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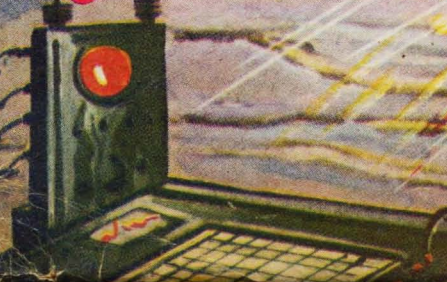
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by L. Sprague de Camp

THREE WORLDS IN SHADOW
by Joe Gibson

ORDEAL ON SYRTIS
by Milton Lesser



DOUBLE-ACTION MAGAZINE



**ALL STORIES NEW
No Reprints**

Volume
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SCIENCE FICTION Quarterly

February
1952

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INTERVENTION

BY MICHAEL SHERMAN

HE CAME into the room, and age was written on his face, bitterness in the curving droop of his mouth, defeat in the slumping of his shoulders. I saw him, and knew that the uneasiness I had felt since the report first came, telling of Joschim's ship entering our city lock, was well grounded. I glanced out the window, peering deep beyond the atmosphere-shell of our city, into space-blackness, almost as if I expected to see the planet we approached loom suddenly before us. It would not appear thus; I knew that. Our approach to planetary bodies was gradual, and this world would show first as a speck in the distance, barely distinguishable from the lights of other bodies. It would become visible and grow, little by little, taking shape slowly.

I turned to Joschim and let his aura play upon my open senses, for no impression must be lost, no matter how painful. His feelings were as much a part of his report as the words he used, and any evidence he brought with him.

"Did you find her?" I asked him.

He nodded and took a seat. "I found her, Antrim ser Dalla."

"Is she... mad?"

His shoulders lifted slightly, then fell. "Yes, she is mad; but on that world, it may not matter so much."

"Why not?"

"On that world, ser Dalla, they are all as mad as Jeanne Kalaris."

I looked around the walls of the directory office and saw that the council screens were all lit, now. In each section, the images of a household ser or lir glowed; in some, younger members of a household were also in evidence, for this was an open report, and any citizen could hear and be heard.

"Jeanne lir Kalaris," I told him softly. "There is no senior in her household."

He looked up. "And I, Antrim—am I now Joschim ser Hoffmann?"

I opened my thoughts to him, and let memories through; there are times when the polite concealment of words is neither kindness nor wisdom. He learned, thus, of his father's last

- To the people of the City, Jeanne was a sick frightened
- child, who needed help. But on this planet, where she
- had fled for refuge, Jeanne was a political genius.
- But did her presence there constitute intervention?
-

sols; knew that his brother remained with a research-team on the last planet our roving city encountered before entering this system; found that Anna Valdes-lir-Geyer awaited his return, and had entered into no long-term alliances since his departure.

"What of her madness, then?" came Valdes-lir-Geyer's voice, and I could see from her face that she was shocked at Joschim's appearance. The two spoke mentally for an instant, and while none of us knew what they told each other, we could feel the auras of pain, sympathy, and guilt-feeling from ser Hoffmann.

I shot a question to Joschim's biopsych, then, asking if he recommended a postponement of the report. There was another brief silence while Wandel ser Tung conversed with Joschim, then the biopsych said, "I have recommended that this report be verbal."

I turned to ser Hoffmann. "Do you accept?"

He nodded, and mental murmurs filled the room for a moment. Except for details known only to ser Tung, the case of Jeanne lir Kalaris was known to all. Born when her parents were spacewrecked on a small asteroid, she had been the only survivor when a scoutship from our city finally reached the little world. Her elder brother, who had been with the rescue party, had taken her with him on a mining expedition; he sent her back to the city shortly after, when she showed signs of deep-rooted guilt and anxiety. Her response to biopsych treatment had been slow, and it was during a brief alliance with ser Hoffmann that she had fled the city in a small cruiser, which she immediately put into cosmo-drive.

Since she could not have had much, if any, experience with navigation, the odds were against Jeanne's finding her way back, even if she wanted to return. We knew that the cruiser was well-equipped, but control center showed that the cosmo-drive unit had shut off automatically after a few seconds, and had not been turned on again. But even a few seconds travel

in the n-continuum (about which we know nothing except that it is outside our own space-time continuum, and that the cosmo-drive will send an object into this continuum, then bring it out where the unit is cut off) equals innumerable sols of distance travelled at the highest speeds obtainable in our own space-time continuum. Jeanne had fled, fled blindly, for quite obviously she had no idea where she was going or where she wanted to go.

