

# **TOPS** *in* **SCIENCE**

**FICTION**

Spring  
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ALL-STAR  
STORIES BY  
**RAY BRADBURY**  
**ROSS ROCKELYNNE**  
**ISAAC ASIMOV**  
AND OTHER  
ALL-STAR  
WRITERS



**CITADEL OF LOST SHIPS**  
*by LEIGH BRACKETT*

# Tops in SCIENCE FICTION

SPRING 1952

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T. T. BYRNE

REVIEWS

MELCHAM BERRY

TOP PICKS

ROBERT WELLSMAN

COVER

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# CITADEL OF LOST SHIPS

A NOVELET By LEIGH BRACKETT

Romany was an asteroid of fused space-bunks. A cavern for the Solar System gypsies. And to Romany came Campbell, space rover, to find this last sliver of freedom had become a secret slave-world.

**R**OY CAMPBELL woke painfully. His body made a blind, instinctive lunge for the control panel, and it was only when his hands struck the smooth, hard metal of the wall that he realized he wasn't in his ship any longer, and that the Sparguard wasn't chasing him, their guns hammering death.

He leaned against the wall, the perspiration thick on his heavy chest, his eyes wide and remembering. He could feel again, as though the running fight were still happening, the bucking of his sleek Fitz-Solomon towards the calm control of his hands. He could remember the great rays lighting through the night, searching for him, seek-

ing his life. He could recall the tiny power that he poured in his memory, as he fought deliberately, so dangerously, to evade the attention of those.

Then there was a busy period, when a blasting cannon had twisted his ship like a wind-blown leaf, and his head had smacked cruelly against the control panel. And then the dinking minutes when he had nursed the safety—and then the sudden blow when sleep was the only thing in the Universe that he needed.

He woke back on the half-frame cot with something between a laugh and a curse. He was sweating, and his body body twitched. He found a cigarette, lit it on the second try and sat still, listening to his heartbeat slow down.

He began to wonder, then, what had wakened him.

It was night, the deep indigo night of Venus. Beyond the open hull door, Campbell could see the Chitrees swaying a little in the hot, slow breeze. It seemed as though the whole night swayed, like a dark blue wall.

For a long time he didn't hear anything but the fat-of screaming of some swamp-beast on the hill. Then, sharp and snarl against the blue silence, a drum began to beat.

It made Campbell's heart jerk. The sound wasn't loud, but it had a tight, hard quality of swamps, something as pinned as the swamp and as slow, no matter how long a man lived with it.

The drumming stopped. The second, perhaps the third, usual periods. The first must have wakened him. Campbell stared with narrow dark eyes at the doorway.

He'd been with the Captain only two days this time, and he'd sleep most of that. Now he realized, that in spite of his assurance, he had sensed something wrong in the village.

Something was wrong, very wrong, when the drum beat that way in the sticky night.

He pulled on his short, black spaceman's boots and went out of the hut. No one moved in the village. That's normal under the slow wind, and that was the only sign of life.

Campbell turned into a path under the wispy-winged Chitrees. He was walking but

the tight black parts of his space park, and the hot wind lay on his skin like soft hands. He filled his lungs with it. It smelled of warm still water and green, growing things, and . . .

Freedom. Above all, freedom. This was one place where a man could still stand on his legs and feel human.

The drumming started again, like a man's angry heart beating out of the indigo night. This time it didn't stop. Campbell shivered. The cross parted precisely, showing a round dark burnmark.

It was lit by the hot flare of burning life-pods. Sweet oily smoke curled up into the branches. There was a million glint of water through the trees, but they were closer glints, brighter, hotter, more deadly.

The glowing eyes of men, silent men, standing in a circle around the burnmark.

There was a little man crouched on the ground in the center. His skin had the blue-whiteness of skin milk. He wore a kilt of iridescent scales. His face was subtly reptilian, broad across the cheekbones and pinched below.

A crest of brilliant feathers—they weren't really feathers, but that was as close as Campbell could get—stated just above his brow ridges and ran down his spine to the waist. They were standing erect now, glowing in the daylight.

He moved a drum between his knees. It stopped being just a drum when he touched it. It was his own heart, singing and throbbing with the beat in it.

Campbell stopped short of the circle. His nerves, still tight from his near-fatal brush with the Spacemart, stung with little burning pains. He'd never seen anything like this before.

The little man rocked slightly, looking up into the smoke. His eyes were half closed. The drum was part of him and part of the indigo night. It was part of Campbell, beating in his blood.

It was the head of the swamp, sitting with hate and a towering anger that was as naked and simple as Adam on the morning of Creation.

CAMPBELL must have made some involuntary motion, because a man standing at the edge of the burnmark turned his

hand and saw him. He was tall and slender, and his coat was pure white, a sign of age.

He turned and came to Campbell, looking at him with appraising eyes. The fire-light laid the Earlham's dark face in sharp relief, the lean hand angles, the high-bridged nose that had been broken and set at an angle, the little mouth.

Campbell said, in pure liquid Venetian, "What is it, Father?"

The Krpton's eyes dropped to the Earlham's naked breast. There was black hair on it, and underneath the hair was twisting, intricate lines of silver and deep blue, interwoven with exquisite skill.

The old man's white coat nodded. Campbell turned and went back down the path. The wind and the darkness, the hot blue night heat with the anger and the hate of the little man with the drum.

Neither spoke until they were back in the hut. Campbell lit a smoky lamp. The old Krpton drew a long, slow breath.

"My atomium," he said, "this is the last time I can give you advice. When you are old, you must go and relax as more."

Campbell stared at him. "But, Father! Why?"

The old man spread long blue-white hands. His voice was heavy.

"Because we, the Krptons, shall have ceased to be."

Campbell didn't say anything for a minute. He sat down on the hide-frame cot and ran his fingers through his black hair.

"Tell me, Father," he said quietly, grimly.

The Krpton's white coat rippled in the lamplight. "It is not your fight."

Campbell got up. "Look. You've saved my neck more times than I can count. You've accepted me as one of your own. I've been happier here than any—well, skip that. But don't say it isn't my fight."

The pale, triangular old face nodded. But the white coat shook.

"No. There is really no fight. Only death. We're a dying race, a mere scrap of old Venet. What matter if we die now—or later?"

Campbell lit a cigarette with quick, sharp motions. His voice was hard. "Tell me, Father. All, and quick."

Opalescent eyes met his. "It is better not."

"I said, tell me!"

"Very well." The old man sighed. "You would leave, after all. You remember the frontier town of this?"

"Remember it?" Campbell's white teeth flashed. "Every dirty stone in it, from the pumping conduits on up, that place on those plains to fence the hot stuff."

He looked off, suddenly embarrassed. The Krpton said gently:

"That is your affair, my son. You've been away a long time. Life has changed. The Trans-Venetian Coalition Government has taken it for the administrative center of Tihara Province."

Campbell's eyes, at mention of the Coalition Government, accepted a hot, hard brightness. He said, "Go on."

The old man's face was cut from marble, his voice still and distant.

"There have been men in the swamps. Now wood has been sent us. It comes there in coal bars, and oil, and certain minerals that men prize. They will drain the swamps for many miles, and work them."

Campbell let smoke-puff of his lungs, very slowly. "Yeah? And what becomes of you?"

The Krpton turned away and stood framed in the indigo square of the doorway. The distant drum sobbed and throbbed. It was hot, and yet the sweat turned cold on Campbell's body.

The old man's voice was distant and throbbing and full of anger, like the drum. Campbell had no strain to hear it.

"They will take us and place us in camps in the great cities. Small groups of us, so that we are divided and split. Many people will pay to see us, the strange remnants of old Venet. They will pay for our skills in the carving of leather-shields and the writing of queer music, and dancing. We will grow rich."

