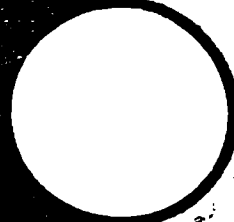


Dynamic Science Fiction



Cover by *A. Leslie Ross*

ROBERT W. LOWNDES, Editor

- KNOWLEDGE IS POWER** **H. B. Fyfe** **5**
Myruc Chib doesn't mind learning from these strange bipeds—not a bit!
- I AM TOMORROW** **Lester del Rey** **12**
When Thomas Blake's dream comes true, it's a nightmare!
- BLUNDER ENLIGHTENING** **Dave Dryfoos** **20**
The Earthlings are prepared to deal with these creatures, but . . .
- "X" FOR "EXPENDABLE"** **William C. Bailey** **22**
If my first caper didn't pay off, that "expendable" would be "expended"!
- BLOOD LANDS (illustrated on cover)** **Alfred Coppel** **70**
Kenyon suspects what these people feed on, but he's far from the truth!
- READIN' AND WRITHIN' (Book Reviews)** .. **Robert W. Lowndes** **96**

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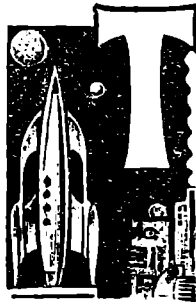
Myru e Chib cautiously flashed the light into the building entrance, as the Earthmen held their weapons ready . . .

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

Novelet of Cosmic Irony

By H. B. Fyfe

It's a nice phrase, and there's a sort of "truth" about it — but you have to ask *which* knowledge and *what kind* of power?



THE YELLOW star that warmed the surface of Vunor had not yet climbed above the low hills outside the city when Myru e Chib crept from his cane-and-mud hovel. He shivered in his ragged gray tunic and tried to hug his four arms about him; since two of them ended in blunt stumps, this was difficult.

"Good morning, Loyu e Huj Keviu!" he murmured in a droning voice. "May you suffer no mishap this day!"

He stared hard at the wooden roof of the ruler's clay-brick palace, where it glinted in the dawn-light above the surrounding one-story buildings at the center of Fyogil. Then he looked down at the pair of eight-digit hands left him. He started along the dusty street toward the guard-post placed where the city met the fields.

It was, after all, necessary to beg his food for the day if he wished to walk out across the plain, later—to the Terran spaceship.

Myru trotted along the unpaved street on two thick legs that were less flexible than his arms, because the joints between the four-inch sections had adapted to support considerable weight. Though the Vunorian was only three-quarters the height of the Terran explorers, who had recently landed from the stars, his trunk and neck were comparatively much thicker. His scale-coloring was average among males of his kind—dull, dark blue on limbs, back, and head, but grayish white in front.

His head was broad, with a heavy bony ridge circling front and sides above the four eyes; he breathed through air-vents situated over each corner of his wide slit of a mouth. Short tendrils projecting from the air-vents carried his auditory-nerves.

As he moved along the street, he turned his head slightly from side to side, for ease in scanning the sides of the thoroughfare. On each side of his head, under the bony ridge, was a burn scar where his side eyes had been.

Approaching the guard-post, Myru slowed prudently.

Lest I be thought a runaway thief, he thought ironically, though it is famous that I have never been caught with any stolen object!

A single sentry leaned forlornly on his two spears outside the clay-and-wood barracks. Myru eyed the soldier's thick tunic and cloak enviously; they were colored a deep crimson and looked warm.

Noticing Myru, the sentry turned deliberately, and strolled away a few steps, as if to look across the plain toward the hills where the Terran spaceship had landed. Myru slipped past to the rear entrance of the building.

FIVE OF the Keviu's soldiers were grumbling over their meal at a

long table. One, Squad-master Rawm e Deej, winked the eye on the left side of his head toward an adjoining room.

Myru entered it and found oil and cloths in a small locker. He set to work polishing the long-bladed spears in a rack, and finished by brushing off the spare sandals of wood, topped with closely-woven cloth. As he worked, he heard the soldiers leave their meal. Myru peeped out when he was sure that the sentry just relieved had gone directly to his pallet in the sleeping-chamber; Rawm lingered on his stool, having dispatched the common soldiers to their posts.

"There is soup in the big pot," he said as Myru moved about collecting leftovers, "and I doubt that anyone wants the rest of that bread."

Myru poured out the soup into a bowl, but slipped the stale bread into a pouch hung from his rope-belt. He would be expected to clean the pots; but with his evening meal in the pouch, he could stay as long as he wanted, out near the ship. He wished that cleaning the weapons could be made an excuse to stop at the guard-post more often.

Rawm e Deej sat silently by, while Myru drank the soup. Neither referred to the fact that they were cousins, though Myru knew that otherwise he would not have been permitted there; should Loyu hear of it, Rawm would certainly be dismissed. Nor did they mention that Myru had been the other's captain, before he had protested too violently the Keviu's decision to seize his mate, Komyll.

"You go again to the Terran ship?" asked Rawm.

"Yes. They are teaching me their talk."

"Indeed?" Rawm made a hissing exclamation through his air vents. "What sort of beings are they? I was not with the procession when the Keviu went out to view them."