Joschim followed her. It was a free choice on his part; he was in no way responsible for the decision Jeanne made. But he felt that he had some part in the situation which resulted in her flight, and wanted to help her if she would accept his aid.

That was twenty sols ago; now, ser Hoffmann was back, looking as if he had lived two hundred sols without rejuvenation, lived that duration under terrible strain.

"Tell of us this world Jeanne found," I said to him.

"It is a society where the vital energies are dammed up, repressed, distorted," he replied, "so they express themselves in fear and endless struggle for power over one's fellow beings. Most succumb, one way or another, and are helpless before others who develop strong personal drives. But leaders can only drive their followers and themselves toward death when love is forbidden, or distorted into dominance. There are many states, each devoted to the same ideal: total control or destruction of the others."

"What of science, art, philosophy?" someone asked.

"None is totally lacking," he said. "Science is nearly all devoted to techniques of destruction; where it is not, the results are adapted to the struggle for power. Art and philosophy exist on a very limited level, since both are subordinated to the main ends—the exceptions show that some individual's life-forces have not been entirely submerged or distorted, but they exist virtually as self-contained units; they do not function with society, but alongside it. Their works are frequent-

ly derived from life-feeling, but these are exploited to conform with the prevailing drive; what cannot be fitted or twisted in is ignored."

"Jeanne lir Kalaris is one of them, now?" ser Tung asked.

"More than that," Joschim replied, as his shoulders sagged. "She leads them!"



HE WONDERED, now, if he had been right in following Jeanne— if, at least, he shouldn't have returned once he satisfied himself that she had reached this planet safely. It was not only that he missed the roving city, but that the strain was beginning to tell on him; Joschim could see himself thinking and feeling more and more like those around him.

It's my duty to be sure she wants to stay here, he thought, and knew, even as he thought this, that the sols he'd spent in this environment had done their work on him. He had no such duty; this was not a necessary job to be done. He felt a compulsion to do it, and he was succumbing in order to avoid the anxiety of not doing it.

I'm sick, he thought, *sick as any of them. Why don't I get out and go back home for treatment?* He knew the answer to that, too; in his present state mere knowing was useless, academic information which could not, by itself, change anything. To give a thing a name, to stick a label on it, does not amount to being able to cope with it—even though the people of this world thought so.

A woman entered the room, and he was astonished. Jeanne had been provocative enough from the very first, but now Joschim saw this as an aspect of her sickness. He had seen many others like her here; it was no longer something to take him by surprise.

I thought it was mutual desire, he thought; *it seemed so natural.*

But here, in the culture of this planet—all the many states had the same

basic culture, despite innumerable differences in language, custom, ideology, etc.—it was plain enough. Jeanne feared love, even while she sought it, and her terror was greater than the desire. The way she dressed, the way she moved, the way she spoke—all suppleness and litheness; her garments too tight, too sheer; her eyes inviting; her voice low, seductive—offered everything, but gave little. She would submit at times, but give and feel nothing.

Except the desire for power; that blazed out like a searchlight.

She held out her hand and said, "Mr. Martell—" She broke off, as her eyes widened. "Why—you're—Joschim!"

He felt tears behind his eyes, and his throat was choking up. But he had repressed tears too often; there were few who could weep in this world, and the act was regarded as somehow degrading—only natural for infants, who must be trained to restrain themselves. He smiled, instead. "So you know me, Jeanne? I scarcely know myself these days."

"But—how did you get here?"

He lifted his shoulders, and let them fall. "A long story. I followed you; got in here pretending to be an amnesiac, thus accounting for my lack of knowledge on the one hand, and learning to pass for a native in the process of being 'cured'." He shuddered. "I pity the sick here; all the cures are worse than the diseases—outside of simple first aid."

She stroked his hand. "Poor Joschim. I, too, was sick—but all the therapists here are not incompetent. You must have been taken to one of the approved state hospitals."

"The approval was overwhelming."

"You must let me help you," she said. "I tried several kinds of treatment before I found one which cleared me."

He tried to imagine what the standards of health might be which could pronounce Jeanne healthy, and sighed in resignation. It didn't matter, he sup-

posed. *She's satisfied with her condition*, he thought; *that releases me from any obligation*. He looked around the over-luxurious living-quarters distastefully.

"Joschim," she whispered, "dear Joschim. You came through all this to help me, didn't you?" It wasn't a question.

He nodded. "I didn't know why you had run away; I thought it might have been my fault."

"I couldn't stand it there; that terrible flying city frightened me. I would have died! . . . I'll never go back, Joschim—never. No one can make me!"

"No one will try," he said. "You should know that, Jeanne. You didn't have to run away; you could have gone any time you wished to, and we would have given you any assistance you wanted."