Campbell dropped the cigarette and ground it on the dirt floor. Khorred wain stood out on his forehead, and his face was cruel. The old man whispered:

"It's still the job."

IT WAS a long time since anyone had spoken. The drumming had stopped, but the echo of it throbbed in Campbell's pulses. He looked at his spread, shrewy hands on his knees and swallowed between

the veins of his neck were swollen and beating.

"Presently, he said, "Couldn't you go further back into the swamp?"

The old Kayles spoke without moving. He still stood in the doorway, watching the trees wave in the slow wind.

"The Natives live there. Besides, there is no clean water and no earth for crops. We are not forest cities."

"The war is happen," said Campbell solemnly. "On Earth, and Mars, and Mercury, and the moons of Jupiter and Saturn. Little people driven from their homes, robbed of their way of life, exploited and killed for the skins in the trade centers. Little people who didn't care about progress, and making money. Little people who only wanted to live, and breathe, and be let alone."

He got up in a swift abrupt rush and knifed a guard of wood crashing into a corner and sat down again. He was shivering. The old Kayles turned.

"Little people like you, my son?"

Campbell shrugged. "Maybe. We'd worked our farms for three hundred years. My father didn't want to sell. They condemned it anyhow. It's under water now, and the dam runs a hell of a big bunch of turbines."

"I'm sorry."

Campbell looked up, and his face softened. "I've never understood," he said. "You people are the most law-abiding citizens I ever met. You don't like strangers. And yet I blunder in here, hot on the hunt and ugly as a swamp-frog, and you . . ."

He stopped. It was probably the excitement that was making his throat heat up like that. The smoke from the lamp stung his eyes. He blinked and tried to trim it.

"You were wounded, my son, and in trouble. Your quarrel with the police was none of ours. We would have helped anyone. And then, while you had been and your guard was down, you showed that more than your body needed help. We gave you what we could."

"Yeah," said Campbell hoarsely. He didn't say it, but he knew well enough that what the Kayles had given him had kept him from blowing his top completely.

Now the Kayles were going the way of

the others, stars swept before the great beam of Progress. Nothing could stop it. Earth's empire ranged out across the planets, building, harnessing, cranking across time and custom and race to make money and the shining steel cage of efficiency.

A cage wherein a sheep could live happily enough, watched and spoken, but Campbell wasn't a sheep. He'd tried it, and he wouldn't believe in it. No, he was a wolf, now, alone and worrying the flock.

Soon there wasn't going to be a place in the Solar System where a man could stand on his own feet and breathe.

He felt satisfied. He got up and stood in the doorway, watching the trees stir in the hot sultry gloom. The trees would go. Wells and mines, slag and smut and chattering machinery, and men in sweat-soaked shirts laboring night and day to get, to give, to produce.

Campbell's mouth twisted, bitter and acidic. He said softly:

"Hovers help the unconstructive! They'll need it."

The old Kayles murmured, "What happened to those others, my son?"

Campbell's lean shoulders twitched. "Some of them died. Some of them submitted. The rest . . ."

He turned, so suddenly that the old man flinched. Campbell's dark eyes had a hot light in them, and his face was sharply alive.

"The rest," he said evenly, "went to Romania."

**H**E TALKED, then. Urgently, pacing the hot air nervous outside strides, trying to remember things he had heard and not been very much interested in at the time. When he was through, the Kayles said:

"It would be better, habitually better. But—" He spread his long pale hands, and his white coat drooped. "But there is no time. Government men will come within three days to take us—that was the time set. And since we will not go . . ."

Campbell thought of the things that had happened to other rebellious tribes. He felt sick. But he made his voice steady.

"We'll hope it's time, Father. Romania is in an orbit around Venus now—I mainly created it coming in. I'm going to try, my-

been. If I don't—well, well as long as you can."

Remembering the dream and the way the man had looked, he didn't think that would be long. He pulled on a loose chain of green spider-silk, along the belt of his heavy needle gun over one shoulder, and picked up his black tunic.

He put his hand on the Kaylan's shoulder and smiled. "We'll take care of it, Father."

The old man's opalescent eyes were dimmed. "I wish I could say you. It's hopeless for us, and you are—*but* is that the word?"

Campbell grinned. "Ho," he said, "in the west, *Wister!* The Coalition gets exactly mad when someone pulls their own hi-making stunt on them. But I'm used to it. I've been playing the game a good many years. They've never caught me yet though they've come mighty close."

It was beginning to get light outside. The old man said quietly, "The gods go with you, my son."

Campbell went out, thinking he'd need them. It was odd how space brought back the mid, the ancient feelings—the fear and the worship of all the gods that be.

It was full day when he reached his hidden ship—a shock, souped-up Fire-Soldiers that had the legs of almost anything in space. He passed lightly by the outcrop, looking at the rusty green of *Abetans* under a post-grey sky, the white mist lapping around his narrow waist.

He spent a long time over his charts, fending numbers to the calculator. When he got a set-up that suited him, he took the Fire-Soldiers up on purring 'wippers, sailing out over the deep swamps. He hit home, with the ship under his hands.

The Planetary Patrol blaster was thin over the deep swamps, but it was vigilant. Campbell's sensors went right. They got a jolt as he came close to the place where he was going to have to begin his loop over to the right side.

He was just cracking for the market switch when the little red light started to flash on the indicator panel.

Somewhere had a distant beam on him. And he was morally certain that the somebody was flying a Patrol boat.

## II

THERE was one thing about the Venusian atmosphere. You couldn't see through it, even with infra-beams, at very long range. The intensity needed glowed the Patrol ship still far off, probably not suspicious yet, although strap seats were sure over the swamps.

In a minute the copper would be calling for information, with his mass-detector giving the Fire-Soldiers a message. Campbell didn't think he'd wait. He slumped in the driver's seats, holding them down till the tubes warmed. Even held down, they had plenty.

The Fire-Soldiers clanked in a whopping spiral. The red light wavered, dim, glowed again. The copper was pretty good with his beam, Campbell had to concede.

The red light died again. But the Patrol boat had all its beams out now, spread like a fish net. The Fire-Soldiers struck another, lost it, struck again, and this time she didn't break out.

Campbell felt the sudden talking (as all through him. "Tractor beam," he said. "You think so, buddy?"

The drive jets were really warming now. He shut it to slow. The Fire-Soldiers hung for a fractional instant, her triple-beamed hull shuddering as that Campbell's with rang together.

Then the beam, blasting up right through the sensor beam. Campbell jockeyed his port and starboard steering jets. The ship heeled and skittered wildly. The copper didn't have time to focus full power on her anywhere, and her power in the Fire-Soldiers was a nuisance and nothing more.

Campbell went up over the Patrol ship, scooped off in the opposite direction from the one he intended to follow, loop in a tight spiral until he was sure he was close, and then dived again.

The Patrol boat wasn't expecting him to come back. The pilot was concentrating on where Campbell had gone, not where he had been. Campbell grinned, opened full thrusts, and went skimming over the curve of the planet to meet the night shadow rushing toward him.

He didn't meet any more ships. He was way off the trade lanes, and moving at fast



that only Mind lock could tag him. He hoped the Patrol was hunting for him in hell, hell where they'd lose him. He hoped they'd lose a long time.

Presently he climbed, on slowed and muffled air, out of the atmosphere. His black ship melted indistinguishably into the black shadow of the planet. He slowed still more, just balancing the V-man-drag, and started out toward a spot marked on his navigation chart.

As Outer Patrol boat went by, too far off to bother about, Campbell lit a cigarette with nervous hands. It was only a quarter smoked when the object had been waiting for him up in space.