"They say they have come only to explore Vunor, as they study other

worlds among the stars. They are tall, heavy, scaleless, and look funny—with only two arms. But let me tell you, they have some fanciful machines in that ship."

"They let you inside?" Rawm demanded. "I thought they told the Keviu their air was unhealthy for us!"

Myru glanced about to ensure privacy, turning his head awkwardly because his side-eyes had been blinded. He knew he could trust Rawm, but one never knew about others; one more session with Loyu's knife-men would indeed be costly.

"I do not think they would like it known," he murmured, "but their air is nearly the same as ours, except not so fresh; their world is much like Vunor, though bigger, they say."

"Indeed?" Rawm hissed again in surprise. "I am happy that our seamen have finally proved Vunor a sphere. At least, we need not appear too ignorant to the star beings."

"Hoh!" said Myru in amusement. "I am not so sure of that! If they thought us so wise, they might ask us about the land and its animals; instead, they pluck up plants, dig rocks, and send me to catch small animals for them to cut up."

"They do that?" exclaimed Rawm. "Why?"

"As I say, they value the seeking of knowledge. Which reminds me—perhaps you could sell for me some things they traded me for my catch. It would not look well for me to be seen in the market-place with such fine knives, or the little needle they say is better than our compasses, or the jewelry."

"They gave you jewels?"

"Hoh!" said Myru. "They are glass, such as our sailors take to the island savages, but of beautiful quality—good enough for the Keviu's harem even."

He paused, with a twinge of remembrance and hatred. "Some," he forced himself to continue as Rawm considerably lowered all four eyes,

"are of metal as fine as real silver."

"Well, bring me something," said Rawm, "and I will try. I remember arresting a certain lender of silver a time ago, for buying thieved goods. He owes me the favor of saying I took them from the thief."

He noticed Myru's expression, and fluttered the eight digits of one hand in protest. "I had them both and one was enough," he said. "Would you have me toss away a chance to buy us some decent food? That monster in the palace needs a good, smart spear-thrust through the money-pouch!"

He stopped suddenly and looked about with all eyes; Myru began to collect the pots and bowls for washing, as if he had not heard. Rawm sighed, and stomped out in his wooden sandals.

WHEN HE had earned his meal, Myru slipped out the back door and started across the fields toward the hills.

He watched the road for a while, until he saw that no carrying-chairs of court favorites were moving along it. The Terran ship had been outside Fyogil for eleven days now, and the novelty was wearing off. Myru shifted over to the road and fell into a monotonous, shambling trot.

When the dark green foliage of the thick-spreading hill-trees loomed before him, he turned to his right along a freshly-beaten trail through the brownish stubble of an old grain-field. The Terran ship reared its gleaming height above a charred circle.

Richter and Kean were talking near the ladder to the exit port. To Myru, their voices had a sing-song quality, soaring upward on questions like a female's and dropping to deep, chesty tones at other times. He waited respectfully to be noticed.

"Hullo, there!" said Kean. "It's our pal, Mumble-Mumble."

"I am Myru e Chib," said the Vunorian, humoring them in case they really had not recognized them.

He had, he reminded himself, difficulty in telling *them* apart, except for two or three. Richter, who dealt with substances, had bright yellow hair atop his head; one of the five who drove the ship had reddish. Lombardi, who dealt with plants and was the thickest of the Terrans, had none. To identify others except Kean, Myru had to look twice.

"All ready to find us something new?" asked Kean.

"Yes," said Myru.

Kean was the one who had told him he was glad to hear that there was no life—but for a few great fish—on Vunor larger than the planet's dominant race.

"Come in," he said, turning to the ladder, "and I'll show you what I want."

He climbed nimbly upward. They had told Myru that they came from a world where everything was slightly heavier; but the Vunorian thought he could have climbed faster than the Terran—were he not lacking two hands that Loyu had ordered chopped off.

Three years now, he thought, following Kean up the metal rungs. Some day, I will pay him back! May he suffer no mishap till that day!

He wondered about Komyll, remembering the beautiful purplish tints in her scales and the way she had cried out when the Keviu's soldiers had dragged her to the palace. Yet, he also had to remember seeing her ride through the streets beside Loyu; she had seen Myru lurking furtively behind the glumly cheering crowd, and turned to the ruler with an amused "Hoh!"

Has she forgotten? he asked himself. *But no—she only hid her feelings lest he revenge himself further upon me.*

Kean entered the ship, and Myru gave his attention to recalling the little of the Terran language he had been taught. He was glad he had been outside the city when the spaceship had landed. With little time to spare

from their research, the visitors had bothered to teach their speech only to Myru, so far, and he planned to profit by it if he could.

"I'll show you a group of the rodents you brought in," said Kean, leading the way up another, interior, ladder. "I'd like more if you can catch them. Also some of the river-fish to compare with the ones from the ocean you bought from your fishermen."

If he knew how I "bought" them! Myru reflected.

2



KEAN SLID open a door and they entered his laboratory. Myru looked at the remains of three of the small animals he had caught for the Terran. The *pori*, which was as high as Kean's knobby leg-joint, had been

put together again—although its inner organs were to be seen on a shelf, floating in bottles of liquid. Perhaps it had been stuffed, Myru decided. The other specimens were still dismembered.

