

FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION

NO. 33

35¢

A NEW PARODY
by ISAAC ASIMOV

CAT O'
NINE TALES
by THOMAS N.
SCORTIA



DOUBLE ACTION
MAGAZINE

FUTURE SCIENCE FICTION

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THEODORE L. THOMAS is an occasional writer, whose stories are usually remembered for many months after their appearance. His most recent appearances have been "The Disappearing Man", in the July *Science Fiction Stories*, and "The Attractive Nuisance" in the August *Science Fiction Quarterly*.

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★ THOMAS N. SCORTIA is a chemist by profession, who finds himself torn between sanity and the desire to make writing his sole career. His profession forms the basis for a notable short novel, "Genius Loci", in the September *Science Fiction Stories*.

ROBERT SILVERBERG seems to be living up to his accolade as the "most promising new writer of 1956", as, in addition to numerous short stories and novelets, all of notable quality, he's now to be found in pocket book novels, as well as in topflight detective and western story magazines.

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★ A. BERTRAM CHANDLER is a British author, well known for unusual and wryly humorous tales. His list of credits would fill quite a few pages.

ISAAC ASIMOV needs no introduction; he's just one of the brightest of those science fiction stars that every science fiction editor is constantly seeking.

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CAT O' NINE TALES

by Thomas N. Scortia

illustrated by FREAS

Something was broadcasting the secret thoughts of men, feeding their hidden fear and guilt back to them, amplified. It was like the brainwashing methods of the alien *Troats*, but far, far worse.

SIX MONTHS to the day after he had assumed command of the eight man picket ship *Abalon*, Lt. (JG) LeFarge blew out his brains with his own ceremonial revolver. His second, Ensign Hartmann, found him in the dispensary, floating amid the debris of his own self-destruction and the splintered fragments of the ancient 30mm pistol which had exploded in the very act of destroying its owner.

Five days later, the Quarter-master ship received his grey body in its issue plastic case, ticketed and coded like some inanimate piece of equipment.

Lt. Goetering, LeFarge's replacement, watched from the hold port of the QM ship until

the transfer was complete, and wondered how many more grey plastic-enclosed things would make the same sort of trip before the war with the *Troats* was at an end.

As soon as the transfer was completed, Goetering rode the shuttle, carrying the *Abalon*'s fuel and food rations for the next month, across the quarter mile of separation to the waiting picket ship. A taped whistle, sounding on the small ship's inter-com, piped him aboard and to the bridge where Ensign Hartmann reported.

AS THE QM ship blasted far aport, Goetering asked, "What happened to LeFarge?" "Well..." Ensign Hartmann



LaFarge couldn't stand his guilt any longer, and took the only avenue of escape there was.

ventured, "you know how things happen."

"That's hardly an answer," Goetering said stiffly.

Ensign Hartmann stood silently. He seemed to be listening for something. "LeFarge was always rather moody."

When Goetering started to say something else, Hartmann said, "That's the K Force, isn't it?" He gestured at the faded patch on Goetering's right shoulder with the "K" and "F" sprawled across a thick circle. The thread forming the insignia was frayed and discolored compared with its mate with the bright V Picket Fleet insignia on Goetering's left shoulder.

"That's right," Goetering said, coloring. "I was one of the survivors."

"Then you're one of the few to see those butchers close at hand."

Butchers? Goetering thought. Hate-love-agony blending. Could he ever forget that two months? "I was a prisoner for two months, until they sent me and the other four back with their message."

Message: You are vermin we cannot tolerate. We will wipe you out and try to forget the filth that you are.

"I saw quite a bit of them," he said.

"And the others, the rest of the fifth?"

"The lucky ones...dead. You know what the *Troats* do with prisoners." He felt sick, wherever he went. If they could forget...

"I'm going to my quarters," he said. "Wake me at the end of this watch."

HARTMANN NODDED absently and saluted. Goetering left him on the bridge, staring at the air in front of him as though listening. It wasn't until the metal door of his tiny cabin slid softly shut behind him that Goetering remembered he had failed to meet any of the other members of his new command.

He unbuckled the ceremonial revolver at his side and stared at it moodily. LeFarge, he wondered, what sort of a man was he? Younger than he, of course. (No one bothered to ask why Goetering was still a Lieutenant, not after seeing the frayed K. F. patch. Everyone knew what had happened to the men the enemy had released.)