He arose. "I followed you just to make sure you'd be all right, Jeanne. You like it here; you're accepted as one of these people; you're allied with a high officer, and you're doing what you feel is necessary work. We won't interfere; we won't even offer an opinion on it."

She caught his hand. "Don't go, Joschim. I—I need you."

He shook his head. "There's nothing I can do now. I am not of this world, even by adoption; I want no part of it."

"But I still love you, Joschim. Wait—hear me out."

There was power in this woman, vital power, distorted as it might be, and he could feel the surge of it. He looked at her now, and suddenly he was seeing, not what his mind told him she was, but what memory threw up to him from the past. He saw only a frightened, appealing girl.

She's sick, and I'm sick. There is no joy here for either of us. I've been repressed too long. . .

"You still love me, Joschim; I can see that you do. Don't deny our love."

She was in his arms, then. "I need you, Joschim. More than just your

love. There will be war very soon unless we can stop it—you can stop it, Joschim. Are you so superior to us that you can sit back and watch while millions are slaughtered? Is that what the great culture of your flying city means—abandoning people to doom?"

Her mouth pressed against his, compulsively, before he could reply.

THERE WAS silence for a few moments as ser Hoffmann paused in his report, then Anna Valdes-lir-Geyer was the first to speak. "Jeanne has become a citizen of this other world, so she doesn't necessarily involve our city; but that is clearly an evasion of the facts. Since she came from us, she brings them various aspects of us—distorted as they may be—and it seems to me that her very presence there amounts to intervention."

She opened her thoughts, then, so we could feel her emotions—tangled with personal affection for ser Hoffmann—and make allowance for this bias in her stated opinion.

"It should be remembered," said Wandel ser Tung, "that Jeanne lir Kalaris is something of a special case, apart from others who may adopt other civilizations—I say 'other civilizations', because finding this world of human beings suggests that there may be still others, similarly sprung from our common ancestors. She has had very little of our environment; her parents died when she was quite young, and the manner of their death—as well as the fact of it—was a severe shock to her. She lived alone for many sols, before she encountered other humans; and her time spent in the city was brief. We do not know *how much* of our culture she has actually absorbed; we do not know whether her parents were well from the time of her conception, up to the time of their death. Thus, we cannot tell whether she is capable of intervention in the sense we mean it when we try to apply our standards to her case."

I addressed Aysha fir Bwana, "Let's look over the record on our non-intervention policy; what it has meant in the past may not be valid for the present."

"The past can never be completely valid for the present instance, ser Dalla," she replied. "In a few cases, we have decided that the similarities of a given instance were so much more significant than the differences, that we merely followed a former decision. But in most cases, we find that the differences far outweigh the similarities, and important modifications have to be made for the new situation."

"Our non-intervention policy has simply meant that we do not interfere in the affairs of other cultures, irrespective of our opinions of them. We will give whatever help we can, when it is asked, or when a natural catastrophe cannot be averted without it. We avoid any actions or 'assistance' which would amount to trying to impose our own standards upon any other culture, and we pay especial attention to technological information—it must not be above or outside of a given culture's range at the given instant."

I turned to Joschim, trying to read behind the aura he presented, look beyond the literal meaning of the words he used, note the significance of what he didn't say. "Ser Hoffmann," I said slowly, "what you have told us, so far, does not seem to account for the feeling with which you have charged it. You have suffered on the level of your own personality and relationships but there is more than that. You should not feel guilty in the way you do...or is this merely part of the trauma?"

Joschim ran his fingers through his hair, and his lips moved soundlessly for a moment. "There is more, ser Dalla. I have interfered."



THE ROOM had a feeling of darkness for all the lighting; darkness

in the walls, which, when activated, would permit those within to see any part or all of the outside; darkness in the almost-inaudible hum of instruments, which would scramble any photographic or audio spying-devices; darkness in the detector-screen, which transmitted any sounds or images throughout the apartment, and from key positions leading to it—anything the watchers felt should be sent on.

They were the nucleus of the conspiracy. Cardiff, Jeanne's ally, arrived first. A large man, heavy-gaited, heavy-faced, yet pleasant enough. He walked in somewhat stiffly, his shoulders hunched, hands clenching into fists. Jeanne lifted her lips to him as he entered, brought him over to Hoffmann and said, simply: "This is Leon Martell; he is one of us." Cardiff took Hoffmann's hand, his grip surprisingly strong for one who was running to fat, and was pale from lack of sunlight. He did not question Hoffmann, or object to his presence; he slumped into a chair and drank morosely until the others came. Jeanne repeated the introduction, and each glanced at Cardiff, who nodded. That was all; Hoffmann-Martell had been accepted.