His infra-beam showed it clearly. A round, plate-shaped man about a mile in diameter, built of three tiers of speedships, Hulla, molten, rusty, pitted things that had died and not been decently buried, welded together in a solid mass by lengths of pipe to form their carcasses.

Before, when he had seen it, Campbell had been in too much of a hurry to do more than curse it for getting in his way. Now he thought it was the most grotesque, God-forsaken mass of junk that had ever made him wonder why people bothered to live at all.

He reached the controls, tempted to go back to the swamps. Then he thought of what was going to happen back there, and took his hand away.

"Hell!" he said. "I might as well look inside."

He didn't know anything about the internal set-up of Romany—what made it tick, and how. He knew Romany didn't love the Coalition, but whether they would run to harboring criminals was another thing.

It wouldn't be strange if they had been given pictures of Ray Campbell and told to watch for him. Thinking of the day of the reward for him, Campbell wished he were not quite so famous.

Romany reminded him of an old-fashioned circuit monastery. Once inside, it wouldn't be easy to get out.

"Oh all the platinum-plated eyes!" he muttered suddenly. "Why are I sticking my neck out for a bunch of venal human swamp-crawlers, anyhow?"

He didn't answer that. The leading edge of Romany halted toward him. There were

lights in some of the hulls, mostly in the top layer. Campbell reached for the radio.

He had to control the big ship. No one else could give him what he needed. He decided, he had to wait right up to the inner shell and announce himself. After that . . .

The manual listed the wave-length to transmit. He jiggled the dials and sensors, wishing his hands wouldn't sweat.

"Speedship First Star calling Romany. Calling Romany . . ."

His screen flared, flickered, and cleared. "Romany acknowledging. Who are you and what do you want?"

CAMPBELL'S screen showed him a pongish man—a Taal, he thought, from some Moroccan backwater. He was ebony-black and hair-borne, and he looked as though the sight of Campbell affected him like stale beer.

Campbell said, "Coalition guy, aren't you? I'm Thomas Black, trader out of Terra, and I want to come aboard."

"That requires permission."

"Yah? Okay. Connect me with the boss."

The Taal now looked as though he smelled something that had been dead a long time. "Possibly you mean Iron Mik, the Chief Controller?"

"Possibly," admitted Campbell. "I do." If the rest of the gypies were anything like this one, they sure had a hant on the outside.

Well, he didn't blame them. The screen blurred. It stayed that way while Campbell smoked three cigarettes and restated his excellent vocabulary. Then it cleared abruptly.

Iron Mik roared Martian, but the man pictured on the screen was no Martian. He was an Earthman, with a face like a wedge of granite and a frame that was all joint bones and throving angles.

His hair was thin, pelted and fanny. His mouth was thin. Even his eyes were thin, close sets of pale blue with no lashes. Campbell disliked him instantly.

"I'm Trekkik," said the Earthman. His voice was thin, with a sound in it like someone walking on cold gravel. "Terra Controller. Why do you wish to land, Mister Black?"

"I bring a message from the Kaplan people at Venus. They need help."

Troobik's eyes became, if possible, more wet and more pale.

"Help?"

"Yes, Help," Campbell was struck by a sudden suspicion, something he caught flickering across Troobik's glaucous features when he said "Kaplan." He went on, slowly. "The Kaplan is moving in on them. I understand you people of Romany help in some like that."

There was a small, tight shiver.

"I'm sorry," said Troobik. "There is nothing we can do."

Campbell's dark hair lightened. "Why not? You helped the Sumpet people on Ganowide and the Erylanders on Mars. That's what Romany is, isn't it—a refuge for people like that?"

"As a detail, there's a lot you don't know. At this time, we cannot help anyone. Sorry, Black. Finer dear ship."

The screen went dead. Campbell stared at it with waking eyes, heavy. The hell you're sorry. What gives here, anyway?

He thrust out an angry hand to the transmitter. And then, quite suddenly, the Tairi was looking at him out of the screen.

The hostile look was gone. Anger replaced it, but not anger at Campbell. The Tairi said, in a low, rapid voice:

"You're not lying about coming from the Kaplan?"

"No. No, I'm not lying." He opened his chest to show the tablet.

"The ship and Mister Black, dear ship, and then make contact with one of the water bulks on the lowest tier. You'll find emergency hatchways in some of the pipes. Come inside, and wait."

His dark eyes had a savage glint. "There are none of us, Mister Black, who will consider Romany a refuge!"

CAMPBELL closed ship. His nerves were stinging in little tight jerks. He'd stepped into something here. Something big and ugly. There had been a certain ring in the Tairi's voice.

The ship, gruffly Mr. Troobik had something on his mind, too. Something important, about Kaplans. Why Kaplans, of all the unimportant people in Vastar?

Troobik on Romany. Romany the pipes would, the Solar Space's arched, strictly a family affair. What business did a Public Enemy with a low number and a high valuation have mixing into that?

Then he thought of the doors he'd try in the ledge night, and an old man wearing 150-crook into in a slow, hot wind.

But Campbell rolled himself a dust, better name, and sighed, and reached for brown hands for the controls. Presently, in the infra-field, he made out an ancient Knob freighter on the edge of the lowest level, connected to companion ways by sections of twelve-foot pipe. There was a hatch in one of the pipes, with a hand-wheel.

The Fitz-Koblers glided with exquisite delicacy to the pipe, touched it gently, threw out hot magnetic grapples and suction fingers, and hung there. The airlock exactly covered the halfway.

Campbell got up. He was sweating and so edge as a tourist on the peak. With great care he loaded his heavy gun around his narrow hips. Then he went into the airlock.

He checked grapples and fingers with inordinate thoroughness. The hand-wheel turned inside. He picked up a spigot and turned it, not touching the digital wheel.

There was a crude hand-lock beyond. Campbell ran his tongue over over dry lips, slugged, and climbed in.

He got through into a space that was black as the Goddard. The air was thin and bitingly cold. Campbell shivered in his silk shirt. He held his hand on his gun butt and took two cautious steps away from the bulge of the lock, wishing to hell he were some place else.

Cold green light exploded out of nowhere behind him. He half turned, his gun blowing into his palm. But he had no chance to fire it.

Something whipped down across the nerve-center in the side of his neck. His body simply faded out of existence. He fell on his face and lay there, struggling with all his might to move and achieving only a faint twitching of the muscles.

He knew vaguely that someone rolled him over. He blinked up into the green light, and heard a man's deep, soft voice

my from the darkness behind it:

"What made you think you could get away with it?"

Campbell tried three times before he could speak. "With what?"

"Syring. Does Trebrick think we're children?"

"I wouldn't know." It was easier to speak this time. His body was beginning to fade in again, like something on a television screen. He tried to shut his hand. It didn't work very well, but it didn't matter. His gun was gone.

Something moved across the light. A man's body, a huge, supple, muscular thing the color of dark bronze. It leapt with a terrible agility and beside Campbell, the beam on its leather belt making a chinking noise. There was a jeweled gorget of red-dish metal around the base of its throat. The stones had a waked glitter.

The deep, rich voice said, "Who are you?"

Campbell tried to force the returning life lining through his body. The man's face was in shadow. Campbell looked up with sultry, furious eyes and achieved a dubious motion toward getting up.

The kneeling giant put out his right arm. The green light beamed on it. Campbell's eyes followed it down toward his throat. His face became a mask, irregular mask cut from dark wood.

The arm was heavily, beautifully muscled. But where the hand should have been there was a leather harness and a hook of polished Martian bronze.

CAMPBELL knew what had struck him. The thin, hard curve of that hook, more potent than the edge of any hand.

The point pricked his throat, just over the pulse on the left side. The man said softly:

"Lie still, little man, and answer."

