

EGG AND

A Siukurnin is so becoming!

FOR a week now the Siukurnin had hung above the hunters' camp disguised as a pine cone. One of the ropes holding their tent fly passed within inches of it, and when the cold evening wind blew, as it was doing now, the rope hummed. This created a masking harmonic that had to be filtered out (along with many other "noises") before the Siukurnin could concentrate on the vibrations coming from the figures around the fire.

Already imprinted and stored in the Siukurnin's sub-cellular structure was a long catalogue of light-reflected *shapes* and vibration meanings from this place and the other places. It knew that

when one of the carbon life-forms moved to the nearby flowing liquid, the creature was going to the *water*. (And that was one of the vibrations for the great heaving expanse of liquid beyond the mountains to the east.) And it knew that when one of these creatures became dormant for the night (low vibration period), that was *sleep*.

Oh, there were so *many* vibration meanings.

The Siukurnin tried reproducing the vibrations for *sleep* and *water* at a subaural level, gloried in its growing mastery of these subtleties.

An aroma of coffee and broiled meat arose from the fire. The Siukurnin listened

to these for a moment, savoring the full roundness of the vibration spectrum in this enchanting place. As yet it had not thought of the necessity for a non-*chilitigish* vibration to refer to itself.

(You must understand that when it thought of itself at this stage (which was seldom), it did not think: "I am a Siukurnin." In the first place, a natural mechanism inhibited prolonged introspection. In the second place, "Siukurnin" is a make-do vibration—a limited auditory approach to the actual "term" that is used only in communicating with creatures who do not hear into the visual spectrum, and who are not yet able to detect the *chilitigish* spectrum. Since

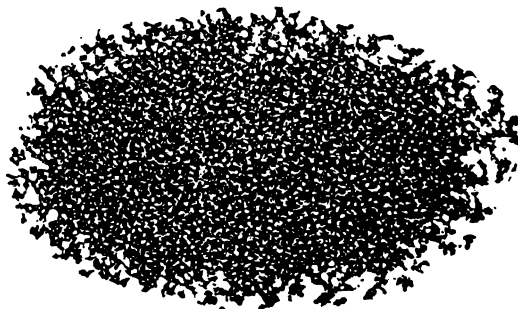
this is only a start at communication, it's perfectly all right for you to think of this creature as a "Siukurnin," but you should keep in mind that there's a limitation.)

BEFORE coming to this hunters' camp, the Siukurnin had spent two weeks as a false rivet head in the wardroom of a long gray warship. It had left the warship as a coating of "film" on a garbage container, and had arrived here in the pine glade as a length of "wire" in the trunk lid of a used car that had been sold to one of the hunters.

Between the garbage container and the used car there had been several other shapealiases, all characterized by

ASHES

By FRANK HERBERT



solid color and smoothness and all difficult to reproduce. The Siukurnin looked on its present pine cone form almost as a rest.

Once started on its repertoire of new vibration meanings, the Siukurnin was like a *lilim* with a new *arabeg*, or, as you might say, like a child with a new toy. Presently, it recalled the period on the warship. "Now hear this! Now hear this!" it chanted to itself at a level too low to be detected by the figures beneath it.

Darkness folded over the camp in the pine trees and the fire flickered low. The upright creatures retired into their tent. (To *sleep*, you understand.) Among these creatures was one identified by the primitive (non-*chilitigish*) vibration: "Sam."

Now the Siukurnin listened to the sougning of the wind through the branches around it, to the scrabbling of night creatures—and once there was a figurative scream of skunk odor nearby. Much later, the Siukurnin defied its inhibitions, tried to recall a time before the awakening at the warship. Only faint fog memory came: a sensation of swimming upward through dark *water*.

The effort of memory brought the inhibition mechanism into action. Destructive hunger gnawed at the Siukurnin. It sensed changes

going on within its structure—a maturation of sorts.

To put down the hunger, the Siukurnin imagined itself as one of the flying creatures to be *seen* in the delightful harmonics of sky above it—soaring . . . soaring . . .

But this, too, became disturbing because its self-image insisted on resolving into a giant red-gold winged thing unfamiliar to these skies (but feeling disquietingly familiar to the Siukurnin).

