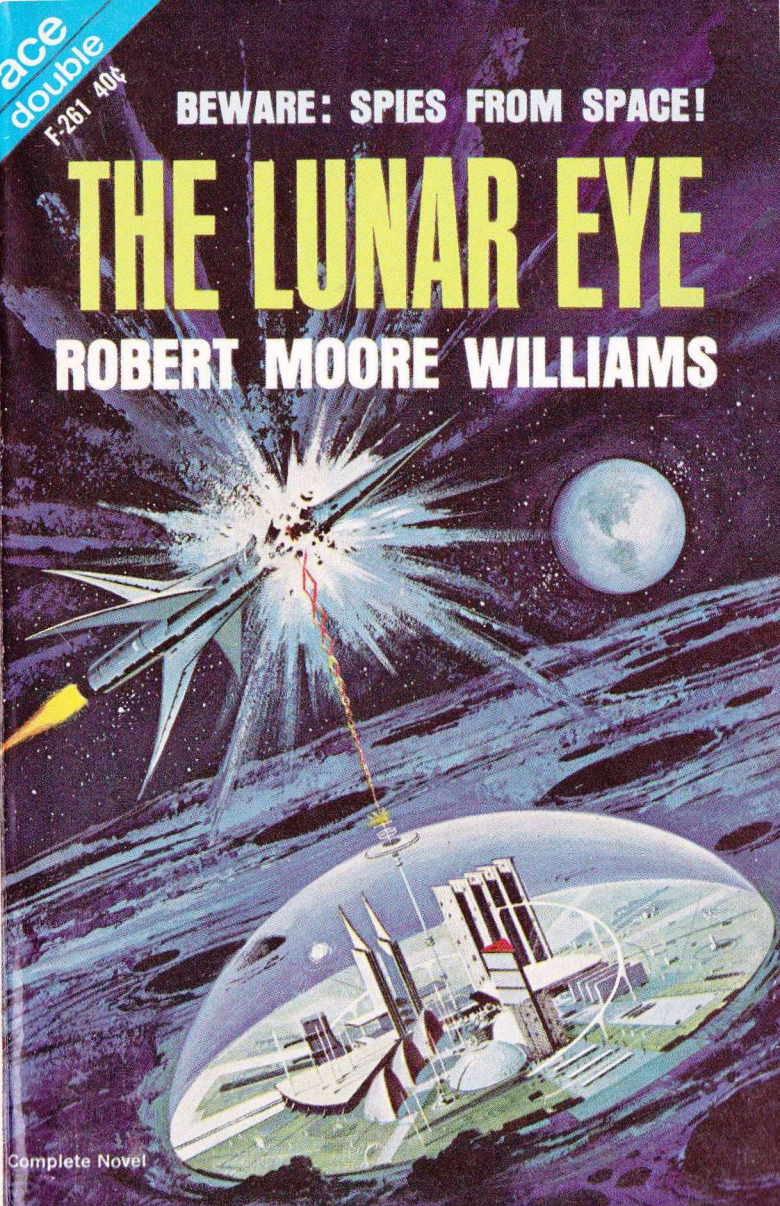


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ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS



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THE LUNAR EYE

ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS

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CHAPTER ONE

“PHONE FOR Art Harper,” the waitress said.

She brought the instrument from the counter to his table and plugged it into the wall outlet near him.

“For a hamburger joint in the desert, this place has downtown ways,” Art Harper said, and then added, “You’ve also got downtown looks.”

“For a grease monkey from a service station in the desert, you’re plenty bold,” the waitress answered, smiling. “One of your women is on the line, sir. Try and be a gentleman when you talk to her.”

She handed the phone to him.

“How do you know it’s one of my women?” Art asked.

“Because she asked for you,” the waitress answered.

Art Harper spoke into the phone, then listened. There was a woman on the line. She was scared.

“If you’re Art Harper, I have to talk to you, at once,” the woman said.

It was an odd voice, one that Art Harper had never heard before. The English was perfect, but there was the trace of an accent in the voice, a haunting accent that seemed to echo out of the lost world of his dreams. The voice, and the accent, made him uncomfortable, and somehow, afraid.

He looked up from the phone. A tire salesman, wearing black-rimmed, thick-lensed glasses, was sitting across the table from him. The salesman had brought him across the street to this restaurant for lunch, using the old sales technique of

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softening up a prospective customer with food. Looking at the salesman, Art thought he had the brownest skin he had ever seen, as though he had been to the fringes of space and back. This thought was nonsense and Art knew it. The astronauts of the world were not selling tires. Twelve of them were right out there in the desert beyond his range of vision.

Beyond the plate glass window of the hamburger shop was a broad highway where big trucks lumbered day and night on their way out into and out of the desert, puffing heavily with the importance of their loads. Out in that waste of sand something was going to happen that had never happened before in all human history.

The world, all of it, was waiting for this thing to happen.

Out there in the desert, behind high fences where armed guards patrolled day and night, with helicopters watching from the sky, was the base where the moon rocket was being made ready. Out there twelve men, the astronauts, the crew of the rocket, were waiting to find out whether they were blasting off to destiny or to death.

The moon rocket should have blasted off months earlier. Delays in vital equipment had prevented it from leaping toward a flaming destiny in the sky. Then more delays. And still more delays. Half way around the world the Russians were also trying to build a moon rocket. They, too, were encountering difficulties.

Across the broad highway that led into the desert was a big service station. Art and Gecko Harper owned this station. They owned the ground, the gasoline tanks, the buildings, the lube racks, and the tools. Learning that a big base was to be built in the desert, they had bought ground on the highway leading to the base and had built a service station. The race of men might be trying to find wings for the sky, but the supplies and the personnel would still travel on wheels. Art and Gecko Harper were young men, alert and alive to their times. Secretly, each felt that if he couldn't be a part of man's conquest of space, he could at least live close to where it was happening, close enough to watch the moon rocket flame into the sky. As owners of a service station, they were

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objects of interest to all the major oil companies and to salesmen selling everything from tires to graphite.

Everything that Art saw when he looked up from the phone was normal. Across the street the attendant in the station was servicing a car from Ohio—and probably trying to keep from admitting that he did not know when the moon rocket would blast off. All tourists thought that every service station man for a hundred miles along the highway knew everything about rockets.

In a normal world, why should a strange woman have fear in her voice? Why should she call him at all? How did she know his name? How did she know where he was at this minute? How . . .

“Gecko gave me your name,” the woman said, over the phone. “He said I should call you.”

At her words, Art Harper felt muscles tighten all over his body.

“I—ah—yes. Gecko,” he said. “How—uh—is Gecko?”

“Fine.”

“When did you see him?”

“It’s been some time,” the woman answered.

“Where—ah—was he?” Art Harper asked. He tried to make his manner and his tone casual but he knew he was failing on both counts.

“I can’t answer that and you know it,” the woman said.

“No. I—ah—didn’t know it,” Art Harper answered. “Where are you?”

“I’m around.”

“How did you know to reach me at this number?”

“I called your station and was told you could be reached at this number,” the woman answered.

“Yes. Yes. What’s your name?”

“That’s another question I can’t answer,” the woman said. “Do you have a man with you?”

“I—ah—” Art Harper’s gaze came to rest on the tire salesman. The brown-skinned salesman was looking at the waitress and was apparently paying no attention to the conversation. “Yes, as a matter of fact, I do.”

“Then get rid of him,” the woman said. “I want to talk to you.”

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"You don't want to talk to me half as bad as I want to talk to you," Art Harper said. "Where can I reach you?"

"Call me at 345-1-3350, just as soon as you get rid of the man with you," the woman said. A click sounded in the phone as she broke the connection.

Art Harper set the phone back on its cradle. He wiped sweat from his forehead.

"Bad news?" the salesman said, regarding him sympathetically.

"No," Art said. "No. Not necessarily. I've got a twin brother, Gecko—" Suddenly realizing that anything he said might be too much, he was silent.

"Yes," the salesman said, nodding. "I was here about nine months ago and talked to him. Where is he?"

"He's—ah—off today," Art answered.

"Vacation?" the salesman asked.

"You might call it that," Art answered. "He went up to Lake Tahoe, with a blonde, I think, though he didn't say."

"Oh," the salesman said. He grinned with understanding. Back of the thick-lensed spectacles, his eyes were wary.

Art Harper was silent. Only he knew how badly shaken he was inside. This vacation that Gecko had taken had already lasted over six months. During this time, Art had heard nothing from his twin brother. Neither the police, nor the bureau of missing persons, nor ads run in the newspapers, nor a private detective had been able to turn up a single clue on Gecko. So far as Art had been able to find out, his twin brother might have walked off the face of the earth. The police had asked many questions, which Art had answered to the best of his ability. There had been no quarrel between them, no dispute about money or women or property. Their parents were dead and, they lived in the home which their parents had left to them jointly. They bowled one night a week, they played poker one night, and though each had had several girls, none of them had seemed suitable and they had not married. To the police, Art had insisted over and over again that Gecko was and always had been completely normal.

"Then why'd he run off?" the cops had asked.

"I don't know that he ran off, maybe he was taken away."

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"Then who took him?" the police had queried.

"I don't know," Art had answered. "That's why I came to you—I just don't know. I want you to help me find him."

The police had huffed and puffed. For a time, Art had thought they were going to charge him with some crime in connection with his missing brother, but they had dropped this idea for lack of evidence. For all of their work, the police had found nothing. A private detective had also tried and had done nothing beyond render a stiff bill.

Now a strange woman with fear in her voice had said that Grecko had told her to call him.

"How are they getting along with their moon rocket?" the salesman said suddenly.

"You know as much about that as I do," Art answered.

"But all of the trucks going to the base stop here before they jump into the desert," the salesman persisted. "You must talk to the drivers—"

"The drivers know only one thing—to keep their mouths shut," Art answered.

The salesman looked disappointed.

Across the highway a big truck was pulling into the service station.

"I've got to go," Art Harper said, getting to his feet.

"About those tires . . ." the salesman said hastily.

"Finish your lunch and I'll talk to you later," Art said. "I've got to get over and help service that truck."

"'Bye, honey," he said to the waitress as he went out of the door. "I'll come back later and have pie."

Had he kept everything normal, natural, commonplace? he asked himself as he crossed the highway that ran between the big service station and the hamburger joint. He thought he had. If he hadn't, then the practice of a lifetime had been wasted.

By disappearing, Gecko had already jeopardized the work of a lifetime, Art Harper thought. He did not blame his twin brother for this. Gecko had not known what he was doing. Gecko had never really understood what Art had meant by his continuous talk about the wisdom of keeping "Everything normal, natural, commonplace."

The driver of the truck pulling into the service station was

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being extra careful with his vehicle as he pulled it up to the air lines. The sign on the side of the truck said:

Jim's Drayage Company

We Haul Anything, Anywhere, Anytime

The sign gave the impression that this truck was entirely innocuous, that Jim was a common hauler who would perhaps cart your furniture from one town to another or haul lumber or empty boxes or any article used in trade. The sign indicated that Jim was nobody important, that he was just another guy who had saved enough money to buy a truck and start in business for himself. And wasn't doing too well either. The paint on the body of the truck was peeled and blistered.

Art Harper had always admired the job that had been done in making these trucks look commonplace.

He knew from talking to the drivers in the past that the body was actually a good grade of plate steel, that the big doors at the back end had special locks built into them, that the drivers never carried the keys to these doors, which went on ahead by special courier, and that the interior of the big body was not only air-conditioned, but also contained an intricate set of springs and foam rubber pads a foot thick.

No driver ever knew what his truck carried but whatever this was, it was carefully protected against jolts or jars. In addition, the drivers had special orders not to drive these trucks over twenty-five miles per hour and to slow down to ten miles on rough roads. Each truck contained a special radio transmitter and receiver which the driver could use in case of emergency.

Jim's trucks had orders to stop at this service station and have the attendant check air in the tires and water in the radiators, this before jumping into the desert highway which led to the base for the moon rocket.

The base was fifty-one miles of deserted highway from this service station. Tire or engine trouble out there in the hot flatlands could cause hours of delay in arrival at the rocket base.

"I'll be with you in a minute," Art yelled.

"All right, but shake a leg. I'm in a hurry," the driver answered.

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"You truck drivers are always in a hurry," Art answered. "Where are you going in such a rush?"

"To the moon, buddy, to the moon!" the driver answered.

Since everybody in Southern California, and most of the people on Earth, knew that a moon rocket was being readied here in this desert hotland, the truck driver's comment could hardly have been considered a breach of security. Officially, he did not know the cargo his truck was carrying. Unofficially, he knew perfectly well it was some part of the moon rocket, though he did not know what part or the technical details about it.

At the moon rocket base, security was tough; that is, for boy scouts, but not so tough for professional spies.

"The moon can wait until I make a phone call," Art shouted.

"Okay, but remember I'm on a meter," the truck driver answered.

Inside the station office, Art used the phone on his desk to dial the number the woman had given him. He heard the buzzing sound which indicated that somewhere a phone was ringing. Then the buzzing stopped and a woman's voice said, quickly, "Art?"

"Yes."

"Te nokol ne sol. Ek bruk en es. Thog ethol tu des!" the woman said.

Art Harper flinched away from the phone. Suddenly, coming out of nowhere, it seemed to him that cold winds were blowing all over his body. This voice, this language, this destiny! A shudder passed through his body, then he caught himself. Carefully learned reflex patterns went into operation.

"I'm afraid I—I—that is. Would you—ah—mind speaking English?"

Silence came over the phone. Somewhere he heard a woman catch her breath.

"You mean you don't understand this language?" the woman asked.

"I'm afraid I don't," Art Harper answered.

"You mean you haven't *awakened*?" the woman continued, in English.

"I—" Art Harper caught his breath. "Lady, I don't know

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who you are or where you are or what you are talking about. *Awakened?* I'm awake, I've been awake since six o'clock this morning."

"That's not the kind of *awakened* I mean," the woman spoke quickly.

"Then what do you mean?"

"If you don't know, I can't tell you!" On the phone, her voice was sharp with rising doubt. She sounded as if she was faced with a situation she did not understand and had to make a quick decision and did not know what to do.

"If you ask me, lady, I think you're another one of these nuts we have running loose in Southern California."

"I didn't ask you!" Her voice lashed at him with sudden fury.

She seemed suddenly to make up her mind, to reach a decision.

"Look, Art, I don't have time to explain anything. I've got to act and I've got to act right now. You've got to help me."

"How."

"I'll tell you how. There's a truck on your driveway—"

"There are always one or two trucks on my driveway."

"This one is from Jim's Drayage Company. You're going to check the air in the tires of this truck. I want you to tell the driver that one of his tires is low and that you will have to change it before he can leave the station."

In Art Harper's mind thoughts were suddenly wild things that pulled him in a dozen different directions at once.

"Lady, it would take me an hour to change one of those truck tires with my limited equipment. Changing those big tires is a job that calls for special tools."

"I know that. I want that truck delayed, for an hour." Her voice was hard and sharp.

"Lady, you don't know what the hell you're saying. If that truck is delayed, out there in the desert a rocket may be delayed."

"That's what I know, that's what I want," the woman said.

Art Harper took a deep breath.

"Lady, in case you don't know it, either the FBI or the boys in the white coats are looking for you." he said.

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"Something worse than the FBI is looking for me." she answered quickly.

"Such as?"

"Such as the *Tuantha!*" she answered. He heard her catch her breath as if she wished she had not used this word.

"Such as *what?*" Art Harper said.

"Do you want to see Gecko alive again?" the woman said.

At her words, cold winds blew in again from outer space and set up chills all over Art's body.

"Either that truck is delayed or you will never see your twin brother again!" the woman said.

Click!

The phone went dead.

Art wondered how he was going to keep himself normal, natural, and commonplace in this situation.

But he did not wonder what he was going to do. He loved his twin brother. But something far bigger than the life of his brother was at stake here. Also, knowing Gecko, he knew what his twin brother would wish him to do in this situation.

"Check the tires correctly, Art!" Gecko would say, if he were present. "And to hell with all the Russian spies who are trying to delay our moon rocket!"

Art Harper wiped sweat from his face. He went out the door of the station.

The tire salesman was standing there. He was pointing toward the sky in the direction of the moon rocket base.

"What's that up there?"

Harper glanced in the direction of the salesman's pointing finger.

"It's only a helicopter," he said. "They have them out all the time, patrolling the area around the base."

"They're not taking any chances on spies, huh?" the salesman said, grinning.

"Not if they can help it," Art answered.

"Hey, buddy!" the truck driver yelled.

"Coming!" Art answered.

He turned toward the truck. A woman in blue came around the back end of the truck.

"Where's the lady's room, mister?" she asked.

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Art pointed to the sign on the side of the station. He watched the blue dress vanish into the women's room. He went around the truck and checked each tire in turn. A hot wind was blowing out of the desert. It flapped a loose door on one of the telephone booths at the edge of the driveway.

"Tires okay." Art called to the truck driver.

"Thanks, buddy."

Exhaust blatting, the big truck with the steel body pulled out of the driveway and began to roll down the asphalt pavement that led across the desert to the moon base.

Art Harper stood watching it. The tire salesman came and stood beside him. The woman in the blue dress came out of the washroom and went to the coke machine. She slipped a coin into the slot and took out the bottle of coke. Sipping it, she stood watching the truck. The salesman glanced at her, then looked away.

"I'd sure like to have the contract to supply tires for Jim's Drayage," the salesman said, watching the truck. He slipped his hand into his coat pocket and brought out a package of cigarettes.

Art looked at the woman in blue. Her skin was brown, he saw, like that of the salesman. The sight sent a tinge of alarm through his nervous system. Looking again, he saw that her clothing was ordinary, the type that could be purchased in any cheap department store. He had never seen her before, but dozens like her stopped in his station every day. Some were wives of the men at the moon rocket base, some were sweethearts, some were sisters, some seemed to be roamers trying to find a sweetheart.

Boom!

The explosion came from the desert. It jerked Art Harper's eyes in the direction from which it had come.

Down the highway, the truck was leaving the road. Turning over twice, it spewed its driver out of the cab.

It came to a rest bottom-side up with its wheels spinning in the air.

Smoke began to lick up from it.

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CHAPTER TWO

"GET DOWN to that truck and see if you can help the driver!" Art told his helper. "I'll join you just as soon as I call the sheriff's office."

The normal action that any service station operator would take in this situation would be to call the local authorities and notify them that a base-bound truck had been involved in an accident. The sheriff's office in turn would call the base where the OD would take appropriate action.

Art turned toward his office to use the phone, but a customer, whose car was waiting on the drive, had taken this opportunity to save himself a dime by using the station phone. Art went directly to the line of public phone booths at the edge of the drive. The operator put him directly through to the sheriff's office.

"Thank you," a brisk voice told him. "We'll look into it immediately. Your name, please, and the phone number you are calling from."

"Art Harper," Art answered. The number of the phone was on the plate in front of his eyes. "Three-four-five one three-three—"

Art's voice went into sudden silence.

"Yes. Yes. What's the rest of the number, please?" the brisk voice said. "Five-oh," Art said. He repeated the number again.

"Thank you, Mr. Harper," the sheriff's office said, and hung up.

Very carefully, Art Harper replaced the receiver on the hook. He stood staring at the number on the plate in front of his eyes. An echo of a voice speaking a strange tongue rang in his ears.

"Te nokol ne sol. Ek bruk—"

She had used other words which he did not recall. The words did not matter. They had been strange sounds that had seemed to him to echo out of some lost nightmare he had once had. What did matter was that she had called him at the restaurant from this phone booth and when he had

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called her back from the phone inside his office, this was the phone that had rung!

The number proved it. She had been on his own driveway in his own service station.

His eyes went through the glass door of the phone booth to the woman in blue standing beside the tire salesman.

She was still on his driveway.

The woman with the brown skin, the woman in the blue dress that could have been purchased in any cheap department store, the ordinary, commonplace woman, she was the one who had told him he must delay the truck from Jim's Drayage Company!

He had refused to do this.

Looking toward the desert, a slight column of smoke told him the truck had been delayed! What had happened to the truck was sabotage! If the truck driver died as a result of injuries sustained in the accident, it was sabotage plus murder!

This was treason! This was a firing squad matter, a hanging matter!

Out of the corner of his eyes, Art Harper saw what he had not noticed before, an ancient car parked to one side at the edge of the driveway. Was this her car? It was as commonplace and as ordinary as she seemed to be.

The car of the tire salesman was parked off the highway, but not on the drive of the station. This ancient car did not belong to him.

Art turned back to the phone, to call the sheriff's office again. His duty was clear enough: to notify the proper authorities. As he started to lift the phone from its hook, he saw that the woman in blue was coming across the driveway toward him.

"Remember Gecko," she said, outside the booth.

Art slid the phone back on the hook. He opened the glass door of the booth and stood looking at the woman.

"If you talk, you won't see Gecko again," the woman said. "Not ever!"

Her voice was tight and taut, but there was no doubt that she meant what she said. Clutching a big purse firmly in both hands, she stood looking up at him.

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Beyond her, the tire salesman was standing on tip-toe trying to get a better look at the truck turned upside-down in the desert.

"Believe me, Art, what I'm really trying to do is to save Gecko's life—and your life too," the woman said.

"From whom?" Art Harper said.

Her eyes widened. She looked at him very carefully. A puzzled expression appeared on her face. She did not seem to understand him, not quite.

"Perhaps from the law," she said. "Perhaps from the *Tuantha!*"

"From the *what?*" Art Harper said.

The puzzled expression grew stronger on her face.

"You're talking treason!" Art said.

"The definition of treason depends on which side you're on!" she answered. Her voice grew hot. "If you are a Russian spy, to the Russians you are a hero. To the Americans, you are a traitor. If you're caught, the Americans shoot you. If you're not caught, the Russians will give you a medal!"

"I'm talking from the American viewpoint," Art said.

"The American viewpoint may be treason to the *Tuantha*, if you are a *Tuantha!*" she answered.

"Who are the *Tuantha?*" Art Harper said carefully. Bewilderment was in his voice. "You keep using that word. Tell me what you are talking about!"

As she started to speak, the tire salesman glanced in their direction, then turned and began to walk toward them. He had a package of cigarettes in his hand.

The woman glanced at him, then spoke to Art Harper.

"Keep on playing dumb, Art, if you want to stay alive!" she said.

"Playing dumb?" he said stupidly.

"Oh, Art, I wish I knew the truth about you!" she said.

The salesman reached them. Behind the thick-lensed spectacles, his eyes went appraisingly from one to the other.

