

# PLANET STORIES



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PLANET STORIES Published bi-monthly by Love Romances Pub. Co., Inc., 130 W. 42 St., New York 18, N. Y. The entire contents of this magazine are copyrighted, 1951, by Love Romances Publishing Co., Inc. Registered as second class matter August 15, 1950, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879. All rights reserved. While due care is always exercised, the publishers will not be responsible for the return of unsolicited manuscripts. Price 25¢ per copy. For advertising rates address: Advertising Director, Fiction House, Inc., 130 W. 42 St., New York 18, N. Y. Printed in U. S. A.



# LORD of a THOUSAND SUNS

*A Man without a World, this 1,000,000-year-old  
Daryesh! Once Lord of a Thousand Suns, now  
condemned to rove the spaceways in alien form,  
searching for love, for life, for the great lost Vwyrdda.*

“**Y**ES, YOU’LL FIND ALMOST anything man has ever imagined, somewhere out in the Galaxy,” I said. “There are so damned many millions of planets, and such a fantastic variety of surface conditions and of life evolving to meet them, and of intelligence and civilization appearing in that life. Why, I’ve been on worlds with fire-breathing dragons, and on worlds where dwarfs fought

by **POUI ANDERSON**



*He saw fire blossom in space as the great guns of Vwyrdda opened up.*

things that could pass for the goblins our mothers used to scare us with, and on a planet where a race of witches lived—telepathic pseudohypnosis, you know—oh, I'll bet there's not a tall story or fairy tale ever told which doesn't have some kind of counterpart somewhere in the universe."

Laird nodded. "Uh-huh," he answered, in that oddly slow and soft voice of his. "I once let a genie out of a bottle."

"Eh? What happened?"

"It killed me."

I opened my mouth to laugh, and then took a second glance at him and shut it again. He was just too dead-pan serious about it. Not poker-faced, the way a good actor can be when he's slipping over a tall one—no, there was a sudden misery behind his eyes, and somehow it was mixed with the damndest cold humor.

I didn't know Laird very well. Nobody did. He was out most of the time on Galactic Survey, prowling a thousand eldritch planets never meant for human eyes. He came back to the Solar System more rarely and for briefer visits than anyone else in his job, and had less to say about what he had found.

A huge man, six-and-a-half feet tall, with dark aquiline features and curiously brilliant greenish-grey eyes, middle-aged now though it didn't show except at the temples. He was courteous enough to everyone, but shortspoken and slow to laugh. Old friends, who had known him thirty years before when he was the gayest and most reckless officer in the Solar Navy, thought something during the Revolt had changed him more than any psychologist would admit was possible. But he had never said anything about it, merely resigning his commission after the war and going into Survey.

We were sitting alone in a corner of the lounge. The Lunar branch of the Explorers' Club maintains its building outside the main dome of Selene Center, and we were sitting beside one of the great windows, drinking Centaurian sidcars and swapping the inevitable shop-talk. Even Laird indulged in that, though I suspected more because of the information he could

get than for any desire of companionship.

Behind us, the long quiet room was almost empty. Before us, the window opened on the raw magnificence of moonscape, a sweep of crags and cliffs down the crater wall to the riven black plains, washed in the eerie blue of Earth's light. Space blazed above us, utter black and a million sparks of frozen flame.

"Come again?" I said.

HE LAUGHED, without much humor. "I might as well tell you," he said. "You won't believe it, and even if you did it'd make no difference. Sometimes I tell the story—alcohol makes me feel like it—I start remembering old times . . ."

He settled farther back in his chair. "Maybe it wasn't a real genie," he went on. "More of a ghost, perhaps. That was a haunted planet. They were great a million years before man existed on Earth. They spanned the stars and they knew things the present civilization hasn't even guessed at. And then they died. Their own weapons swept them away in one burst of fire, and only broken ruins were left—ruins and desert, and the ghost who lay waiting in that bottle."