He pressed the button that lowered the bunk and threw himself on it. Well, he could understand it in a way—at least the impulse. Lord, the times when he had wanted to end his own life. And not for the reasons the brass thought.

"Give him a line command, an easy one," they said. "The *Troats* did something to him."

But we need men in the line. We have to use him, him and the others."

If they had known the whole story...

...of endless horror and self-loathing...

He almost sobbed aloud at the intensity of the memory. *...and smothering black hatred, hatred you can drown in ...and the fostered awareness of massive power...of untouchable force...*

"Oh, God," he said aloud. They were in his mind... again!

HE SAT erect, feeling the horror wash over him and...

...image of love, of strength whom I shall hate. .and love with a cruelty that I destroy and...

"No, I've killed him once already."

...to burn in sin-bright flame to the end of eternity... screaming at the fire of revenge in my hand.

Goetering pushed from the bunk, opened the door and stumbled into the passageway. Then, awareness returning, he returned, donned the parts of his uniform which he had discarded, and made his way to the bridge.

Hartmann and another man, the Warrant officer, were speaking in low tones when he

entered. On the far side of the bridge, two enlisted men worked at the console of the long distance mass detector.

Hartmann looked at him curiously and introduced the other officer as Mr. Marvin.

"Welcome aboard, sir," Marvin said uneasily and Goetering realized that his face must still mirror the fear he had felt minutes before.

HE STRAIGHTENED his body and stared into Hartmann's jet eyes. After a moment the boy looked away, his thin shoulders hunching slightly. Marvin moved away and bent his head in study of the chart the two men were plotting with the detector.

"How did you sleep?" Hartmann asked.

"I didn't."

Hartmann paused in indecision. "I didn't think you would."

"What do you mean?"

"I suppose I should have showed you when you first came on board."

He led Goetering from the bridge and down the central passageway. They stopped before a door marked "Dispensary."

"You must understand," Hartmann said slowly, "we didn't know what to do about this. It...well, LeFarge kept the things and there just wasn't

any way to decide after he died."

"What are you talking about?" Goetering demanded.

"LeFarge called it *Gumbo Ya-Ya*. That's Creole for 'everybody talks together' or something like that."

"I'm not very good at puzzles, Mister."

"Here," Hartmann said, opening the door.

THE CENTER of the room was dominated by a transparent plastic case bolted to one of the equipment tables. Below the table were a series of oxygen bottles connected with plastic tubes to the enclosure. On the side of the enclosure were two thin metal rods and a rheostat which Goetering recognised as a makeshift thermostat.

Inside the improvised incubator.

...like that when I killed him with fire...father!

"My God," Goetering said. "What is it?"

"*Gumbo Ya-Ya*," Hartmann said. "LeFarge thought the name was amusing."

Inside the transparent case four small kittens with blind eyes attacked the breasts of their mother. The larger cat was a perfectly ordinary tabby of indeterminant origin, Maltese-striped and sleek, with the

well-fed look of a ship's mascot.

At first glance, the kittens seemed equally ordinary. There were four small bundles of fur with matted faces and greedy mouths that mewed and pulled at distended nipples.

But there was something wrong with the color of one.

IT WAS THE runt of the litter, Goetering saw, but its fur was thick and silky, with a brilliant orange-yellow coloration. There were other differences, too; the head was overly large, while the tufted ears were sharp with a clipped feral look.

Then he saw thin white fangs protruding from the mouth and he saw the faintest touch of red about them. The thing, he realized, was not drawing milk from the mother.

"The creature's a parasite," Hartmann said. "It can't manufacture its own red corpuscles, so it has to depend on the mother for both food and air. The fangs aren't teeth, they're mesodermal in origin, an extension of the cervical arteries. That's the reason for the highly oxygenated air. The mother wouldn't have enough without it, and the mutant would die."

Goetering stared at the blind thing, drinking its mother's blood. Only it wasn't drinking, he realized. As he watched,

twin feathery antennae lifted and writhed like small snakes.

...they did it...with love and hate and the pain that wouldn't go away until...my hands...my burning murderer's hands...

Involuntarily Goetering gasped.

"It's a little frightening at first," Hartmann said. "Not telepathy, really. More of a personal feedback—as though the thing received a man's secret thoughts and retransmitted them. Everyone gets something different."

...his face, screaming... charring with bright flame...

"It started before they were born," Hartmann was saying. "LeFarge built the incubator when the x-rays showed what he had. The first viable deep-space mutation he'd ever seen, he said."

"I want that thing killed."