"These are the ones," said Kean. "Can you get more?"

"I think yes," said Myru.

"They appear to belong to the same family. In fact, if you will forgive my saying so, their structure—to judge from externals—resembles yours; it is also to be seen in a less-developed stage in the fish."

"Your words have great interest," Myru told him, "but why do you seek such knowing?"

Kean showed amusement by what the Terrans called laughing. "What else is worth having but knowledge?"

"Power," answered Myru promptly, thinking of Loyu e Huj.

"Knowledge is power," argued Kean. "Could all your workers or

soldiers make a ship like this? They have strength, yes; but we made it because we had knowledge."

"By yourselves?"

"No, of course not. By 'we,' I mean our civilization. What this expedition learns about Vunor will be only a small item in the information available to others in our culture. Yet, it would be a long time before another expedition visited here to report whether the planet might be good for a colony, or a repair-station, or for minerals."

"As you say," agreed Myru.

"But one never knows when having the facts on hand might save a lot of trouble. That shows you why it's a good policy for everyone to observe what he can and to collect knowledge. If it isn't exactly power, at least it creates power."

Myru made a sound of assent, and looked thoughtfully at the dissected specimens.

"How about birds?" asked Kean. "We have seen some flying above the hills."

"They are beyond me," said Myru staring unhappily at the deck. "Perhaps I can find a more agile fellow to hunt them."

"No matter," said Kean. "You can take me through the hills with a shotgun, and I'll get some myself."

"Shotgun?"

"One of our minor weapons—like a rifle. We carry them for hunting, just as we carry grenades, bombs, and rocket-torpedoes in case of real trouble. How about going into the hills now?"

Myru hesitated.

"What's the matter? Didn't you say there wasn't anything big enough to hurt us?"

"Well," Myru answered, "in the hills I thought not to go. I do not like it with only a club. There might be a *kuugh*."

"A *kuugh*? What's that? Dangerous?"

"Not very high," Myru told him, "but thick and very...very—"

"Vicious?"

"I think yes. Maybe I can show you where to look, since you have weapons."

Kean laughed in the Terran manner. "We'll have a look now. I'll bring a shotgun and a rifle in case we meet anything like your *kuugh*."

He sent Myru to wait on the ground below. In a little while, he came down the ladder with two strange objects, which Myru took to be the weapons mentioned.

"Hey, Richter," called Kean. "I'm going out with Mumble to get some birds. Want to come?"

The yellow-haired Terran declined, but suggested that some of the others might go. Kean spoke into a little machine connected to the ship by wires, and was soon joined by two more Terrans. One was Lombardi, the thick one.

THE PARTY started off. As Myru led them into the hills, he saw that Lombardi was more interested in shrubs, trees, and blossoms than in helping to find birds. The third, called Harris, continually scampered off to chip at rocks.

"Why does he do that?" Myru asked Kean.

"To see what your planet is made of. It is really very much like our own, enough to make an extremely convenient colony."

"Colony?"

"A place for some of us to live in this part of the Galaxy so our starships would have a supply base."

"As you say," agreed Myru, but he was thinking hard.

He recalled the troubles that had followed the bearing of his own civilization to some of the outlying islands. It was told about the market-place that few of the island-people still survived, though Myru himself had once journeyed to the seacoast to see the great ships that sailed back with goods from the conquered lands.

By the middle of the day, he had

(Continued on page 86)

led them through the narrow range of hills. He now carried a number of birds Kean had shot down, and no longer leaped into the air at the report of the Terran's weapon. He was, in fact, wondering how he could manage to borrow the other—the rifle. He paused on the crest of the last hill, above the rolling dunes of the desert that lay beyond.

"Over that way," he said, pointing with one of his unmaimed arms, "lies the road to the mountain-cities. There is much sand in between."

"What was it, Harris?" Kean asked his companion.

"Hard to say just offhand," murmured the other Terran. "Not a seabottom. Maybe over-cultivated once."

"Did your people ever live out there?" Kean asked Myru.

"Long ago, I think. If you look that way... where the hills curve out... can maybe see old, old building sticking out of sand."

The Terrans squinted against the brightness of the desert.

"By golly, he's right!" exclaimed Harris. "What say we take a walk over there?"

"Not... like," Myru demurred. "It's too late. Be dark before we come back through hills. It is further than shows."

He thought Kean was not displeased; it had been a long walk. He let the Terrans make him promise to show them the ruins the next day, and they started back.

Before they parted at the ship, he offered to try hunting a *kuugh* if Kean would lend him the rifle. The Terran leaped at the chance, although Myru thought the others were inclined to disapprove.

"What harm could it do?" demanded Kean. "It's only a superslingshot!"

"Some... things... are good at copying," muttered Harris.

"Aw, suppose they do. What good will it do them against fission-torpedoes or automatic-cannon? Not to

mention the biological weapons we carry in case of mass hostilities!"