Campbell lay still. There was nothing else to do. He said, "Yes, Thomas Black, if that helps. Who are you?"

"What did Trebrick tell you to do?"

"To get the ball out. What gives with you?" If that Tred was spreading the word about him, he'd better hurry. Campbell decided to take a chance. The guy with the hook didn't seem to love Trebrick.

"The black boy in the radio room told me to come ahead and wait. Seems he's over at Trebrick, too. So am I. That makes us all pals, doesn't it?"

"You lie, little man." The deep voice was quietly certain. "You were sent to spy. Answer!"

The point of the hook put the exclamation point on that word. Campbell wince away. He wished the boy wouldn't call him "little man." He wouldn't remember ever having felt more hopelessly scared.

He said, "Damn your eyes, I'm not lying. Check with the Tred, he'll tell you."

"And betray him to Trebrick? You're clumsy, little man."

The hook bit deeper. Campbell's neck began to throb. He felt all right again suddenly. He wondered whether he'd have a chance of kicking the man in the stomach before his throat was torn out. He tried to draw farther away, but the pipe wall wouldn't give.

A woman's voice spoke then, quite suddenly, from beyond the green light. Campbell jumped. He hadn't even thought about anyone else being there. Now it was obvious that someone was holding the light.

The voice said, "Well, March, Zed is calling me now."

It was a clear, low voice. It had music in it. Campbell would have loved it if it had needed, but as it was it made his nerves prick with deep worry.

The hook lifted out of the hole it had made, but it didn't go away. Campbell raised his head a little. The lower edge of the green light spilled across a pair of sand-filled feet. The bare white legs above them were as beautiful as the voice, in the same strong clear way.

There was a long silence. March, the man with the hook, turned his face partly into the light. It was oblong and slanted and hard as bronze before. The eyes in it were smoky amber, set about under a hunched crest of tawny hair.

After a long time the woman spoke again. Her voice was different this time. It was angry, and the anger made it sing and throb like the Knight's drum.

"The Darkman is calling the truth, March, Zed ~~was~~ him. He's here about the Knight."

The big man—a Martin Dryden-ler, Campbell thought, from somewhere around Earth—got up, fast. "The Kaxelans!"

"He asked for help, and Treddick got him away." The light moved closer. "But that's not all, Martin. Treddick has found out about—us, Old Earth talked. They're waiting for us at the ship!"

### III

MARSH turned. His eyes had a greenish, forest glint like those of a lion on the kill. He said, "I'm sorry, little man."

Campbell was on his feet, now, and reasonably steady. "Think nothing of it," he said slowly. "A natural mistake." He looked at the bank and stopped the blood from his neck, and felt sick. He added, "The name's Mack. Thomas Mack."

"It wouldn't be Campbell?" asked the woman's voice. "Roy Campbell?"

He spit into the light, not saying anything. The woman said, "You are Roy Campbell. The Spaceguard was here not long ago, hunting for you. They left your job."

He stopped. "All right. I'm Roy Campbell."

"That," said Marsh softly, "helps a lot!" He could have meant it any way. His bank made a small, average flash in the green light.

"There's trouble here on Romany. Civil war. Men are going to be killed before it's over—perhaps now. Where's your place in it?"

"How do I know? The Coalition is moving in on the Kaxelans. I saw them something. So I came here for help. Help! Yeah."

"You'll get it," said the woman. "You'll get it, somehow, if any of us live."

Campbell raised his dark brows. "What gets on here, anyhow?"

The woman's low voice sang and thrilled against the pipe walls. "A long time ago there were a few ships. Old ships, crowded with people who had no homes. Lots, drifting people who made a living selling their old handicrafts in the spaceports, who were cursed as a menace to navigation and distrusted as thieves. Perhaps they were thieves. They were the odd, and

hungry, and resentful.

"After a while the ships began to band together. It was easier that way—they could share food and fuel, and talk, and exchange ideas. Space wasn't so lonely. More and more ships drifted in. Pretty soon there were a lot of them. A new world, almost."

"They called it Romany, after the wandering people of Earth, because they were gypsies, too, in their own way.

"They cling to their own ways of life. They traded with the noise, trampling people on the planets they had been driven away from because they had it. But they hated them, and were hated, just as gypsies always are.

"It wasn't an easy life, but they were free in it. They could stand anything, as long as they were free. And always, anywhere in the Solar System, wherever some little lost tribe was being swallowed up and needed help, ships from Romany went to help them.

Her voice dropped. Campbell thought again of the Kaxelans' dream, singing its anger in the indigo night.

"That was the creed of Romany," she whispered. "Always to help, always to be a refuge for the little people who couldn't adjust themselves to progress, who only wanted to die in dignity and peace. And now . . ."

"And now," said Marsh softly, "there is civil war."

CAMPBELL drew a long, unsteady breath. The woman's voice thudded in him, and his chest was tight. He said "Treddick!"

Marsh nodded. "Treddick. But it's more than that. If it were only Treddick, it wouldn't be so bad."

He ran the curve of his back over his curved chin, and his eyes burned like coffee flames.

"Romany is growing old, and soft. That's the real trouble. Greys, Ghorvies, Treddick would have been kicked into space long ago. There are old men in the Council, Campbell. They think more of comfort than they do of—well . . ."

"Yeah. I know. What's Treddick's angle?"

"I don't know. He's a strange man—"

you can't get a grip on him. Sometimes I think he's working for the Coalition."

Campbell squawked. "Could be. You givers have a lot of wild talents and some major skills—I've met some of 'em. The man that controlled them would be sitting pretty. The Coalition would like it, too."

The woman said bitterly, "And they could always catch on. Four, or so much a head. So quiet—a cross-section of a lost world!"

"Treich's the strong man," Marsh went on. "Ben Mui is Chief Counselor, but he does as Treich tells him. The idea is that if Romney sealed down and steps getting into trouble with the Planetary Coalition, we can have regular orders, regular trade, and so on."

"In other words," said Campbell dryly, "keep being Romney."

"You understand. A pet trade, a tourist attraction, a lot more of revenue." Again the average drab of the book. "A damned crowd!"

"And Treich, I take it, has decided that you're endangering the future of Romney by rebellion, and put the finger on you."

"Exactly." Marsh's yellow eyes were bright and hard, meeting Campbell's.

Campbell thought about the Fitz-Sherens outside, and all the lonely reaches of space where he could go. There were lots of Coalition ships to rob, a few play-actors left to speed the loot in. All he had to do was walk out.

But there was a woman's voice, with a note in it like a singing, angry drum. There was an old man's voice, murmuring, "Little people like you, my son?"

It was funny, how a guy could be alone and not know he missed it, and then suddenly walk in on perfect strangers and not be alone any more—alone inside, that is—and know that he had missed it like hell.

It had been that way with the Kraylons. It was that way now, Campbell thought. "I'll stick around."

He added irritably, "Sweet, will you for Free's sake get that light out of my eyes?"

She moved it, shining it down. "The man's Name: Stella Mouse."

He grinned. "Keep. So you do have a few, after all."

It wasn't beautiful. It was pale and bean-shaped, framed in a mass of messy red-gold hair. There were long, gray eyes under dark-gold brows that had never been plucked, and a red, rather mouth.

Her teeth were white and curved, when she smiled. He liked them. The rest of her softer lips was thin and even. She wore a short tunic the color of Tokay grapes, and the body under it was long and clear-cut. Her arms and throat had the whiteness of pearl.

Marsh said quietly, "Contact Zard. Tell him to turn the PA system wide open and say we're taking the ship, now, to get the Kraylons!"

STELLA stood absolutely still. Her gray eyes took on an eerie, somber look, and Campbell advanced slightly. He'd seen stupidity often enough in the System's backwaters, but it never seemed normal.