"We can't do that," Hartmann said.

"Can't you see? This is why LeFarge killed himself."

"Perhaps," Hartmann said, "but we can't kill it. Orders."

"Orders?"

"Base is sending a ship to pick them...it up."

"I want that creature killed. I'll take the responsibility."

"No," Hartmann said. "Look, you know the *Troats*. We've held them for a decade, falling back, regrouping. We've

held this same line for three years with our picket ship defense in depth. But we're losing; in the end, they'll wipe us out."

GOETERING NODDED, remembering. "Because," he said, "they can't allow another intelligent race to exist."

"Egoists. That's why they sent you and the others back to tell us that they were coming to destroy us."

And they almost did, Goetering thought. He'd tried to give warning of the danger, but who would believe. Telepathy? It had been proved that the energy requirements for telepathy were impossible to a living organism. The enemy would have to fight their battles in the same manner the Earthmen did...with great battle machines that could think and act a thousand times faster than organic brains.

Besides, Goetering himself insisted that the effective range of *Troat* telepathy was only about a hundred thousand miles—well within the range of a detector. So what was the advantage? The enemy couldn't reach the important minds, directing the battle far to the rear.

But the *Troats* were more than mere telepaths. Goetering and the others could have told what to expect. Daily,

Cammeron, the Gamble brothers...all had to be kept under constant sedation. No one knew what had happened to them. And who would listen to their ravings, the ravings of madmen?

And Goetering? He could not tell. It had taken two months to break him, but his captors found the lever. Control was complete. He knew what would happen when the Earth ships contacted the enemy; he tightened into a knot when he thought of it, and the other horror, and he could not speak.

HE HAD TO live with the knowledge of the imminent destruction of his own race. Living and thinking with hate and love and loathing of those sadistic minds that had vowed death to men. And in the end...

"Every time a *Troat* ship approaches our lines, you know what happens," Hartmann said.

Agony, mind-splitting agony...and death. Impossible to fight; impossible to feed data to the programming machines. The ships could be fought from remote positions if the crew survived long enough to release control. But the ship was lost...inevitably.

"We're losing. We fight them with the picket ships. Base remote-controls us like puppets.

It's a bad solution, though. They're getting through, driving us back. And in the end..."

And they will come to destroy this mind which they would not let die before...

"An enemy ship tried to break through this sector eight days ago," Hartmann said.

"Here? In this sector?" Goetering demanded.

"That creature drove them off," Hartmann said. "Don't ask me how. Maybe it fed them back a dose of the poison of their own minds. We received some of the echoes of it on board."

He paused.

"It wasn't nice," he said after a moment. "I think it drove the *Troats* mad."

"And then LeFarge killed himself."

"We'd have all been dead," Hartmann said.

Goetering looked at the mindless thing in the incubator, its thin sharp teeth gleaming whitely as it devoured its mother's life.

AFTER THE watch, Goetering returned to his cabin and tried to sleep; but his mind was filled with a nagging fear of the thing in the dispensery. He remembered his first experiences with the telepathic *Troats*, and the horror of finding someone...something in

his mind, probing, seeking each memory of scarred emotion, each flaw, every weakness.

Of course, it was not the same with the creature in the dispensery. A single mutation doesn't elevate the intelligence of a lower animal. The creature was as mindless as a recording, only receiving the hidden impulses of a man's mind and sending them back.

Yes, sending them back, but with an incredible intensity.

Gumbo Ya-Ya. LeFarge must have been completely mad... to live with a thing like that and to invent pet names for it. *Gumbo Ya-Ya.* Guttural and primitive-sounding; like something from the depths of Africa—terrifying in its primitive mindlessness.

He waited, wondering when that idiot mind would again begin its assault. What had the creature repeated to LeFarge? What had there been in LeFarge's mind that he could not live with?

The others didn't know. At least, Hartmann said that *he* didn't know. But would Hartmann tell if he did?

GOETERING sat up and felt blindly for the light switch panel. What if the others *did* know? he thought fearfully. What if the others could hear what the creature found in his mind?

For the first time, he realized that he must have been dozing and that the wall communicator was buzzing insistently. He pressed the "open" button and Hartmann's voice said, "Lt. Goetering, can you come to the bridge? Important."

He found Hartmann and Mr. Marvin standing silently, waiting for him. There was no mistaking the fear in their eyes. Hartmann silently handed him a message flimsy.

"This is impossible," he said after reading the paper.