Myru listened with interest, but the others yielded to Kean's vehemence. Accepting the rifle and brief instruction in its use, the Vunorian withdrew. On the road again, he struck out for the city at a steady trot, pausing only once—to disguise the rifle in a bundle of dead branches such as he might openly carry home for kindling.

DUSK FELL, shortly after he had reached his hovel, and Myru crept forth to seek out certain individuals among the riff-raff of the city; some, sniffing profit to themselves, were eager to obtain what he wanted. A few were annoyed at being diverted from their own little coups, planned to net them a money pouch or two.

None, however, bluntly refused Myru's request; for it was widely told that, though under the Keviu's displeasure, he still had the ears of former comrades among the soldiery. A prudent thief avoided unnecessary grudges.

Myru arranged that they should meet him in the hills at dawn with what they could steal. Then he went unobtrusively to the guard-post of his cousin, Rawm e Decj, and waited till that officer came out to make his last round of the night.

Myru attracted his attention and moved cautiously up the road.

"What now?" demanded Rawm, as Myru drew him into the deeper shadows of a spreading bush.

"I have had an idea," said Myru, and proceeded to describe it to his cousin...



Early the next day, Myru surveyed the sand-choked entrance to the old ruin. He held the Terran rifle in one hand. With his other uninjured hand, he beckoned the nearest of the score of ill-clad, shifty fellows behind him. "The old gate is still there," he said.

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

"See if you can push it open."

Three of them moved forward with an ill grace, but the curiosity Myru had been careful to leave unsatisfied kept them from grumbling too openly. They heaved and panted, and the dried wood of the gate squeaked in protest.

Another of the band, a hulking fellow who had lost one of his front eyes, slogged through the sand to help. Myru recalled him as Yorn—a notorious robber who went by no name, but who cut throats efficiently nevertheless.

With the added weight, the gate rasped open reluctantly on its ancient hinges. When the others hesitated, Myru led the way inside. There was little rubble in the interior, which was a single chamber with bricked-up windows, such as might once have been a warehouse.

"Good," he approved. "Not much sand got inside. All right—everybody come in! There's nothing here to hurt. Bring the spades and brooms...and let me see what you have in your pouches!"

"You expect us to sweep out the sand?" demanded Yorn. "What ails your wits, Myru e Chib? Where's the profit?"

"There will be enough profit for all, and yet more," Myru retorted. "It is true I did not tell you how it is to be won. I will give you a hint—you will be shoveling more than sand!"

He glanced around at them, forced as usual to turn his head to accomplish it. They had gathered in a little group and were watching him uneasily.

But far enough inside the gateway, he thought, slipping two of his thin fingers inside the loop of metal guarding the firing lever of the Terran weapon.

"You are really digging at the foundations of the Keviu's throne!" he told them.

He saw that the idea scared them, and felt the old anger growing inside him. "Why not?" he shouted. "Are

you afraid for your lives? Look at you! Do you live so well it matters? Why not take a chance on becoming the masters instead of the outcasts?"

"That's all very well, Myru e Chib," said an ugly fellow with dull, greenish scales. "but how is this wonder to be done?"

"By you—and some others I know of—doing what I tell you," snapped Myru. "Believe me, I have planned carefully."

"Hoh!" said the green-scaled one.

He turned toward the doorway, through which the heat and light of the desert reached in like a fiery hand.

"Wait," suggested Yorn, the robber. "He may know *something* of value. No harm counting what is in his money-pouch before we pass him by."

The other paused, as did two or three who had drifted after him.

"First," said Myru quickly, "I have you; and there are more such as we in the city who will follow the glint of silver past the spear points of the Keviu's guards."

"But such long spears they have," murmured Yorn.

"Secondly," Myru continued, "though I will speak no names, I know a few soldiers, who in turn know others; they are nearly as hungry as we."

There was a shuffling of feet at the reminder of his contacts, and other signs of awakening interest. He even heard a few admiring grunts of "Hoh!" His former position and the cause of his dismissal were common knowledge.

"And thirdly, I have the friendship of the Terrans, who are very knowing people and have in their ship such weapons as you have never imagined."

The green-scaled one hesitated at that. "Have *they* promised you help?" he demanded.

"Not yet," admitted Myru, "but I will arrange— Wait!"

But the other had turned to the exit once more. Yorn sidled forward with

DYNAMIC Science Fiction

a worried expression, two of his hands groping at the rope-girdle of his faded blue tunic for the notorious knives he carried there. "He will tell," he murmured.

"I warn you, wait!" called Myru, but not very loudly.

Something in his tone impelled the deserter to look around. Myru pointed the Terran rifle at the silhouette against the bright sand, and pulled the firing-lever.

The report echoed between the clay brick walls, freezing the group of thieves in their tracks. It was followed by a meaty thud as the body dropped to the sand-veiled flagging and rolled a little way into the chamber. The finger of light from outside illuminated a purple-oozing hole above the eyes.

Better than I thought I could do, Myru congratulated himself. How convenient of him to help me show the scum what power I hold!

"Stop carressing my weapon with your eyes, Yorn!" he said calmly. "Mine it will remain, though I have other means of doing what I plan. Do I still sound crazed?"

"I would not say so," answered Yorn. "I think perhaps we will sweep out the sand now. The next I will leave to you."

