to get drowned in the river? It is interesting to note, too, that Mary, Sarah, Delia and Susan were the potential child

bearers. And, as well as working in his laboratory, Morrow set up a still and soon had it in operation, turning out a very potent liquor from a fermented mash of berries and wild grain. The surviving men and the two remaining women didn't care much then what happened, and as Morrow had succeeded in activating a team of robots from the cargo he was independent of them.

He didn't bother to kill them as his first batch of 'children' was growing to forced maturity. He just let them die—or be killed by wild animals when they went out hunting for meat."

"Yes," said Kane. "I know all that. The Morrowvians are non-citizens."

"I haven't finished yet, Captain Kane. There was something of the Pygmalion in Morrow—as there must have been in quite a few of those genetic engineers. He fell in love with one of his own creations—his Galatea. He even named her Galatea."

"Touching . . ." commented Kane.

"Yes, wasn't it? And he married her; he'd decided that his people couldn't live in a state of complete anarchy, and must have a few, necessary laws. So he made the union legal."

"Uncommonly decent of him," sneered Kane.

"But that didn't stop him from having quite a few concubines on the side . . ."

"So the Morrowvian idol had his feet of clay."

"Don't we all, Captain, don't we all?"

"So the records prove that true humans can have sexual relations with these underpeople. I'd found that out long before I saw the precious records. Judging by the stink in here, Commander Grimes has found it out too."

"John! What have you been doing? Don't tell me that you and Maya . . ."

"I won't tell you if you tell me not to."

"So you did. I hope you enjoyed it, that's all."

Kane laughed patronizingly. "So I'll leave you people to your family squabbles, and get back to my ship and send my report off to Lindisfarne. A very good day to you all."

"Wait!" Maggie snapped sharply. "I haven't finished yet."

"I don't think that anything further you can say will change my mind. Underpeople are underpeople. Underpeople are property. Period."

"There is a ruling," said Maggie slowly, "that any people capable of fertile union with true people must, themselves, be considered true people."

"And so, to coin a phrase, what?"

"Morrow's unions were fertile."

"So he says. How many glorified tomcats were sneaking into his wife's or his popsies' beds while he was elsewhere?"

"The Morrow strain is strongest in North Australia, among the people who bear his name."

"What evidence is there?"

"The Morrrows are a little more 'human' than the other Morrowvians. Very few of their women have supplementary nipples. Their general outlook is more 'human'—as you know yourself. That show you put on for Janine with the saluting cannon . . . And the show she put on for us."

"Yeah. I grant you that. But I think the words of the ruling you mentioned are, 'a fertile, *natural* union.' Old Doc Morrow was a genetic engineer. I've heard it said that those boys could crossbreed an ant and an elephant . . . I'm sorry. I'm really sorry for you all. You've tried hard, but by the time the Federation reaches a decision I'll have made my pile."

"I," said Danzellan, "can supply more proof for Commander Lazenby's arguments."

"You, Captain? You're no biologist, you're just a shipmaster like myself."

"Even so . . ." The master of *Schnauzer* was obviously finding something highly amusing. "Even so . . . You know, it's just over two hundred and twenty days that I first landed on Morrowvia—and that's about two hundred and seventy days Standard . . ."

"I can do sums in my head as well as you can."

"I am sure you can, Captain Kane. And are you married? Have you a family?"

"No—to both questions."

"It doesn't matter. Well, on the occasion of my first visit, my second officer, Mr. Delamere, got Tabitha, the daughter of the Queen of Melbourne, into trouble, as the saying goes. The young idiot should have taken his contraceptive shots before he started playing around, of course. He's really smitten with her, and managed to get himself appointed to *Schnauzer*, rather against my wishes. Now he wants to make an honest woman of the girl—

once again, as the saying goes—but Lilian, Tabitha's mother, will not allow him to marry her unless he complies with local law. This means that he will have to change his name to Morrow, which he does not want to do. He will, of course. The Dog Star Line wants a resident agent on this planet. And even though the queenships are not hereditary in theory they usually are in practice."

"What are you driveling about?" asked Kane crudely.

Danzellan flushed. He said stiffly, "Tabitha has presented young Delamere with a son."

"And how many local boyfriends has she had?" demanded Kane.

"She says that she has none. Furthermore, I have seen the baby. All the Morrowvians have short noses—except this one, who has a long nose, like his father. The resemblance is remarkable . . ."

Kane refused to concede defeat.

"Paternity tests . . ." he mumbled.

"I can soon arrange those, Captain," Grimes told him. "Don't forget that I have my own biologists, as well as other scientists." He turned to Danzellan. "Did Mr. Delamere come with you, Captain? Call him up, and we'll wet the baby's head!"

"You can break a bottle of champagne over it!" growled Kane, pushing his way out of the day cabin, brushing past Maya who was just coming in, and complaining, "I'm *still* hungry, John. They say that all the ice cream is finished . . ."

"Go on," said Maggie. "Do the decent thing. Buy the girl a popsicle to show her how much you love her."

"I'll have some more ice cream made, Maya," promised Grimes, looking at her with combined pity and irritation, noticing that Danzellan was regarding her with condescending amusement.

The Morrowvians, thanks to the long-dead Morrow's skill—he had even imposed the right gestation period on his people—were safe from Drongo Kane and his like, but had no defenses against Big Business as represented by the Dog Star Line.

Or had they?

Grimes suspected that they, with their innate feline charm combined with selfishness, would not do at all badly in the years to come.

THE END

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The Inheritors

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