"Do you two know each other?" he asked. His voice was casual and indifferent. He conveyed the impression that he was asking a question that really had no meaning to him.

"No," Art answered. "She seems to think she can use only one telephone booth. This happens to be the one I am using."

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"But I left my lipstick in that booth!" the woman protested. "If you will get out of my way . . ."

Harper moved to one side. The woman went past him. Art could hear her hunting in the phone booth for a lipstick that had never been left there.

He looked past the salesman and down the highway. His helper had reached the truck. Art could make out the figures of two men, one supporting the other. The sight lifted a little of the tension from his mind. The truck driver was alive. There would be no charge of murder from this accident.

"I wonder what that truck was carrying!" Harper said. "I hear they are planning on using atomic fuel on the moon rocket. If it was that—" Horror leaped into his mind.

"If it was atomic stuff, it will just burn, it won't explode," the tire salesman said. His manner was indifferent, as if this was of no importance in comparison to something else he had on his mind. He still held the package of cigarettes in one hand. One cigarette was thrust from the package. Like the barrel of a gun, it covered Art Harper.

"How do you know about this?" Art asked.

The salesman shrugged. "It's common knowledge. Big bombers carrying hydrogen warheads have crashed. The bombs merely burned. Nobody—and I mean nobody—wants an accidental atomic explosion."

Behind the thick-lensed spectacles, the eyes of the salesman studied him. The man seemed to make up his mind.

"Damn it, Harper! You're acting too stupid!" the man said.

"Stupid?" Art Harper let anger rise in him. "What the hell are you talking about? One minute you're trying to sell me tires. The next minute you're telling me I'm acting too stupid. Do you think you will talk me into buying tires by telling me how stupid I'm acting?"

The salesman seemed surprised. He drew back a step.

"I don't give a damn about selling tires, Harper! And never did. And you know it. You also know the penalty for treason!"

The salesman's voice was sharp, with a burr like a cutting tool revolving at high speed.

The woman in the blue dress had finished hunting for the non-existent lipstick. She had come out of the booth and was

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standing directly behind the service station owner. He could hear her breathing hard and fast back there, but he did not turn to look.

"Are you hinting I'm a Communist?" Art demanded. "If so, who the hell are you to be making such insinuations?"

"I don't give two whoops in hell whether you are a Communist or a Democrat or a Republican," the tire salesman answered. "When I talk about treason, you know what I mean!"

"No, he doesn't, Jestin!" Sharp and taut, the voice of the woman came from behind the service station owner. "He hasn't awakened! I tell you, I talked to him. He hasn't awakened."

The salesman blinked surprised eyes.

In the distance a siren was howling. Harper could not see the source of this sound, but he guessed it was a squad car from the sheriff's office.

The tire salesman heard the sound. He fingered the cigarette that was extended from the package.

"I tell you, he hasn't awakened!" the woman in the blue dress repeated. Her tone said she was pleading for Art Harper's life. "You can't accuse him of treason when he doesn't know what treason means!"

The salesman seemed to make up his mind. He twisted the cigarette.

As if she knew what this meant, the woman gasped.

Art Harper hit the tire salesman on the chin, a sudden, smashing blow that had all of his strength in it. As if it was on a swivel, the salesman's head went backwards. His head hit the asphalt of the service station driveway with a solid thump, his glasses flew in one direction and the cigarette he had been fingering flew in another direction.

The woman moved quickly. The pointed toe of her high-heeled shoe flicked out, striking the little cylinder of paper and tobacco, kicking it across the asphalt.

Spat!

Like an angry, hissing cat, the cigarette spat suddenly, at nothing in particular and at everything in general, giving out a sound that seemed to hate the very earth itself. Then it flared. Light as bright as the noonday sun blazed suddenly

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on the driveway of the service station. It flared for a micro-second in intolerable, painful brightness, then was instantly gone.

Art Harper was looking at it when this happened. He clapped his hands over his face as pain leaped into his eyes. The pain moved deeper into his head.

The only thought in his mind was that he was blind. He moved aimlessly, stumbled over some object, and fell heavily. As he went down he realized that he had stumbled over had been the body of the salesman. He had knocked the man unconscious.

The woman grabbed him by the arm. He couldn't see her but he could feel her. He tried to shove her away.

"I'm blind!" he whispered. "Blind!"

"Let me help you to your feet. I'll take you to a doctor!" the woman said. Pulling at his arm, she lifted him to his feet and began to push him in the direction of her car.

Sirens screamed past them on the highway. For a mad second, Harper hoped they would stop, but apparently the men in the squad car saw the column of smoke and guessed from it where they were going. The sirens screamed on into the desert.

"Here's the door of my car, Art. Step up now, please."

Alternately guiding him, then pushing him, she helped him into her car. The pain behind his temples, and the horror at the thought of being blind, were so great that he was not thinking clearly. The woman slid under the wheel. The motor of the old car started with a gulping rumble.

"What—what about the salesman?" he asked.

"Don't worry about him!"

"But—my service station. My helper has gone to help the truck driver. There's no one to handle the pumps. The cash register isn't locked."

"Are you out of your mind? You are more important than any service station. Also, you don't want to be around when Jestin recovers. After that clip on the chin you gave him, he'll be hard to reason with for awhile."

The motor howled as she fed gas to it. The old car started with a lurch and a howl of gears. Art's head was thrown

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back against the seat. As she turned out of the driveway, he had to hold on.

Ahead of them another siren was howling. Another squad car was coming. She hastily pulled the car to the side of the highway. With the urgency of a vast emergency, the siren went past them. Gears howled again in the old car as the woman in the blue dress started it up.

Behind Art Harper's eyes, the pain was trying to turn into light. He thought this was coming from tortured optic nerves. At times, as the old car roared along the highway, it seemed to him that something other than light was trying to explode inside his brain. Like an erratically running motion picture projector, ancient scenes flitted across his inner vision, things he did not wish to view, sights he had resolutely set his mind against seeing. He pressed the palms of both hands against his eyes, hard. The light and the scenes went away. The light became pain again. As pain, it was bad, but it was endurable.

Carefully built reflexes were telling him to keep everything normal, commonplace, ordinary. He wondered how he could do this when he could no longer see.

If he did not do it—well, it was so easy to die.

"What—what doctor are you taking me to?" Art asked.

"A good one," the woman answered. "An eye specialist. I only hope he will be in."

The car swerved as she turned a corner, then roared again. Art tried to keep track of the turns she made and to guess at the distance they were covering, but the pain behind his eyes was too great to permit him to remember such things.

The pain screamed for all of his attention. It constituted a demand on the total organism.

The car spun around another corner, the horn honked twice, at somebody, then the car slowed and stopped.

"We're at the doctor's office," the woman said. "I'll help you."

He heard the door slam on her side of the car, then his door opened and she had him by the arm again, helping him out. He felt asphalt under his feet. Removing a hand from one eye for an instant, he found he was still blind.

"Here's a step, Art. Lift your foot."

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Obedying, he found a step under his foot. Ahead of him a door opened. He felt his way across a sill and into a room.

"Lie down here, please," the woman said.

She guided him across a room. A bed or a couch touched his legs. He turned around and sat down. Springs creaked under the weight of his body.

"Let me get a wet cloth over your eyes," the woman urged.

"What about this doctor?" Harper asked.

"His office is next door. I'll get him in here in just a minute. Please lie down."

He let his body drop backward on some soft surface. Heels thumped on the floor, water splashed, a damp cloth appeared on his forehead.

"I'm going out now for the doctor. I'll be back in just a minute."

Heels thumped on the floor, the door opened, then closed.

Art Harper lay quietly on the soft surface that he suspected was a bed. The pain behind his eyes was reducing in intensity. He tried to think.

He did not like the way his thinking was going. He was blind, he did not know how long before his sight would return—or if it *would* return. He did not know where he was, but he knew that back at the edge of the desert a truck was burning. He also knew there was going to be merry hell raised about the accident to this truck. He did not for an instant believe this accident had been accidental, but he did not know how it had been accomplished. Did he want to know? There was such a thing as knowing too much!

The door opened. Heels pounded on a floor. He listened to them. There was only one set of heels.

"Where's the doctor?" he said.

"He'll be here in just a few minutes," he was told.

"What's your name?" he asked.

She hesitated. It was as if she had dreaded this question and did not quite know how she was going to answer it.

"Lecia," she said finally. "Lecia Brown."

He felt the cloth move from his face. Water splashed again. The cloth, damp and cool again, came back to his face. With a fast movement, he caught her wrists.

Startled, she tried to jerk free.

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He closed his fingers tighter.

"I have very strong hands," he said. "I have also studied a little karate. Don't try to jerk free."

"But, Art—" she protested.

"You can see. I can't. Seeing is your advantage," Harper said. "But I can break either or both of your arms. That's my advantage."

He heard her catch her breath.

"If you want to scream for help, go right ahead," he said. "But whoever comes to help you—if anyone does—will have to set two broken arms."

"Art—"

"Broken necks are very hard to set," he said. "After the arms, the neck comes next!"

He heard her gasp again as she grasped his meaning.

"I—I won't scream!" she whispered.

"You had better not!" Art Harper said. "Because I want you to answer some questions!"

CHAPTER THREE

"WHAT ABOUT the delays on launching the moon rocket?" Harper said.

"You—you don't suppose they were accidents, do you?" the woman who called herself Lecia Brown answered. She was talking fast, her breath was coming fast. Art Harper kept a firm grip on both wrists. The damp cloth over his face was dripping water into his eyes but he did not dare release his hold on her wrists to move the cloth.

Behind his eyes, the pain was diminishing a little. But not enough.

"I'm not that simple," he answered. "How did you manage to blow up a tire on that truck?"

"I—"

"Lying will get you a broken arm," he said, putting more pressure on her wrists.

"I—I stuck something that looked like an ordinary thumb-tack between the treads!" she answered.

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"An ordinary thumbtack? What if I, checking the tires, had found it?"

"You would have thought it was a thumbtack the tire had picked up somewhere."

"What if I had turned it over to the FBI?"

"They would have thought the same thing," the woman answered. "That's what it looked like."

"What if they had sent it to a laboratory for examination?"

"The lab men would have thought the same thing. Even if they had examined it under a microscope, they would have still thought it was a thumbtack. If they had examined it under z radiation, they would have detected the difference."

"What is z radiation?" Harper interrupted.

"Something that humans haven't discovered yet," she answered. "But if they had examined the tack under z radiation, nothing would have been left for them to examine."

"Nothing left of the tack or of the examiners?"

"Certainly nothing left of the tack. The examiners might have lived."

"The tack explodes when z radiation hits it?"

"Yes."

"Do you know what you have just said could get you hung?" Harper asked.

"How? Without the thumbtack, there is no proof. Even with it, the best instruments that humans possess would produce no proof. There is no explosive hidden inside the metal of the tack. The metal itself is explosive, under certain conditions. So what could be proved?"

"My evidence would be some proof," Harper answered. "Even if I can't see, I can still talk."

"If you talk—well, I don't advise it!"

"Is that a threat?" Harper demanded.

"I didn't mean it that way. I meant it as a warning."

"What is z radiation?" Harper asked.

"It's—it's—You know what x-rays are and what radio waves are like. Z radiation is similar, only it moves much faster. The speed is so fast and the frequency is so high it moves right through a measuring instrument without the in-

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strument reacting to it. But you know what it is—or you should know.”

Art Harper ignored his statement.

“That thumbtack you stuck into the tire exploded when z radiation hit it?” he asked.

“Yes,” she admitted.

“The truck was on a highway leading into the desert. My service station was the closest building. Those of us in the service station were the people closest to the truck when it exploded. It was no accident. I suppose that thumbtack in the tire just happened to run into z radiation on that desert highway!”

“No, the woman answered. “Jestin had the z generator. He used it. The thumbtack exploded then.”

“You tried to get me to delay the truck?”

“Yes. That was the safest way. If you had delayed the truck, I wouldn’t have had to use the thumbtack.”

“I see,” Art Harper said. He kept a firm grip on the woman’s wrists. More water from the damp towel was dripping into his eyes. He ignored this.

“What is your relationship with this tire salesman, with this Jestin?” he asked.

“He’s—uh—my boss,” the woman answered. “Only I have been trying to escape from him. I—”

“You came with him to the station?”

“Yes. We were in separate cars but were really together. When you went across the street with him to the restaurant, I called you from one of the phone booths in your station. I wanted to talk to you, because of Gecko.”

“You threatened me, you said that if I didn’t delay that truck Gecko would be in trouble.”

“He—he’s already in more trouble than he can ever get out of! But I—Well, I got to know him fairly well. When he learned I was coming back to Earth, he asked me to carry a message to you.”

“*Coming back to Earth?*” Harper said.

He put more pressure on her wrists.

“If you break my arms, you’ll be sorry. I’m your friend. I really am.”

“What does *coming back to Earth* mean?” Harper re-

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peated. He did not let up on his pressure on her wrists. "What the hell are you talking about?"

"Art, when are you going to wake up?" the woman demanded. "I'm not human. I don't belong on this planet!"

"Don't belong on this planet?" The confusion grew stronger in his voice.

"No! And neither do you!" the woman said sharply.

"And neither do I!" Harper gasped. He sat up on the bed.

The wet cloth dropped from his face. He opened his eyes. The paralysis had passed from the optic nerves.

He could see!

The fact that he could see again was like a great weight lifting from his mind. More than anything this woman had said the fact that he was blind had worried him. What chance did a blind man have? Until the damp cloth had dropped from his face and he had opened his eyes, he had not known whether the blindness was temporary or permanent.

As the weight of possible blindness lifted from his mind, he also relaxed his grip on the woman's arms. Instantly, she jerked completely free. He grabbed for her and missed. She leaped across the room to a dresser sitting against the wall. Snatching her purse from the top of the dresser, she jerked it open. From it, she took a package of cigarettes.

From this package, as if it was supposed to do exactly this, a single cigarette slid part-way.

She pointed the end of the cigarette at him.

On the bed, Art Harper sat very still. He remembered Jestin and the cigarette that had exploded on the driveway of his service station.

The woman nodded.

"You've got the right idea, Art," she said. "This is just like the cigarette that Jestin almost used on you!"

"What—what is that thing?" he asked. His brain was too overloaded for him to think clearly.

"It is called a *nurlo*," Lecia Brown answered. "It has a very strange effect on the nervous system of a human being. People who are struck by the radiation from it become unconscious."

"That's nice," Harper said. "Yes. Very nice. If anyone tries

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to examine it, I suppose it explodes like one of those thumb-tacks?"

"It does indeed!" Lecia Brown answered. "That's why I didn't want you to touch the *nurlo* that fell on your driveway. It would have blown your hand off!"

"Well—ah—thanks," Harper said.

She studied him thoughtfully, then frowned.

"But you already know much of this," she said.

His ace was a mixture of innocence, despair, and perturbation. In his mind was the thought that perhaps it was best and simplest to insist that this woman in the blue dress was crazy. Insanity was a term that covered a multitude of inexplicable events.

"You keep saying I already know these things," he said plaintively. "You also said that you were not human and that I am not human and that neither of us belong here on this planet. I was born here. I can show you my birth certificate."

He thought this statement would knock a little sanity into her mind. A birth certificate was a fact that could not easily be ignored. It was a matter of public record. While the certificate itself could possibly be forged, the public record, made shortly after birth, could not be easily changed.

Lecia Brown nodded as if he had said something quite sensible.

"I can show you my own birth certificate, too. It looks perfectly legal. If you check it out, it will fit the records. But it's a lie, Art, just as much as your birth certificate is a lie!"

Art Harper stared at this woman. In him was the feeling that he wished he had never seen her. In him was another feeling that said seeing her had been inevitable.

"Your birth certificate says that you and Gecko are twin brothers, that you were born to John and Amanda Harper, and that the attending physician was Dr. Horatio Melic. The doctor signed the certificate."

"That's what it says!" Art Harper said.

"But only one baby was born to your mother," Lecia Brown continued. "The second baby was brought by the attending physician."

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"What?" Harper said. The cold that had been blowing up his spine was now spreading to his whole skin surface. He almost wished he was blind again, so he would not have to look at the woman in the blue dress and at the cigarette extended halfway from the package.

Another thought hammered in his mind.

"One baby was born to mother? Which—"

"Gecko," Lecia Brown said.

"Then that means that I—"

Lecia Brown nodded. "It means you are not human," she said.

Art Harper expelled his breath in a long sigh.

"That's the craziest story I ever heard!" he said. "It means my mother, my father, and the obstretician all had to be in on this scheme!"

Again Lecia Brown nodded.

"They were," she said. "Your parents in part, the doctor completely. You see, your parents were without children. They had made arrangements to adopt a child. As these arrangements were concluded, your mother learned that she was pregnant. This meant they would soon have two children. They decided to go ahead with the adoption. They were told that this second baby was a love child, that they would never know the identity of its parents, that they were to raise it and love it as their own. They were also told that its real parents were wealthy, and that they would be well paid for taking care of this orphan. They thought the orphan was a human baby. They never really had any reason to think otherwise. Only the attending physician and his nurse, who provided the baby to be adopted, knew the real truth."

Art Harper looked at the wallpaper in the room, he studied the dresser with care, he looked toward the bathroom, he looked anywhere except at the woman in the blue dress. Never at any time did he seem to glance at the cigarette extending from the package.

"And this attending physician and his nurse?" he said.

"They were our people," Lecia Brown said. "They were *Tuanthans*."

"Eh?" Art Harper said, blinking at her. "What?"

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Standing beside the dresser, she studied him with thoughtful eyes. Little movements appeared in the pupils as thought passed through her mind. She looked as if she had to make some decision and did not know quite how to make it.

"Are—are you really unawakened, Art?" she said.

He stared at her. Inside his chest, he could feel his heart beating very fast. Jestin had talked about treason. This was a nasty word. Death was also a nasty word. He did not doubt that death was here in the room with him, hidden in what looked to be an ordinary package of cigarettes.

"*Awakened?*" he said. "I'm awake."

"I don't mean this kind of being awake," Lécia Brown answered. "I mean awakened to your true identity. After we are brought here, as helpless infants, we don't know who we really are. This is a result of conditioning implanted in our brain just before we are brought to the surface of Earth. However, sometime between the seventh and the twelfth years of our lives here, this conditioning is supposed to pass away. We are then to remember who we are and to start looking for other Tuanthans. Is that clear, Art?"

He continued to stare at her.

"As clear as mud," he said.

She sighed.

"All right, Art. I see the true situation. You don't believe me. You think I'm crazy. This is as it should be, if you have not awakened. Sometimes it happens that the infants do not awaken or the awakening is badly delayed. There have even been cases where a Tuanthan has gone on thinking he was human all his life! Of course, we who are awakened know our own kind. If we didn't, we could check our records and find out the truth."

"You have checked these records on me?" he asked.

"I most certainly have!" Lécia Brown answered.

"Who," he asked slowly. "Are the *Tuanthans?*"

"The *moon people*, Art. *Our people!*" The woman in the blue dress answered. "We look human! This is because we were an Earth race once. We left the home planet millenia ago and settled on the far side of the moon. During the past century, we have found it necessary to come often to Earth."

"But why come back here?" he asked.

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"Because we could see space flight coming, because we knew that sooner or later another tribe on the home planet would solve the problems of flight into space."

"But—" he protested.

"We don't want that moon ship to reach its destination, Art!" the woman in the blue dress answered. "We don't want a tide of human migration started toward the moon. We are few. We would be lost, destroyed or kept as specimens in museums if the humans of this age ever reached the moon. We're not going to let this happen. These moon rockets will run into delays, and more delays, and still more delays! If sabotage is suspected on the rockets in this country, the Americans will think the Russians are responsible. When the Russians run into sabotage on their moon rocket, they will blame the reactionary, capitalistic Americans. Oh, yes, we have our people in Russia too, Art."

Her words were sharp sounding and they hammered at his ears and at his brain for recognition.

He spoke with care.

"But if all of this is true, aren't you failing to understand the situation? Humans coming from Earth would greet you as long-lost brothers!"

"Did they greet the Red Indians of this continent as long-lost brothers?" Lecia Brown spat at him. "Humans coming from Europe to this continent greeted the Indians with a bottle of whiskey in one hand, a gun in the other, and the germs of smallpox riding on their breath!"

"It wasn't quite that bad," Art Harper tried to protest.

"The white man claimed he came as a brother and as a friend to the Red Indian," Lecia Brown continued. "But the white man ended up owning the continent and the Indian ended up dead or on reservations. The humans of today are no better than those of yesterday. They're not going to pen the Tuantha on reservations!"

Art Harper was silent. He realized there was logic in what this strange woman was saying, but deep in his heart he knew this was not the whole story. The human of 1972 was *not* the same as the human of 1600! Men had grown better, at least a little.

Mostly, out of the corners of his eyes, he watched the

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package of cigarettes Lecia Brown was holding. Were her fingers sagging a little? Was she so interested in what she was saying that she was forgetting the *nurlo* in the cigarette?

"The Tuanthas today are in the same situation the Red Indians were three centuries ago," Lecia Brown continued. Her voice was intense, hot with deep feeling. "But with this difference! We are not stupid enough to believe what the humans of today say! If we let them land on the moon, we know they will make promises. But would they keep those promises? Did they keep their promises to the Red Indians? Have they kept their promises to any other minor group when it was to their advantage to break their given word? Let history answer that question!"

Art Harper was still silent. Inside, he was cringing. He knew what answer history would give to this question, if it was honest history.

"There are other differences," Lecia Brown continued. "The Red Indians had bows and arrows and spears and clubs as weapons. We have other weapons."

"Do you have anything as powerful as an H-bomb?" Art Harper asked.

"No! And that is another reason why no rocket will ever reach the moon. We will never permit a ship carrying an H-bomb in the sky over our domed city, over that beautiful oasis we have constructed on the other side of the moon. We have works of art there that will make you gasp at their beauty! We have libraries that contain documents giving the real history of Earth before the last ice age drove us from our home planet!"

"What wouldn't the historians of Earth give to study those documents!" Art Harper said.

"They will never have the chance!" Lecia Brown answered. "We're going to hold what we have, now and forever, or until we choose to give it up for something better. We will do this until the Great Council of the Tuantha—which includes every one of us—decides otherwise! That day will never come!"

Her words were hot gusts of sound.

"This is your heritage, Arthur Harper, when you awaken," she continued.

He stared at her.

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"I know you don't believe any of this," she said. "No one of us who has not awakened ever believes it. Or indeed can believe it, so strong is the psychological block built into his brain. We have clever psychologists on the moon, who have forgotten more about the way the mind functions than the greatest doctor on Earth even thinks exists."