3



MYRU STOOD quietly aside as the robber served out brooms and spades, and pushed the others into a line across the hall to attack the layer of sand. Then he beckoned Yorn to join him beside the pouches brought by the thieves. "Open them," he ordered, "and let us see what they found during their night-calls!"

Yorn looked surprised at the variety

of statuettes of small animals or fish that had formerly decorated homes in the city, but he removed their protective-wrappings wordlessly and dusted off ledges about the hall at Myru's bidding. The latter followed him, setting the statuettes wherever they would fit.

By late afternoon, the interior was clear of sand; the walls, and a few stone tables put together after being dug out the sand, were populated by carvings of Vunor's fauna, Myru's henchmen slumped upon the cool stone floor to rest.

"I must go now, Yorn," said their leader. "Finish smoothing the sand outside so it will not look new, and have someone bury *that* before the heat makes it smell any worse!"

"Where are you going?" asked Yorn, with the assurance of the secondary command he had assumed.

"I must visit the Terrans," Myru told him. "If all goes well, we will return for a short visit—so I want you to have everyone out of here before dark. Wait for me tonight along the road to the city."

He paused outside, squinting in the glare.

If anyone watches from the hills, I would never see him, he decided, and set off toward them at a brisk trot.

Shadows were lengthening as he approached the Terran ship. Most of the aliens were sitting on the ground outside, about an open fire which they seemed to enjoy.

As would I—if I lived in a palace, thought Myru.

He edged into the circle of light and waited until he was noticed.

"Well, well, what brings you out here in the evening?" asked Kean.

"I think," said Myru, "that maybe you like to see the temple in the sands now."

"Now?"

"It is a good time. No one will

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

dare go there at night, being afraid of spirits."

Kean laughed before he could control himself in the interests of courtesy. The other Terrans exchanged glances in their head-turning fashion, and Myru knew that they were amused.

"All right!" said Kean. "I'll go see what it's like. Who else?"

The stone-chipper named Harris, and two others, decided that the tour might relieve their boredom; they went with Kean to get weapons. When they had made ready, Myru led them back the way he had come.

IT WAS DARK by now, and Myru had some difficulty until he reached to open expanse of the desert. In the light of the stars, his vision was at least as good as that of the Terrans, to judge by the number of times they stumbled. For the sake of impressing them, Myru cautioned them often to make no noise.

Finally, the party reached the ruined building. Warning the Terrans again to be quiet, Myru borrowed one of the mechanical-torches he had forbidden them to light in the open, and slipped inside. One flash of the cold-light showed him that all had been left as he desired.

When he judged that the Terrans had had time to become sufficiently uneasy, listening to the whisper of sand blowing in the chilling night-breeze, he padded outside and called them. Keane exclaimed in subdued tones at the sight of the statues facing him from every ledge and niche.

"What are they here for?" he asked Myru, as his friend wandered about in a group, examining the Vunorian "temple" and conversing quietly.

"It is a temple," answered Myru.

"Yes, of course! But why the animals? Say—*there's* a kind you never brought me!"

"It swims in the sea," Myru alibied. "The images? They were set

here by those desiring to honor their ancestors, or maybe to make them friends."

"What do you mean?"

"It is believed on Vunor that each person, when he passes, will be one of these...will become some animal...do I say right?"

"Oh-h-h!" Kean exclaimed with sudden understanding. "A sort of reincarnation. I might have guessed it!"

He had to explain the word to Myru. Then the other Terrans gathered around as the latter further informed them that the reincarnation worked only in one direction—animals did not later become people, so that one had no need to worry about one's offspring too. A new thought struck Kean.

"But why is it that this doesn't seem to bother *you*? You came out here in the dark when none of the other natives would, and you bring me specimens to dissect. How do you know I didn't cut up your own grandfather?"

"My male ancestors," said Myru, "belong to one of the fish clans. Besides—like myself—many of us have sunk to the point of not really believing it any more."

"Oh, I see," laughed Kean, apparently relieved. "How about the official...your whaddyacallim...Keviu?"

"He is very strict about it," said Myru. "Even to the point of...of..."

"Fanaticism?" prompted Kean, as if preparing to hear the worst.

"Yes, I think. He does not like anything new—even beings from the stars—and he has those in his palace with long, not-too-sharp knives to speak with such that disagree."

He could not tell whether Kean looked worried. The others muttered some words he did not know, but they were a good deal more quiet on the way back to their ship. Myru left them there, after promising Kean again to hunt for a *kuugh* the

DYNAMIC Science Fiction

next day, and trotted warily along the road to the city.

NOT FAR from the outlying hovels, he thought he heard a noise. Then a cautious murmur reached him. "Myru e Chib?"

"As you say. Yorn?"

The robber and the others flowed silently out of the darkness to gather around him.

"Are they willing?" demanded the three-eyed cutthroat, shivering in the growing chill of midnight.

"It takes but a short talk tomorrow to arrange things," said Myru cautiously. "Meanwhile, it would be well to make ourselves invisible against the rise of dawn. Are all with us?"

"Everyone!" replied Yorn, with grim emphasis.