"No mistake," Hartmann said. "There's a *Troat* ship bound inward for our sector."

"We've never had a warning before."

"It didn't molest the point ship that sent the alarm," Mr. Marvin said. "And it's just one ship, not a fleet."

"What shall we do?" Hartmann asked.

"Do?"

Do? What could they do? There was no precedent. The *Troat* ship wouldn't be within detector range for thirty-six hours yet. No Earth ship had ever had such an advance warning of the approach of the enemy. Two...three hours, yes. Barely time enough to throw control to automatic before the crew became mindless things, incapable of any action.

BUT HE would see the *Troats* again, Goetering knew. They'd know him...and they wouldn't kill him. No, they wouldn't destroy a tool they could control so perfectly. For, of all those aboard the *Abalon*, only he had ever talked with the enemy, had known the cold minds of the aliens. The very contact had driven a dozen K. F. men insane.

I'll kill myself first, he thought, before the endless nightmare of cold fingers in my mind...and the oppressive guilt of the thing he had done, the horror of...

...hate, searing hate that made your stomach a knot of raw tissue...and his face dissolving in fire...

For a moment, he thought that the enemy was already upon them. Then he knew; the creature in the dispensery was awake again.

"God, what can we do?" he managed. "Except wait."

...hated him all my life... He died too early...wanted always to kill, to watch his red blood spill...to burn his flesh and separate it from mine...

"What's wrong?" Hartmann asked with a twisted smile.

"N...nothing," Goetering stammered, and fled to his cabin.

In the darkness he sat, while the cat-thing fed his fear and the secret corners of his mind

back to him, blanketing his thoughts with its endless streams of hate and agony and remorse.

He knew, somehow, that he must put an end to this. The flow of stifling thought would drive him to the edge of insanity until eventually, like LeFarge, he would...

But Goetering knew that he would never follow LeFarge's course. The *Troats* had planted the blocks to prevent his escaping like that. If it hadn't been for those inhibitions, he would have killed himself long ago, after the memory of what the *Troats* had done, and what he himself had done.

HOURS LATER, Goetering felt the pressure cease, and he knew that the creature was asleep again. He had been like a sleep-walker, divorced from thought, existing automatically. It seemed as if the endless chanting of the cat-mind in some fashion heterodyned his own thoughts, as a light beam returned along its own axis ninety degrees out of phase cancels itself, leaving only blackness.

He wondered what the others must feel from the thing in the dispensery. Certainly, they were receiving their own impressions at the same time, though they had apparently learned how to live with the

product of their own minds.

But was the cat-thing able to handle repetitions of eight separate minds—Goetering's, Hartmann's, Marvin's, and the five crewmen? Or did it emit an impalpable stimulus which brought a different set of images and emotions to each man?

He was surprised that he could reason about it, think it through so clearly now that the influence of the thing was withdrawn.

And what did the other seven receive? What secret depths of their minds did the mindless probing find?

HE RETURNED to the bridge and found Hartmann still on duty. Marvin had retired and one of the rated men was supervising the detector watch. "What have you heard?" he asked.

Hartmann shrugged. "Another recon ship spotted the enemy. One of the fast *Troat* scouts, you know, a "Betty" class—looks like an over-grown basketball with airfoils and a bank of high-velocity reaction tubes."

Hartmann inspected him. "You feel all right?"

"You mind your duty, Mister," Goetering snapped. "I'll take care of my health."

Hartmann colored and

started to say something, then compressed his lips. Finally he said, "Fleet Frog predicts contact somewhere in this sector within twenty hours."

"All right," Goetering said. "You're relieved. Get some rest; you'll need it."

THE WATCH

THE WATCH passed slowly. Each moment, Goetering expected some new assault from the direction of the dispensary. His nerves were getting him, he told himself. Of all people, why did *he* have to wind up on this ship. It was bad enough with the creature they called *Gumbo Ya-Ya*. (Stupid name.) But the coming of the *Troat* ship... How could he face the enemy again? He looked down at his hands, and saw that they were quivering as though they had a life of their own.

When the watch was over, and Mr. Marvin appeared to relieve him, Goetering stayed on for an hour. He was afraid to return to his cabin.

"You feel all right, sir?" the Warrant officer asked.

Goetering nodded. "What do you get from that thing in the dispensary?"

Marvin shrugged. "I... well, it's hard to say."

"Well, what does it feel like?"

"I'd rather not say." The Warrant officer turned away.