Finally she said, "It's done," and became human again. The green light went out. "Power," she explained. "Besides, we don't need it. Give the poor hand, Mister Campbell."

He did, with absolutely no reaction. "My friends," he said, "generally call me Ray." She laughed, and they started off, moving with quick nervous in the black, by darkness.

The ship, it seemed, was up on the second level, on the edge of the living quarters. Down here was all the machinery that kept Romney alive—heat, light, water, air, and cooling systems—and a lot of storage bins.

The third tier was a vast hydroponic farm, growing the grains and fruit and vegetables that fed the Romney thousands.

Scrambling through pipes and dismantled bulkies that method of working and dried vegetables and oil, Campbell filled in the gaps.

The leaders of the rebel element had held a meeting down here, in secret. Marsh and the girl had been coming from a where Campbell blundered into them. The decision had been to capture the Kraylons no matter what happened.

They'd known about the Kraylons long before Campbell had. Captain trading in Liu had brought word. Now the Kraylons were a settled crew which two points of

eyes were darting in deadly earnest.

Remembering Friedrich's thin, harsh face, Campbell wondered anxiously how many of them would live to take their ship away.

He became aware gradually of a hooded, rhythmic tap and clank transmitted along the metal walls.

"Hammers," said Stella softly, "Hammers and riveters and welders, fighting not and age to keep Ramsey alive. There's no scrap of this world that wasn't discarded as junk, and reclaimed by us."

Her voice dropped. "Including the people."

Campbell said, "They're scrapping some beautiful things these days."

She knew what he meant. She even laughed a little. "I was born on Ramsey. There are a lot of Earth people who have no place at home."

"I know," Campbell remembered his father's face, with blue cold water over the folds instead of sky. "And Friedrich?"

"He was born here, too. But the taste is in him . . ." She caught her breath in a sudden sharp cry. "Maah! Maah, it's *Zed!*"

They stopped. A pain began to beat under Campbell's jaw. Stella whispered, "He's gone. I felt him call, and now he's gone. He was trying to warn us."

Maah said grimly, "Friedrich's got him, then. Probably knocked him out while he was trying to escape from the cabin room."

"He was frightened," said Stella quickly. "Friedrich has done something. He wanted to warn us."

Maah grunted. "Were your gun ready, Campbell. We go up, now."

THEY went up a wooden ladder. It was suddenly getting hot. Campbell guessed that Ramsey was in the top again. The Martian opened a door at the top, very, very slowly.

A young, vibrant voice sang out, "All aboard!" They piled out of the doorway. Four or five lanky young Perki Barbarians from Venus stood grinning beside two hound and shagboring Barbarians.

Campbell stared past them. The air was cold and hot, being with such of steamy rain. There was slushy earth dotted with warm pools. There were life-trees, satry

groves under a pearly light that was still brightening out of indigo gloom.

A slow, hot breath of wind stirred the mist and life-trees. It smelt of warm soil water and growing things, and—flowers.

Campbell drew a long breath. His eyes stung and the veins in his neck hurt. He knew it was a dead bulk, with an iron slip above the pearl-gray mist. But it smelt of freedom.

He said, "What are we waiting for?"

Maah laughed, and the young Venesian laughed. Barbarians, going to fight and laughing about it. Stella's gray eyes held a silver flame, and her lips were blood-orange and trembling.

Campbell kissed them. He laughed, too, softly, and said, "Okay, Gypsy. Let's go."

They went, through the seven halls of the Venesian Quarter. Because of the Krapples, most of the Venesians were with the rebels, but even so there were angry voices raised, and fists, and a few weapons, and some blood got spilled.

More two-headed young men joined them, and squat little optical normals who could talk to animals, and three four-armed, suppositing creatures from the Labor swamps.

They came presently to a huge dismounted Mart freighter on the edge of the Venesian Quarter. There were piles of goods waiting linking through the row of airlocks into smaller trading ships. Maah stopped, his forget shooting walked jumbled spots in the sunlight that moved in through half-shuttered ports, and the others flowed in behind him.

They were on a narrow gallery above halfway up the inner wall. Campbell looked down. There were people on the ladder and the two halting levels below. A swollen ugly mob of people from Earth, from Venus, from Mars and Mercury and the moons of Jupiter and Saturn.

Men and cat-men and dove-monstrous lins, silent and watching in the hot light. Here a crew of scarlet antennae burning these the sinuous flash of a washed back and beyond that the slow antennae were long of light-blink tentacles.

A creature like a huge blue spider with a child's face let out a shrill unworldly scream. "Train! Train!"

The whole packed mass on the balcony and the galleries stirred like a wild agency caught in a gust of wind. The rushing whisper of their movement, their breathing, and their anger rang across Campbell's senses in pulses of fire.

Anger. Anger in the Kayler's drum and Nella's voice and Marsh's yellow eyes. Anger like the sunlight, hot and primal. The anger of little men flogged into greatness.

A voice spoke from across the deck below, cold, clear, without the least trace.

"We want no trouble. Return to your quarters quietly."

"The Kaylers!"

The same name thundered out of all those angry throats, beating down against the guard, over Agnes standing in the forefront of a circle of Tardimon guarding the deck with ready guns.

Tredrick's thin, red head never stirred from its pained swivel. "The Kaylers are not of your hands, now. They harbored a dangerous criminal, and they are now being imprisoned in *Uli* to answer for it."

Ray Campbell gripped the iron railing in front of him. It seemed to him that he could see, across all that space, the cold, bright flame of satisfaction in Tredrick's eyes.

The thin, calm voice did across his ear-drums with the cool impressiveness of a surgeon's hands.

"That criminal, Ray Campbell, is now on Romany. The Spaceport is on its way here now. For the sake of the safety of your families, for the future of Romany, I advise no one to hide him or help him escape."

#### IV

CAMPBELL stood still, not moving or speaking, his hand, dark face fixed and dead, like old wood. From a great distance he heard Marsh's smothered, furious curse, the quick cough of Nella's breath, the soft breathing and stirring of the mob that was no longer sure what it wanted to do.

But all he could see was the pale, blind face of an old man smiling in the warm, blue light, and the dirty, soiled plumes of *Uli*.

A voice spoke, from beside the study of armed men. Campbell heard it with some part of his brain. An old voice, dry and rasping, possessed of great dignity and great pain.

"My children," it said, "Have patience. Have faith that we, your leaders, have the good of Romany at heart."

Campbell looked with dead, dark eyes at the speaker, standing beside Tardimon. A small man in a robe of white fur. A Martian from one of the Polar Clans, dead, black-eyed, green, and gruffly strong.

"Remember the cold, the hunger, the uncertainty we have endured. We have a chance now for security and peace. Let there be no trouble, now or when the Spaceport comes. Return to your quarters quietly."

"Trouble!" Marsh's voice leaped out across the hot, still air. Every face above there below turned up toward the balcony. Campbell saw Tredrick stare, and speak to one of the guards. The guard went out, not too fast. Campbell swung under his breath, and his brain began to tick over again, swift and hard.

Marsh thundered on, a bronze Tsan in the velvet glare. His eyes, his yellow eyes, the bones on his left held points of angry flame.

"Yes, Iron Mah, a Martian! Have you forgotten Kook, and Selding, and the Wells of Tardimon? Can you stand to the Condition like a soldier for the sake of the honor they throw you? Yes, Tredrick! You've said so out. Since when keep details been called to mobility in Romany's affairs?"

Tredrick's cold voice was quiet steady. "The Kaylers are beyond reach, Marsh. A wound will get you nothing. Do you want blood on your hands? Do you want to get or all wiped out?"