"Remain so loyal," said Myru, "and each shall have the looting of a palace! But first, we must enter the city while darkness yet covers us; such a band approaching in the light would look suspicious."

"Any *one* of us, Myru e Chib, would look suspicious by daylight!" said someone in the darkness.

Myru snorted "Hoh!" with them, then told Yorn to follow him at a hundred paces. He headed for the guard-post, walking slowly as he drew near.

He did not see the sentry huddled against the wall until the fellow challenged him in a low voice. Myru halted instantly.

A good sign! he exulted. *Normally, he would shout out, caring not whom he caught.*

He approached slowly upon command and murmured his name.

"Hoh! Well met, Myru e Chib!" said the soldier, with the greater politeness than Myru had recently enjoyed. "I will tell Master Rawm you have arrived."

"Wait!" said Myru. "Tell me—is all well?"

"For us in this post, I can say

'yes.' Rawm e Deej has not told us more, but after a long day in the city, he returned with a cheerful look about him."

"Good, then! Call him, but pay no heed to any friends of mine you may see on the road!"

Within a very few moments, Rawm hurried out, breathing on the sentry's back.

"Myru!" he greeted his cousin. "Come inside! I have much to tell you!"

"First—have you room to hide a score of my friends?"

"A score of—" Rawm broke off to peer into the darkness. After Myru explained in a few hasty words, he said, "Bring them in quietly. They can find places for the night in the barracks. All my spearmen are ready to follow you."

"My cousin!" said Myru.

He moved a few steps down the road and called softly to Yorn. When the group had been guided into the unlighted building by Rawm, Myru drew the robber aside.

"Choose two or three well-known as secretive," he instructed, "and go into the city proper. With luck, you should be able to double your numbers from those padding the alleys. I will ask Rawm to send a soldier or two through the streets, so you will not be interfered with."

WHEN YORN had departed with a taciturn pair of thieves, preceded by a "patrol" of Rawm's guard, the cousins sat down in the kitchen room of the post. Rawm told a cheerful tale of disgruntled soldiery.

"Except the company of thirty-two palace-guardsmen," he added, after detailing those who had fervently sworn to aid in any uprising against the detested Loyu e Huj. "They will *have* to be loyal, for it is common knowledge that he has enriched them with the estates and wives of many he has had executed,

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

or has forced to flee into the desert."

"And the bulk of the military is with us, so easily? You must be more popular than even I hoped, Rawm."

"Hoh! Let me tell you something! You are not the only cousin in the city who has met the Keviu's knifemen; you just lived longer than most. There is many a score to settle!"

"Perhaps I had not noticed," said Myru, "for thinking of my own. May no mishap befall the monster without me at his side!"

"Exactly as you say!" Rawm endorsed feelingly.

"And now," said Myru, "show me a sleeping-place. I must go to the Terran ship at dawn."

Rawm woke him while it was still dark, fed him hot soup, and sent out a pair of soldiers to see that the way was clear. Myru passed them just outside the city.

"Do not look so eager with those spears," he advised, "or things may be thought!"

"Hoh!" retorted one of the soldiers, cheerfully stroking the broad blades of his weapons. "They will be brief thoughts, then. Until we meet... Keviu!"

"Hoh!" murmured Myru in his turn, pleased despite himself. "Until we meet!"



He reached the Terran ship before any of the aliens had opened the round door in its flank, and squatted patiently beside the ashes of the dead fire while the sky grew bright. At last, the red-thatched crewman appeared, and climbed down the ladder to the ground.

"Hey, there!" he greeted Myru. "Looking for Kean?"

"Yes," said the Vunorian. "I have a tale for him."

The crewman shouted up to another who was just starting to climb down. The summons was relayed inside the ship, and Kean presently appeared. Myru discreetly led him

aside from the growing group and the equipment they were passing down to use in their day's pursuit of knowledge.

"I am sorry to take you to the temple," he told the Terran.

"Why?"

"I am told by a friend who serves in the Keviu's palace that an early worshipper saw our tracks in sand; the Keviu is sending soldiers to see."

Kean whistled, a sound displeasing to Myru, and one which he interpreted to indicate concern. The other Terrans, when called over by Kean, also acted annoyed.

"Will they try to make trouble?" Harris asked Myru.

"The present Keviu is famous for his strictness. It is often said people wish there could be a kinder Keviu."

"Well, there *will* be, if he tries to monkey with us!" Harris threatened. "A couple of you fellows chase up the ladder and bring down a few guns and grenades. Pistols ought to do for these clowns."

"By the way," said Kean, looking at Myru, "where's the rifle I lent you to get a *kuugh* with?"

"I left it with a friend, an officer of the city guard."

"What?"

The others somehow looked as startled as Kean sounded.

"How come you know an officer so well?" asked one.

"I was once a captain myself," said Myru, hoping they could not tell how very far from that state his faded tunic appeared. "To tell the truth, I can claim to be relative of the Keviu—by mating... what is your word... marriage?"

"Yeah? Then why do you help us and take us to places like that temple?" demanded Kean. "How do we know you didn't report us yourself?"

"Hoh! Not likely!" said Myru. "After I caught small animals for you?"

"What has that to do with it?"