GOETERING finally returned to his cabin and tried to get some sleep. He knew that he would need all the rest he could get within the next ten hours, as the enemy drew within range. There was no word yet on which human ship was likely to encounter the scout but he prayed silently that it would not be the *Abalon*.

He had slept perhaps three hours when he awoke, his head throbbing as the blood distended the veins in his temples. He had one lucid thought before all sensation faded and that thought was that his *prayers* had not been answered.

He felt the unclean fingers within his mind, twisting the tissue into the pattern that meant...

...killed him...killed him...in hate and desire for revenge that...

And another thought "...thing in the box...kill it...kill it...kill it... Before it destroys you."

He was suddenly in the passageway, stumbling blindly, feeling his way along cold metal walls. He pushed open the door to the dispensary. He didn't look at the sleeping thing in the incubator; his hand fumbled for the plastic tubes, leading to the enclosure. He ripped them aside and heard the enriched air hissing from the bot-

ties. Then he ripped the wires from the thermostat and stumbled back to his cabin.

FOR AN instant, he could feel the pain and the anger of the cat as it died...and the distant hurt of the thing that had entered his mind. But that distant mind, after long moments of agony, again grew strong for an instant.

And he felt remorse for an instant... The one chance against the *Troats*, who had long ago destroyed him and were coming again to finish what they had begun over a decade before.

"Listen, you have not done it"... That was a *Troat* thought.

But I did...Goetering's mind replied.

"Somewhere there are others..."

It was the only one...

"No, there are others and they will destroy us...as surely as they will destroy you..."

No...last chance...

"We will land...talk... You must listen..."

No, don't come near me...

"Don't you understand, I'm afraid. We're afraid..."

Get out of my mind, you...

Something twisted, and Goetering screamed, but not aloud.

"Filth... But you will help us. This thing can destroy us both!"

And the mind withdrew as Goetering awoke, bathed in perspiration.

Then he realized what he had done; he had killed the creature. For a moment, he felt exultation, then fear; the cat-thing was the only barrier between the ship and the *Troat* minds approaching.

But...they thought the cat-thing was still alive, still capable of destroying them. The danger was still a real thing in their minds.

How?... Or was it dead?

IVE FOUND Hartmann in the dispensary bundling things into an incinerator bag.

"I was just going to call you," the Ensign said. He gestured at the bag. Goetering reached out and parted the folds. Inside, the mother cat was rigid in death, her blue tongue protruding from her mouth. The fur at her throat was speckled with blood.

"I've already destroyed the litter."

"What caused that?"

"I think you know," Hartmann said.

"Mister," Goetering said fiercely, "I asked you what happened."

"LeFarge knew that the mutant needed more oxygen, more warmth. That's why he set up the incubator. When the oxygen-rich air cut off, and the

temperature dropped, it didn't bother the other cats. But the mutant needed oxygen to live."

Goetering felt suddenly ill. "So..."

"So it drained the mother, trying to get enough to live," Hartmann said.

Goetering spent the next eight hours on the bridge, receiving reports on the *Troat* ship. Hartmann had returned from the dispensary and kept him silent company. Mister Marvin was nowhere to be seen; Goetering assumed that he and the engineer's mate were readying the motors of the *Abalon* for possible pursuit.

WHEN THE report came that the enemy had penetrated the picket line nearly two hundred thousand miles to their port, Goetering breathed a sigh of relief; this was within the sector of responsibility of the picketship *Vesper* rather than the *Abalon*.

His relief was short-lived; a message came from the *Vesper*. Engine trouble. The *Troat* ship was making for the second planet of Star X-Go-4523 in *Abalon's* sector. The *Abalon* would have to follow it in.

Goetering gave the orders and Hartmann signaled the engine room for stand-by power. From somewhere, Goetering found the strength to give the order. "Set up the course," he

told Hartmann. "We'll have to go in after her."

They lost contact with the *Troat* ship shortly thereafter, but the detectors picked the enemy up again as the *Abalon* approached the mist-shrouded second planet, three hours later. The *Troat* was patiently circling the world as though waiting.

The *Abalon* followed a long parabola inward as the enemy lost velocity and disappeared into the mists of the lower atmosphere. They picked up the radiation of its engines as they entered the atmosphere. The *Troat* ship had landed by that time, but its engines still radiated their tell-tale signal. There was only one possible conclusion.

"They want us to find them," Goetering said. Hartmann grunted.