"They're trying to learn," Art Harper said.

"They had better stay at home to do their learning!" Lecia Brown said. "The moon is denied to them. If one of those moon rockets ever gets past our saboteurs and into space—well—" She shook her head.

"Brave men will be in those rockets," Art Harper said.

"Brave or not, they will fly only to their death!" Lecia Brown said. "Our ships do not come down to the surface of Earth any longer, do not need to. We have another method of reaching Earth. If an Earth ship ever reaches space—" Again she shook her head. "Out there in space, death is quick and easy."

"If one ship fails, they will send up another ship," Art said. "They are not afraid of death."

"Brave men die as easily as cowards!" Lecia Brown said.

Outside the motel room, tires swished softly on asphalt and drew to a halt in front of the door. Lecia Brown glanced toward the sound.

Art Harper leaped at her.

He didn't reach her. Before he could cross the distance to her, she pressed down on the tube extending from the package of cigarettes.

It did not explode. What seemed to be a smoke ring of soft blue light puffed from the end of it. The smoke ring struck Art Harper and went through him as though he did not exist.

Deep inside him, nerve centers went into sudden spasm as a result of contact with the energies flaring in this smoke ring.

His whole body collapsing, he fell to the floor.

When he hit the floor, he did not feel it. He was already unconscious.

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CHAPTER FOUR

THERE WAS a hole in space. If you saw it from a distance, it would look like a round hole in space.

At the outer, or space-end, of this opening was a space ship. This was not a rocket ship, it operated on quite a different system of propulsion.

As he saw the ship, Art Harper understood how it operated, but he could not remember when he had learned this knowledge. He knew such ships as this would never be used close to the surface of a large planet. The magnetic stresses there would be too great, and it would be pulled toward one pole or the other. It could operate with ease in space, and it could land on a minor planet such as Mercury or Pluto or the moons of Jupiter, but its operators would never take it into the gravity field of Earth or even of Mars. If they wished to reach the surface of a major planet, they used the hole-in-space as a transit between the ship and the planet.

Sustained by its own energy system, the ship floated in space like a dream.

Art Harper liked this dream. True, there were other dreams elsewhere, like nightmares on the far horizon, but he was not concerned with them at present. The ship was the dream he liked.

Somewhere on the other side of some lost infinity somebody was yelling at him. He heard this voice and ignored it. He was enjoying the dream.

Vaguely now, as he dreamed, he could remember having had similar dreams at other times in his life, when he was younger, dreams of other ships that went through other skies and of a world that existed somewhere in space. These had been pleasant, too, and very important. But he had ignored them, and their importance, and they had gone out of his life like shy ghosts that felt they were not welcome in his mind.

"Wake up!" somebody yelled.

Art Harper heard the voice. He ignored it. He liked this

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dream and had no intention of awakening from it. Perhaps he would even go for a ride in the dream ship in the sky!

"Damned drunk, wake up!" somebody shouted.

This voice also came from the far side of the lost infinity. He ignored it. He watched the ship. It was at the hole in space. Danger was in this hole. At the far end of it was possible death.

"Damn it, I said wake up!" the voice screamed again. Now something kicked Art in the side. The kick was painful. It jarred him out of his dream. He opened his eyes.

He was lying on the floor of what looked to be a motel room. An angry man was bending over him. Art looked at the man, then looked away. He didn't like what he saw in the man's face. For an instant, he wondered where he was and what had happened to him. Then memory came flooding back. He scrambled to his feet and looked wildly around the room for the woman in the blue dress who had called herself Lecia Brown.

He did not see her.

"Where is she? Where did she go?"

"Where is who?" the angry man demanded.

Art tried to explain.

The angry man put his hands on his hips and stared in disgust at Art Harper.

"Mister, I don't know what kind of pink elephants you were seeing while you were passed out, but there hasn't been any woman in a blue dress in this motel. In fact, this room hasn't been rented in three days!"

"Oh, come now," Art Harper said. "She brought me in here. I was blind."

"Blind drunk, you mean!" the angry man said. "Drunk or sober, you're not going to sneak into one of my motel rooms and sleep it off. I'll call the sheriff's office."

"Do you own this motel?"

"I most certainly do!" the angry man answered.

"Does a doctor have an office in your motel?"

"No."

"Oh," Art said. He was dazed and confused but had no intention of revealing this. "Oh. Well, maybe it's the way you say it is, maybe I did have a drink too many."

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He looked again at the motel owner. The fellow was middle-aged but his skin was brown and unlined. Harper regarded the color of the man's skin with alert interest. If there was any truth in the story told him by the woman in the blue dress, if she was a Tuanthan, if a brown skin was a mark of an alien from the moon, if this motel owner was also a Tuanthan, then the motel owner and the woman in the blue dress might be working together!

Art Harper did not know whether or not this deduction was correct. If it was correct, he did not see where it gave him a better chance to stay alive.

But he *was* alive! The *nurlo* had not been used in sufficient strength to kill him. This proved that he was not marked for death.

Or did it? Perhaps the *nurlo* had merely failed to do its job properly. Perhaps the woman in the blue dress had told the motel owner to come into this room and remove a dead body. Perhaps, entering the room, the motel owner had found the victim of the *nurlo* to be alive. Perhaps, under such circumstances, it had seemed best to the motel owner to claim that Art Harper had been drunk.

Was the motel owner a Tuanthan? If Lecia Brown's story was true, Tuanthans might be anywhere! They might be anybody!

"If I came in here drunk, I'm sorry," Art Harper said, apologetically.

"Being sorry is not enough," the motel owner said.

"Oh, I'll pay you for the room and for any damage," Harper said.

He reached into his pocket. At least she had not taken his billfold. He found a twenty dollar bill and passed it to the owner of the motel.

"Keep the change to pay for any damage," Harper said.

The motel owner took the bill and seemed to relax.

"Now if I could use your phone."

"There's a pay phone up front," the motel owner said. Now that he had been paid, his manner was utterly indifferent. The tone of his voice said, "Get lost!"

As he walked out of the door in front of the motel owner, Art Harper felt little prickles of cold in the middle of his

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back. But if the motel owner was a Tuanthan and had a *nurlo* in his pocket, he did not use it.

Outside, the afternoon sun was slanting across what looked to be a new but quite ordinary motel of the type erected all over Southern California. If anything, it was too commonplace, too normal, too ordinary.

Harper walked past the little office at the front and entered the phone booth at the end of the driveway. A glance at the street in front of the motel showed him that he was in a small town about ten miles from his service station and was less than two blocks from the main highway that led to his place of business.

From the phone booth, he called his station. He wanted to tell his helper there to lock up the station and come and pick him up. There were no cabs this far from the city and no method of transportation except by car or by hitchhiking. He heard the phone ring at the other end of the line.

It kept on ringing. And ringing.

He hung up and dialed again. The phone rang and rang. There was no answer.

Walking down to the main highway, he hitched a ride with a motorist going toward the desert.

"What are they building out there in the desert?" the motorist asked. "I've heard it's a moon rocket. But is this really true?"

"Your guess is as good as mine," Art answered.

"When are they going to launch it?"

"That's another question I can't answer."

"Delays, huh?"

"That's what I hear," Art answered. In the near distance, at the top of a rise, he could see a car stopped on the highway. High in the sky above it, a helicopter was circling lazily. The whirlybird resembled a hawk scanning the sand of the desert for prey.

"Wonder why that car is stopped in the highway?" the motorist said.

Art Harper did not answer. As they drew nearer, they saw that the car was turning around and was returning. As it cleared the highway, they saw a man with a rifle across

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his chest standing in the middle of the road. Beside the highway, two other men waited.

"It's a road block," the motorist said. "Those are cops. They're turning cars back!"

"They're probably paratroopers from the base of the moon rocket," Harper said.

The motorist grunted in surprise. "Why would they have paratroopers out here?"

"We'll ask them," Art said.

As the motorist pulled the car to a halt in front of the soldier in the road, a man with sergeant's stripes on his uniform stepped up from the side of the highway. He had a carbine on a sling over his shoulder.

"Sorry, buddy. Road closed," the sergeant said.

"But I own a service station down the road!" Art protested.

"It'll keep," the sergeant said.

"But I live down this road!" the motorist said, his voice suddenly sharp. "My wife and my kids are down there!"

"If they're there, they are being evacuated," the sergeant said. "You can pick 'em up at the evacuation point about ten miles down the road."

"What?" the motorist's voice was a gasp now. He took a firm grip on the steering wheel with both hands and looked down the road.

"Don't try to run this roadblock, buddy," the sergeant said. "We've got orders!"

"Who gave you these orders?" the motorist demanded.

"The man who gave me mine has five stars on his shoulders," the sergeant said. "Sorry, buddy. But your wife and your kids are probably already back at the evacuation point. If not, they will be there soon. They're in good hands, buddy. They're being evacuated for their own protection. You are being stopped here for your protection."

"Protection from what?" the motorist demanded.

"They don't tell me things like that," the sergeant said.

"A truck bound for the base went off the highway just beyond my service station," Art Harper said. "Was it—"

The sergeant shook his head.

"I don't know nothing about nothing," he said.

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CHAPTER FIVE

BECAUSE HE could not reach his service station and his car, Art Harper rented an automobile. Dusk had turned into early evening when he reached the home where he and Gecko lived—when Gecko was there.

Art started to pull the rented car into the driveway, then jerked the wheels back into the street and continued driving. No light was supposed to be burning in the kitchen, yet one was burning there. Someone was in the house!

Under other circumstances, Art would have thought that one of the neighbors had gone into the kitchen. In this subdivision, no door was ever locked, the neighbors looking out for each other. But, circumstances being what they were, Art had no confidence that the person in the kitchen was a neighbor. It might be somebody called Jestin. Or a woman in a blue dress who had said her name was Lecia Brown. Either one might have what looked to be an ordinary cigarette, but which was actually something they called a *nurlo*, a deadly device which jetted a small smoke ring of expanding blue light which left blindness and possible death when it struck a human.

Parking his car around the block, he went up the alley and paused at the entrance to the back yard of his house.

The light was no longer burning in the kitchen. While he had driven around the block it had been turned out. He hesitated, then went through the wooden gate in the stone wall that enclosed the back yard and into a place of quiet, of cool darkness, where the scent of flowers and the feel of growing plants was in the air. He had no light and needed none. Since he had been big enough to crawl, this garden had been home to him.

At the kitchen door, he listened, waited, listened. No sound came from the kitchen. Quietly trying the back door, he found it turned in his fingers. Opening the door, he stepped into the kitchen and reached for the light switch.

"Stand right there!" a voice said. It came from the shadows within the house.

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"Geckol" Art gasped. Into his mind a picture of his brother flashed: Gecko, very young with a skull cap with a propellor on it; Gecko with a rubber ball on the end of a rubber string; Gecko older with his shirt pocket full of pens and pencils, some of which worked; Gecko, with the look of a born dreamer in his eyes; Gecko who seemed to live always in some world other than the one in which most people lived; Gecko, who would get into trouble faster and deeper than any other boy in the neighborhood!

"Art is that you?" Gecko answered, surprise in his voice. Somehow the light got turned on. It revealed Art and Gecko Harper pounding each other on the back. Gecko was very brown and very thin, as if he had been much in the sun and had not had enough to eat. He also had an open package of cigarettes in his shirt pocket, behind the pens and pencil. Art saw the package of cigarettes but said nothing, assuming that Gecko had begun smoking in his absence.

Gecko gestured toward the kitchen table, covered with sandwich makings.

"I was hungry," Gecko said. "Sit down and have a can of beer, Art. It's your beer," he added.

Art took the can of beer which Gecko removed from the refrigerator, popped open the top, and asked the question uppermost on his mind.

"Where've I been?" Gecko said. He looked thoughtfully at his brother, a kind of expression which said he was in doubt as to how much of his story would be believed, then seemed to decide to plunge. When he spoke, his voice was completely commonplace, as if he was reporting nothing more important than a trip to the grocery store.

"Oh, me. I've been on the moon," Gecko said.

Art started to speak, then changed his mind before his lips had time to ask Gecko what the hell he meant, started to speak again, to ask Gecko how nutty he could get, then changed his mind again. He tried again to find words for what he wanted to say, then choked over the words and decided there simply were no words adequate to express his feelings.

"Go on—ask me how crazy I actually am," Gecko said, watching him.

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"I actually had marijuana more in mind," Art said.

"Then get it off your mind," Gecko said. "I'm neither nuts nor on dope. I've actually been on the moon. I slipped back to Earth with the last bunch coming this way, without being noticed—I hope!"

Defiance was in Gecko's voice, and more than defiance, a kind of yearning that seemed to be drawing from many sources, including a strong wish to be believed.

"And when things are settled down, I'm going back to the moon, to live," Gecko said. The yearning in his voice grew even stronger. "*The Tuantha*—they always refer to themselves as the Tuantha, meaning that in their opinion they're the greatest race that ever lived—really do have a beautiful city there. Nothing half as beautiful has ever existed on Earth. The buildings of Tuantha seem to float on air."

The yearning that had been in Gecko's voice was now on his face and in his eyes. The yearning told of sights seen that were visions of wonder, sights that had delighted the eye, the heart, and the mind, things of the soul of man, things that any man, seeing once, must yearn to see again.

"You do believe me, don't you, Art?" Gecko said suddenly.

"I—uh!" Art started to speak, to say that he believed every word Gecko had said, then forced his words to turn aside before they were spoken. Instead he asked questions about the location of this place of wonder.

"They have an ion screen that serves as a means of holding air and, at the same time, protects them from stray meteorites. It passes light in both directions. The result is you can look out through the ion screen at any time and see all of the suns of space! This is one sight you never forget. It does things to you, inside, things in your heart. . . . And that's not all, that's just what you see when you look outward. Inside, the city itself is made up of buildings which float on the air held inside the ion screen. Surrounding the buildings are little streams and gardens where flowers grow. The whole city looks like—and is—an oasis of beauty in the bleak and bitter face of the far side of the moon. It looks like—and is—a work of art done by some master painter who was also a magician. Nothing but art and magic allied together could produce such beauty."

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Gecko looked defiantly at his brother. "A city a tenth as big as Los Angeles, jewel-bright and jewel-beautiful, exists on the far side of the moon. Just as soon as I get my job finished here, I'm going back to the moon, to live!"

"Job finished here?" Art echoed. "I don't understand. You were working in our service station."

"I don't mean that kind of a job," Gecko said. "This job is all my own idea. I didn't reveal it to anybody before I left but I came back here to help the Tuanthans on Earth stop the moon rockets!"

The only sound in the kitchen was that of Art Harper gulping beer. In Art Harper's mind was the memory of a tire exploding sharply and of a truck turning over in the desert road leading to the base of the moon rocket.

"Stop the moon rockets—" Art whispered. "Do you know—"

"I only know they have to be stopped," Gecko answered. "If men land on the moon, they will destroy the most beautiful thing that exists in the solar system, the city of the Tuantha. This can't happen!"

"Maybe it won't happen!" Art said. "Humans are not all barbarians. In fact, some of them are fairly decent."

"Not enough of them are decent enough," Gecko said. "It isn't that I am turning against my own kind, it is that I want to preserve intact the city of wonder on the far side of the moon. I'm going to help stop the moon rockets!"

"If you get caught trying to stop one of them—"

"I'm not going to be silly enough to try to sneak into the moon rocket base and blow it up! I told the Tuantha this was kid stuff. The only way to stop the moon rocket is to go to the head man—"

"The commanding general at the moon rocket base—"

"How'd you know?" Gecko interrupted.

Art sighed. Beyond wondering again when Gecko was ever going to grow up, he did not attempt to answer this question.

"There's somebody over the commanding general at the base of the moon rocket."

"The president of the United States?"

"I hope I don't have to go that high to get action, but if I have to go to the president, I will," Gecko answered.

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"Somebody has got to listen to me. The whole earth is full of war and thoughts of war. Every nation is looking for some way to grow bigger, to expand, to increase its living space."

"Before you can stop that kind of thinking, you will have to stop the breeding impulse," Art interrupted. "How are you going to do that?"

"Well, I—I hadn't thought of that," Gecko said.

"The population problem is one pressure that is sending men to space," Art said. "This is not the only reason why moon rockets are being built, but it is one reason that has to be considered when you try to stop the moon rockets. Other reasons include jobs in plants manufacturing parts for the rockets, others are personal and national prestige, things of the ego of a man or of a nation, our feeling of being important. All of these must be considered in trying to stop the rockets to the moon."

Grim thoughts that he did not try to put into language were in Art Harper's mind. Just under the surface of his conscious thinking, some of these thoughts sounded like the tails of many rattlesnakes. Others, roused into wakefulness by Gecko's description of the beauty in the city on the other side of the moon, were as bright as brilliantly colored tropical birds. What a wonder it would be to see the city of the Tuantha!

But the rattlesnakes buzzed loudest!

"Don't you think that the very best thing we can do is to keep our mouths shut?" Art said.

"We can't do that," Gecko protested. "We're human. I've got to try to tell people what I have seen, what I know to be true, I've got to try to give them a better sense of direction than they now have! That's part of what being human means! When you find something good, something fine and true and wonderful, you share it with others."

The dream was back in Gecko's eyes. Art Harper sighed and was silent.

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CHAPTER SIX

FROM THE desert road, the nose of the rocket could be seen like a spear pointing at space. At the main gate of the rocket base, the military police were like a hedgehog of spears pointing outward at the public trying to get through the gates.

When the site of the base had been selected, it had been assumed that it was so far out in the desert that few trespassers would appear. Why drive through 110 degree heat just to look at the nose of a rocket rising in the sky?

The people who thought that the desert would give protection from too many sight-seers had reckoned without the public. Moon flight had caught the public fancy. Braving the desert heat, they came here by the thousands, to look at the moon rocket from the distance, to wonder about it, perhaps to dream about it, thinking wistfully of the stars in the depths of space, wondering what was actually there. Something about space flight held the imagination, the hopes, and the dreams of the world. Forgetting that they actually knew very little about their own planet, and less about themselves, men wanted to go to space.

They saw pictures of the base, and of General Holcomb, commanding officer of the base, in the newspapers, with the nose of the moon rocket in the background. They saw pictures of the twelve astronauts, with the twelve alternates, their wives and children, their parents and grandparents, in newspapers and in magazines, and on TV. They were deluged with radio and television talks by news analysts and commentators riding the free publicity of the rocket, and adding to it. As a result of all of this, and of the unconscious desires within them, they came by the hundreds each day to the main gate of the base, seeking admittance. Meeting the hedgehog of spears of the military police, they were turned back.

At the gate of the rocket base, each person was given a form to fill out with his name, age, address, telephone number, and purpose of the visit, then took his place in a line

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leading into a long building. Over twenty people were already ahead of Gecko in line. Directly in front of him was a young woman wearing a blonde wig.

"I'm the cousin of Roy Hart—you know, he's one of the 12 men already selected as astronauts," she told Gecko.

"That's nice," Gecko said.

"Cousin Roy told me to be sure and come and see him," she continued. "On, I think it's just wonderful to be selected to be one of the heroic men to fly to the moon! Just wonderful!"

"Um," Gecko said.

Directly behind him in the line was a man whom Gecko mentally named The Prophet. With bare feet and a dirty beard, the prophet was wearing a single brown garment that was gathered into a kind of robe. The smell about him was not so much that of holiness as it was that of a person who is a stranger to soap and water. He looked at Gecko and did not seem to see him. Gecko did not feel slighted.

Be Patient, Please.

You will be seen.

Gecko looked at this sign. It was on the outside of the building. Inside were more signs. Also, the inside was air conditioned. Working in small booths dozens of interviewers were on duty, each performing the task of a first screening for those who thought they had business here. Behind a partition typewriters clattered and buzzers sounded discreetly. Inside the door, a brisk young woman behind a counter gave Gecko a number.

"Please be seated until your number is called," she told him.

The space age was determined to be efficient. And polite. It gave much thought to its public image and to how this image was reflected in Congressional appropriations.

When his number was called, Gecko was directed to a booth. The interviewer wore black-rimmed spectacles and a smile. He scanned the card that Gecko had filled out.

"Ah, yes, Mr. Harper. You wish to see General Holcomb?"

"That is correct," Gecko said. In his own mind, he felt comfortable about the way he had been treated. He had already decided what he wanted to say and how he would

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say it. What would happen after that, he was not prepared to say. Possibly General Holcomb, or someone above him, would want confirmation of his story before acting to stop the flight of the moon rocket. This would necessitate showing someone, perhaps several people, a remote area called Greg's Canyon, where the *door* would open next. . . .

"Could you clarify for me your purpose in seeking this interview with General Holcomb?" the interviewer asked.

"I would prefer to explain this to General Holcomb in person," Gecko answered.

"Ah, yes. Yes, of course. The general is a very busy man, of course, but if you will excuse me, I will contact his secretary and find out when I can set up a personal appointment for you. Please remain seated. I'll be gone for just a few minutes while I get a pass for you."

The interviewer exited through the door in the far side of his booth. He returned in a few minutes. Beaming, he handed Gecko a card with the word **PASS** prominently displayed on it. The words Mr. Gecko Harper were carefully typed on the face of the card.

"Just show this to the MP at the gate on the designated day," the interviewer said, rising and shaking hands. "This will get you passed directly to the aide of the commanding general of the base."

Gecko looked at the pass. Then looked again. "But this pass is for 19 May 1973!" he said, astonishment in his voice. "That's over a year from now!"

"Sorry, but this can't be helped. I just checked it out with the general's aide. He's a very busy man. Every second of his time is taken up until then."

"You're stalling me, you're giving me the brush-off!" Gecko said sharply.

"Please, Mr. Harper!" the interviewer answered. "I am merely doing my job. This is the appointment time that was given me."

"How many people keep an appointment over a year in the future?" Gecko demanded.

"Well—"

"Damned few and you know it!" Without noticing what he was doing, Gecko balled his hands into fists.

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"Remember, you are on a military reservation!" the interviewer said. He had been slugged, once, by an outraged citizen.

"This interview won't wait a year," Gecko said. "Sooner or later, the rocket will blast off. Before it reaches the moon, the Tuantha will blow it to junk!"

"Blow it to junk? Are you threatening sabotage?" The interviewer pushed a button with his toe.

"I must be seen," Gecko insisted. "Today! Tomorrow may be too late!"

"But General Holcomb is a very busy."

"He's not too busy to see the newspaper photographers, so he can get his picture in the paper!" Gecko said.