Dawn crystallized the peaks to the east, brought stirrings that aroused the Siukurnin from its reverie. A figure emerged from the tent, yawned, stretched. The Siukurnin matched light vibrations and sound vibrations for the figure and, in its own way, "recognized" the hunter, Sam. There were checkered harmonics with merging of long and short olfactory-visual waves punctured by great sound-meaning vibrations.

"Chilly this morning," said the hunter. "Wish I could stay in the sack like you bums."

From the tent came another voice: "You lost a fair and square toss, Sam. Get that fire goin'."

A connoisseur sense within the Siukurnin came to full alert. It felt that this crude creature carried some supremely desirable element. In a sense, the Siukurnin "crouched."

The hunter put a hand on the fly rope, glanced at the false pine cone. "Yeah," he said. "You'll burn like pitch." He reached up, touched the "cone," felt sudden warmth, then nothing. The "cone" was gone. He shook his hand, looked around the ground, back to the tree. Nothing. "I'll be danged," he muttered. He scratched the palm that had touched the "cone."

"That fire goin' yet?" demanded the voice from the tent.

Sam shook his head. "No. I was going to pick a pine cone to help start the fire and the darn thing disappeared."

"You're gettin' old, gram-paw," came the voice from the tent. "Better buy some glasses when we get back to town."

Another voice intruded from the tent: "Will you guys quit your yakking? I'm trying to sleep!"

For the Siukurnin there had been an instant of exquisite languor. Then it had felt itself changing uncontrollably, spreading out over the hand of the carbon life-form, seeping immediately through pores, between cells, into a vein. It stretched out—no more than six cells in diameter—reaching . . . reaching . . .

A long, thin thread explored the length of the vein. (You'll appreciate that the vibrations here were magnifi-

cent in their contrapuntal relationship: little hissings and squealings and lappings played against a superb background throb. There were also a few moments of delicate adjustment before the leucocytes ceased their ravaging attack.)

IN ITS own way, the Siukurnin danced for joy. Its hunger became only a faint beckoning: a dim sort of knowledge that end-of-hunger was at hand.

And there came a trickle of memory from before the upward swimming and those first moments of awareness on the warship. There was not enough recollection to frighten it with the thought that its own little egg of ego might be overwhelmed . . . just enough to whet its curiosity.

(All Siukurnin are fully endowed with a curiosity that cannot be inhibited, you know. And *chilitigish* awareness makes this faculty even more potent.)

The Siukurnin swam, crawled, wriggled, elongated and squeezed. Down, outward, upward. It had to filter out part of the "music" around it now: wheezings in the great air sacs, gurglings and sloshings, cracklings and swishings. All so distracting. One of its elements enwebbed the host's vocal cords ("great vibrators" to a Siukurnin).

Another part interfingered the speech centers of the brain. Cilia reached out to the eye surfaces and the eyelid veins, contacting the exterior.

It was distracting at first to discover how all the vibrations were separated by different sense organs; then temptation became irresistible. (Who can hurl blame for this?) The Siukurnin coordinated its contact with speech centers and vocal cords.

Across the pine glade a human voice shouted: "Now hear this! Now hear this! Water! Sleep! Fire! Eat!"

Oh, it was an exhilarating sensation!

Two of the upright creatures, the other hunters, tumbled from the tent. One called: "It's about time you got . . ." It broke off. There was no fire. Only Sam standing terror-eyed beside the firepit, left hand to throat, right hand outthrust as though to push something away.

Then Sam swayed, collapsed.

In the hospital room, gross vibrations had been dampened to a remote hush. Slatted blinds were closed against raw morning sunlight. The bedside lamp had been turned off. But there still was a soft harmonic reflection from cream-colored walls that mingled with the even hiss of sleep breathing.

Sam lay on his back in the room's single bed, eyes closed. His chest under a green humming of blanket rose and fell gently. Somewhere, a pumping motor throbbed its obbligato. Distantly, stiff little shuntings and pantings and screechings told of city traffic. Ether trailed its solo virtuosity through the air, riding on a wave of disinfectant. A nurse's heels along the hall added an abrupt random rhythm that wove back and forth . . . back and forth through the other vibrations in a way that excited the connoisseur sense of the figure on the bed.

(After all, the long, virtual silence of the migration had now been recalled. In a sense, it was *starved* for these wonderful "noises.")