"I do not know your feeling," said the Vunorian with his best dignity,

DYNAMIC Science Fiction

"but I do not like to be cut up how you cut *them* up—which will be if the Keviu finds out! *His* ancestors are *pori!*"

"Jack," said Harris to one of the others, "*will* you get out a couple of rifles and grenades for the ten of us! This might end up nasty business."

Myru watched two of the Terrans hurry up the ladder.

"Of course, if *I* were Keviu, as friends would like," he said, still looking up. "I would not be so strict on some things. I have learned from you the good of getting knowledge."

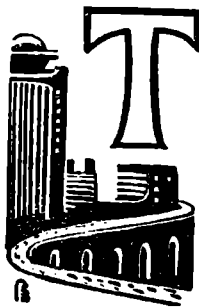
Kean raised one of his two hands with a thick finger pointing at Myru. The others were quiet.

"And *you* are in line to rule the city?" he demanded intently.

"When the present Keviu dies," claimed Myru, feeling it was very likely going to be the truth. "It may not be so long, if I am truly told how many have said they would like to shorten his life."

"Wait here a minute!" said Kean, a trifle more abruptly than Myru thought polite.

4



THE TERRANS gathered into a tight little group and talked excitedly in their booming, sing-song voices. Myru strained to hear but the speech was too rapid.

But I think, he told himself, that they see the value of "having eight fingers inside the palace," as we say. They must be planning a colony on Vunor.

He was not disappointed when the Terrans regrouped about him. Kean opened negotiations with blunt directness. "Do you think our...influence...would help you reach a place of authority in the city?"

"It would, surely," said Myru, making certain they saw him stare hard at the weapons being brought down the ladder.

"And you say you would have a more *friendly* attitude?"

Myru looked into his eyes in a manner he had observed was much used by Terrans. "I admire much your interest in finding knowledge," he said. "If your knowledge is power for me, my power will be used to make more knowledge."

Kean's little mouth twisted in a pleased grimace, imitated by the other Terrans. One of them muttered something about having a tame dictator in their pocket, but Myru was careful to give no sign of having understood.

"If you only walk into the city with me," he suggested, "maybe we see how unliked the Keviu is. I have many friends!"

Kean hesitated, then seized a rifle. "Come on!" he urged. "If we walk in and there's nothing to it, we'll just act like tourists. If the little devil can really deliver—well, there's nothing like snapping up a good deal fast!"

"How about a guard for the ship?" asked Richter.

"Maybe we ought—no! Better land on them in town with everything we've got before they start nosing around out here. Detach the ladder and let it go at that!"

Two of the Terrans unhooked the ladder and laid it on the ground.

"All right, Myru!" said Kean. "Lead the way!"

Trotting loosely to keep up with the Terrans' long strides, Myru felt an exultation he had not hoped to experience for years.

Soon, Loyu e Huj! he thought. *Soon we will settle scores!*

Even should the day go against him, he could die comforted by the chance to take open action against his enemy.

At the guard-post, Rawm and his soldiers swarmed out to meet them.

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

The Terrans clutched their weapons, then looked pleased at Myru's reception. The spearmen and Myru's band of outcasts, swollen by Yorn's recruiting, were correspondingly impressed by his alien supporters.

"The chips are down, I guess," remarked Kean, Myru taking it to be some Terran proverb. "Let's move before this crowd is noticed."

They know what to do, thought Myru, as if they have done it before, on other worlds.

"As you say," he agreed. "Rawm, are the others posts ready?"

For answer, his cousin motioned to a soldier, who ran into the barracks. A moment later, a thick cloud of smoke issued from the chimney of the fireplace in the kitchen room.

"Now it will be a race," said Rawm, "to see who reaches the palace gates first!"

IT WAS easier than Myru had ever dreamed. The palace-guards, understanding the roar of the less favored spearmen streaming into the great square from all posts of the city, made a show of holding the gates. A few of the Terrans threw their little bombs.

When the smoke and splinters cleared away, there was an awed silence. Rawm, with his soldier's instinct for exploiting the moment, hurled a spear at a blackened figure struggling to rise from the wreckage of the gates. A louder roar went up.

Myru seized a spare lance from a soldier and led a mad rush through the palace halls to the throne chamber, where the quaking Keviu was pounced upon amid screams of triumph.

"Let me, Myru Keviu!" pleaded Yorn, brandishing two purple-stained knives as long as spearheads.

"Not so hastily," said Myru, holding his spear in one hand and letting the fingers of the other left to him rub gently over his stumps. "Escort him to the place of knives beneath the palace, Yorn. Tell the unspeak-

ables there that I *may* spare their lives if they are artful with him!"

Amid the rioting, he walked deliberately to the throne of silver and polished wood, and sat upon it. A fresh racket broke out. "What is that?" he asked Rawm.

"They have reached the harem upstairs," said his cousin. "I had better stop them before you are completely robbed of your inheritance."

"No," Myru halted him. "Pick out those who did well in the fighting and let each have his choice; you know which to bring to me!"

"Hoh! But I do!" said Rawm.

"And one other thing," Myru added. "Ask the Terrans to take up positions in the entrance chamber and watch the square against a rescue attempt."