The door at the back of the booth opened. A man in the uniform of the military police appeared in the opening. He looked at the interviewer.

"Got trouble here?" the MP said.

The interviewer waved a hand at Gecko.

"All right, I'll go," Gecko said wearily.

"That's good sound sense, fellow," the MP said.

Gecko dropped the pass on the desk of the interviewer. "Give this back to the general," he said. "Tell him to stuff it!"

"Now Mr. Harper . . ."

But Gecko was walking away. Outside, the first person he saw was the young woman in the blonde wig. She was proudly displaying a green card.

"I'm getting right in to see my uncle," she said. "You know, he's Roy Hart, one of the 12 men who are going to fly right up to the little old moon and claim it for all of us."

"He was your cousin the first time you told the story," Gecko said.

"What did you say, honey?" the blonde gasped.

"Nothing," Gecko answered. He walked to his car in the parking lot. The bitterness was still deep within him. Out of the corner of his eyes, he could see the nose of the rocket in the distance. It was a spear impatiently waiting for the end of all the strange delays that had kept it from fulfilling its destiny in space. Or had the delays kept it from exploding before it finished its journey of 240,000 miles?"

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At the exit from the parking lot, the prophet thumbed Gecko for a ride.

He stopped the car and opened the door.

"How far ahead did they set up your interview?" Gecko asked.

"Two years," the bearded man answered, without bitterness. He glanced sharply at the man who had given him a ride, then whistled softly. "They did better for you than for me! They gave you next year. Have you got influence out there?"

"Not that you would mention," Gecko answered. Then, realizing what had happened, his voice grew sharp. "How'd you know?"

The prophet grunted, then sighed, then grunted again. The sigh said that the world was run by fools, but what could you do about it.

"Oh, I can read minds," the prophet said.

"What?" Gecko gasped.

"I'm a sort of a natural receiving station," the prophet explained. "It seems that every human being—and other life forms too—are transmitting stations. Oh, they receive too, but they don't know it. The only difference is that I receive and I know it. People send thoughts and feelings out into the ether. I kind of pick up these."

"That's how you knew my appointment time?" Gecko gasped. "Say, that's wonderful—"

"Don't start wishing you could do it too," the prophet said. "It's not always fun. Sometimes you know men are plotting murder and you can't prevent it. But mostly you just learn about contractors putting shabby material in new houses and realtors selling over-priced tract houses to people from Iowa."

"Did you go to the base to tell them something you found out by reading minds?"

"I was that kind of a fool," the prophet said sadly.

"I'm surprised they didn't hold you for a psychiatric interview," Gecko said.

"Oh, they thought about it. I could hear the interviewer thinking. The trouble was, there's no law against being crazy, yet, even in California, if you're harmless. I'm obviously harmless. And the interviewer was in a hurry. If he held me

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for a psychiatric interview, he'd have to waste a lot of his time explaining how I was nutty. He finally decided I wasn't any nuttier than dozens of others he had interviewed."

"So he gave you an appointment two years in advance, thinking this would satisfy you, and let you go?"

"That's about the way it was."

"What did you want to tell them at the base?"

"About something that's going on out there," the prophet answered, jerking his thumb skyward to indicate what he meant. "There's people out there in space who don't like this rocket heading for the moon."

"Do you mean the Tuanthans?" Gecko gasped.

"So that's their name!" the prophet said, glancing sideways at Gecko. "And you've been on the moon! You know about them! I didn't realize that until right now."

He was silent for a moment, then he nodded to himself. "The Tuantha! That's their name for themselves. That word has been heard on Earth before now."

"How do you know?"

"I know it from the sound and the feel of the word," the prophet answered. "It's an Earth-born word. It will be heard again on Earth if that rocket back there ever reaches the moon." He jerked his thumb over his shoulder.

"I know," Gecko said, sudden despair rising in his voice.

"I know you know," the prophet said. "If you hadn't known the truth, I would never have talked to you. But there's no real reason to feel so bad about the coming trouble. A human being is a natural heir to trouble. We've seen worse in our long history. We'll see worse in the future. I've about concluded that human beings *like* trouble, they have so much of it."

Like a jack rabbit drifting over the edge of the horizon, his voice drifted away into silence. They rode through the desert. Big trucks lumbered toward them, met them in a blat of diesel exhausts. On the right of the broad highway, fanged mountains, that looked as if they had never been softened by rain, crouched glaring at the sky. On the left of the road, rolling hillocks of white sand moved slowly down into an enormous dry valley. It was the desolate land of the coyote, the scorpion, and the rattlesnake.

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The prophet gestured toward the mountains. "If you'll let me off at the next wash, I'll be heading home," he said.

"You live out here? How do you stay alive?"

"There's a spring up toward the mountains. It gives enough water to grow beans and a little corn, tomatoes, and squash. For people afflicted as I am afflicted, it's better to live in a place like this."

"Do you regard mind reading as an affliction?" Gecko said.

"Hell, yes!" the prophet answered. "When you can really do it, it's an affliction."

The last Gecko saw of the prophet, he was walking up the rocky bed of the wash, his robe flapping dejectedly about him.

Art, his brother, listened sympathetically to Gecko's story. While Gecko talked, Art continued repairing the asphalt on the driveway of their service station. As if tremendous heat or tremendous radiation had been applied here, in one spot the asphalt crumbled to fine dust at the touch. Art had cleaned away the asphalt to the dirt and was replacing it.

"That's too bad," Art said.

"I'm not licked," Gecko answered.

The next day he drove into Los Angeles, going to the office of the biggest newspaper in this city. Gecko ended up in the office of the features editor, whose eyes got wide with interest as he listened to Gecko's story.

"Say, you've got a real feature there!" the editor said. "Wait until I get a writer—Hey, Mack!"

The man named Mack pounded out Gecko's story, then summoned a photographer. They took pictures of Gecko, patted him on the back, thanked him, and told him his story would be in the next edition of the paper.

It was there. Gecko and Art read it together. The headline said:

PEOPLE ALREADY ON MOON

Gecko Harper, 27, a filling station operator of 2149 Raynoud Street, Clagmont, California, says that people similar to humans already live on the moon. As proof of his claim, he says he has been on the moon and knows this to be true from personal experience. When asked

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how he got to the moon, he says that the people who already live on the moon took him there and brought him back.

"They're laughing at me!" Gecko said, his voice hot.

"I hope so," Art answered.

"What do you mean by that?"

"If anybody, including the FBI, takes that story seriously, you and I will spend more time than we have to spare explaining exactly who we are, what we do for a living, and how we spend our spare time."

"You too?" George gasped.

"I'm your brother, of course I'll be investigated!" Art said.

"I didn't think of that!" Gecko gasped. "I didn't mean to get you into trouble."

"We're not in trouble, yet. It just depends on whether anybody takes that story seriously. If anybody thinks it ought to be looked into, we will be checked from the day we were born right up to what we had for breakfast this morning. But what really concerns me is the odd chance that some Tuantan here on Earth may read the story."

"What if they do?"

"It has your address on it. If a Tuantan comes calling, with that story in his pocket, neither of us will live very long."

"Hell, I didn't think! Why didn't you stop me?"

"How could I stop you? You were so eager to tell the whole world what you had found, so eager to help everybody on Earth and the Tuantans on the moon, that you could not see the dangers involved."

"But some way must be found to stop that moon ship."

"The ship can't be stopped by logical argument any more than you can be. The world, and you, have to learn the hard way, by experience. If experience is a hard school, neither men nor planets can learn in any other."

"I'll go see my senator. I'll go see the president. I'll go—"

"Better stay home, keep your mouth shut, and hope to hell nobody comes to see you!" Art said.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

IN THE MORNING, early, Art Harper awakened with the sure knowledge that during the night something had gone wrong. He slipped a hand out of the sheets and into the open drawer of the night table at the head of his bed. The gun in there was a .38, with a short barrel. It fitted snugly into the palm of his hand. With it in his possession, he slid out of bed.

The room was dark, but a sleepy bird whispering outside told him that the night had gone. He moved to the door of his room, opened it carefully, and stood looking along the hall that led to the front.

The door there was open.

Gecko's bedroom was at the front end of the hall. Gun in hand, Art opened the door and peeped inside.

The bed was in disarray. Gecko was gone.

Gecko's clothes were also gone. Perhaps Gecko had been unable to sleep and had dressed and gone out for an early breakfast.

For an instant, this thought made Art Harper feel a little better. But not for long. He knew he was lying to himself. Gecko was gone. He did not know where, when, or why, and would not know until Gecko returned. Insofar as hunting for Gecko was concerned, his feeling was not to do it except surreptitiously, without telling anyone what he was doing, and without departing from his own normal routine.

The only change Art Harper made in his normal routine of shaving, showering, and dressing before leaving home was to slip the .38 in the right pocket of his jacket. The gun might be useful.

He had breakfast at the restaurant across the highway from his service station, kidding and laughing with the friendly waitress. She had blue eyes and an open face. Art decided again that he liked her, then pulled such thinking up short. Who was he to even think of liking a woman?

"Lots of whirlybirds in the sky since the big alert the other day," the waitress said to Art. "And where that truck exploded, they even sifted the sand."

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"They've sure got something on their minds," Art agreed.

"You have any idea what it is?"

"No more than you."

"But those trucks stop at your station."

"And returning, the drivers stop in this restaurant and you get to talk to them," Art said. "You probably know more than I do."

She laughed, and he went across the highway. Changing clothes, he opened the station. His lubrication man arrived shortly after.

During the day, Art Harper watched for four events, the arrival of a woman in a blue dress, a brown-skinned man wearing horn-rimmed spectacles who might pose as a tire salesman, the return of Gecko, and, fourth and last, the fanfare of flame and the beat of distant thunder that marked the moon rocket leaping into the sky.

None happened. Great trucks lumbered past his station. As each moved past the service station, a helicopter moved into position overhead. As the truck lumbered into the desert, the helicopter followed like a hawk watching from the sky.

That evening, at home, he did not find Gecko waiting for him. As he watched television that night, the program was interrupted by a special newscast:

RUSSIANS LAUNCH MOON ROCKET

Since they were sure this was the greatest victory they had ever won—and the biggest propoganda break that had ever come their way—the Russians intended to exploit the feat to the utmost. It was a real scientific achievement. The Russians released live television coverage of the launching of the rocket, both from cameras surrounding the space port and from inside the ship itself.

The world saw a great fan of flame leap into the sky. The world heard the roar and the thunder of a great ship leaving the planet. The world saw and heard the end of the biggest rat race ever run on Earth, the race to see which nation would put the first ship on the moon.

The world also waited to see if military control of the Earth really lay on the moon. Across all history, military minded men had sought to control headlands like the rock of Gibraltar, high mountains, strategic islands and seas, be-

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cause such control of a small area made it possible for them to control a much larger area. Was this the real purpose of the rat race to gain control of the moon, so that the nation which controlled the satellite could use it as a natural pad for launching rockets at the planet? Did the nation that ruled the moon automatically rule the planet?

As the fan of flame fared into the sky, in the race of men an old, old fear took a new direction. Men asked each other, in silence, by looks out of the corners of their eyes, if this rocket to the moon meant that they had acquired a new master. Aware of the fear in the world, wishing to take full advantage of it, the Russians reported every instant of the rocket's progress. They claimed this was the greatest scientific achievement of all human history.

Reaching a hungry finger for the moon, the fan of light was clearly visible to the naked eye.

In the Congress of the United States, in the upper house, a senator arose and quoted the number of billions of dollars the United States had spent on moon rocket program.

"I have only one question to ask," the senator concluded. "Why has this money been wasted?"

In the Pentagon, heads began to be selected for the axe. At the moon rocket base in the California desert, General Holcomb began to think about packing his uniforms. Other generals on duty elsewhere began to wonder how they would like life in the desert.

From space, guttural voices speaking Russian spoke glowingly of the beauty of the Earth as seen from forty thousand miles away. These voices became even more rhapsodic as the distance increased. Halfway to the moon, the voices were speaking poetry.

The the voices ceased.

The rocket blew up.

There was a glare and a flare of flame in space. Halfway to the moon, there was a spew of metal and of men. There was a flash of light in the void.

Then there was no light. There were no guttural voices exulting in poetical language how beautiful was the Russian homeland as seen from space. There was no hungry finger

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reaching for the moon. As the ancient quiet of the void was restored, there was silence in space.

The watching, listening world gasped in horror. Out there between the Earth and the moon, brave men had died.

Now they were dead men, a scramble of brains and blood and guts in space.

On Earth, there was horror and fear—then there was relief. The conqueror had leaped for his foothold and had missed his footing and had fallen. The senator who had wanted to know why the American money that had gone into rocket development had been wasted was suddenly silent. General Holcomb stopped wondering if his uniforms would be properly packed.

Art Harper saw the explosion of the rocket from the TV set in his service station in the desert. He and his lub man sat glued to their chairs. A car pulled in at the pumps. The driver waited for service, got none, honked, and still got no service. He pulled out. Other drivers pulled into the station and came inside to see what was happening. When they heard the story, they forgot as completely about buying gas as Art had forgotten about selling it to them.

An old, battered car with a dented fender pulled into the service station. . . .

Art Harper looked up from the TV screen in time to see the woman in blue walking toward him. He recognized her instantly. His hand dropped down into the pocket of the rough jacket he was wearing, feeling the .38 there. Looking out, he saw she had a package of cigarettes in her fingers. Getting to his feet, he looked past her, trying to see if Jestin was with her. If the brown-skinned tire salesman with the horn-rimmed glasses was around, he was not in sight. Art walked out the front door of the station. Right hand in the pocket of his jacket, he stood by the nearest gasoline pump, waiting.

"Hi, Lecia," he said. "We're watching history and the service is a little slow."

"Watching history? I don't understand." She was fully aware that he had one hand in the pocket of his service jacket, aware also of its probable meaning.

He nodded over his shoulder to the TV set inside the office.

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"The Russian moon rocket just blew up," he said.

"Oh!" Her mouth made a round O, lines tightened in her face, but her eyes showed no surprise. "I—Well—What happened? Was it—What a horrible accident!"

"It was no more of an accident than the truck going off the road was an accident!" Art Harper said.

She studied his face. In her fingers, the package of cigarettes turned toward him.

"Can the *nurlo* beam move faster than a bullet?" he asked.

"Yes. But it can't move fast enough to paralyze your finger before you shoot," Lucia answered. "Anyhow, I didn't come here for a shoot-out."

"What did you come for?" Art asked.

"I came to tell you the *door* will open tonight, in a place called Greg's Canyon," she said.

He concealed his start. "And so?" he questioned.

"Don't you ever—well, sort of yearn to return to your homeland?"

"This is my homeland," he answered.

Both her eyes and her words snapped at him. "Stop it, Art! You know who you are!"

He gestured skyward. She looked quickly upward. "It's only another helicopter," she said.

"After the truck exploded, the number of helicopters doubled. Now that the Russian ship has exploded, they may double again."

Alarm came over her face.

"On that helicopter they may have secret listening equipment that enables them to hear a conversation taking place half a mile away. They may also have cameras with excellent telephoto lenses."

"You mean they may have been listening to me!"

Harper nodded. "Also to me. And taking our pictures while they listened."

The package of cigarettes went hastily into her purse. The helicopter was lazily drifting closer. She eyed it with deep concern.

"It's not that I am afraid," she said. "It's just that the thought of somebody listening to what I am saying is—well, unsettling."

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"I understand what you mean."

She looked at him, then at her car. "Well, thanks, Art." She moved toward the car.

"Wait a minute," he said.

"Don't tell me you are going to threaten me with the police!" She said, stopping. "That's utterly silly, and you know it."

"I'm not going to call the police," Art said.

"No? Then why—"

"I'm going with you," Art said.

"What?" Surprise and inexplicable pleasure showed in her eyes.

"Wait until I tell my lub man he'll be running the station alone tomorrow—at double pay," Art said.

They left the station in Lecia Brown's battered old car. For several miles the helicopter lazed through the sky above them, then it veered off to the north and dropped from sight.

"I'm glad he decided not to try to follow us any farther," Lecia said. "I would feel sorry for any helicopters circling above Greg's Canyon tonight!"

"The Tuantha don't like helicopters?" Art said.

"They don't give a damn about helicopters," Lecia Brown answered. "What they don't like are human spies."

"You can hardly call a man a spy who is serving his own country on his own soil," Art protested.

"Let's don't go into that again," Lecia said. "It's enough of a problem to get you awakened to your real identity without fighting with you over the meaning of words."

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE NEON sign said:

CAFE
LIQUOR
DANCING

When Lecia Brown pulled her car into the parking lot, dozens of cars were parked in the lot already.

"Would you like some hot coffee, Art?" she asked.

"I sure would," he answered.

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Inside, they sat down at an empty table. Lecia promptly rose and headed for the rest room. Art looked around the little cafe. A man in a gray parka lounged at the counter. A woman in yellow slacks sat beside him. Two men in crimson-red hunting jackets were at the far end of the line of stools. Most of the tables were occupied by similarly-dressed people.

Lecia Brown returned from the rest room. "Third turn to the left, second turn to the right," she said. "Several cars are ahead of us so we won't have any trouble finding the place those in the ship have selected for the opening of the door. The recognition signal is to blink the car lights twice with the left turn blinker going at the same time."

"What on Earth are you talking about?" Art Harper demanded.

"Greg's Canyon," she answered.

"Oh. But why recognition signals?"

"Because we don't want anybody but Tuanthans in Greg's Canyon tonight."

"I see," Art said. "Where did you get all of this information?"

"It's all written in code on the wall of the washroom," Lecia answered. "The same message, also in code, is on the wall of the men's room. Or so I have been told." She sipped at the hot coffee the waitress had brought to their table.

Art Harper nodded in understanding. The weight of the gun in the pocket of his coat was comforting. He had no delusions that it was as powerful or as devastating as a *nurlo*, but only a very stupid or a very brave Tuanthan would dare use the energy hidden in the fake cigarette when he was looking into the muzzle of a .38. Whatever else the Tuantha were, they were not stupid. He saw that Lecia Brown was looking around the dining room and was nodding to the people here. He also was aware that he was the object of occasional glances from curious eyes.

"They're all Tuanthans," Lecia Brown told him. "They are our people. They are curious about you."

"Are you vouching for me?"

"Yes."

"And if you didn't vouch for me?"

"You would be perfectly safe here in this little cafe. Anyone

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might come in here. But you would never get into Greg's Canyon alive tonight unless you knew the recognition signals or had someone to vouch for you."

"What would happen to me?"

She shrugged. "Who knows? Perhaps a cigarette would explode in your face, perhaps some hunter would mistake you for a deer and put a bullet through you. Shall we go?"

He rose and nodded. As they went out of the little cafe, he knew that curious glances followed him. He was also aware that a man in a red hunting coat hastily left the counter and followed them in a powerful sport car.

"Sure we're being followed," Lecia Brown admitted, as the old car groaned up the mountain grades. "That's to make certain you don't overpower me."

"I have no such thought in my mind," Art said.

"I know you haven't, now. But in case such a thought should enter your mind—" She nodded over her shoulder at the lights of the car following them.

When he was not watching the headlights of the car following them, Art Harper watched the moon. It was full this night. He knew he could not see the fragments of the Russian rocket. These were lost in the vast depths of space, fragments of metal and of men, derelict objects that some space ship would encounter in some future age.

"Here's where we turn left," Lecia Brown said. Slowing, she turned the car into a little used side road that seemed to lose itself in the moonlit gash that was Greg's Canyon. The headlights of the following car made the same turn.

No one had ever found either gold or water in this canyon, hence it had remained what it had been during Indian days, a desolate gash in the side of a mountain, the natural home of the rattlesnake and the coyote.

The road became a trail which became a right turn. Lecia blinked her headlights as she turned on her left-turn blinker. From beside a giant cactus on the right of the road, a flashlight beam flicked in reply.

With headlights following, Lecia spun the car along the narrow track that was little more than an Indian trail. They reached an area where the canyon widened and became a flat sandy waste where giant cacti stood like rooted ghosts in

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the moonlight. On the far side of the sandy waste a huge bluff rose hundreds of feet into the air. Under the overhang of the bluff, a small fire was burning. Near a clump of scrub cedar on the left cars were parked. Lecia pulled her car to a stop with the others. The car that had been following them swung in beside them. A man wearing a scarlet hunting coat got out and came to them. He had a high powered sporting rifle cradled in his arms.

"I'm Tim Bond," he said.

"This is Art Harper, Tim," Lecia said. "He is a Tuantha who has not as yet awakened."

"Eh?" Bond's voice was hard and sharp. He drew back a step. The rifle dropped to a ready position.

"It's all right, Tim," Lecia said hastily.

"How can he know he is a Tuantha who has not awakened if he can't remember it?"

"I know it," Lecia said. "I checked it out. Something went wrong somewhere and he did not awaken. I brought him here tonight in the hope that the sight of the *door* opening would stir his lost memories to life."

"I see," Bond said. He stood without moving, irresolute, with the rifle ready in his hands. Then he relaxed. "Well, if you have checked it out—"

"I have," Lecia said firmly. She took both men by the arm. "Come on. Let's go to the fire."

At the fire, she introduced Art to the others there. Although they seemed to accept him without reservations, he had the impression that his presence made a big change in the subjects brought up for conversation. Lecia brought him coffee from the big pot bubbling on the fire. Tim Bond stood apart, the rifle held in the crook of his arm.

"If you didn't know who these people are, you'd think this is just a bunch of people having a picnic," Art said.

"That's the way we intend it to look," Lecia answered.

"These people seem to be as happy as they would be if they really were on a picnic," Art said.

"Why shouldn't they be? Most of them are going home, after years of starvation for the finer things of life here in this wilderness of Earth."

"Is life on Earth as bad as that?"

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"Life on Earth is all right, if you don't know anything better. When you awaken, you will know that Earth is not your true home. Deep in your heart will be a longing to return to the world that gave you birth."

"The longing to return home is deep in the heart of all men," Art said. "We would go there—only we seem to have forgotten where home is."

"That's exactly the way it is with a Tuanthan."

"I'm referring to humans, to ordinary people living on Earth."

"How do you know how an ordinary human feels?"

"I've talked to them," Art answered. "They all feel this vague longing to go home. Some say it is in the east, some say it is in the west, some say it is in the stars. Wherever they think it is, there they want to go."

Headlights swung into sight along the winding road leading into the sandy waste. Art watched them as the driver of the car picked his way to the parking area. Tim Bond went forward to meet the car. They heard his voice raised in greeting. He came forward to the fire with a man and a woman. Laughing and talking, it was obvious that they knew each other.