Now he could feel the drive of this woman, observe the impact her personality had upon others of this world. Cardiff was the titular head, but Jeanne was the real power; they seemed to know this, without realizing it.

She wants power. Yet, there have been instances when power, after finally achieved, has been used wisely. He remembered the old histories of the dim mother world, the accounts of men and women who had swum to supremacy in blood; then, once their position secure, they ruled as ably as anyone could have in the era. *If she wants power for a consolidating and constructive goal, then she may be a better choice than the others; if she wants it for its own sake, she will be the worst choice.* Between the two extremes were administrators who merely sailed with the tides of event,

some ably, some disasterously, some helplessly swept along.

It's an era of contention; war is constantly possible, but not always inevitable; able direction can keep the contention on other levels.

"It is near time," someone said.

Cardiff nodded. "We need a little more crucial information. We could strike now, could have struck at any time within the past two weeks. But it would have meant violence, and possibly civil war, however brief. We've seen what has happened when a group operates on the proposition that the end justifies the means."

"At times, it does," said Jeanne.

"But only at times," continued Cardiff. "And we have to concentrate on the means, because they condition the end. Peace cannot be obtained through making war; in itself, war negates the end. The administration thinks that a quick victory—which may be possible, though I doubt it—will finish things; they claim that the last war failed to result in lasting peace, simply because we handled the situation badly afterwards."

"Well, that's true enough," another man said; "we were far more destructive than necessary to begin with, and we tried to impose our own standards upon the enemy without consideration of what they needed for peaceful life on their own terms—I mean on the terms of the majority who would have preferred not to have war in the first place."

Jeanne gave a little gesture of annoyance. "When two people are fighting, how can you tell which blow is necessary and which isn't?"

"That is the whole point," replied Cardiff. "The means was that of violence and it distorted everything. No one could be sure at the time, even allowing for panic or bad judgment or outright malice on the part of the leaders. When two people are fighting, there is no time to consider which blows are necessary and which are not; when you get into a position where it's either kill or be killed, all

your attention has to be concentrated simply on not getting killed yourself—anything you do seems right at the moment, providing it works well enough so that you're alive and reasonably whole afterwards."

Jeanne looked thoughtful. "The less resentment and disorder at the start, the easier it will be to make our way when we're in. A little bloodshed might be justified by the results; but if it is possible to win without any, we will have the strongest possible position. People will believe we mean what we say when we promise peace—we can stress the 'bloodless revolution' in our propaganda."

"That is it, precisely," Cardiff said. "We must continue delaying tactics in the council, without apparent opposition to the administration, until the time comes. We must have *precise* information on the movements of the key members and on their immediate plans, so that, when we strike we'll have them all at once, without violence. Then we go ahead with the plan; they call for a vote of confidence, and lose."

Hoffmann looked about curiously. "Forgive me for asking what sounds like an elementary question, but how do you propose to keep the administration from counter-efforts against you?"

Cardiff seemed puzzled at the question, until Jeanne explained Hoffmann-Martell's background, briefly. "Mr. Martell is in an excellent position to obtain information we could not; I cannot explain further right now." She smiled, then, added: "I am taking full responsibility for him."

He could feel the aura of her power again, an almost-tangible presence beating against the others. They sat silently, then Cardiff asked, "Has Martell been—conditioned?"

Jeanne nodded.

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THAT SEEMED to relieve the momentary tension. "The key figures

in both civil and military administration are conditioned, too, Martell, to protect our system of government. In the case of civil leaders, they are incapable of over-riding majority decisions of the council, or concentrating personal power over and above the scope of their office. The military is conditioned against interfering with civil affairs—unless civil leaders call upon them—or starting hostilities with an enemy on their own initiative.

"We've used the term 'violence' a little loosely. 'Violence' doesn't necessarily mean personal violence in this frame; it can also refer to forcing the council to call for a referendum of the entire population; legally, we have the right to arrest them and demand a referendum, and we would have certain pro-tem powers during the debate and the plebescite. But this procedure, particularly during a time of near-hysteria, could very easily lead into actual violence, political assassination, and civil war; too many things could go wrong. They would resist violent revolt, and if there was time to call in the military, we'd have civil war for sure; the military might intervene, even if not called, if any of a large number of very likely contingencies arose.

"No, what our plan calls for is abducting the key men and conditioning them to accept an immediate vote of confidence; there are no grounds for their acceding should we introduce a motion into a council meeting, under present conditions. They would simply rule it out of order, and be perfectly within their legal rights."