"My hand," said Marsh softly. His hand made a burning, vicious arc in the hot light. "If there's blood on this, the Condition spilled it when their *Prophet* Marsh killed my right-hand for seeing it against him."

The mob stirred and murmured. And Campbell said swiftly, "Tredrick's right. But there's still a chance, if you want to take it."

Nella Moore put a hand on Marsh's arm. "Here!"

Yusufik was still pretending he hadn't seen Campbell, pretending there wasn't even crawling through dark tunnels to trap him.

"It's mean trouble. It may mean death or imprisonment. It's a million-to-one shot. You'd better give me up and forget it."

The point of Marsh's hook pricked under his jaw. "Speak quickly, little man!"

"Okay. Tell 'em to behave. Then get me out of here, fast!"

FREDRICK'S men knew their way around. A lot of gypsies, moreover, who weren't with Yusufik, joined the hunt for the leech. They didn't want trouble with the Sparguard.

Campbell stumbled through a maze of dark and stifling passages, holding Sofia's hand and thinking of the Sparguard ships sweeping closer. They were almost caught a dozen times, trying to get across Romany to the Fitz-fathers.

The boat seemed to be an outlet for the poor feelings of Romany. Campbell decided he would never go hunting again. And then, just above where his ship lay, they stopped into a trap.

They were in the Saravian Quarter, in the halls devoted to refugees from Tiam. There were centers working here. There was more on the lower walls, glimmering in mistal light like a dark rainbow.

"The crev," said Sofia Moore. "The Barikl."

There was an echoing clatter of voices all around them, footsteps clattering over metal and my rock. They ran, breathing hard. There were some low shafts, and a ledge, and then crev with queer blue-violet fire burning in them.

Cretons sat at the crev mouths. They were small, vaguely anthropoid, dead white, and unpleasantly rubbery. They were quite naked, and their single eyes were prominent, Marsh said.

"Little Fetters, we ask shelter in the name of London."

The shafts and the footpads were closed. There was sweat on Campbell's forehead. One of the white things smiled slightly.

"No disturbance," it whispered. "We will have no disturbance of our thoughts. You may desire, to stop this ugly noise."

"Thank you, Little Fetters." Marsh plunged into the crev, with the others on his heels. Campbell cursed. "They'll come and take us!"

Sofia's sudden lips smiled wistfully. "No. Wash."

The crev, the violet fire very suddenly gone. There was a queer darkness, a small electric shiver across Campbell's skin. He started, and the girl whisped:

"Trelchama. They've built a wall of force around us. On the outside it seems to be solid like the crev wall."

Marsh moved, the bones on his left clinking slightly. "When the noise are gone, there's a trap in this hall leading down to the pipe where your ship is. Now tell us your plan."

Campbell made a short, bitter laugh. "Plan, hell. It's a gamble on a lived crev, and you're back if you play it."

"And if we don't?"

"You're going anyway. The Krayless—well, I owe them something."

"Tell us the plan."

He did, in rapid nervous sentences, scratched behind the shielding wall of thought from those alien brains. Marsh laughed softly.

"By the gods, little man, you should have been a Krayl!"

"I can think of a lot of things I should have been," said Campbell cheerily. "Hey, they've got our wall."

It hadn't been more than four minutes. Long enough for them to look and go away again. There might still be time, before the Sparguard came.

There was, just. The gateway couldn't have been more perfectly timed. Campbell grunted, feeding power into his jaw with exquisite skill.

He didn't have a Chinaman's chance. He thought probably the gypsies had less than that of coming through. But the Krayless weren't going to rot in the dark-pain of his because of Roy Campbell.

Not while Roy Campbell was alive to think about it. And that, of course, might not be long.

He saw the Fitz-fathers shooting toward the right side of Wama, in full row and still throttled down. The Sparguard ships, nine fast patrol boats, took an after



him, going Romany for the job. No one stopping there. No mistaking that lean, black ship, or whose hands were on the controls.

Campbell studied the flying keys, and the Fitz-Sobiers pursued under him like a cat. Just for a second he couldn't see clearly.

"I'm sorry, old job," he said. "But that's how it has to be."

**I**T WAS a beautiful chase. The General ships pulled away trick they knew, and they knew plenty. Campbell searched over the keys, sweating, his dark face set in a grin that held no mirth. Only his hands moved, with nervous, delicate speed.

It was the ship that did it. They stopped tracking on her, and she broke them. They tried to encircle her, and she walked away from them. That slight edge of power, that narrow margin of speed, pulled Roy Campbell away from what looked like instant, easy capture.

He got into the shadow, and then the Spacemart began to get scared as well as angry. They stopped trying to capture him. They abandoned their hunters and went to work.

Campbell was breathing hard now, through his teeth. His dark skin was mottled with sweat, pulled tight over the bones and the ridges of muscle and the hairiest veins. Deliberately, he slowed a little.

A bolt flamed just the stationed posts. He slowed still more, and wozed the slightest bit. The Fitz-Sobiers was alive under his hands.

He didn't speak when the next bolt struck her. Not even to curse. He didn't know he was crying until he tasted the salt on his lips. He got up out of the pilot's seat, and then he said one word:

"Jeez!"

The follow-up of the first shot blasted the control panel. It knocked him back across the cockpit, mired and scorched from the flying metal. He got up, somehow, and down the passage to the lock compartment. There was a lot of blood coming from his chest, but he didn't care. He could feel the ship dying under him.

The timer were that. She was running away in a wavy, blind spiral, racking her plates apart.

He climbed into his vestment. It was a special coat, black even to the helmet, with a super-powerful harness-rocket with a jet illegally hatched. He hoped his hands weren't too badly burned.

The ship shuddered brutally, flinging him head into the bulkhead. Truncated. He slumped toward the lock, an animal whimper in his chest. He hoped he wasn't going to be sick inside the helmet.

The panel opened. Air blasted him out into jet-black space. The city spat out flame of the harness-rocket flared bright and died, smothered among the trailing legs of the structure.

Campbell lay quite still in the blackness. The Spacemart ships flared by, playing the Fitz-Sobiers like a target on the line of their marker beams. Campbell closed his eyes and cursed them, slowly and without expression, until the tightness in his chest choked him off.

He let them get a long way off. Then he passed the plunger of the rocket, heading down for the eight-direction swamps of Tehan Province.

He retained an very clear memory of the trip. Once, when he was quite low, a space-ship blazed by over him, heading toward Lili. There were still about eight hours' distance over the swamps.

He landed, eventually, in a clearing he was pretty sure only he knew about. He'd used it before when he'd had mail to leave in Lili and wasn't sure who would be town at the time. He'd learned to be careful about those things.

There was a ship there now, a smallish trader of the inter-lunar type. He stared at it, not really believing it was there. Then, just in time, he got the helmet off.

When the world stopped moving over, he was lying with his head on Stella Moore's lap. She had changed her tunic for plain spaceman's black, and it made her face look whiter and livelier in its frame of black hair. Her lips were still swollen, and still red.

Campbell sat up and looked them. He felt much better. Not good, but he thought he'd live. Stella laughed and said, "Well! You're surprising."

He said, "Listen, you've good medicine for anything." A hand which he recognized as Maxie's materialized out of the heli-

down. It had a flask in it. Campbell accepted it gladly. Presently the icy darkness round the stomach thawed out and he could see things better.

He got up, rather unsteadily, and fumbled for a cigarette. His skin had been mostly down and chafed off of him and his hands hurt like hell. Seika gave him a smolder and a light. He sucked it in gratefully and said: "Okay, now. Are we all ready?"

They were.

CAMPBELL led off. He drained the flask and was pleased to find himself firing on all fours again. He felt empty and relaxed and ready for anything. He hoped the liquor wouldn't wear off too soon.