"Were all of these people brought here as babies and adopted by human couples?" Art asked.

"That's special treatment," Lecia explained. "There aren't many of those. For most of us training began as young children on the moon. We came here as late teen-agers and joined a family of Tuanthans already established here on Earth. From this family, we got the rest of our training. We were assigned to our duties by our supervisors, of whom Jestin is one."

"Jestin? Yes," Art spoke vaguely. His mind was on the fourth person coming from the direction of the parking lot.

Tim Bond was with the couple that had just arrived. A fourth person was following behind them at a little distance. They were not as yet aware of the existence of the fourth person. Looking at him, Art thought there was something very familiar about that walk.

Tim Bond finally heard the footsteps of the man following him. He turned quickly, started to raise the rifle, then halted

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the movement before the muzzle covered the man following him.

"This is a private party!" Tim Bond said.

"I understand," the fourth man answered.

Beside the fire, Art Harper froze. He had thought the walk was familiar. He was certain about the voice, which he knew as well as he knew his own.

The fourth man was Gecko.

Looking past Tim Bond, Art saw why the man in the scarlet hunting jacket had stopped raising his rifle. Gecko had a partly opened package of cigarettes in his hand. Like the barrel of a small pistol, one cigarette was extending from the end of the package.

Tim Bond—and everyone else around the fire—was staring at the cigarette.

"I'm going to lay my cards on the table," Gecko said. "I'm going back to the moon with you!"

The only sound was the crackle of the tiny flames of the fire. Around the fire was frozen silence.

"Some of you will remember me," Gecko continued. "I was recently on the moon."

He paused.

"I remember him," Lecia spoke quickly, as if rushing to his defense. "He was on the moon."

"I heard stories about that," Tim Bond said, slowly. He seemed to make up his mind. "So you're the man who was on the moon? So now you want to go back."

"That's right," Gecko said.

"Would you mind telling us why you want to return?" Bond asked.

"Glad to," Becko answered. He took a deep breath and then let words slowly drip from his mouth. "I want to go back to the moon—to stop murder!"

"I—I don't understand," Tim Bond said. "Do you think we are going to murder someone? I assure you—"

Gecko jerked a thumb toward the sky.

"It's murder up there that I am trying to stop," he said.

To Art Harper it seemed as if a night wind suddenly blew in from deepest space. In the wind was the cold of the void.

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"A rocket just exploded up there," Gecko continued. "That was murder."

The wind from the night got colder still.

"They were Russians," the man called Tim Bond said.

"They were humans before they were Russians," Gecko Harper answered.

Listening, Art Harper suddenly loved his brother. Until this moment, he had not known that Gecko had eyes wide enough and deep enough to see the whole world. In Art's eyes, Gecko suddenly stopped being a small boy, with his shirt pocket full of pencils and pens, and reached the stature of a man.

Gecko pointed toward the desert.

"Out there another rocket is waiting to leap skyward. The men in it think of themselves as being Americans, and they are. But they were humans before they were Americans, just as you were humans before you became Tuanthans!"

His voice was grim and bitter.

"I'm an American," he continued. "I tried to get my own people to listen to me long enough to postpone this rocket flight until we had made peace with the moon people. They laughed at me. They thought of themselves as Americans. They could not understand that what I was trying to do was to save the lives of a few *humans!*"

The grim bitterness in his voice faded into pain as if he, as a human, in some way also shared the same fate as the men who had died in space, or who would die there.

"The fact that the Russian rocket has blown up won't make the Americans listen to reason, won't make them slow down. On the contrary, they will hurry faster. When his sense of his own self-importance is involved, nobody likes to listen to somebody else's reason. Americans won't listen to my kind of reason. To them, it isn't reason. They want a military base on the moon to protect themselves. If I try to tell them they are sending brave men to certain death, I will find myself in an insane asylum. I have tried to stop my own people from doing this. I have failed. Now I am going to try to stop the Tuantha."

"You are going to try and stop the Tuantha!" Daze was in the voice of the man called Tim Bond, daze that sprang

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from utter disbelief. "You can't do that. You're not big enough. All the guns, all the weapons, all of the armies the human have are not big enough to stop the Tuantha!"

"Perhaps not," Gecko said. "But I can try. I'm going to talk to the Grand Council of the Tuantha. I'm going to ask them to permit peaceful landings by humans on the moon."

His voice went into silence. Around the fire, listeners shook their head in utter disbelief.

"When the *door* opens here tonight, I'm going back to the moon with you," Gecko said.

"But this *door*—" Tim Bond tried to say.

"I can read signs on restroom walls," Gecko said. "I know the *door* opens here tonight. As to how I got to this canyon, I came in the trunk of a car."

Art Harper's eyes went beyond Gecko, to the parked cars, to the cacti. A shadow had appeared beside one of the cacti. He watched this shadow.

"If I can manage it, I am going peaceably," Gecko said. "But one way or another, I'm going."

"*Gecko!*" Art said softly.

The sudden sound of a voice he knew calling his name startled Gecko so badly that he almost dropped the package of cigarettes. "Art?" he gasped.

"Keep these people covered with the *nurlol*!" Art said.

"I'm keeping them covered. It's you that worries me. What are you doing here?"

"The man coming up behind you is what worries me," Art said.

"Behind me?" Gecko started to turn to look, then, as if remembering Tim Bond and his rifle, hastily changed his mind. "I'm not falling for an old trick like that!"

"It's no trick." Art answered.

"Drop the package of cigarettes," Jestin's voice said, from behind Gecko.

Jestin's voice was bitter cold.

Gecko did not move.

Art slipped the pistol out of his pocket.

"If you use that *nurlo* on him, I'll kill you, Jestin!" Art Harper said.

Art did not get to his feet. He remained seated. This way,

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Jestin would have a harder time picking him out as a target. He saw Jestin hastily look from person to person around the fire, trying to determine who had spoken.

"You know me, Jestin," Art said.

"The service station man!" Jestin said. The way he said the words, they were sounds of contempt.

"Yes," Art answered. "My brother, Gecko, wants to go to the moon. I think he deserves the chance. What he wants is a chance to present his ideas to the Grand Council of the Tuantha. I think this is a very good idea. So, if Gecko gets to go to the moon, nobody here will get hurt. But if you try to oppose him, Jestin, I'll kill you."

Beside him, Lecia Brown gave a little cry of distress. The little wordless wail said she was sorry for what she was going to do, but that she was going to do it anyhow.

Art Harper heard the sound, saw her move her hand. He did not see how she got the *nurlo*. Perhaps she had had it in her hands all of the time. All he saw was the flare of light puffing its soundless spinning smoke ring at him.

The light blinded him and knocked him into some half-world of distorted nightmare where strange shapes moved in a land of incredible dreams.

CHAPTER NINE

WHEN ART HARPER recovered consciousness, his first fear, coming out of his previous experience with the *nurlo*, was that he would open his eyes and find himself blind. The fear vanished as he opened his eyes and found that he could see. Out of the corner of his eyes he caught a glimpse of the campfire flickering in the moon-drenched darkness of Greg's Canyon. He was lying on his back.

Lecia Brown was bending over him. Slapping him on the face, she was telling him how sorry she was she had had to use the *nurlo* on him. He ignored her. He did not have the gun in his hand. Assuming he had dropped it when the beam from the *nurlo* hit him, he was searching for it in the sand.

That the gun might still be on the sand was an assumption and he knew it.

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"Art, wake up!" Lecia whispered. She sounded scared. He caught a glimpse of her looking upward at someone standing beside her.

"I gave him the charge at lowest load," she said to the person standing beside her. "It should have done no more than knock him out for a few minutes."

"You should have given him the full charge!" the man standing beside her said. As the man spoke, Art Harper recognized Jestin's voice. Jestin sounded mad.

"But that would have killed him!" Lecia protested.

"Yeah, I know," Jestin answered. "That would have saved the executioner the trouble of shoving him into the space door."

Vaguely, Art wondered what the *space door* was. Whatever it was, he decided he did not like it.

"You have no right to even think such thoughts!" Lecia said, her voice sharp. "He is a Tuantha."

"Then that makes him a traitor. You know the penalty for treason!" Jestin answered.

"He is innocent until he is proven guilty. He is entitled to a trial to find out which he is!"

"I know Tuanthan law," Jestin answered. "He'll get a trial, such as it is! He deserves to die here and now!"

"You don't have any authority to kill him!" Lecia spoke quickly.

"I'm not going to kill him. The Council can order that done. . . . What's that you're saying?" Jestin spoke to Tim Bond, who had come up and was holding something toward the Tuanthan leader.

On the ground, Art Harper kept trying to find his gun. He was having no luck.

"You mean he tried to bluff us with an ordinary package of cigarettes?" Jestin said.

"Here's the package," Tim Bond answered. "There isn't a *nurlo* in the whole package. I checked it out."

"Goddam! I didn't know any human had that much guts!" Jestin's voice was heavy with amazement. "Is—is he dead?"

"No," Tim Bond answered. "What shall we do with him—kill him or take him with us?"

Lying on his back on the ground, Art Harper knew that

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they were talking about Gecko. Art hunted frantically for the gun. If he could find it, perhaps he could threaten Jestin. . . .

Lecia Brown saw the movement of his hand.

"Art, you're awake! Are you all right?" She was instantly on her knees beside him, helping him to his feet, taking him away from the gun that might be lying in the sand, this without knowing what she was doing. He could have strangled her. Getting to his feet, he found he was facing Jestin. The face of the Tuanthan leader was grim and bitter in the moonlight. Ignoring Jestin, Art walked around the fire to where Gecko was lying on the ground. Dropping to his knees, he laid an ear on Gecko's chest. The heart beat was strong and regular.

"Don't try anything funny," Tim Bond said, with the rifle ready.

Art got to his feet. Ignoring Tim Bond, he moved to face Jestin.

"Take him to the moon," he said to Jestin. "That's where he wants to go. Give him the chance he risked his life to get."

Jestin studied the man who faced him. The group around the fire was very still. Lecia moved through the group to stand beside Art Harper.

"Lecia thinks you are a Tuanthan," Jestin said.

"I am not responsible for what Lecia thinks," Art answered.

"He is a Tuanthan but he has not awakened," Lecia said quickly. "You can't blame him for not knowing his true identity."

"Um," Jestin said. His tone of voice said he had heard what she had said, but that he was not agreeing with her argument.

"The principle of non-responsibility in such cases is well established in Luanthan law," Lecia continued. As if she was trying hard to find a word that would fit the situation and dissolve it, she was speaking very quickly now. "The Council has upheld this principle—"

"The Council has also upheld the right of the leader of a unit on the big planet to act as he sees fit in any emergency that may arise," Jestin said.

"But this is not an emergency," Lecia said.

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"The leader defines the emergency," Jestin answered.

"Then I hope you won't define this as an emergency," Lecia said.

Jestin studied her. The Tuanthan leader seemed to be cold, without feelings of any kind.

"You are taking much interest in this man," he said at last.

"My interest is not in him but in seeing justice done."

"Are you in love with him?"

"In love with him?" Lecia gasped. "You know that Tuanthans do not fall in love! We are long past that stage of evolution in which people fall in love with each other!" Horror was in the tone of her voice.

Jestin sighed. "I was afraid you had become infected with human ideas. I'm still not sure you haven't."

"Not a chance!" Lecia said. "I'm past the animal stage of sexual love."

"Let's hope so," Jestin said. "Why did you bring Harper here tonight?"

"I hoped the sight of the *door* opening here in the canyon would awaken him," Lecia said.

"You did not receive my permission in advance for such action," Jestin said.

"I tried but I could not contact you," Lecia said.

"Do you want to go to the moon, service station man?" Jestin said suddenly to Art Harper.

"I—"

"That's where both of you are going," Jestin said, making up his mind.

"But—"

"If you are truly a Tuanthan, but have not awakened, our psychologists on the moon will know how to awaken you," Jestin said.

There was much that Art Harper wanted to say, but Jestin told him coldly, "That's all." Then everyone in the group forgot all about Art and Gecko Harper.

From the sky, a ring of light was diving downward toward Greg's Canyon. Brighter than the noonday sun in these hot, high deserts was this circle of light, faster moving than the fastest jet, than the fastest rocket, the circle of light dived from sky to Earth, growing larger, or seeming to grow

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larger, as it descended. Brighter than the sun, it swung along the sandy canyon floor, illuminating every cactus, every clump of desert growth, catching the parked cars, dimming the light of the fire, frightening the creatures of the night caught in its sudden burst of sizzling illumination.

The ring of light moved erratically along the canyon. It seemed to be searching. It shifted, faded, came again, then moved to a new spot in the canyon. The effect was that of a huge searchlight pointed downward from sky to Earth. The operator of the searchlight was having trouble with his instrument. His control of focus and of direction were both off. As Art Harper watched, the ring became a shaft of light perhaps fifty feet in diameter. Like a beam of a searchlight, the circular beam of light came booming down from space. Looking up, Art saw that the other end of the shaft of light was lost in the infinite depths toward the moon.

The people around the fire suddenly came to life. Jestin shouted one word: "*Move!* Like actors playing roles, the group went into action. Bags were jerked open. Instruments were taken from the bags. One man took one instrument and ran straight across the canyon. A second man took a second instrument and ran down the canyon. A third man moved just outside the range of the fire with another instrument.

The third man was close enough for Art to get a good look at the instrument he had placed on the sand. From the top of the instrument a short antenna projected out. A short rod with a heavy wire attached to it was shoved into the ground, apparently forming a ground connection. On the face of the instrument was a dial for tuning.

In the moonlight, the three men shouted at each other. Jestin, checking the instrument nearest the fire, seemed to be giving orders to the other two men to move nearer or farther away.

The ring of light, and the shaft of light, coming from the sky, had disappeared.

"What are they trying to do with those instruments?" Art asked Lecia.

"Establishing anchor points for the radiation," she explained.

"How can you anchor radiation?" he asked.

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"Tuanthan scientists know much more about radiation than is known on Earth," she said.

The ring of light reached downward again, searching through Greg's Canyon. It was as if some unknown search-light operator in the sky was trying to pinpoint a target on far-away Earth and was having trouble finding the exact spot he wanted. The column of light pulsated downward, a gleaming whiteness that came and went and came and went and flowed downward in a series of rhythmic pulsations. The whole show was hardly less than the northern lights and must have been visible for many miles.

"Hasn't anyone seen this display of light?" Art Harper questioned. "Surely many times—"

"It has been seen many times," Tim Bond answered. Contempt was in the voice of the man in the red hunting jacket. "The Indians saw it. They said it was the path the gods used in coming to Earth and in returning to their home in the sky. When the west was new, cowboys sometimes saw it—though not often, because it was not much used in the western country in those days. During the past twenty-five years, when we have had good reason to be on Earth more often, this light display has been seen many times."

"Then it has been reported to the proper governmental agencies?" Art asked.

Tim Bond almost forgot himself enough to laugh at this question.

"That almost convinced me you *are* human!" Bond said. "No Tuanthan would be stupid enough to ask such a question."

"Then it has been reported?"

"Time and time again," Bond answered. "By competent witnesses, by people who were not drunk and who did not use drugs. Pictures have even been taken of it. The reports, plus both still and motion pictures, have been seen by every president during the past twenty years."

"With what result?"

"All of the evidence has been shrugged away as unimportant. Reports have been marked TOP SECRET so they could be easier to lose. Even the existence of the reports has been denied. The general explanation of high officials is that such

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reports might swing the next election, or that some bishop or some preacher would not like for his parishoners to have such dangerous ideas, or that the reports would unsettle the stock market. The way the reports have been handled is so incredibly stupid as to be beyond belief."

Bond's face, seen by the reflected light now pouring from the sky, was lean and bitter.

"Such fools these humans be! And it is these fools who think they can invade the beautiful and holy city the Tuantha have created on the far side of the moon!"

Jestin had finished with his work on the nearest instrument and had moved back around the fire. He heard the conversation.

"Before we will let them invade our world, we will fill all space with pieces of steel from exploded rockets!" Jestin said. "The guts of their own kind falling from the sky will warn humans that space is not for them!"

Light moved across his face. In the flare, his features were rock hard.

"Are you being a little harsh on the human race?" Art Harper questioned.

"Only as harsh as they deserve," Jestin answered. "No harsher than they would be on us if they had the chance. It's our world they are trying to invade. If we don't stop them, they will destroy us!"

Art Harper tried to think of words that he could use, of thoughts that he could express. Light was flaring from the sky. Part of his mind was on this light. The three men with their instruments were still trying to settle on the exact spot they wanted. Part of his mind was on them. Gecko was still lying by the fire. Part of his mind watched Gecko and was concerned about him. Emotional tides were flowing within him. He was trying to keep them under control and at the same time, say what he wanted. He was not finding this an easy task.

"Vast tides are constantly flowing in the Solar System and in the Universe," Art said. "We see many different kinds of tides flowing here on Earth, tides of time, tides of invention, tides of new discoveries, tides of new population seeking new lands. In the shift and ebb and flow of these tides, each of

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us, each individual and each group of individuals called a nation, try to arrest the flowing of these tides, try to build little private worlds called 'home,' called 'our house,' called 'our country' where these tides do not flow. We build dikes around our nation, our homes, around ourselves, and we say that the tides of time and space will not flow over these dikes. For a while, we stop the flowing of the tides. But in the long run, the tides flow over our nation—and it becomes a new and better nation—they flow over our house—and we build a new and better house—and they flow over us—and we build new and better ways to think and to live. Always, the tides keep flowing. Right now a tide of men is beginning to flow to the moon. Eventually this tide will flow past the moon and into space. We—”

“Are you trying to tell me that, we can't stop the flowing of this human tide?” Jestin interrupted.

“I am trying to tell you that you can only slow it and this only for a time,” Harper said. “But the moon is the first space station for humans, just as it was this for the Tuanthans. You can't hide forever on the moon. A new tide of life is leaping the bridge of space to what you think is your world. You can't stop it.”

“I'll see you—and all the human race—in hell before I stop trying,” Jestin said.

“You can't hide on even the moon forever,” Art Harper said.

Light was leaping from anchor point to anchor point now, flowing like living electricity from stubby antenna to stubby antenna, forming a triangle of flashing light perhaps a foot from the ground. The quality of the light was changing. It became milky in appearance and seemed to be becoming more tangible. Suddenly the triangle became a pyramid. Simultaneously the channel of light flowing downward vanished from sight. Art Harper had the impression that the channel was still there, only now it was of too high a frequency to be visible to the eye.

Incredible energy of some kind was flowing down from space and into this pyramid. What was the source of this energy? Looking upward, Art could not see the source. The full moon had cleared the wall of Greg's Canyon. The energy

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was not coming from the moon, or not directly, yet there was some connection between this alabaster pyramid here in the slot-like canyon on Earth and the moon in the sky. Above the pyramid, the air seemed to be distorted as it is in the desert when a heat mirage is forming.

Out of the side of the pyramid, out of the now seemingly solid alabaster, a man walked. He reached down with one hesitant toe for the feel of the earth, stumbled a little when he found it, then stepped out of the alabaster-colored light. The stuff seemed to follow him for a distance, then abruptly to snap back and become again the apparently solid side of a pyramid.

"Ah-Allo," the man said. He spoke English like one who has learned it from sleep tapes and from classrooms, not like a person who learned the words as he learned to crawl. "My mentor is—ah—will be—Mr. Timothy Bond. Is he—ah—present?"

"Here I am," Tim Bond said, stepping forward. Shifting the rifle to his left hand, he shook hands with the right hand. Then the two men were talking together, Bond asking about the jump from the moon ship, asking about how things were in the old home, eagerly and wistfully asking, Art Harper thought. The new arrival was also asking questions. The rifle caught his eyes.

"This is a gun," Bond explained.

"Gun?"

"You shoot animals with it—"

"People?"

"Not that kind of animals, not unless your leader orders it. I'll show you the ropes, including how to use the gun."

Others were coming out of the side of the pyramid. Another man emerged. He was young and his attitude and manner as he stepped from the pyramid to the sandy soil of Greg's Canyon was that of a traveler landing on a strange and, to him, a forlorn shore. His expression was that of a person who is not happy and who is not preparing himself even to try to be happy. He glanced at the people watching him, he glanced at the sandy floor of Greg's Canyon, the place where cacti and desert shrubs grew, he looked up the rough wall of the canyon. On his face fear appeared. He took

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a step backward as if he intended to run back into the pyramid. Then he became aware of the moon, serene in the sky of night.

The expression of fear went away from his face. Happiness replaced it. The expression on his face now said that no matter what sacrifice was required of him, his homeland was worth it.

For the year 1973, his clothing was perfect. He could have walked down Hollywood Boulevard, Fifth Avenue, or Michigan Avenue without attracting a curious look because of his clothes. He looked like a young man on his way up. The appearance of Madison Avenue was on him.

A man stepped forward to greet him. Their voices rose in a tangle of excitement that was like sounds heard in a nightmare to Art Harper. They were not speaking English. What, then, were they speaking?

"Enough of this. We must speak English from now on," the newcomer was told. The two walked away together.

Two women carrying a big basket which contained a fluffy white blanket came out of the pyramid. At the sight of them, a young couple waiting by the fire moved forward in growing excitement. Lifting a corner of the blanket, the young woman peeped inside. Squealing with growing excitement, she motioned for the man to look. The man bent over and looked under the blanket.

"Say, that's wonderful" he exclaimed. "A boy, isn't it?" he spoke to the two women who had brought the basket from the side of the pyramid. They answered him in a tongue that was not English, but which Art Harper perfectly understood.

"Thank you, thank you. We'll take him right along. Don't worry about him. We'll take good care of him. We've already got a name picked out for him."

The two women who had brought the basket insisted on hugging its occupant one final time, then they turned and re-entered the side of the pyramid. The couple who had been given the basket departed for their car. As they moved past Art, he heard a wail come from the basket, knew that the baby was crying. Whether the sound represented a wail

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of despair at being taken down into hell or was a cry of triumph at reaching a new heaven on Earth, Art could not tell. He suspected it was the former.

Cold chills were going through him. Had he arrived on Earth this way? He knew that somewhere this night, or within a few more nights, some home would receive a new resident, who would go on the records as being born to such and such parents, at such and such a place, with such and such a doctor in attendance. The secret of the real birth of the infant would be carefully and competently kept. It would not know its own true identity until it awakened. Then deep centers of its brain would go into action and it would know its true origin.

"It's not fair," Art said.

"What?" Jestin asked, beside him.