There was a little more discussion, then the meeting broke up, and the others left. Cardiff, too, excused himself; when they had gone, Hoffmann turned to Jeanne. "Very well, I have some idea of what you plan to do—but I don't see why you need me."

"Gilbert is getting tiresome," she said, "but I'll have to go along with him. I suppose he'll become suspicious of you after a while; you'd better stay

until he comes back—that will make it look better."

"You haven't answered my question, Jeanne—why does this conspiracy need me? What is this information that I can obtain better than anyone else?"

"Oh, all right, if you must talk business this very moment. First of all—the others who were here: are they all loyal?"

He looked at her in utter amazement. "What a question you ask me! How would I be supposed to know? I just met them for the first time tonight."

She tossed her head in an irritated gesture. "Don't fence with me, Joschim. You could tell if they were not; you would feel something about them that didn't jibe with what they said, and the feelings they showed on the surface. Oh, I know your abilities; you, and a lot of others in the flying city. You can tell when a person is putting on a front."

"I can tell that you do not love this man Cardiff," he said. "But you do not seem to be pretending that you do, either, and he knows it. Why do you keep up this false alliance with him, when you do not love him?"

Jeanne shrugged and lit a cigarette. "In this world, Joschim, a man often enters into an alliance with a woman, or a woman with a man, simply because it is useful. I do not dislike Gilbert, and our relationship has not been unpleasant."

"But he is in love with you."

"Which is his misfortune, not mine. We understand each other, I'm sure."

"Now who is fencing, Jeanne?"

"Oh, you're impossible, Joschim. Why must you torment me like this? . . . Very well, then, since we must be precise and accurate Gilbert does *not* understand me. There, is that better, darling? He knew I wasn't in love with him when we took up our alliance, but he hopes he can win me; perhaps he thinks he *has* won me—or that I feel a gradual increase of

affection." She broke off suddenly and covered her face. "Oh Joschim, Joschim, don't question me like this; I can't stand it."

Suddenly, she was wracked with sobs; she threw herself on the coach, and Hoffmann again received the impression of the frightened child.

This is a trick; she's playing on my emotions, just as she plays on his and the others. But... I must find out what she wants. He went over and sat down beside her, his hands comforting her.

"All right, Jeanne; I'm sorry if this has upset you. You are right, of course; I would have sensed it if any one of them had been disloyal. Is that what you need from me—this sort of psychic check-up?"

"We *must* be careful," she murmured; "Gilbert will be coming back soon... Yes, this and one other thing. You can explore the minds of the key men we have to deal with; that is very important. There is information we cannot get any other way, in time."

He got up, strode about the room. "I can't do that, Jeanne. First of all, it's extremely difficult to get into the minds of anyone on this world—even when they're willing. Their minds are locked against themselves, for one thing. And, even if it were easy, I couldn't do it."

She arose, too, her face somehow brighter with the tears; she came up to him, close, and lifted her face to him. "This is different, Joschim; we want to stop a war; you know we do—don't you?"

Hoffmann nodded. "Yes—I know that you do. You, too, Jeanne. You have ambitions of your own—I can sense that—but you are not pretending about this thing."

"I want to have the power, Joschim—the power to stop war. Look into me—am I lying?"

He raised it, now, his voice dropping to whisper. "And I forgot one thing, when I looked into her as she asked.

A simple thing, perhaps a thing that only a sick person would forget. I had lived in this environment, now, for nearly five sols and it never occurred to me how much of their orientation had become mine.

"I forgot that a person may not be lying, and still may not be telling the facts. When one lies, one may be giving out information that is false to the facts, or distorted information, or dangerously incomplete information—assuming that 'telling the truth' amounts to as accurate a report of the facts as is possible. There was no intent to deceive me, now, with Jeanne; she let me see her desire for power—which I had already sensed—and looking into her I saw that her feelings and words and actions were all well coordinated; so I assumed she was telling the 'truth'. I believed her, and did as she asked."

Aysha Iir Bwana asked what Hoffmann had found in the minds of the administration leaders.

"Fear," Hoffmann said. "Driving terror; not only fear that they had worked themselves into from their own propaganda about their neighboring states, but deep-rooted fear which made them seek out enemies constantly. There was little conscious deceit in them, either—outside of petty matters, which would have made little difference otherwise. It was not difficult to condition them to accept the demand for a vote of confidence which they knew they would lose; they dreaded their responsibilities, and were happy to be rid of them—so long as they could save their pitiful dignity in the process."

"And what of the war?" I asked.