I signalled for another round of drinks, wondering what he meant, wondering just how sane that big man with the worn rocky face was. Still—you never know. I've seen things out beyond that veil of stars which your maddest dreams never hinted at. I've seen men carried home mumbling and empty-eyed, the hollow cold of space filling their brains where something had broken the thin taut wall of their reason. They say spacemen are a credulous breed. Before Heaven, they have to be!

"You don't mean New Egypt?" I asked.

"Stupid name. Just because there are remnants of a great dead culture, they have to name it after an insignificant valley of ephemeral peasants. I tell you, the men of Vwyrdda were like gods, and when they were destroyed whole suns were darkened by the forces they used. Why, they killed off Earth's dinosaurs in a day, millions of years ago, and only used one ship to do it."

"How in hell do you know that? I didn't think the archeologists had deciphered their records."

"They haven't. All our archeologists will ever know is that the Vwyrddans were a race of remarkably humanoid appearance, with a highly advanced interstellar culture wiped out about a million Earth-years ago. Matter of fact, I don't really know that they did it to Earth, but I do know that they had a regular policy of exterminating the great reptiles of terrestroid planets with an eye to later colonization, and I know that they got this far, so I suppose our planet got the treatment too." Laird accepted his fresh drink and raised the glass to me. "Thanks. But now do be a good fellow and let me ramble on in my own way.

"It was—let me see—thirty-three years ago now, when I was a bright young lieutenant with bright young ideas. The Revolt was in full swing then, and the Janyards held all that region of space, out Sagittari way you know. Things looked bad for Sol then—I don't think it's ever been appreciated how close we were to defeat. They were poised to drive right through our lines with their battle-fleets, slash past our frontiers, and hit Earth itself with the rain of hell that had already sterilized a score of planets. We were fighting on the defensive, spread over several million cubic light-years, spread horribly thin. Oh, bad!

"Vwyrdda—New Egypt—had been discovered and some excavation done shortly before the war began. We knew about as much then as we do now. Especially, we knew that the so-called Valley of the Gods held more relics than any other spot on the surface. I'd been quite interested in the work, visited the planet myself, even worked with the crew that found and restored that gravitomagnetic generator—the one which taught us half of what we know now about g-m fields.

"It was my young and fanciful notion that there might be more to be found, somewhere in that labyrinth—and from study of the reports I even thought I knew about what and where it would be. One of the weapons that had novaed suns, a

million years ago—

"The planet was far behind the Janyard lines, but militarily valueless. They wouldn't garrison it, and I was sure that such semi-barbarians wouldn't have my idea, especially with victory so close. A one-man sneakboat could get in readily enough—it just isn't possible to blockade a region of space; too damned inhumanly big. We had nothing to lose but me, and maybe a lot to gain, so in I went.

"I made the planet without trouble and landed in the Valley of the Gods and began work. And that's where the fun started."

Laird laughed again, with no more mirth than before.

THERE WAS A MOON hanging low over the hills, a great scarred shield thrice the size of Earth's, and its chill white radiance filled the Valley with colorless light and long shadows. Overhead flamed the incredible sky of the Sagittarian regions, thousands upon thousands of great blazing suns swarming in strings and clusters and constellations strange to human eyes, blinking and glittering in the thin cold air. It was so bright that Laird could see the fine patterns of his skin, loops and whorls on the numbed fingers that groped against the pyramid. He shivered in the wind that streamed past him, blowing dust devils with a dry whisper, searching under his clothes to sheathe his flesh in cold. His breath was ghostly white before him, the bitter air felt liquid when he breathed.

Around him loomed the fragments of what must have been a city, now reduced to a few columns and crumbling walls held up by the lava which had flowed. The stones reared high in the unreal moonlight, seeming almost to move as the shadows and the drifting sand passed them. Ghost city. Ghost planet. He was the last life that stirred on its bleak surface.