"What is being done to that child is not fair," Art answered. "It was sent here without having a voice—"

"Does anyone?" Jestin answered.

"I mean, the child does not know what kind of a world it is getting into."

"Does anyone who is born know in advance what kind of a world he is getting into?" Jestin answered. "Would anyone choose to be born on Earth?"

"I guess—"

"The question in my mind is whether or not you know what kind of a world you are getting into when you return to the moon."

"I don't understand you," Art said.

"What I am curious about is whether or not you actually have awakened," Jestin answered.

He lifted the *nurlo* in his hand.

"If I was sure you had awakened, I would kill you here and now. But I'm not sure. So I'll have our psychologist check you out," Jestin said.

The *nurlo* in his hand puffed its soft ring of cigarette smoke. The ring of illumination struck Art Harper in the cheek. So swiftly did the radiation act, in less than a second he was unconscious. He went out so fast that he did not even feel himself falling.

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Lecia and Jestin carried him into the pyramid of light that had come into existence on the sandy floor of Greg's Canyon in the High Sierras of California.

CHAPTER TEN

IN THE WILD world of incredible nightmare into which he was instantly plunged, Art Harper had again the dream that he was in space at the midpoint between the Earth and the moon. He knew he had had his dream before, knew also that it was more than a dream, that it was some vague memory of a real event that had happened when he was very small. But memory stirring to life or dream-structure of pure fantasy, it was strange and incredible. He dreamed that at a spot midway between Earth and the moon, a ship waited. Held by its own power, it floated there in a world of low gravity where the pulls of the planet and the pull of the satellite were evenly balanced. Here at this point of balance, the pulls of great Jupiter and of vast Saturn and Neptune were the major gravity forces acting on the ship. In this dream, he remembered that this ship could not go near the surface of a major planet because of the gravity pulls and that this deficiency made necessary the use of the space door. The ship was a beautiful thing, in design, execution, and engineering, but it worked best in space. To use it too close to a major planet would be like trying to use on a country lane a racing car designed for use on the Indianapolis speedway. The car just could not go slow enough to be used on a country lane. But on a speedway, it was a thing of beauty.

In space, this ship was a thing of beauty. But if it went into the gravity pulls of a major planet, it would crumple into twisted, distorted metal.

In his dream, Art Harper thought he was inside a pyramidal-shaped structure which itself was inside a big laboratory in the ship that floated in mid-space. He was lifted out of this pyramid. Vaguely he knew he was in a place where powerful electronic equipment hummed and threatened to spit at anyone and at anything within range. Dimly, without regaining consciousness, he knew he was taken from this

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laboratory to a bunk in a cabin. He knew that everyone near him thought he was completely unconscious. The idea amused him. A person who had practiced as long as he had in keeping everything normal, natural, commonplace would always be a little conscious, even in the deepest sleep or the deepest anesthesia.

This thought amused him. Then somebody—he thought it was Jestin—discovered he was partly shamming. This person used the *nurlo* on him again. After this, the dream fogged completely, slipped out of focus and became a thing of horrible distortion, a nightmare filled with terror and with the memories of haunted, hunted things. It was not a pleasant thing, this nightmare.

Vaguely, as he came back to consciousness, he was aware that he was lying on a hard table with a white cover over him. Electrodes were taped to his skull. A man in a white coat was bending over him.

"I—I've been having—the most horrible nightmare!" He made his voice a babble of sound.

"So you are conscious again, Talu Sar?" White Coat said to him. White Coat did not speak English, but Art understood the language well enough to grasp its meaning. He also understood his name was Talu Sar.

Neither the language nor the name of Talu Sar really surprised him. They came to him as echoes out of some long-forgotten past. This was his own tongue. This was his own name. Whispering to himself, he rolled the name of Talu Sar over his lips.

Then he remembered the role he must play if he was to live.

"I've been having an awful dream, a horrible dream!" he gasped.

White Coat bent solicitously over him. "What was your dream, Talu Sar?"

"I dreamed that I was a human being and that I lived in hell!"

"Hell?" White Coat said softly.

"Living on the big planet, on Earth, that's hell!" Talu Sar babbled. "A man living on Earth!" Shudders passed through his body as the memory came up again.

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He tried to sit up but found that straps restrained his motion. "Where—?"

"Be quiet and easy," White Coat said. "You are in the psychological department of the hospital. This was no dream that you had. This was reality, this nightmare of life on Earth."

"What?" he gasped. Again he tried to sit up. "But it had to be a dream! *Had to, I tell you!* I am Talu Sar! I am a Tuanthan! I have never even been on Earth. What kind of nonsense is this that you are telling me? Speak honestly!"

"This is the nonsense, this pretense that your memory of life on Earth is only a nightmare! You remember it well enough. You know why you were sent to Earth! You also know you defected in your mission there, failed in it, became a turn-coat, a renegade."

"I did no such thing!" Talu Sar shouted. "I am a loyal Tuanthan. I have never been anything else. Why are you telling me these lies? What admissions are you trying to trap me into?"

"My instruments say you are lying," White Coat said.

"Instruments?" Talu Sar quavered. "What is this talk of instruments? I know nothing about—"

"They are in operation at this very moment," White Coat said. "They are probing your brain down to the oldest cell structures in it. In addition, they are analyzing the radiations from your brain, the more subtle frequencies that leap outward from your mind like waves from a radio transmitter. All of this adds up to mind-reading."

"Mind reading?" The quaver in the Tuanthan, Talu Sar's voice became stronger.

"And all of the mind-reading adds up to the fact that you are lying," White Coat said.

"You are the one who is lying," Talu Sar said. Hope was in his mind that this was the real explanation of the situation, but it was doubtful hope. He knew that instruments existed on Earth which could almost read the mind of a human. Why not instruments on the moon that could read the mind of a Tuanthan? The science of Tuantha was far ahead of that of Earth.

"I am Talu Sar," Art Harper said. "I am a Tuanthan. I

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don't know what happened, perhaps I was in an accident of some kind and became unconscious. When I regained consciousness, I found myself strapped on this table listening to your accusations, to your talk of reading my mind. However, I know my rights. No one, except by order of the Council, has the right to restrain another citizen of Tuantha. I assure you that unless I am immediately released."

"So you are going to try and get legal on us?" White Coat said.

"I know my rights," Talu Sar answered. "No one has the right to run mental tests on a citizen of this city unless the citizen gives his permission, in writing, or with an order from the Council. I certainly have not given my permission. Do you have an order from the Council?"

"We have applied for it," White Coat said. Traces of alarm were showing in the voice of the psychologist.

"Applying for it and possessing it are not the same thing," Talu Sar said. "You know the law of Tuantha: *an action taken against another is to be suffered by the person taking the action.*"

"You don't seem to realize the situation you are in," White Coat said hastily. "You are charged before the Council with high treason. In such cases, much leeway is allowed in order to produce evidence that may be adequate."

"High treason?" Talu Sar interrupted.

"Yes. The charge is that you awakened on Earth, that your orders were to ascertain the advance of science and invention on the big planet, to report same to your superior officers, to take orders from them, and to perform such actions as you might be directed to do."

"But this was a dream."

"It was a fact of high treason, not a dream!" White Coat answered. "If the Council finds you guilty, you will be flung through the space door into deep space with no landing pyramid there for you."

"My God!" Talu Sar whispered. Horror was rising in him. Now he understood more clearly another meaning of the space door. Used as he had seen it used in Greg's Canyon, with a landing area in the form of a pyramid, it was an excellent, economical, and safe method of transportation. But

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it had other uses. One such use was as a means of execution for condemned criminals. Used as a method of execution, the criminal was hurled out into space, and the supporting energies were then withdrawn without the pyramid being brought into existence. A criminal, as a naked man, would suddenly appear halfway to the Earth. Or halfway to Mars, depending on where the *door* opened.

No one knew what death was like under such circumstances. No criminal had ever returned to report. Perhaps death in mid-space was relatively quick, but however fast it came, it could not come quickly enough in a place that held neither heat nor air. Space hated life; space destroyed life.

On the table, Talu Sar writhed and twisted.

"Is your defense going to be that you did not awaken to your true identity?" White Coat asked.

"Y—yes. What else could it be? If I was ever actually on Earth, if what I thought was a dream really happened, then I must not have known who I was," Talu Sar answered. Desperation was in him.

"If it is proved that you did awaken but deliberately refused your duty, then may heaven help you, for no Tuantan will!" White Coat said.

"But I am a Tuantan, this was only a dream, this life on Earth—" Talu Sar tried to say.

"If you are going to try to play that record again, then I am going to release you and send you home," White Coat said, in a voice suddenly kind and gentle. He released the straps.

"Thank you," Talu Sar said. He sat up on the table and swung his legs over the edge. "Where are my clo—" he began, then hastily stopped.

White Coat had turned and was holding up garments to him. On Earth, these would have been quite ordinary clothes. A pair of slacks, a flannel sport shirt, a sport jacket, sport shoes, these would fit perfectly into the California scene.

The only trouble with these clothes, he wasn't in Californial "Those are my clothes?" he said.

"These are what you were wearing when you were brought in," White Coat said. "Put them on and go on home."

Talu Sar slipped into the clothes.

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"You know exactly how to put them on," White Coat said.

"I'm doing it by guess-work," Talu Sar said. "The things feel very clumsy."

"Go on home," White Coat said.

"Yes, of course." Talu Sar started toward the door, then hesitated. He passed a hand across his forehead. "I'm afraid my memory—" he began.

"What you are trying to hide is that you have suddenly realized you no longer have living quarters assigned to you here in this city," White Coat said. "Hence you have no home to go. If you were a Tuanthan living here, you would have a beautiful apartment. Since you don't have it, you have not been living here."

"But—"

"Since you have no place to live here in Tuantha, your claim that your life on Earth is only a dream can have no foundation in fact," White Coat said. "And in case you should still try to press this alibi, here are witnesses against you."

Moving to the door, he opened it. Jestin and Lecia walked in. Jestin's face was grim.

Jestin looked at White Coat, asked one question.

"I have no doubt that he awakened on schedule," White Coat said. "I will so testify in court, if it is required of me. But he has trained himself so well in evasion, he has become so perfect in keeping every word and every action normal, that he has become most competent in deceit. He has spent years learning how to act, how to talk, how to think like a human."

Jestin turned cold eyes toward Talu Sar.

"We might ask him what his motive was for this betrayal of his own people," Lecia said quickly.

"Do motives matter?" Jestin asked.

"To a woman, they matter," she said.

"To a man, facts matter," Jestin said. "The fact is, this man, this Talu Sar, is a traitor."

"You can't say that."

"I am going to say it before the Grand Council," Jestin said. He turned to Talu Sar.

"You are under arrest, on charges of treason. You will be brought to trial, and given a chance to defend yourself, be-

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fore the Grand Council of the Tuantha. In the meantime, you will be assigned quarters. You will also have freedom of the city. When you are wanted, the officer of the court will summon you."

Jestin's voice had no sound of sympathy in it anywhere. Lecia gave a little cry, a wordless sound of protest which never got beyond her throat. White Coat's face had suddenly lost all of its normal brown color and had become white and strained.

"Thank you," Talu Sar said. "And if I am found guilty."

"The penalty is the *space door*," Jestin said. His voice shifted, perhaps softened a little. "I have no personal feelings in this matter, Talu Sar. If we permitted defectors to go unpunished, we would have too many of them. Hence, in matters such as this, we show no softness."

He bowed.

"Good luck with your defense, Talu Sar." Turning, Jestin walked out of the room.

"I'm sorry, Art," Lecia said. "I'm awfully sorry. I didn't intend to bring you to such a situation as this. But I was sure you were an unawakened Tuanthan. If this had been true, there would have been no penalty."

"It's all right," Talu Sar said. "What about—Gecko?"

"He is here on the moon, and all right," Lecia answered. "I have already put in a request for the two of you to be assigned joint quarters. There is a vacancy on the floor of my own building. I have asked that you have this vacancy, so that your last—last days—" Her voice went into haunted silence.

"You don't think I have even the smallest chance of being found not guilty?" Talu Sar asked.

She shook her head. "I'm sorry but I don't."

"But in spite of this, I am still being given freedom within the city? Aren't they afraid I might run away?"

"There is no place to run to. Outside is the surface of the moon. No one can live beyond the ion shield of this city," Lecia answered. "Why did you do it, Art? Tell me why."

Talu Sar shook his head. "I had what I regarded as adequate motives."

"I hope the Council finds them adequate," Lecia answered.

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"Now, If you will come with me, I will show you where you are to live."

Outside, Talu Sar found that he was in the corridor of what looked like an ordinary hospital. Nurses in white were scurrying, a vague smell of antiseptics was in the air, somewhere a woman was moaning as if in great pain.

"Can't they stop pain?" Talu Sar asked.

"Not in this case. She is moaning because she has lost her newly-born baby. It is considered best to let her cry as much as she wishes. It is a sound often heard in the city of the Tuantha these days."

Talu Sar hardly noticed what she said. He was about to die. What did it matter to him if women wailed over still-born children in the hospital of the city of the Tuantha? Also, a man in the garb of a human had risen from a seat beside the wall and was coming toward them.

It was Gecko.

Holding out his hand, Gecko looked very close at Talu Sar.

"All my life, I thought you were my blood brother," Gecko said. "It's kind of a shock to learn that all along you were a Tuanthan and that I never guessed it."

"I didn't know it myself, at first," Talu Sar answered. "When I realized who and what I was, I took steps to prevent you or anyone else from guessing my identity."

"Why?" Gecko demanded. "I would have been your friend!"

Talu Sar felt a gulp rise in his throat at Gecko's frank words. "There were reasons why I let nobody know who I was," he said.

"I would give anything if I were a Tuanthan," Gecko said.

"It's my turn to ask you why?" Talu Sar said.

"Then I could appear in person, then I could demand the right to appear in person before the Grand Council of the Tuantha and no one could deny me and I could insist that the moon rocket from the United States should be allowed to land here on the moon!"

"Moon rocket?" Talu Sar said, startled. "I had forgotten about it."

"They've gotten it up," Gecko said. "It's on its way here right now!"

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE GREAT rocket ship lumbered through the sky. It was not a pretty thing, a graceful thing, or even an efficient thing. All that could be said for it was that it worked. Later years, later generations, would add grace, beauty, efficiency, perhaps a much better system of propulsion, to later ships.

Looking outward, communications specialist Rod Stamm watched the home world.

"The Earth is a pile of mud in the sky," he thought. It was not a pretty thought. Stamm was not a pretty man, physically or emotionally. In his mind was the continuous thought that he was a dead man, that the ship had a saboteur hidden in it, and that at some point in space, this saboteur would detonate a secret device and blow the rocket and all of its crew, including him, to chunks of metal and strings of bloody guts. He thought this saboteur was a Russian as fanatically devoted to his country as the Japanese kamikaze flyers had been when they had deliberately crashed their planes on American carriers and battleships in the closing days of World War II, going willingly to their deaths if they could take an American ship with them.

The belief that the rocket ship to the moon carried a saboteur was Stamm's own private idea. He had not told anyone else on the ship about this nor had he communicated it to medical or security officers before the ship had blasted from Earth.

"Piles of mud in the sky, that's all the stars are," Stamm repeated to himself.

In the control room of the rocket, with space gnawing at their guts as if there were no inches-thick plastic window between them and the airless void, Lieutenant-colonel James Gerson and Major Anderson watched the quivering of the needles of the instruments metering the function of various parts of the ship. When they were not watching the needles, they were stealing quick glances at what was beyond the plastic window. It was an unsettling sight. Space was the hole between the worlds, the planets were intruders into a universe designed to be constructed of nothing but holes.

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This was the feeling not only of the two commanding officers, but also of every man on the ship. They were mentally and emotionally sound, or reasonably near this state, they had been trained and re-trained, then given additional training, until they could have dismantled the ship in total darkness with no tools except their bare hands. This ship was more familiar territory to them than their bedrooms at home. Men had been known to get lost in their own bedrooms, but none of these men would ever get lost anywhere on this ship. They knew it too well.

Out here in space, each one of them felt lost, alone, and afraid, though each tried to hide this feeling from the others—and mostly from himself. No man likes to admit to himself that he is scared, least of all a man who has been selected on the basis of his physical, mental, and emotional fitness.

They were coasting now, sliding down the long slant toward the moon. Each man on the ship knew that where they were going there was no landing field. They had studied thousands of photographs of the surface of the moon, studied them until they felt they knew every crater and every pitted mountain range on the satellite. They knew perfectly well what the pictures showed.

But what was actually there they did not know. What were these things that looked like craters and mountain ranges and old sea beds and just plain rocks, what were they really? No man would know the answers to these questions until he had set foot on the moon and had found out.

All that they were seeing was going back to the home planet and was being put instantly on the TV channels. Billions of people were watching their television sets, if for no other reason, to see this ship explode.

One ship had exploded. This much was certain. What was not certain was whether this ship would explode. Watching what the men in the ship saw, seeing with their eyes, listening to their voices, the viewers felt some of the awe of the void come into their own lives. To some slight degree all of those who watched the pictures transmitted from this ship shared the feelings of the men in the ship. If wonder was in the minds of the men on the ship—and it was—wonder

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was also in the minds of the watching world. Those of the watching world who had always lived close to the Earth, their heads turned down as they rooted their way through the little events in the sky.

Communications Specialist Rod Stamm, busy keeping in operation all of the channels transmitting audio and visio back to Earth, plus information on temperature, radiation, gravitational pulls, had little time to remember about a possible saboteur.

How could a saboteur be aboard this carefully inspected, carefully guarded ship? There wasn't a part of this ship that hadn't been double-checked, then double-checked again.

"Didn't the Russians also check their rocket?" Rod Stamm wondered.

He knew the answer to his own question. To him, it seemed certain that the Russians would have checked their rocket carefully before blastoff. Yet in spite of this checking, it had blown up in space.

Rod Stamm knew perfectly well there was no real saboteur aboard their ship. He was personally acquainted with every member of the crew, for months he had eaten, slept, worked, and played games with them as they had been molded into a unit. The same doctors had examined all of them so often that the examinations had become a kind of a game. The crew was all right. They weren't going to sabotage the ship?

Then how could it be sabotaged out here in space?

This was a question the communications specialist could not answer to his own satisfaction. He knew that the thought that the ship would be sabotaged had arisen from his own mind and that it had no reality in the outside world. He thrust the verbal thought and the feeling of his mind. Both kept returning. Like gray ghosts from some lost and forgotten world, they kept slipping back into his mind.

A cluster of space fireflies drifted past his window. He ducked away from them before he remembered they were only harmless light clusters.

How could this great ship lumbering through the sky be destroyed?

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CHAPTER TWELVE

"THIS CITY is heaven regained," Talu Sar said.

He and Lecia were on top of the building where they lived. Like a dream out of some lost fairyland of the race the city of the Tuantha lay below them, rising upward as spiraled mass of sky beauty piled on top of spiraled mass of sky beauty, the whole so balanced that the effect was that of a fairy city spun from moonbeams. Down below, Talu Sar could see winding streets and turning walks, he could see spots where flowers bloomed and circles and rectangles of green grass, all of these brought from Earth by Tuanthans and adapted to life here in their city on the far side of the moon, the whole effect being that of a vast hothouse where common plants of Earth became exotic blooms. Apartment buildings where people lived rose up from below, each so fitted into the landscape that it was almost impossible to tell where structure left off and landscape began.

Beyond the ion curtain here on the moon was only frozen death, boulders half as big as mountains, pitted holes as deep as the Grand Canyon, a place of freezing cold where the relief of gentle warmth had never come. Outside the ion screen, the moon's surface was a place of quick freezing and of sudden death to all warm-blooded life forms.

Inside the ion screen art and science were so cleverly blended that the total effect was that of art, of science creating and developing its own forms of art, of art fitting into science as smoothly as a hand fits into a glove, art and science mutually supporting and sustaining each other.

The result was beauty plus utility.

Without art, this city could not exist. It was all art here. Or it was all science. To say one was to say the other.

Talu Sar was in awe as he looked down at the city, *awe* in a religious sense, meaning a feeling appropriate to a human in the presence of a deity.

"Justin means to have your head," Lecia said, beside him.

He ignored her, indeed, he was so lost in awe and wonder that he did not hear her.

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"Memories are rolling back into me," he whispered. Gone was any notion that he was Art Harper, that he had once operated a service station at the edge of the desert. The awe in him was rising higher. This was *his* city, this was where he had been born, this was a world that was almost heaven that he had never got to enjoy. His heritage had been taken from him without consulting him.

This was the world of *the* Tuantha. Seeing it, he could see some reason for their assumption of superiority. They could back up their claim. This place of beauty hidden on the far side of the moon was their memorial. They had created it as their haven of refuge, as a space where no space storm could ever penetrate, as an area where no swirling eddy in the population tides could ever upset the even tenor of their days. Their science and their art had wrested this place from the utterly inhospitable face of the moon!

It was not only their city, it was also *his* city. He was a Tuanthan! Pride rose in him at the thought.

"It's magnificent!" he whispered. In green lawns below him, he could see people playing games, and in the pools of crystal water, he could see swimmers splashing. All of this was clearly visible in the light that came through the ion screen. Through this screen, shining clear and bright, he could see so many stars that it seemed to him that all of the stars of space were hungrily trying to get into this place of paradise that existed on the far side of the moon.

"And, on Earth, I had turned my back on all of this!" he thought.

Concern was in him, that he should have missed all the beauty, all the warmth, all the wonder, all of this color and twisting line here in this place. In him was the suspicion that he had done this deliberately, that when he had turned his back on this place of wonder, his action had been purposive.

Why should he have done this?

What was wrong here in this heaven that the Tuantha had created?

Unease was a rising chill in him, unease that was not because of him alone. Something was wrong here in this vast city that stretched away on all horizons to the ion screen coming down to form a vast circular dome. But what was it?

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"Jestin means to have your head," Lecia repeated, beside him.

This time the unease that was rising in him broke into his trance and he heard what she had said. He took his attention away from the wonder of the city.

A day had passed since White Coat had released him. He and Gecko were living together again. Gecko had gone somewhere but Talu Sar did not know where. The Tuanthans paid almost no attention to Gecko, apparently considering him in somewhat the same way that a tame monkey is considered in an Earth city, as a source of mild amusement. They let Gecko wander where he pleased. They would have let Talu Sar do the same thing if he had wished, but he had chosen to stay with Lecia.

"I am a Tuanthan citizen," Talu Sar answered.