"Cardiff became nominal ruler of the state, although Jeanne was the leader, in fact. The neighboring state was in a position where it would risk war, but did not want war at the moment; Cardiff's policy worked as the

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SER HOFFMANN'S head was bowed, and we all waited silently.

conspirators had hoped—it continued the contention on other levels.”

“It seems to me, then,” I put in, “that your intervention was not reprehensible, Joschim. Under the circumstances, Jeanne could do little harm—she had to be conditioned, did she not?”

He shook his head. “Jeanne was not considered a member of the council, even though her influence on Cardiff was known. It was assumed that his conditioning would be protection enough—after all, regardless of what Jeanne, or anyone else, urged upon him, he alone could make the decisions.

“Well, theoretically, they were right; but they didn’t consider how much was not covered by conditioning...”

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EVEN NOW, Cardiff could not keep his eyes off Jeanne. She was as compelling as ever, dressed as revealingly. When Cardiff was present, the flame in her seem to envelop him, still offering everything...

He must know, Hoffmann thought; and yet, perhaps he doesn't; perhaps he'll never let himself know.

“Oh, it isn’t important,” Jeanne said hastily; “besides, we shouldn’t discuss affairs of state all the time. Martell was just about to leave when you came—you can stay, can’t you, Gilbert?”

He shook his head, heavily. “I’d hoped to, but our personal matters will have to wait, my dear. It won’t be long, now.” He turned to Hoffmann. “Martell, I’d appreciate it if you’d fill in for me, somewhat; Jeanne must be rather lonely these days, and you two seem to get along.”

A light-button in the wall indicated a tele-call on the private screen. Jeanne excused herself. Cardiff looked after her, then smiled wanly. “I’m sure that she is seldom very lonely when I’m not around, but I’d rather see her playing with you than with some others.”

“Isn’t that a rather dangerous concession?”

Cardiff shrugged. “What isn’t dangerous around that woman? Think I’m worried about her falling in love with you, eh? Even if she does, it won’t last too long; Jeanne wants the top man—that’s why I was able to take her away from the general; she was convinced that I’d get farther, and she was right—so I know that no matter how she may stray, now and then, she won’t wander too far. She’ll come back to me, Martell. Oh, I’m a fool not to get rid of her, I suppose; but when she’s with me, she gives me something I want more than power.”

He thinks he knows, thought Hoffmann.

“No, I’m not worried about discreet indiscretions, Martell. I can’t pick her friends for Jeanne, so I just wanted to let you know that I don’t particularly mind about what goes on between her and you. Know why? Because there’s one thing that I’m sure of about you, Martell—you’re not ambitious. That’s what I have to worry about.”

He broke off as they heard the door close down the hall, and Jeanne’s footsteps sounded. “What do you think about this business Jeanne was mentioning? It sounds rather far-fetched to me.”

She came in, purring. “Of course, darling. That is your one fault; you haven’t very much imagination. Oh, you’ve enough to foresee any number of likely things that would never occur to me, but it is the unlikely possibility which often actually happens. Like Leon’s coming to us just at the moment we needed him. And something like what I’ve been telling you would only have to happen once.”

“Why hasn’t it happened already?”

“I’ve admitted it was unlikely, Gilbert. But—don’t you see, my dear—a statesman has to be prepared for the *unlikely* emergency. Once this is provided for, then we can all forget about it until and unless such a contingency arises. I’ll grant you that it

most probably won't happen; but if it should, and during your term of office, then you will be ready to deal with it."

Cardiff nodded. "Perhaps we ought to have an official plotter," he said, smiling. "Someone whose entire duty is to dream up the most fantastic devices for overthrowing the government imaginable, then figuring out counter-measures, and arranging for them to be handy."

Jeanne pouted. "You're laughing at me."

"From what I have seen here," Hoffmann put in, "I'd say that your thought isn't a bad one at all, Cardiff."

"Well, what *do* you think of this one of Jeanne's?"

It probably has happened, and will continue to happen, without their suspecting it, he thought. "I would say it's possible, and less unlikely than you imagine. A member-elect goes to a state therapist for conditioning. The conditioning is not strictly a mechanical process, but the result of a relationship between the therapist and the patient, even though mechanical devices are used. Many people have unconscious hostilities toward each other, a fundamental antagonism which operates at first sight, at times without either party being aware of it."

Cardiff shook his head. "I doubt it—that is, I doubt a competent therapist wouldn't be able to spot the patient's hostility and work within it."

"There's a difference between knowing it is there, and knowing the depth, the degree, and the shape of it. In such a brief treatment as the conditioning actually is, the therapist could be deceived; as Jeanne suggests, the results only have to be serious once."

"And," Martell persisted, "you believe it is really possible that such a thing could negate the conditioning, or sidetrack it into something dangerous?"