"Who would rescue Loyu?" demanded Rawm.

"Never mind; I shall have other instructions later."

When two of Rawm's soldiers returned with Komyll, who wore a shimmering robe of silver cloth, her greeting was a shock to Myru.

"You barbarian!" she spat. "Do *you* actually think to hold the Keviu's throne? Loyu e Huj has powerful allies, whose armies will march tomorrow!"

"Hoh!" said Myru. "Let them; the worse for them! You need pretend no more; I, too, have friends—from the Terran ship!"

Komyll ignored his gesture to approach the throne. "You filthy, mutilated thief!" she raged. "What should I pretend? That I did not like being the Keviu's favorite? Get back to the ditches where you belong! You will be hunted out of them soon enough!"

Myru stared at her, feeling as if he had caught a spear-butt in the thick of the belly. It was such a moment as when he had seen the Terran ship land—the unbelievable lingering before one's eyes to prove that it was real.

It seemed that the hall had been

DYNAMIC Science Fiction

quiet a long time before he found his voice. A foot scraped the floor as someone fidgeted. "Perhaps not very soon," he croaked at last. "Not soon enough for you to enjoy, I regret. Guards!"

Two of Rawm's soldiers stepped forward.

"See that there is a place for her with Loyu e Huj; a Keviu should not pass unattended. But... tell the knifemen to do it without pain..."

He continued to sit there, feeling cold and empty. After a while, he noticed that the guards come back, alone. Still later, he roused himself to give Rawm further orders, which were followed by a distant commotion and banging to Terran weapons.

THEREAFTER, Rawm stood before the throne, receiving reports for Myru, giving orders in a quiet voice, or sending this or that one on errands. He kept a side eye anxiously on his cousin.

"Rawm!" said the new ruler at last.

The soldier hurried over.

"Now, the Terrans!"

"Yes, Myru Keviu."

"To you, 'Myru,'" said the latter.

"I remember who fed me when it was unwise, and who fought for me today. I do not forget; though I may remember too long. Now, the Terrans!"

He thought he knew their features well enough to judge that they were angry at being led in with their arms bound and under guard. The soldiers reported that they had been forced to kill one of the ten. The aliens, reacting viciously at being taken by surprise, had killed two soldiers and a thief with their small guns, before being swarmed under.

"What are you doing?" demanded Kean, quite red in the face.

"I have nothing against you," said Myru, "but I am learning that one in my position may leave no small fire untended, lest it burn down his pal-

ace. Do you want anything before you die?"

Kean gaped. Some of the others growled words Myru did not know, but he thought it best not to show ignorance.

"For me to let you go back to your ship and leave would be very foolish," he said.

"But we had an agreement!" sputtered Kean. "You were to help us if we helped you!"

"Partly. I would be your slave-master when you send your people to make a... colony."

"Okay!" snarled Richter. "Maybe that *was* in the backs of our minds; shall we tell your people you were willing?"

"Hoh!" said Myru. "Which you will tell, in *your* language?"

That silenced them, till Kean rallied with a new thought.

"You have won this trick," he admitted, "but you will be more foolish to lose the advantage. We have much to teach you."

MYRU LEANED back and stared at him. "You are telling me again that knowledge is power?"

"Obviously!" said Kean. "Look at what it did for you today!"

"Today proves only that I had one kind of knowledge and you another; perhaps *mine* made power."

Kean looked angry and disbelieving.

"Your weapons helped," said Myru, "but better was your advice which you often gave me—to observe and learn against the time when knowledge would be useful. I observed *you*!"

The Terrans were all silent again, and he saw that they did not like him to say such things. They were star-travellers, accustomed to gather, not yield, knowledge.

"I told you of the *kuugh* in the hills, but there is no animal called 'kuugh.' See my people! Do they know the word?"

Kean did not look at the Vunorians in the throne chamber, but watched Myru intently, waiting.

KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

"Then I told you about Vunorians becoming little animals, but they do not believe so. I showed you the temple, but it was just an old ruin with stolen statues."

"So it was all a trick!" snorted Kean disgustedly. "Well, you should hardly sneer if the knowledge you gave us was false!"

"Did *you* tell *me* all truth?" asked Myru, beckoning to the guards. "You know so much, you forget simple ways of thought. I think maybe you have gone to planets having animals stranger than my *kuugh*. You maybe saw many worlds with strange temples and many peoples with strange beliefs, so that nothing is new to you. Even, maybe, you found among the stars those who would sell their own kind to do what you say."

He could not read the expression on the faces of the Terrans, but he hoped it was shame. That would

make it easier for Myru to do what he had to do.

"You have seen that any thing is possible," he finished, "so—you believed *anything* I told you. You can do all things except see simple truth in open daylight. Do you call that knowledge power?"

They flung hard, defiant looks at him as the guards led them away, but there was nothing they could do. Myru was sad for them—for they were great in their way—until he stepped out on an upper balcony later, for air. Then he saw the stars beginning to glitter in the moonless dusk of Vunor's sky, and he forced down the pity that might weaken him.

"So they would make Vunor their 'colony'!" he murmured, staring upward into the heavens. "Not while Myru e Chib lives! We will be ready for the next ones!"