"That is true. Your rights will be respected. You may have a lawyer, or a dozen of them if you wish. Or you may conduct your own defense. But the charge is treason, Art!" She took him by the arm and squeezed hard to emphasize her meaning. "And the court officer may come for you at any time. When that summons comes, you must appear immediately."

"Can't I ask for a delay?"

"There are no delays in Tuanthan justice," Lecia answered.

"But with the rocket coming, everyone will be watching it, including the judges of the court."

"The rocket won't delay justice here! There is no such a thing as a delay. If you are brought to trial, you stand trial then and there. You can ask for a vote of the whole population on your case. This is a new development that has come since the invention of what would be called television on Earth."

"I see," Talu Sar said.

"And anyhow, the rocket will never get here," Lecia continued. "Like the Russian ship, it will explode in space."

Talu Sar felt the unease in him grow stronger. Up there in the void beyond the ion screen men were riding a steel ship to certain death. Each crew member had known that he risked death when he volunteered for the moon hop but each had thought it was only a risk he was facing, not certain death.

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"Somewhere on that ship there is a piece of metal, like a thumbtack, perhaps . . ." Talu Sar said, his memory going back to the explosion of the truck in the desert.

"Probably that will be used," Lecia admitted. "Perhaps a small piece of metal will be imbedded in another piece of metal, hidden so well that no inspection will reveal its existence, that not even x-rays will detect it."

"Is there no way to save the lives of those men?" Talu Sar asked.

"There is nothing that I can do, personally," Lecia answered. "And if I could, I would not do it. To save them, is to destroy all of this, eventually." Her hand swept in a gesture that included the whole vast city."

"But progress—"

"The price of human progress is Tuantia death," Lecia answered.

"What I am trying to say is that this is not an *either-or* proposition. It is not either destroy the ship or die ourselves. There are other choices, other alternatives."

"What other choice is there?" she asked, astonished.

"To let humans land in peace, to greet them as friends, to permit the two races to mix on the individual level. Out of such a blending new growth may come, perhaps better ways of life for both races."

"What way of life could be better than what we have here?" Lecia demanded.

He shrugged off her question and asked one of his own.

"More important, what is wrong with this city and with its people?" he asked.

"Wrong with our city, wrong with us?" At this criticism, hot pride was suddenly in Lecia's voice. "This city is the greatest scientific, artistic, and cultural achievement in the history of the solar system. You could search through all of the worlds and not find another city like this or another people like the Tuantia! There is nothing like this on Earth, there never has been, there never will be."

"I know all of this," Talu Sar said. "But I also know I fled from this. I wanted to be human rather than a Tuantian? Why?"

Her eyes widened at his words. She was thinking, hard

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and deep. From the expression on her face, she was not finding these thoughts to her liking.

"What is the birth rate of this city as compared to the death rate?" Talu Sar asked.

His words seemed to sting her. She was slow to answer. When she did speak, her voice faltered and fell away.

"So one thing that is wrong here is that the Tuantha are dwindling in numbers?" he asked.

"Yes," she admitted. "There are more deaths than births. Women just have fewer children, that's all that can be said. All of our doctors and psychologists are working on the problem."

"They are a dying race."

"They are not!" She tried to sound furious but her voice faltered into fear.

Listening to the way she spoke, he knew he had touched a sore spot.

"There are cycles in these things," she tried to say. "The birth rate will come back. The time will come again when the buildings are full instead of half empty, when children's voices are again heard in the playgrounds, when toys are made again for the little ones, when life has meaning that only women know."

Her voice faltered into silence. Her eyes suddenly filled with tears. Watching, he saw raw pain in her, raw hunger, raw fear, the pain of the women of Tuantha. The birth rate had fallen below the death rate, the race was dying, and the women of Tuantha blamed themselves for this. They felt shame, they felt they were to blame, because a race was dying. Worst of all, they had no solution to the problem. All they could look forward to was a day when there were no children in this place of beauty their ancestors had created. And beyond that day, to another day when the last Tuanthan had died and this vast and beautiful city was as silent as the tomb—which it had become.

"I'm sorry, Lecia," he said quietly.

From the distance in the city, from a spot near the circle where the ion shield dropped down to the surface of the moon, came a thud, a sound as soft as that of a man dropping

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a shoe in the middle of the night, and in this city of silence, as startling.

Lecia clutched Talu Sar's arm. "That was an explosion!"

"I don't see anything," he said. "What is in that direction?"

"The radiation control laboratory is the only important thing. You don't suppose . . ."

"I don't recall this laboratory."

"It is the source of the α radiation here. Do you remember the thumbtack in the tire of the truck? This exploded when α radiation released by Jestin struck it. Here on this city we have really powerful α generators. These were used when the Russian ship was blown up in space." Alarm grew stronger on her face.

Talu Sar shrugged. To him a minor explosion did not seem very important, even if it was in the radiation control lab. He had clear memories of the truck turning over in the desert. He also had clear mental images of the ship the Russians had sent into space. It had been a beautiful ship, arrow clean as it moved toward its destination. Then it had become a spew of metal and of men in the depths of space.

From down below, so far away they seemed to come from some other world, came the sound of running feet.

Moving to the edge of the roof, they looked down.

Down the broad street far below them, a man was running toward them. As they watched, he reached their building and turned into the entrance.

"That man blew up the radiation laboratory!" Lecia gasped.

Simultaneously, the runner turned into the building entrance. And Talu Sar recognized him.

It was Gecko Harper.

"Come on," Talu Sar said. Lecia joined him as he ran to the elevator. "That utter idiot!" Talu Sar said over and over again. "That utter idiot!"

As they got out of the down-car on their floor, Gecko was discharged from an up-car.

"You—" Talu Sar said. "You— Oh, damn, Gecko!"

"They'll send you through the space door!" Lecia said.

Gecko's face was white and he was puffing from running. But his eyes were bright with both excitement and resolution. When he spoke, his words were firm and clear.

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"I know," he said. "But no matter what they do to me, the radiation laboratory is so badly damaged that they won't be able to repair it before the rocket lands!"

In his eyes, the brightness grew even brighter.

"After the rocket lands, all of Earth will know the Tuanthans exist here. Once men know for sure that the moon is inhabited, nothing will stop them from learning more about the strange race here on the satellite. Nothing! Eventually, the Tuanthans will have to permit free landings here, the two races will have to meet!"

"Come into my apartment," Lecia said. "I'll hide you. In the confusion over the arrival of the rocket, no one may even think to look for you."

"I'll go with you, but your apartment is no hiding place and you know it," Gecko answered. "There is no hiding place, none anywhere."

"Go into my place." Opening the door, she pushed Gecko through it. Talu Sar followed them.

"I tried to stop humans from intruding on the private world of the Tuanthans," Gecko said. "I failed. I tried to stop the Tuanthans from blowing up the rocket. I failed again. So I did the only thing that was left for me to do, I blew up their z radiation laboratory. If I die for this, at least twelve men, the crew of the rocket from America, will live because of me. Once this rocket lands and reports back what is here on the moon, the course of history is changed. Right then and there, history changes. Something new comes into existence in the universe. I am glad to play my part in making this possible."

He wiped sweat from his face. But there was no sweat on the soul of Gecko Harper.

"Maybe Lecia is right," Talu Sar said. "Maybe in the confusion over the rocket landing, they will forget all about you."

Gecko Harper grinned in response. "Thanks, Art. You're a nice guy. You would save me if you could. But the Tuanthans won't forget about me. They'll probably name a day after me, Gecko Harper Day, the Day of Infamy, the day when the lights went out! It is not that I want to die. It is that I do not really wish to continue living in a world where men fight each other like wild beasts, where Tuanthans do not trust humans, but do not really know what they distrust, and

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where men do not know about Tuanthans and would not trust Tuanthans if they knew them. Isn't it possible for men and Tuanthans to know each other, and if they learn they can't really like each other, isn't it still possible for them to live in peace together? Is the universe too small to hold both men and Tuanthans, is it?"

"I can't answer these questions, nobody can answer them," Talu Sar said. "Once, I tried to find answers for them. I didn't have much luck."

"I don't expect to have much luck, either," Gecko admitted. "But before they execute me, the Tuanthans will have to give me a hearing. Or will they just put me into the space door and jump me off somewhere into space without hearing what I have to say. For that matter, both of you are Tuanthans. You should be the first to summon your police."

"I'll do nothing of the kind!" Lecia said, her voice hot. "Do you think all Tuanthans are like that?"

"When the Russian rocket exploded, I saw murder in the sky. If I hadn't blown up their radiation laboratory, they would have used it to blow up the American rocket and I would have seen more murder in the sky. Tuanthans are like that."

"But I am not personally responsible!" A frantic note appeared in the voice of Lecia Brown. "I did not blow up that rocket, I did not kill those Russians."

"You have a share of responsibility for it," Gecko answered. "Every citizen must share the responsibility for what his country does."

The face of this Tuanthan woman was suddenly as white as paper. "But I didn't do this. I have no control over the whole of Tuantha."

Gecko stopped listening to her. He moved to the broad window and stood looking down. Talu Sar moved to stand beside him. Far below them in the street Tuanthans were moving. Some were coming out of their dwelling places to come into the street where they gathered in small groups. They had discontinued their games, the swimmers had stopped splashing. Talu Sar knew what these people were discussing. He moved to the wall where the full-life projection screen, which was the vastly improved Tuanthan

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version of television, was located and pushed the button that activated it. In Tuantha, there was continuous coverage of all important events.

As the TV came on, the effect was that of the wall vanishing. Where the wall had been, an announcer seemed to be standing. On the face of the announcer, sweat was clearly visible.

"All we know at the moment is that the ion screen is intact, but that the equipment which generated the α radiation has been badly damaged by this mad human who has taken advantage of our free hospitality, this saboteur sent from Earth, this spy, who was sent here to damage our equipment so that we could not stop the landing of the rocket now coming toward us."

Talu Sar glanced at Gecko. A look of consternation was on Gecko's face.

"I came of my own free will!" he shouted at the announcer. "Nobody sent me! I am not a spy!"

"You may be a hero to yourself and to us," Talu Sar said. "But to the people here on the moon, you are a spy and a saboteur."

"Damn it, I didn't do it!" Gecko shouted. "I blew up their damned laboratory but my purpose was to stop murder."

"They look at it differently," Talu Sar said.

"I need not remind you that this is a calamity for the entire nation," the announcer continued. "The chief of the laboratory tells me that he was only waiting for an order from the chief of the Grand Council to blow up the oncoming rocket. Thus perhaps only a matter of hours, possibly only of minutes stood between us and freedom from these hated, hateful, hostile humans coming to violate the peace of our world."

The announcer wiped sweat from his face.

"This crime against our culture, against the only real civilization known to exist in the solar system, will not go unpunished!" the announcer shouted. "We will find this man from Earth. I am sure the Council will instantly order him hurled through the space door."

"These people are no better than humans!" Gecko whispered. Bitterness was in his voice. He had dreamed of a

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better day, of a better world. In an effort to bring this better world into existence, he had been forced to destroy a weapon. He had expected death but he had not anticipated being called a spy! In his mind, he was no spy.

On the door, a sharp knock sounded.

"Are they hunting for me here already?" Gecko asked.

"I'm afraid they are," Lecia answered.

"What will they do with him?" Talu Sar asked.

"They will take him before what is called the Emergency Committee of the Grand Council. This committee has full power to act in any emergency that may arise. Get in my clothes closet, Gecko!"

"What? Why—" Gecko asked.

She stood full height as she answered. "I am a Tuantan citizen. They have authority to seize you, but they have no authority over me. Unless I give them permission, they cannot enter this apartment, if they don't see you. This is probably just a general search of the whole building. They don't, *can't* know you're here."

Gecko's eyes came to focus on her face. "This is nice of you," he said gently. "I appreciate it very much. But I am not going to try to hide in your clothes closet."

"Gecko, use your damned head!" Talu Sar shouted.

Lecia's face had gone completely blank. She stared at this man from Earth as if she did not see him. Then she found her voice.

"The Emergency Committee will act instantly. Within half an hour after you leave my apartment, the committee will have acted and you will have been hurled to death in space!"

"They certainly work fast," Gecko said. He looked at her. "You're a wonderful person, Lecia. It was—and I really mean this—it was good to know you, good also to know that people like you exist here in Tuantan."

His gaze shifted to Talu Sar.

"All my life I thought you were my real brother, Art. If you had been, I could not have asked for a better one."

"Gecko—" Talu Sar started to shout, only to let his voice go into silence as he saw Gecko's shaking head. "If I run, the Tuantans will think all humans are cowards. If I stay, they may listen to me."

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He shrugged. "If they see one man die for the sake of creating a better world, somebody may take notice."

His shrug almost became a grin. "One thing is certain. When these proud Tuanthans see how a human can die, they may decide they are not as superior to humans as they think they are. This may be good for them!"

"Who in hell cares about that?" Talu Sar demanded.

The knock came again on the door, louder now. Gecko nodded to Lecia. "Open it, please," he said.

Neither Lecia nor Talu Sar tried to stop him. To both of them, a man's life was his own, to do with as he saw fit.

Gecko Harper walked out the door and into custody. As he walked from Lecia's apartment, his smile had become a little fixed. As he stood facing the Emergency Committee, the smile had become set, like a mask that he had slipped over his face and which he was now powerless to remove.

Three Tuanthans made up the Emergency Committee. Their faces said they were in deep shock, in shock so heavy that it had warped and grooved their minds. Their way of life was threatened, in their minds, by the rocket booming toward them from the big planet. More than their way of life was threatened, their very lives were in danger. For millenia, this city had known art and beauty, soft and easy ways of living. Now danger was coming toward them. With their z equipment out of order, they could not stop this rocket.

Before and below them in the prisoner's dock stood the man who had brought upon them this threat to their city and to their lives. If not for him, the rocket booming toward them would have spewed out its guts and its crew into the deadly embrace of space. If two rockets blew up before reaching their destination, humans would not be so eager to launch a third.

The judges looked at Gecko. Their faces froze. Frozen faces looked down. A frozen face looked up. Tuanthan TV cameras caught the scene.

The Emergency Committee wasted no time. All they wanted was positive identification that this human had blown up their z radiation laboratory. Gecko admitted the action. The three Tuanthans looked at each other and nodded. The foreman spoke one word.

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"Death through the space door!"

Gecko broke the frozen mask on his face. "Thank you," he said. He tried to grin. His face muscles refused the effort. He squared his shoulders. Let these damned superior Tuanthans see how a human could face death!

"I'm ready," Gecko said.

The three faces looking down at him became even blanker, more frozen. They did not know what to make of Gecko Harper. Tuanthans who had heard the sentence of death through the door into space cringed in terror and usually had to be carried to the chamber that opened out into the vastness of the void. Death itself was bad enough. Death was the vast unknown. Death by being hurled at the speed of light into space was doubly horrible because the dying person had to face two unknowns.

The frozen mask that was the face of the judge in the middle broke into pieces of ice.

"Take him forth to die, at once!"

Gecko felt strong hands close on both arms. Then a voice he knew—it was really two voices—spoke from the rear.

"Hold everything, please!" the voice said.

Gecko turned his head. The man whom all his life he had thought was his brother was coming toward him. With him was the Tuanthan woman called Lecia.

They had spoken together, two voices speaking so simultaneously that they had sounded like one voice.

The three members of the committee stared down at these two intruders.

"Do you realize that you are intruding on an emergency court in session?" the middle committee member asked.

"We do," Talu Sar said. "If it please the emergency court, we request that this human be held for action by the Grand Council of all Tuantha."

"We are citizens of this city," Lecia spoke. "By law and by tradition, this emergency court has no choice except to grant our request."

The three blank faces looked down at the two who had intruded into their court.

"Well, yes, that is correct," the middle committee member said. "We are not a court of final jurisdiction. The Grand

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Council has authority over us and may upset our rulings if it sees fit. We have no choice except to grant the request of any citizen, but any citizen who makes such a request must stand sponsor for the appearance before the Grand Council of the person charged before us, and in the event we have reached a decision, must in person accept that same decision if such decision is affirmed by the Grand Council."

"I agree to stand sponsor for this human," Talu Sar said. "Release him to my custody. I will guarantee his appearance before the Grand Council."

"I also stand sponsor for him," Lecia spoke. "Please release him to our custody at once."

The three members of the Emergency Committee looked at each other. They looked down at Gecko, at Talu Sar and at Lecia. They looked again at each other. The middle member continued to act as spokesman.

"Before we grant your request—if we grant it—we want you to be very clear as to the meaning of the action you are taking. By standing sponsor for this man, you state that in your opinion he is innocent of the charges against him."

"We so state," Talu Sar and Lecia spoke almost in one voice.

"Good," the spokesman for the court said. His face was still a frozen mask through which he was speaking with great difficulty. "You understand that if he is found guilty by the Grand Council, you who stand sponsor for him, you who state that he is in your opinion innocent, contrary to our findings, must suffer the same penalty that the Grand Council gives him?"

"Yes," Talu Sar and Lecia answered together.

Gecko now caught the full meaning of what they were doing.

"What's that you said?" Gecko demanded. "If they stand sponsor for me, they must suffer the same penalty given me?"

"Yes," the spokesman answered.

"I refuse to accept their sponsorship!" Gecko said.

"*Gecko, shut up!*" Talu Sar shouted. He was suddenly what he had always felt he was, Gecko's big brother, with the right to make the decisions for Gecko when the younger brother erred.

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"I will not shut up!" Gecko answered. "There is no reason why you should die for me. My action was my own. I and I alone should bear the consequences of it. You can't save me."

"I can try!" Talu Sar said, his voice hot.

"And I can help him!" Lecia said.

"You cannot!" Talu Sar was shouting again. He turned to the three members of the committee. "I and I alone stand sponsor for him. It is not necessary to have two sponsors."

"Whether it is necessary or not, you have them!" Lecia said.

Talu Sar ignored her. He looked up at the three Tuanthans on the bench above him and pointed to Gecko.

"It is right, fit, and proper that I stand sponsor for this human. I was raised with him. All of my life, until I awakened, I thought of him as my brother. Between us there is a bond composed of thousands of shared experiences starting from the time when we were infants. This is not lightly set aside. This Tuanthan woman has not shared these experiences, her claim is not as strong as mine. She is a woman. Obviously she does not know her own mind."

"I am a Tuanthan citizen," Lecia interrupted. "The law of Tuantha makes no distinction between its citizens because of sex."

"That is correct," the spokesman said. He was obviously confused at the scene taking place below him. Two citizens of Tuantha, a man and a woman, both trying to die for a convicted human! This was a strange thing. What manner of men were humans that two Tuanthans shouted aloud at each other for the doubtful privilege of dying beside one of them?

So the three members of the emergency court wondered. So also wondered the Tuanthans watching this scene.

"I refuse either or both of them!" Gecko shouted, again and again.

The judges considered what Gecko was saying, wondering what manner of creature this human was who had the courage to refuse even a stay of execution, but who preferred to go immediately to his death. The judges had to think about this. Since all of Tuantha was watching them, they had to render a correct decision. Ignoring the shouted protests of the three on the floor below them, they considered their decision. And gave it.

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"We accept you two as sponsors for this human," the spokesman said to Talu Sar and Lecia. "You are to bring him before the Grand Council of the Tuantha, when ordered."

As they left the meeting room of the emergency committee, Gecko was still shouting at Talu Sar and at Lecia, calling them hopeless idiots and utter addled fools. But as he called them bad names, he had one arm around Lecia and the other arm around Talu Sar and his eyes were shining.

Outside the room, Jestin was waiting. His eyes were as cold as the wind from space.

"You are twice a traitor, Talu Sar, once for failing to do your duty on Earth, twice, for giving this man a chance to escape from the just consequences of his own action."

Jestin pointed at Gecko, then his gaze came back to Talu Sar.

"You are summoned to appear immediately, for trial, before the Grand Council of the Tuantha!"

"You will appear immediately and forthwith, for trial," Jestin continued.

"You said that before," Gecko said.

"You are on trial with him," Jestin answered.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE CHAMBER of the Grand Council of the Tuantha was a huge room big enough for a sports arena on Earth. Once it had been intended to seat every Tuanthan but now few chose to attend in person, preferring to watch the proceedings on their equivalent of TV and to vote by pressing either the guilty or the not guilty buttons in their own homes. Elaborate safeguards had been established to make certain that no person voted twice. The results of each ballot were electronically tabulated and flashed on a screen in the chamber of the Grand Council. The results of each ballot were telecast back to the homes so that each citizen who was interested in such matters could see what had happened.

Justice was swift here in Tuantha. Or, at least, the trial was speedy, even if justice was not achieved.

The judges on their high bench were masked, as they had

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been in ancient Venice on Earth. Looking up at the judges, Talu Sar could see the black masks but not the faces behind them. The judges were paying very little attention to the accused below them. Talu Sar was sure they had a portable television receiver out of sight below them on the bench. On this receiver, they were watching the rocket booming toward them through space.

Probably the thoughts of the judges, and of every Tuanthan, were grim. For millenia, mothers had frightened their children with stories of humans coming from the big planet to destroy them. Now they could see these fears coming true with their own eyes.

The judges of the Grand Council could take their eyes off of the television receiver and look down and see a human on trial before their eyes.

They liked this. The rocket was bringing humans to their world. A human was on trial. Humans were bringing death to them. They could send a human to his death.

Off to the right, elevated cameras with their crews were putting this trial on the air. Somewhere a program controller was shifting the outgoing material from the cameras catching the rocket ship to the cameras in this huge room, possibly to still other cameras, as the situation developed.

Talu Sar's first action was to ask for a delay, pointing out that with the rocket coming from Earth, there was little chance of receiving a fair hearing. "Even the honored judges are paying more attention to the news on their television sets than to this trial," Talu Sar ended.

Five judges were on the bench above him. Since each was masked, he could not be really sure which judge answered him. But up there some judge took his eyes off his TV set long enough to speak. He had a voice like a bell.

"There will be no delay," the bell-voice said.

Jestin summed up the charges neatly and concisely. "I charge the two men with acts against the welfare of Tuantha, with treason. Since the woman stands as co-sponsor for the human, his fate must be her fate. In accordance with the law and custom of Tuantha, I request that the first vote, to determine guilt or innocence, be taken immediately."

"Request granted," the bell-voice said above them.

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"But are you going to vote on our guilt or innocence without hearing our side?" Talu Sar protested.