Hoffmann spread his hands. "It's all speculation, Cardiff. But assuming that such a thing could happen, I think

it would be more likely to happen under the present set-up, than were the person to be conditioned by a therapist he trusted and liked."

"So you think conditioning shouldn't be handled by the state therapists?"

"Not exactly that, darling," Jeanne put in. "I don't suggest that the laws be changed completely—but why not just add a slight amendment, a provision that the member *may* choose his personal therapist if he wishes to."

"I see. And, in most cases, the very fact that the member is free not to use the state therapist will make him feel better about going through the usual routine. Good psychology." Cardiff got up. "Well, my dear, you've made your contribution to the state for tonight; I must be going."

"I'll walk you down," said Hoffmann. "I'd like a bit of fresh air."

"But you'll come back, won't you?" Jeanne put in.

Cardiff smiled heavily. "He'll be back."

The two of them were silent in the elevator. They stepped out into the night, and Cardiff looked up at the sky. "Clear," he said. "You want to warn me about this proposal, don't you?"

Hoffmann nodded. "I'll admit, I do not see where she is leading to, but she must have something in mind. Jeanne doesn't toss out idle fancies without some purpose."

"I think I know her purpose, Martell. And I don't think she's ready to push a really important one—important to her own ambitions—yet. She's throwing out little things—unimportant, or just slightly useful—to give an impression of being valuable. She wants me to feel I need her, you know—need her help in case I get annoyed over her infidelities at any time. Well, I can play cat and mouse, too. Good-night, Martell."

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NOW THE picture was growing clearer to us, little things falling

into place, one by one, as ser Hoffmann told us of Cardiff's death in an aircraft accident, and of Jeanne's election to his position in the council. General elections took place each year, although a vote of confidence could be called at any time; in the event of mid-term vacancies, the council could elect one of their own number to fill in, and elect a citizen to replace the stepped-up member—or elect a citizen to move directly into the vacant position. Jeanne was chosen as chief of state, without delay.

"She made an appointment with the state therapist for her conditioning," ser Hoffmann continued, "then withdrew after an interview, and put the matter up to the council. Since the modification of the law was her suggestion, she told them, she felt that they should determine whether she, herself, ought to take advantage of it; she brought in her personal therapist, and the state therapist who had interviewed her, to testify. It was all done so straightforwardly that the council suspected nothing; they approved Jeanne's preference.

"I determined to intervene once more—to examine Jeanne myself, against her will if necessary; we were to see each other that night. But, some time in the afternoon, I became suddenly ill, and the physician sent me directly to a hospital. I do not know exactly what happened, but I do know that—apparently through accident—I came to myself one day and found that I had been in the hospital for nearly a full sol. It was clear that I had been kept under some sort of drugs, or hypnosis; I lost no time in exploring the minds of the attendants and found that I was under treatment by Jeanne's personal therapist—and that Jeanne herself had been a frequent visitor, often spending many hours talking with me alone. Of this I remembered nothing, but the next time she visited me...

"I learned that, during this sol, a technicians' team had developed a primitive version of our own power transmitter, then adapted it into a

weapon. Later, the members of the team disappeared, and all their data had been confiscated; it was clear to me what was going on. Jeanne, and Jeanne only knew the full details of the construction; she could let others make the parts, and assemble them herself—a simple enough procedure when one knows how—and put the coating on the tubes, the final, vital step without which the transmitter is merely an interesting toy.

"There is little more to tell, except that I managed to escape, make my way to my ship, and come back. But I do know this—they could not have developed the power transmitter without my information—and Jeanne is the only one who can make it. It is obvious that she, and she alone will operate it."

There was no need for a long discussion, after we had heard ser Hoffmann's story. This was an unusual case, one where a devastating war and a terrible weapon could be traced to one individual; we questioned ser Hoffmann but little farther, enough to make sure that the Cardiff policy of peaceful contention was still the apparent policy of the state. It was clear that Jeanne planned to strike alone, herself, and present the state with a *fait accompli*. Once they were committed to war, they would follow through—but if the commitment were not made, war might not ensue for some time.

The vote was unanimous; we had intervened, but it was possible to undo what damage had been done by removing Jeanne, and destroying the transmitter.



We were close to the planet now, would pass by very soon. The locator-chart following Jeanne's personal vibration-pattern indicated the quadrant of the planet we must pass over to find her. We would be able to spot her exact position when we were close enough.

Joschim ser Hoffmann checked his

maps, then turned to me. "She is in an uninhabited section of wastelands, bordering on the Free State—that is her strongest rival."

"We'll have her on our screens shortly," I said.