GOETERING brought the ship down, scarcely a quarter mile from the waiting *Troat* ship. Only a low ridge, covered with a rank tropical growth separated them from direct vision. Something was pressing him, speeding him with an urgency that he could not identify.

"Get your men in landing gear," he ordered. "Light weapons."

"Against the *Troats*?" Hartmann protested.

"No weapon is any good against the *Troats*," Goetering caught a faint look of suspicion from Hartmann, but the man said nothing.

Goetering found his way to the airlock in a warm haze. He was only dimly aware of adjusting the helmet, with its heavy kepi, to his head. He checked the charge of his bolt gun automatically and holstered it. Then he stepped out into the muggy air and motioned for Hartmann and the five men with beam rifles to follow him.

"Listen," the *Troat* voice said in his mind, "you small, sickening little vermin. We broke you and you come again."

But there was a touch of fear in that thought.

What do you want?

"To see you, to touch you, to twist the thoughts from your dirty mind, to..."

They were on the ridge now, looking down into the shallow valley where the ship rested. It did look like a fat basketball with airfoils, a part of his mind observed.

To what?

"To find out what..."

To find out what can kill you?

The mind in the enemy ship was silent. Then it sobbed.

"I'm...we're afraid...That thing..."

GOETERING laughed out loud, ignoring Hartmann's startled expression. The Ensign moved to his side as the other men filed past them in a ragged line. He watched as four preceded him, while he and Hartmann and one of the detector men brought up the rear.

He realized that he was weaving drunkenly. "We'll quit... We'll give you anything," the *Troat* mind was shrieking "...only not...not..."

...burning...his face afame...

The mutant wasn't dead. Goetering hadn't killed it.

And then he saw the creature, flaming orange, a giant thing that moved over the low ridge behind the *Troat* ship and raised a soft paw, for all the world like a small kitten attacking a ball of twine.

Then he was yelling, ordering the men to fire at the creature. Goetering turned and saw Hartmann standing there, his hands on his hips, laughing. "Fire, for God's sake!"

HARTMANN and the other man laughed and raised their weapons. They fired over Goetering's head, laughed and fired again. He heard the sizzling sound of other weapons, turned to see the four men in the valley laughing and firing at the cat-thing.

"Kill it...kill it..." came

the thought in his mind. "Kill it...like flame...you burned him down because you always hated him..."

Goetering didn't realize that he was yelling his answer to the probing thought from the enemy. "Liar! You made me do it; you found the secret in my mind. You twisted it to use against me, to control me, just the way you used the others' secrets."

He saw the cat-figure folding inward, enveloping the *Troat* ship. And the figure was diminishing in size; it was only a mental image, he thought. But mental images can cripple...and kill...

He heard an enemy outcry in his brain now. "My brother...I didn't want to serve with him...help...hated him from the time we were boys, and he..."

The deadly parallel continued...not exactly the same secret as Goetering's but close enough.

Hartmann and the others were still laughing and firing, as thoughts continued to shriek in Goetering's mind; then the *Troat* thoughts were drowned out by the recurring images from his own past.

...killed him as I'd burn down an animal...father...hate love...agony...blending in chaos as...

Something in the *Troat* ship

screamed and died, as LeFarge had died.

Then they carried Goetering back to the *Abalon*, only half-alive, to the engine room, where Marvin—pale and naked—squatted in the dirt, holding a thing to his throat...

For it would never do for the *Troat-Human* war to end, until...

Until each ship had its defense, its master, its *Gumbo Ya-Ya*...

And now there was no hope of killing the thing in the *Abalon*.

THREE WAS Marvin, dirty and naked, moving toward Goetering in the shadows of the engine room, as Hartmann and the others held him and pulled his shirt from his body.

Gumbo Ya-Ya. Everybody talks together. Talks of the things hidden in them, the black tales that no one wants to tell, the flaws in the psyche,

whereby another may take control...

Eight men on the *Abalon*—eight tales of violence, of blackness, of horror...

Goetering felt the sharp teeth of the thing fasten on him, pierce his throat, and through a drugged haze he heard fragments of the eight tales...*the time when blood was on my knife...with wide hips and full mouth and I didn't mean...* Dimly he pieced out the stories of violence, of insanity, of hidden fear, of brain-warping from his mind and the minds of the seven others...fusing, everyone talking together...

Then, came the outlines of a ninth tale...a dream of many creatures holding the stupid race of men for their service and sustenance...a dream that did not distinguish between man and *Troat*...

The ninth tale was not a tale of fear, but of conquest.