"Yes," the bell-voice told him. "Many times a person is found innocent on the first ballot. If this happens, there is no need to listen to his plea and he is dismissed. Only if he is found guilty on the first ballot is his case heard. Only three votes are allowed. The prosecutor has requested one vote. Either the prosecution or the defense may ask for the second vote. By tradition, the third and final vote can be requested only by the defense, providing, of course, that in the opinion of the court, the defense is not delaying the trial. If this happens, the court itself may order the third and final vote. A simple majority rules. Any time a vote of innocent is recorded by a majority, the case is dismissed."

Calling for a vote, taking the vote, and counting the results, took less than a minute. The verdict was guilty—821 to one.

"We will hear your plea," the bell voice said to Talu Sar. The one of the bell-voice said the plea had better be good.

"At least one person voted for us!" Lecia said hopefully. "And there are thousands who did not vote. When they start to listen—"

"They're watching a rocket," Talu Sar said. "What do they care about us?"

His thoughts were rebellious things, fighting him and fighting each other. He realized that the judges were not listening. Even Jestin was not listening very closely. Off to the right on a table, the court attendants were grouped around a TV receiver on a table. He could hear little spurts of the audio side. Somewhere an announcer was reporting the progress of the rocket.

"The ship from Earth has gone out of control!" Talu Sar heard the announcer say. "It is certain to crash somewhere on the moon. Long before they can build another one, our z radiation equipment will be repaired."

Inside the ship, iron discipline built on many years of training kept down the impulse to panic.

"Braking tube No. 2 not firing properly," the chief engineer reported.

"Can you repair it?" Colonel Gerson asked.

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"I can do my best," the engineer answered.

"Then do it," Colonel Gerson answered. Out of the corner of his eyes he was aware that below him—or above him, he could not tell which—the moon seemed to be swinging at the end of a long chain. He and his ship seemed to be standing still while the moon swung slowly back and froth.

Colonel Gerson knew that neither he nor his ship were actually standing still and that the moon was not swinging at the end of a long chain, no matter what the situation looked to be. He knew that the failure of the braking tube to fire properly had caused his ship to move erratically on both its perpendicular and longitudinal axis and that the ship was both tumbling end-over-end and was spinning at the same time.

Looking through the viewport, Colonel Gerson could see the surface of the moon coming slowly closer and closer. He could see the depths of the craters, the jagged edges of the lunar mountains, the fissures in the surface.

Death was down there and Colonel Gerson knew it. But he was quite calm about it. His ability to remain calm under any circumstances was one reason he was commander of this ship.

Communications Specialist Rod Stamm also looked at the swinging moon. He knew the ship was out of control. Although he suspected this was due to sabotage, he did not panic.

"I regret to report that we are out of control," he spoke into the microphone. "Unless we regain control of our ship, we are certain to crash on the moon."

On the screen in the court room, Talu Sar watched the scene fade away. The voice of the announcer came on, stating that they would flash back to pick up the rocket ship from time to time and that they would do their best to pick up the crash of the rocket, but that this might not take place for several hours. Exultation was in the announcer's voice. Now that this ship was doomed to crash, he was a very happy Tuanthan.

"We will take you now to our radiation laboratory," the announcer said.

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The scene that followed was an interior view of the building where the z radiation was generated. That the equipment had been damaged by an explosion was obvious but it was equally obvious that the explosion had not been heavy enough to do much damage. A radiating antenna that had been mounted on top of a rotating ball had been knocked from its mounting. Pieces of equipment which Talu Sar could not name were blackened. Glass had been broken. A small fire had started but it had been extinguished promptly.

White-jacketed Tuantha technicians were working rapidly to repair the damage.

As the scene faded in the laboratory, the voice of Gecko Harper was suddenly heard in the courtroom.

"What's everybody looking at me for?" Gecko demanded. "What if I did blow up that radiation laboratory? I tried to save the lives of the men in the rocket! Am I supposed to be sorry about that?"

"Continue with the defense," the bell-voice said to Talu Sar.

"I request again that this trial be postponed," Talu Sar said. "It is not possible to have a fair trial under these circumstances."

"Request again denied," the bell-voice answered. "Continue with the defense. Or do you wish another vote to be taken at this time?" The question was asked hopefully, as if the judge would really like to order another vote.

"I'm not that insane!" Talu Sar answered, his voice hot with indignation.

Again Talu Sar tried to bring his thoughts into a coherent movement. Before he could speak, the announcer had come on again, sputting with angry excitement.

"The ship from Earth is back under partial control! It has gone into orbit around our world!"

A view of the rocket ship appeared on the screen. It was tumbling through the sky no longer but was in smooth flight in what appeared to be an orbit.

"Apparently this invading ship is again under control," the announcer said. "Presumably some damage was done to the drive mechanism. Possibly it will remain in orbit long enough to correct this damage. This may take anywhere from a few

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minutes to a few days. When the ship is repaired, the threat to our existence will be renewed!"

His voice caught, grew hoarse, faded into silence, then came on again with even stronger conflict in it.

"The most we have gained is a respite. Once this ship even spots the existence of our city from the sky and radios back to Earth what it has found, in that instant our doom has come upon us. If men on Earth know that we exist, in that instant the last and final step has been forced upon us that will eventually bring us to the fate of the Red Indians of North America. We will become a lost race—"

"Continue with your defense," the chief judge said to Talu Sar in the courtroom. "According to our laws, three votes may be taken. If you are found guilty three times, you are guilty, and the trial is at an end. There is no further appeal and the sentence will be given and will be carried out instantly. If any vote finds you innocent, this also ends the trial. The first vote is taken automatically. This has already been done. Either you or the prosecution may ask for the second vote. But only the defense may ask for the third vote. Continue, please!"

The bell-voice of this judge had lost its even smoothness. A clangor and a clamor had appeared in it. Now it sounded like a bell that had suddenly become cracked.

"I wish again to protest that this is not a fair trial," Talu Sar said.

"I have made a note of your request. We will act upon it at the regularly scheduled re-making of the laws five years hence," the judge told him.

"Five years? Do you mean Earth years?"

"Yes."

"But if we are found guilty, we will be dead long before then!" Talu Sar said, sharply.

The judge nodded. "But if your protest results in changing our laws, you will not have died in vain!"

"After you're dead, what difference does it make to you whether or not you died in vain?" Gecko demanded.

"Silence, please," the judge said.

"From all I can see, our guilt and our deaths are already established," Lecia said.

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"That is true," the judge said.

"Then why bother to try us?" she demanded.

"Because that is our custom," the judge continued. "Continue, please," he ended, nodding to Talu Sar.

"Very well," Talu Sar answered. "In this case, since no defense is possible, this trial is a farce. I wish to plead guilty as charged, to treason against Tuantha!"

Bitterness was a sickness in him. Deep within him, unrecognized until this moment, had been the feeling that in a city where art and science had been so competently blended as in this one, justice would be handled with equal competence. Quite suddenly he saw that the Tuanthans might be far advanced in art and in science, but that they had only the vaguest notion of the meaning of justice. As he realized this fact, the bitterness and the sickness grew stronger.

Beside him, Talu Sar heard Lecia gasp. He was aware that Gecko was looking sharply at him. All his life, Gecko had seemed to think that his brother could do anything, could solve any problem. Gecko had expected the same thing to happen here. Now, suddenly, Art was taking a step that would solve all problems forever—by death!

Talu Sar was also aware that both the judges and Jestin were paying close attention. Their minds were no longer on the rocket ship. They were watching him, thinking of the action he had just taken. Concern was on Jestin's face. And something approaching respect.

"You are aware that you have signed your own death warrant?" Jestin said.

"I am aware of it."

"But why?"

"Why not? My race is dead. Why should I not be dead with it?"

"Your race dead? You are a Tuanthan."

"That's what I mean. The Tuanthans are dead—dead to any sense of justice. When a race—or an individual—dies to the meaning of these words, physical death is not far off."

"What is this you are saying?" the bell-voice of the judge demanded.

Talu Sar ignored the judge. He addressed himself to Jestin.

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"I am guilty of treason," he continued. "On Earth, I awakened on schedule. I remembered my identity."

He heard the collective gasp in the courtroom and knew its sources. His own words were damning him forever.

"I deliberately chose to be human. I built a personality—and a life—on keeping everything normal, natural, commonplace. In part, I did this because I sensed there was something wrong with Tuantha. What this was I did not know clearly. Now I know only in part, but this much I know. I chose to be human rather than Tuanthan because to be human is to be alive to the meaning of fair play, equality, and justice.

"And this is not all. Earth, the big planet, is alive in another way. It is a planet of conflict, of war, and of struggle. To be alive is to know struggle, war, conflict. This is the way men and ideas are tested. There is no other way. On Earth, men and ideas are continually tested in this way. Here on Tuantha you are trying to avoid conflict, to avoid struggle, you are trying to destroy strangers—humans in rockets—before the strangers even learn of your existence. The reason you do this is because you want to return to the sleep of centuries that has engulfed your race. Just as water that does not dash itself continually against a rocky shore, finding new oxygen and new life in the dashing process, but forms itself into sheltered pools, turns stagnant, so have the Tuanthans turned stagnant. They have tried to build a shell around themselves, tried to die behind an ion shield. On Earth, the turtles tried to learn to live behind shells. Millenia ago the turtles learned this secret. They are still turtles!

"I chose to be human, rather than to accept my orders as a Tuanthan, because as a human I would have to face the challenge of life daily on the big planet. Here in the city of the Tuantha there is such beauty, such science, and such security as humans have never known. Beauty and science are good, but are not enough. Peace and security are wonderful, for a short time, but uninterrupted peace leads to stagnation and stagnation not only leads to death, it *is* death."

He knew that everyone in the courtroom was listening to him, knew also that his words were being put on the air so that everyone in Tuantha was hearing them.

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"Let me say these words again and again and again," he repeated. "The city of the Tuantha here on the moon is the most fantastically beautiful place I have ever seen. I want to give full credit and pay due homage to the generations of scientists-artists who labored here so many generations to bring this masterpiece to reality. All of the fine words ever invented are not enough to pay adequate credit to these men. When I see the result of their work, I am proud to be a Tuanthan. When I realize that the present generation here in this masterpiece is trying to restrict this city to its own use and to exclude the new race now coming on in its turn from Earth, I am sick at even the thought that I am a Tuanthan!

The judges stirred on their high bench, twisting and looking down. Perhaps in the whole city many others were twisting and squirming. What conclusions they were reaching would be revealed by the next vote.

"The city of Tuantha is a dream city, built by generations of master artists. It is also a dying dream. The old energy that gave it zest is gone. The only hope that this masterpiece has to live again lies in opening its gates to the new life now trying to come here from Earth. Accept this flood of new life coming to you. True, the new life will mean enormous changes in your ways of life, it will seem to threaten the quietness and the security of this city, men from Earth will bring a new hustle and bustle to disturb your quiet ways, but if you will accept this new life coming to you, if you will mix with it, blend your blood with it, out of this will come a new flowering of even more intense life for your sons and your grandsons!"

He let his voice drop off.

"The saddest sound I ever heard was here in this place of beauty. It was the wailing of a young mother over her still-born child. I know that all of you have heard this same sound. I know that all of you know that the birthrate in this city is now below the death rate. This means your city is dying. This means that your race is dying. This means that if you destroy the rocket now coming to you, at the same time you also destroy your only hope of having a future!"

"Your only hope is to welcome humans here. Let them

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bring new life to you. If you do not do this, the day will come—and it is not far off—when no one will be left to tend the ion screen generators. When they cease functioning, then the dust of space will fall quietly on your streets until it has laid a carpet as high as the tallest building. When this happens, the dream city of the Tuantha will cease to exist. When you refuse to let life flow, it dies. Life cannot be penned within one man, within one race, within one city. It only exists, it only finds itself, in flowing and in blending.”

All over the city of the Tuantha was silence. Talu Sar’s voice went on in this silence.

“Let the Earth rocket land. Greet its crew as friends. Make humans welcome here. If you do this, you will also find that you have made your own grandsons welcome in the universe!”

He let his voice drop away. He bowed to the judges and to the cameras recording this scene. He walked over and put his arms around Gecko and around Lecia.

“I have said what is on my mind. I ask for a vote. I ask that we be found innocent. If you give life to us, you give it to yourselves. If you take it away from us, you take it away from yourselves.”

“The price of stagnation, the price of isolation, is racial death. Only by opening your doors to new life coming from the big planet, can you find life again.”

There was silence in the vast hall of the Grand Council of the Tuantha. The same silence existed all over the city of Tuantha.

The judge set in operation the machinery for the second vote. The result was quickly recorded and flashed on the big board in the great hall.

2140 to 617—Guilty!

“You have one more vote,” the chief judge told Talu Sar. “You alone can ask for it. The prosecution does not have this privilege.”

“I have said all that I have to say,” Talu Sar answered. Despair was in his voice. In his mind was the sense of coming death. A premonitory feeling of cold was in his body.

Gecko moved, twisting out of Talu Sar’s arm laid loosely on his shoulders, took a pen out of his jacket pocket, looked up at the judges, started to speak, then changed his mind.

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Before he could speak, the voice of the announcer was clamoring in the great chamber.

"We have wonderful news! Our α radiation laboratory has been repaired. We are now in a position to blast the Earth ship from the sky!"

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE TUANTHAN TV announcer was almost beside himself with exultation and excitement. This was his moment of triumph. It was also the moment of triumph of all Tuantha.

"Any time we choose—*pouf!*—the ship becomes pieces of broken metal in our sky. The bodies of the crew become little particles of ice in orbit around our world!"

A TV shot of the α radiation laboratory followed. The little antenna was now circling its ball in rhythm with the ship orbiting the moon. Like a miniature finger that could trigger doom, the little antenna always pointed at the ship.

"The clumsy rocket from the big planet will try to land on the Earth side of the moon, away from us," the announcer said. "The orbit it is following will take it over the dark side of our world. When it is over the dark side, it is at our mercy. We will knock it down when we choose. When the signal is given, it will explode out there in the sky!"

The announcer was really living in anticipation of the moment when the rocket would explode in the void.

"Cameras from Earth are on this rocket!" he continued. "They will see it explode. But they will never know *why* it exploded. When two of their rockets explode, they will not have the courage to build a third! Or the resources! We will be free of them forever!"

Listening in the courtroom, with sickness rising again inside him, Talu Sar was aware that Lecia was nudging his arm. "Do you object if I say a word in our behalf?" she whispered.

"Please, say anything you wish!" Talu Sar answered.

She stepped forward and faced the judges. The cameras swung to cover her. Her voice rang out clear and sharp.

"I know we have been told that humans will give up

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building rocket ships if a few of their efforts explode in space, that they will lose heart. We have been told that the costs of building such ships will soon make them prohibitive if they all fail and that crews will refuse to volunteer for missions that mean only death."

"This is what we have been told!" she repeated.

"But what we have not been told, or what we have forgotten, is some of our own history. When we lived on Earth, when the ice ages were coming down, when we began to build clumsy rocket ships in an effort to reach the moon, we lost ships through accident. The question is: How many ships did we lose before we reached the moon, through accidents alone?"

The judges suddenly were listening very closely.

"I will give you the answer, as it is recorded in our books of history. Before our forefathers landed safely on the moon, we lost sixty-one rocket ships! So many brave Tuanthans, so much material, so much labor went into the void of space!"

Her voice dropped into sadness as if the memory of this long-lost history brought pain with it.

"If you think our far-removed cousins who now live on Earth are weaklings to be stopped by the loss of a few ships, you must think again. They are not weakling, they are not stopped by shadows, they do not flee from phantoms! I know them. I lived among them. They are as tough-minded, as physically fit as were our ancestors who reached the moon. If they have to lose sixty-one ships, they will lose them. In losing them, they will learn how to build better ones. Sooner or later they may even find the secret method of propulsion we use in our one unarmed space ship! Whether or not they ever find this secret, eventually they will reach our world. When they do this, they will learn why so many of their ships exploded in space, why so many brave men went unknowingly to their deaths."

Her voice caught and she paused.

"I want no son of mine—if I can have a son—I want no grandson of mine, no greatgrandson of mine, to be living in this city when our cousins from Earth appear over it to exact vengeance for what we did to their ships and to their men with our α radiation!"

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"This is all I have to say."

She bowed and stepped backward. Behind their masks, the eyes of the judges looked down at her. All of the eyes in Tuantha must have been watching her, all the ears must have heard her, all the minds must have been concerned with the question she had posed. The judges were silent. All of Tuantha was silent.

In that silence, the voice of the announcer could be heard.

"You have heard the words of this renegade Tuanthan woman! Take them for what they are worth!"

Glancing up at Talu Sar, Lecia sighed. "I guess I failed too," she said.

The voice of the announcer came again.

"The chief of the radiation laboratory is standing by to blow up the ship just as soon as it comes into range of our projector. We will keep our cameras trained on it. . . . After the ship is gone, we will show you the death of these three traitors!"

The tone in the voice of the announcer said it was a great day in his life. He would have the opportunity to put the death of a great ship on his circuits, then the death of three who were called traitors!

Suddenly a voice was shouting in the courtroom!

"Just one damned minute!" the voice was saying. "Before you decide to blow up that ship, and before you decide to execute us traitors, put those cameras back on me and listen to what I have to say!"

It was Gecko speaking. Gecko's voice was clear, hard, and intent with the sureness of high purpose.

The startled judges looked down at this brash human. The cameras swung to cover him.

"Just one goddamned minute!" Gecko repeated. "As you start to destroy that ship, remember that its destruction will precede your own deaths by not more than three or four minutes!"

Shock ran through the judges, ran also through the city of Tuantha. This human was a mad man. He had blown up their z radiation laboratory. Was there no limit to his madness?

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Gecko held up his hand and exhibited an object he had taken from the pocket of his jacket.

"You taught us humans a trick or two," Gecko said. "You taught us about something called a *nurlo*, which is a weapon that looks like an ordinary cigarette. We stupid humans learned from you, we learned fast! This object that I hold in my hand looks like an ordinary ball-point fountain pen. This is what it looks like. This is what it is. But this is not all it is!

"Now listen to me, listen all of you. When I left this city after my first visit here, I took a *nurlo* with me. On Earth, our great experts in this field examined it. They thought the *nurlo* was a trick worth learning. So we learned it. So, when I returned here, I brought a similar device with me. This ordinary pen is the control of a piece of explosive metal, like a thumbtack that you might find in the tire of a truck, perhaps, like some other simple, common thing!"

Sarcasm crept into his voice.

"When I touch this catch that is the pocket clip, a piece of metal hidden somewhere in your city will explode."

Listening, Talu Sar caught the impression that the judges, the camera men, the court attendants, Jestin, and probably all of the Tuanthans in the city, were suddenly in danger of going completely crazy. The emotional strain on them had been great. Just when they thought they were going to find relief from this emotional strain, this madman had come up with a new threat.

"I—uh—" the bell-voice of the judge tried to ask a question. "Where is this piece of explosive metal located?"

"In your ion screen generators," Gecko promptly answered. "If I detonate this device, your ion screen generators will be destroyed. The ion screen protects this city from meteors. It also holds the air in the city. Without the ion screen, the air will vanish into space."

Shock waves passed through the city of Tuantha.

"Now listen to me, all of you. Either you find the three of us innocent on the next ballot, innocent of all charges, either immediately after this vote is taken you take another vote, this one to permit this ship from Earth to land safely, or all of you go to hell with the three of us!"

Horror held the city of the Tuantha. Talu Sar watched

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Gecko. Horror rose in Talu Sar. He saw Jestin start toward Gecko.

Talu Sar had never hit anyone as hard as he hit Jestin. The Tuanthan went down. He pulled himself to a sitting position on the floor and sat there. Shaking his head, he made no attempt to rise.

Talu Sar started toward him. Jestin waved him away.

"You didn't need to hit me!" Jestin explained. "I joined you."

"You what?"

"I joined you. When I finally realized you were right, I joined you. Now stay out of my way while I get up and help that crazy brother of yours run his bluff!"

"Bluff?" Talu Sar whispered.

"He's bluffing with an ordinary fountain pen and you know it," Jestin answered. "He tried it in Greg's Canyon, trying to pretend that a cigarette was a *nurlo*. It failed there, but he's trying it again. That's courage! If there is one thing I like about humans, it's the fact that they have courage."

Jestin got to his feet. "Keep your damned fists to yourself!" he said to Talu Sar. "I'm going to back Gecko's bluff!"

Jestin in this moment was as good as his word. Standing beside Gecko, he begged the listening Tuanthans to listen to the only kind of reason they really understood, that of force. When he had finished speaking, Gecko spoke again.

"Just make up your minds!" Gecko told them. "Either the ship lands in peace, and we're all innocent, or we all go to hell together. Just make up your goddamned minds!"

The Tuanthans made up their minds so effectively that on the next ballot they found the three defendants innocent without a dissenting vote. The decision to let the ship land was also without a dissenting vote.

On the home planet, they saw the ship set down. Rod Stamm's shout of triumph rang across 240,000 miles of space. Men were on the moon! Men were on the moon!

In the courtroom of the Grand Council of the Tuantha was confusion. New ways had come to an old world. More important, new life had come to a dying land. The Tuanthans

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would have to learn to adjust to the vast changes required of them. As soon as humans realized that they had had cousins on the moon for millenia, men on Earth would have to learn to adjust to this fact too.

Gecko slipped the fountain pen back into his pocket.

"They're real smart people, these Tuanthans," he said, grinning. "Only they don't understand all of the finer points of Yankee bluff!"

"You were wonderful," Talu Sar said. He was going to say more, but Lecia was clamoring for Gecko's attention and Jestin was pulling at him.

"When you go back to Earth, take me with you," Jestin was saying. "I want to learn more about life on the big planet."

"I'll be glad to," Talu Sar answered. "But I thought perhaps I would stay here for a time. After all, it is my home. And I was thinking—" His eyes sought Lecia. Gecko had both arms around her.

Talu Sar looked in surprise at Jestin. The Tuanthan grinned.

"I kind of think I know where these two races are going to start blending right away," the Tuanthan said.

"Yes. I—ah—see—Well!" Talu Sar swallowed and hastily changed his mind. "This blending of the two races, I did sell this rather strong, didn't I? If I have to live up to my own words—"

A picture flicked across his mind of a laughing woman.

"Across the road from my service station in the desert is a restaurant. A red-headed waitress works there. She laughs a lot. I wonder . . ." Talu Sar said. "I hadn't really thought about it until now but if I have to practice what I have been preaching."

"Then this red-headed waitress may be just the one to start the blending rolling on Earth!" Jestin said. "Tell me—does she have a friend?"

"I'm sure she does," Talu Sar answered. "Every waitress I have ever known on the big planet has always had a friend."

He smiled at Jestin. The Tuanthan grinned back.