There was a path threaded through the swamplands, the logs and pebbles and reeds and sediments. Only Campbell, who had made it, could have followed it. Remembering his blind stumbling in the maze of Romney, he felt pleased about that. He said, rather strongly: "Be careful not to slip. How'd you do the getaway?"

Marsh made a grim grin laugh. "Romney was a madhouse, hunting for you. Some of the hundred boys started minor wars over policy on top of that. Fredrick had to see most of his men to keep order. Besides, of course, he thought we were heaven on the Krypton question."

"There were only four men guarding the locks," said Seika. "Marsh and a couple of the Pacific boys took care of them."

Campbell remembered the speeding flailing toward Lili. He told them about it. "Could be Fredrick, coming to supervise our defeat in person." Defeat! It was because he was a little tight, of course, but he didn't think anyone could defeat him this night. He laughed.

Something stopped out of the milky night to answer his laughter. Something so unhumanly swift and sure that it made him want to cry, and then she led him with the deep and sure power in it. Campbell looked back over his shoulder. He thought:

"Ma, hell. These are the guys who'll do it, if it's done."

Seika was behind him. Beyond her was a thin, small man with four arms. He wore no clothing but his own white fur and his

head was crowned with feathery antennae. Even in the blue night the antennae and the man's eyes burned living amber.

He came from Callisto and he carried in his four hands a thing vaguely like a hoop, only the rings were double-barbed. It was the hoop that had spoken. Campbell hoped it would never speak against him.

Marsh brought up the rear, swinging along with no regard for the burden he bore. Over his naked shoulder, Campbell could see the still white face of the Baski from Titan, the Little Father who had saved them from the hunters. There were tentacles around Marsh's big body like white ropes.

Four gyenas and a Public Enemy. Five little people against the Tarno-Vossian Coalition. It didn't make sense.

A hot, slow wind stirred the sediments. Campbell breathed it in, and grunted. "What does?" he wondered, and stamped to part a tangle of branches. There was a noise-flood raised beyond.

"Here we go, children." He took Seika's hand in his left. Because it was Seika's he didn't mind the way it bent. In his right, he held his gun.

## V

HE led them, quickly and quietly, along the drenched branch of an old drainage system that he had used so often as a private entrance. Presently they dropped to a lower level and the conduit system proper.

When the time was up, the drains would be running full. Now they were only pumping seepage. They waded in pitch darkness, by-passed a pumping station through a side tunnel once used for cold storage by one of Lili's cautious business men, and then found steep, slippery steps going up.

"Careful," whispered Campbell. He stopped them on a narrow ledge and stood listening. The Callistoans murmured, with faint amusement:

"There is no one beyond."

Antennae over ears, Campbell peered and found a hidden spring. "Lil is full of these things," he said. "The boys used to keep their little man going just for fun, and every smart gap had several built holes."

They emerged in a tiny deep, very dark cellar. It was utterly still. Campbell felt

a little sad. He could remember when Martin Mal's was the busiest thieves' market in Lbi, and a man could hear the fighting even here. He smiled bitterly and hid the way upstairs.

Presently they looked down on the main gate, the main square, and the slave pens of Lbi. The surrounding streets were empty, the buildings mostly dark. The confusion had certainly cleared up when it took over the town.

Campbell pointed, "Reception committee. Trenches refused, anyway. You'll get you twenty he followed it up in prison."

The gate was floodlighted over a wide area and there were a lot of tough-looking men with heavy-duty needle guns. In the day of anesthetic charges you could do a lot of effective shooting without doing permanent damage. There were more lights and more men by the slave pens.

Campbell couldn't see much over the high stone walls of the pens. Taper movement, the occasional flash of a brilliant crest. He had known the Receptions would be there. It was the only place in Lbi where you could impress a lot of people and be sure of keeping them.

Campbell's dark face was creased. "Okay," he said. "Let's go."

**D**OWN the same steps to the entrance. Stella's quick breathing in the hot darkness, the rhythmic click of the bones on Maan's belt. Campbell saw the eyes of the Callistan harper, glowing red and angry.

Stella opened the heavy steel-strengthened door. Quietly, slowly. The Bardsi white passed. "Put me down."

Maan set his grin as the stone floor. He killed an open handoff, tentacles around white, rubbery flesh. His single eye burned with a cold phosphorescence.

He whispered, "Now."

The Callistan harper went to the door. Reflected light painted him briefly, white fur and scarlet crest and outlandish harp, and the glowing, angry eyes.

He vanished. Out of nowhere the harp began to ring.

Through the partly opened door Campbell had a clear view of the square and the gate. In all that glow of light an empty street nothing moved. And yet the music

rippled out.

The guards. Campbell could see the starbed glitters of their eyeballs in the light. There was nothing to shoot at. The harping was part of the night, an all-enveloping and invisible.

Campbell shivered. A pain beat like a trip-hammer under his jaw. Stella's voice came to him, a faint breath out of the darkness.

"The Bardsi is disturbing him with thoughts. A wall of force that turns the light."

The edge of the faint light touched her cheek, the blackness of her hair. Maan stretched beyond her, motionless. He had glared dully, curved and coiled.

They were getting only the feeble backwash of the harping. The Callistan was sitting his music outward. Campbell felt it rising and trembling, blind with the hot slow wind and the indigo sky.

It was some trick of vibrations, some diabolical flexing of notes against the brain like fingers, to press and control. Something about the double-handed strings descending against each other under the coming of fine drilled hands. But it was like witchcraft.

"The Harp of Dagda," whispered Stella Moore, and the Irish music in her voice was older than time.

Somewhere outside a man cursed, thickly like one dragged with sleep and afraid of it. A gun went off with a sharp snapping sound. Some of the guards had fallen down.

The harp sang louder, something along the grey stones. It was the slow wind, the heat, the deep blue night. It was sleep.

The floodlights blazed an empty zone, and the guards slept.

The Bardsi sighted and shivered and closed his eyes. Campbell saw the Callistan harper standing in the middle of the square, his scales crest crest, striking the low drumming note.

Campbell straightened, catching his breath in a ragged sob. Maan picked up the Bardsi. He was lumpy, like a feral child. Stella's eyes were glowering and strange. Campbell went out ahead of them.

It was a long way across the square, in the silence and the glowing lights. Campbell thought the harp was a man wasps. It

didn't attract attention because everyone who heard it slept.

He hung back the three heavy bars of the slave gate. The pain of his burned hands jured him out of the queer mood the harping and his Celtic blood had put on him. He began to think again.

"Hurry!" he started at the Kraylons. "Hurry up!" They came pouring out of the gate. Men, women with babies, little children. Their coats burned in the molten glass.

Campbell pointed to March. "Follow him." They recognized him, tried to speak, but he raised them on. And then an old man said,

"My son."

Campbell looked at him, and then down at the ground. "The Flower's wife, Father, here." A hand reached his shoulder gently. He looked up again, and grinned. He couldn't see anything. "Get the hell on, will you?" Somebody found the switch and the sewer lights went out.

The hand pressed his shoulder, and was gone. He shook his head wearily. The Kraylons were running now, toward the tower. And then, suddenly, March yelled.

Men were running into the square. Eight or ten of them, the bodyguard of the curly grey-haired man who led them. Beside the grey-haired man was Trebrick, Overhead of the Tarran Quarter of Ramsey.

**THEY** were startled. They hadn't been reporting this. Campbell's battle-worn eyes saw that. Probably they had been making a routine tour of inspection and just stumbled onto the incident.

Campbell dove, from the hip. Anesthetic needles sprayed into the close-packed group. Two of them went down. The rest retreated, dropping flat. Campbell wished there had been time to kill the gate lights.