"What if the energy beam strikes her, ser Dalla?"

I shook my head. "Harmless," I assured him. "It will be terrifying, perhaps—more of a shock, and fireworks display than anything else. She'll feel a trace of heat, of course. But a very low level will be sufficient to burn the coating off the tubes in the transmitter; once that is done, the mechanism will be useless, and quite unintelligible to their technicians. The coating on those tubes, simple as it is to us, requires a level of molecular comprehension necessary to understand the cosmo-drive—something which is far beyond them."

A communication-light blinked, then the voice of Wandel ser Tung came through. "I've landed safely near the base of the mountain range. The air is very clear, and I can make out a figure in the distance."

The vision screen narrowed down, and we could see Jeanne distinctly now. She wore the oxygen helmet and belt necessary for protection when one used a portable transmitter.

"Look," breathed Joschim. "Look at her costume. Even when she's alone, doing technical work, she has to be as provocative as possible."

I could see what he meant. The only necessary part of Jeanne's array was her belt and the helmet with small purifying tubes on her back, below. Since the transmitter sent out carbon dioxide as a by-product, an air-purifier was vitally necessary. One tube brought air into her helmet; purified, while the other drained out stale air. The heavy belt she wore would attract any possible leakage from the transmitter—there is always some in the portable models—and the large red crystal in the belt would absorb and shield it.

But Jeanne was garbed in brilliant red, a head-covering that accentuated

the seductive lines of her face and the fullness of her mouth; thin red gloves; a tight shirt, with an elongated opening in the chest exposing part of her bosom, and trousers which clung closely. The microphone wire was looped around her wrist, which told us that Hoffmann had been more than right in assuming that Jeanne, and Jeanne alone, would operate the transmitter—it was attuned to respond only to her voice.

The communication-light blinked again. "I am proceeding toward her, slowly," said ser Tung.

I nodded to the image of ser Nolte in the beam tower. "Fire as soon as you have the transmitter centered."

"In a moment, ser Dalla."

For an instant, there was silence as we watched Jeanne setting dials on the transmitter; then we saw the pale yellow of the energy beam touch her back. She straightened up suddenly, stiffening, as coruscations played around her; her mouth opened as she turned and looked up, saw the city in a soundless scream. Then she slumped softly beside the transmitter, and the beam played upon the mechanism. We watched, stepped up the image on our screen, and saw smoke trickling out.

It was finished as quickly as that; they would find the mechanism now, and doubtlessly suspect it was some sort of weapon, but without the tube-coating, the transmitter would be meaningless. I realized, too, that Jeanne had just turned it on, low-power. Now that the coating had burned off the tubes, the machine would burn out all its delicate parts—there would be nothing but fused metal by the time its batteries were exhausted.

We watched ser Tung's scout cruiser drift slowly along, then land by the red figure on the ground. Ser Tung looked up and waved to us as our city disappeared from his sight, over the horizon, then lifted the girl's figure gently and carried it into the ship.

I turned to ser Hoffmann. "So it

ends, Joschim. We've undone the worst, and—who knows?—perhaps Jeanne and you helped them a little despite yourselves. Who do you think will take her place in the council?"

"Most likely Cardiff's brother, if he's still alive. I do not know how many people Jeanne had secretly murdered, but I do know that she maintained all the outward aspects of the peace policy; it is possible that her successor will be able to pick up from where Cardiff left off."

The communication light from Wandel ser Tung's ship blinked again. Joschim leaned forward and spoke into the communicator. "Is she all right?"

The biopsych's voice was subdued, and there were tones of sadness in it. "She's dead, ser Hoffman."

"But...but," stammered Joschim, "I thought the energy beam was harmless at that frequency."

I sprang up. "It must have been, ser Tung. It couldn't have hurt her; had the beam been powerful enough

to kill a person, it would have started to melt down the transmittor immediately; we would have seen it!"

"I didn't say the energy beam killed her, ser Dalla," came the biopsych's voice. "It was fear that killed her—fear, shock, guilt, rage—all the pent-up emotions ser Hoffmann found on this world. It stopped her heart."

"Then," I said, "she can be revived."

"I think so. I've injected her with stasis solution. There is no need for haste in reviving her."

I turned to Joschim. "What do you think, ser Hoffman? Would you let Jeanne lir Kalaris die?"

He smiled bitterly. "Ask me when I'm well, Antrim ser Dalla. I've spent twenty sols on a mad world, thinking of little but Jeanne lir Kalaris. She's dead, now, so let's concentrate on the living; as Wandel says—if she can be revived, she can be revived at any time. Let ser Tung decide it—and I hope the decision isn't made in my time!"