Outside the half-opened door of the room, a doctor could be heard talking to Beverly, Sam's wife. The doctor was tall, a beak-nosed shape: pink and blond with white on white on white echoing across the image. Acrid little shouts came from his hands, clinkings from his pockets, and a buzzing of tobacco rode his breath.

There had been a strange *dual* recognition of Beverly: a sense of familiarity with her dark hair, soft curve of cheeks, alert gray-green eyes. (The Sam-memories, of course.) And there had been

added to this a pungent explosion of perfume-base powder (still familiar, yes, but heightened to an indescribable pitch), plus a glissando of gold necklace on green coat on green suit, all played against a bright beating of gold-bronze buttons. (And there was much more, but without *chilitigish* awareness in the reader, the effects are meaningless.)

The doctor's voice carried a drum quality as he uttered cautious reassurances. "There is no doubt that it's some type of narcolepsy," he said. "But there's no enlargement of the lymphatic glands. His pulse and respiration are normal. Temperature's up, but not dangerously. I'm inclined to suspect this may be a reaction due to nervous strain. Has he been working very hard?"

"Narcolepsy, narcolepsy, narcolepsy," whispered the Siukurnin with its Sam-lips.

Well . . . they weren't exactly Sam-lips now. They were much more accurately Sam (to the Siukurnin power) lips.

You just have to understand that single-ego orientation sets up difficult problems in communications here. What you would consider odd and irresistible things had been happening to Sam and Siukurnin. Cilia of Siukurnin had gone creeping and seeking of their own volition. It was now a great thin net spread throughout the host.

Wherever it touched nerve cells—in brain and elsewhere—subtle displacements occurred at the subcellular level. New memories (Sam-memories) filtered into Siukurnin. And Siukurnin memories, of course, filtered back to Sam. (This is one of those processes that just cannot be confined to a one-way circuit.)

THINGS had gone so far that Siukurnin had displaced the temporary migration-ego. And Sam—"he" now thought of himself as a kind of "needle" at the end of an extremely long thread. You see, the "thread" was the Siukurnin ego-memory-chain, its past so ancient that the Sam-ego was staggered.

(If you open up a Siukurnin-past you find that it is other creatures stretched out to a virtually meaningless number. This is a fascinating infinity process in which a quite satisfactory internal relationship has been worked out.)

Fully awakened, Siukurnin now understood the necessity mechanism that had blanked out ego-memory-chain awareness. There is such a temptation in the migration period to turn inward upon the merged multiplicity, encyst all distracting processes, and just think and think and think and . . .

You can see how this would be a kind of death.

(Strictly speaking, Siukurnin do not fear death, although they are vulnerable during the "flight-of-joy" vector in their life cycle.)

Both Sam and Siukurnin were completely merged now. Sam-Siukurnin ^(ego-memory-chain +^x) lay in the meaningful vibration core of the hospital room. Neither "unit" could now undo what had happened—nor wanted to undo it. Oh, there had been some Sam-resistance at first. Quite natural.

But Siukurnin revealed how a reluctant host's flesh could be incinerated without stopping the merging process. (And there were all those memories laid out in the open to prove this!) The other capture memories were a compelling argument, too.

The process is so *drearily* repetitive—except for the new life with its fascinating vibration meanings, of course.

And now you know how it happens. Not painful (except for some initial shocks). Not harmful to the host-ego. And not to be resisted.

In fact, this is being written in the hope that the rest of you will see (what an *odd*

sensory division) how foolish it is to resist.

There's no point in resistance.

You cannot fight the inevitable.

Besides, you will find the merging a very rewarding experience. And if you stop to think about it, this is not the first time your kind has encountered us (although never before in such numbers as our present migration). You do have your legend of the Phoenix. According to your legend, this was a great red-gold "bird" that returned to Heliopolis in ancient Egypt every five hundred years (a reasonable Siukurnin-host life span), there to be reborn from its own ashes.

Naturally, the flesh of a dead host has to be incinerated to free the Siukurnin web for its "flight-of-joy." To think of the Phoenix as a "bird" was somewhat of an oversimplification, you understand. But we're sure you'll enjoy the flying sensation and the act of creating your new egg—especially when you view the experience with full *chilitigish* awareness.

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