He bent over and began to run, guarding the rear of the Kraylons' line. Stella, at the corner of the doorway, was lying down a methodical wall of needles. Campbell groaned.

Some of the Kraylons caught it and had to be carried. They slowed things down. Campbell's gun clicked empty. He showed in another clip, cursing his burned fingers. A charge sang by him, close enough to stir his hair. He fired again, blanketing the

whole sector where the men lay. He wished he could blow Trebrick's head off.

The Kraylons were vanishing into the house. March and the Calliban had gone ahead, leading them. Campbell groaned. Speed was what they needed. Speed. A child, separated from his mother in the rush, leapt on the stones and shrieked. Campbell picked him up and ran on.

Empty air was choking. Stella was dying all right. The last of the Kraylons strove through the door. Campbell leaped up the steps. Stella got up all her body and smothered it him. His eyes closed. They were halfway through the door when the cold voice said behind them:

"There are lethal needles in my gun. You had better stop."

Campbell turned slowly. His face was weaker. Trebrick stood at the bottom of the steps. He must have crawled around the edge of the square, where the darkness was thick under the walls.

"Drop your gun, Campbell. And you, Stella Bloom."

Campbell dropped it. Trebrick might be bluffing about those needles. But a Mistry at this stage of the game would be just as fatal. Stella's gun clattered beside him. She didn't say anything, but her face was coldly murderous.

Trebrick said evenly, "You might as well call them back, Campbell. You led them in, but you're not going to lead them out."

It was funny, Campbell thought, how a man's voice could be so cold when his eyes had fire in them. He said softly:

"Okay, Trebrick. You win. But what's the big idea behind this?"

Trebrick's face might have been cut from granite, except for the fatal eyes. "I was born on Ramsey. I froze and starved in those winter holes. I heard it. I hated the darkness, the loneliness, the uncertainty. But when I said I hated it, I got a hearing."

"Everybody else thought it was worth it. I didn't. They talked about freedom, but Ramsey was a prison to me. I wanted to grow, and I was stifled inside it. Then I got an idea.

"If I could rule Ramsey and make a treaty with the Confition, I'd have money and power. And I could fix it so no more kids would be brought up that way, cold

and hungry and scared.

"Marsh opposed me, and then the Kraytons became an issue," Treddick smiled, but there was no mirth or softness in it. "It's a good thing. The Coalition can take care of Marsh and you others who were mixed up in this. My way is clear."

Stella Moore said softly between her teeth. "They'll never forgive you for turning Romano people over to the labors. They'll be war."

Treddick nodded solemnly. "No great change is made without bloodshed. I'm sorry for that. But Romano will be happier."

"We don't ask to be happy. We only ask to be free."

Campbell said wearily, "Stella, take the kid, will you?" He held out the little Krayton. Jeoppy and spiky man. She looked at him in quick alarm. His feet were spread but her hands, his head sunk forward.

She took the child, Campbell's knees sagged. One second arm in a latticed green sleeve came up to cover his face. The other pressed steadily along the wall. He dropped, staring dully, to his knees.

The groping hand fell across the gun by Stella's foot. In one quick sweep of motion Campbell got it, threw it, and followed it with his own body.

**T**HE gun missed, but it came close enough to Treddick's face to make him move his head. The involuntary muscular contraction of his whole body spoiled his aim. The charge went just Campbell into the wall.

They crashed down together on the floor. Campbell gripped Treddick's wrist, knew he couldn't hold it, let go with one hand and slumped backward with his elbow at Treddick's face.

The gun lay off again, harmlessly. Treddick groaned. His arm was weaker. Campbell thrust over and got his knee on it. Treddick's elbow hit was arranging his already tortured body.

Campbell brought his fist down into Treddick's face. He did it twice, and wept and cursed because he was suddenly too weak to lift his arm again. Treddick was bleeding, but fat from fat. His gun was coming up again. He didn't have much play, but enough.

Campbell set his teeth. He couldn't even

see Treddick, but he swung again. He never knew whether he connected or not.

Something thumped past his head. He couldn't see he heard it. It was more like feeling. But it was something deadly, and strange. Treddick didn't make a sound. Campbell knew suddenly that he was dead.

He got up, very slow, shaking and cold. The Gallitan hayer stood in the doorway. He was lowering his hands, and his eyes were living coals. He didn't say anything. Neither did Stella. But she laughed, and the child stirred and whirled in her arms.

Campbell went to her. She looked at him with queer eyes and whispered, "I called him with my mind. I know he'd come."

He took her face in his two hands. "Listen, Stella. You've got to lead them back. You've got to touch my mind with yours and let the guide you that way, back to the ship."

Her eyes widened sharply. "But you can come. He's dead. You're free now."

"No." He could feel her throat quiver under his hands. Her blood was beating. So was his. He said hoarsely.

"You had, do you think they'll let you get away with this? You're talking the Coalition. They can't afford to look silly. They've got to have a weapon, something to use fast."

"Romany, so far, is beyond planetary control. Slip past stations on her, how far out. Clear out to Saturn if you have to. Nobody saw the Gallitan. Nobody can anybody but me and the Kraytons and an undesirable somebody up here on the porch. Nobody, that is, but Treddick, and he won't talk. Do you understand?"

She did, but she was still rebellious. Her million lips were angry, her eyes bright with tears and challenging. "But you, Ray?"

He took his hands away. "Damn you, woman! If I hide out on Romano I bring you into Sparguard jurisdiction. I'll be trapped, and Romano's last chance to say free will be gone."

She said stubbornly, "But you can get away. There are ships."

"Oh, sure. But the Kraytons are there. You can't hide them. The Coalition will search Romano. They'll ask questions. I will

you they've got to have a goal?"

He was really weak, now. He hoped he could hold out. He hoped he wouldn't do anything disgraceful. He turned away from her, looking out at the square. Some of the guests were beginning to stir.

"Will you go?" he said.

She put her hand on him. "Ray . . ."

He jerked away. His dark face was set and crust. "Do you have to make it harder? Do you think I want to sit on Phobos in their stinking mines, with shackles on my feet?" He swung around, challenging her with savage eyes.

"How do you think Romano is going to stay there? You can't go on playing cat and mouse with the big dogs this way. They're getting sick of it. They'll pain him and tie you down. Somebody's got to spread Romano all over the Solar System. Somebody's got to pull a publicity campaign that'll make the great public sit up and think. If public opinion's with you, you're safe."

He smiled. "I'm big news, sister. I'm Roy Campbell. I can splash your lousy little mess of tin cans all over with glamour, so the public won't let a hair of your little head be hurt."

"And now will you let me take you?"

Still wasn't crying. Her gray eyes had lights in them. "You're wonderful, Roy."

He was ashamed, then. "In my jacket you don't expect to get away with it further. Besides, I'm an old dog. I know my way around. I have a little dough stowed up. I won't be in for long."

"I hope not," she said. "Oh, Ray, it's so stupid! Why do businessmen have to change everything they lay their hands on?"

He looked at Theodick, lying on the stone.

His voice came slow and somber:

"They're building, Stella. When they're finished they'll have a big, strong, prosperous world extending all across the planets, and the people who belong to that world will be happy."

"But before you can build you have to grade and level, destroy the things that get in your way. We're the things—the turkeys and the rocks that grow one way and can't be changed."

"They're building, Stella. They're growing. You can't stop that. In the end, it'll be a good thing, I suppose. But right now, for us . . ."

He broke off. He threw her roughly inside and locked the steel-clashed door. "You've got to go now."

It was dark, and hot. The Kaplan child whimpered. He could feel Stella close to him. He found her lips and kissed them.

His voice became a longing whisper. "You'll be back?" he promised.