But somewhere above that surface—

What was it, that descending hum high in the sky, sweeping closer out of stars and moon and wind? Minutes ago the needle on his gravitomagnetic detector had wavered down in the depths of the pyramid. He had hurried up and now stood looking and listening and feeling his heart

turn stiff.

*No, no, no—not a Janyard ship, not now—it was the end of everything if they came.*

Laird cursed with a hopeless fury. The wind caught his mouthings and blew them away with the scudding sand, buried them under the everlasting silence of the valley. His eyes traveled to his sneakboat. It was invisible against the great pyramid—he'd taken that much precaution, shoveling a low grave of sand over it—but, if they used metal detectors that was valueless. He was fast, yes, but almost unarmed; they could easily follow his trail down into the labyrinth and locate the vault.

Lord if he had led them here—if his planning and striving had only resulted in giving the enemy the weapon which would destroy Earth—

His hand closed about the butt of his blaster. Silly weapon, stupid popgun—what could he do?

Decision came. With a curse, he whirled and ran back into the pyramid.

His flash lit the endless downward passages with a dim bobbing radiance, and the shadows swept above and behind and marched beside, the shadows of a million years closing in to smother him. His boots slammed against the stone floor, *thud-thud-thud*—the echoes caught the rhythm and rolled it booming ahead of him. A primitive terror rose to drown his dismay; he was going down into the grave of a thousand millennia, the grave of the gods, and it took all the nerve he had to keep running and never look back. He didn't dare look back.

Down and down and down, past this winding tunnel, along this ramp, through this passageway into the guts of the planet. A man could get lost here. A man could wander in the cold and the dark and the echoes till he died. It had taken him weeks to find his way into the great vault, and only the clues given by Murchison's reports had made it possible at all. Now—

night. It was fifty feet high, that door. He fled past it like an ant and came into the pyramid storehouse.

His flash gleamed off metal, glass, substances he could not identify that had lain sealed against a million years till he came to wake the machines. What they were, he did not know. He had energized some of the units, and they had hummed and flickered, but he had not dared experiment. His idea had been to rig an antigrav unit which would enable him to haul the entire mass of it up to his boat. Once he was home, the scientists could take over. But now—

He skinned his teeth in a wolfish grin and switched on the big lamp he had installed. White light flooded the tomb, shining darkly back from the monstrous bulks of things he could not use, the wisdom and techniques of a race which had spanned the stars and moved planets and endured for fifty million years. Maybe he could puzzle out the use of something before the enemy came. Maybe he could wipe them out in one demoniac sweep—just like a stereofilm hero, jeered his mind—or maybe he could simply destroy it all, keep it from Janyard hands.

He should have provided against this. He should have rigged a bomb, to blow the whole pyramid to hell—

With an effort, he stopped the frantic racing of his mind and looked around. There were paintings on the walls, dim with age but still legible, pictographs, meant perhaps for the one who finally found this treasure. The men of New Egypt were shown, hardly distinguishable from humans—dark of skin and hair, keen of feature, tall and stately and robed in living light. He had paid special attention to one representation. It showed a series of actions, like an old time comic-strip—a man taking up a glassy object, fitting it over his head, throwing a small switch. He had been tempted to try it, but—gods, what would it do?

He found the helmet and slipped it gingerly over his skull. It might be some kind of last-ditch chance for him. The thing was cold and smooth and hard, it settled on his head with a slow massive-

**H**E BURST INTO a narrow antechamber. The door he had blasted open leaned drunkenly against a well of

ness that was strangely—*living*. He shuddered and turned back to the machines.

This thing now with the long coil-wrapped barrel—an energy projector of some sort? How did you activate it? Hell-fire, which was the muzzle end?

He heard the faint banging of feet, winding closer down the endless passageways. Gods, his mind groaned. They didn't waste any time, did they?

But they hadn't needed to . . . a metal detector would have located his boat, told them that he was in this pyramid rather than one of the dozen others scattered through the valley. And energy tracers would spot him down here . . .

He doused the light and crouched in darkness behind one of the machines. The blaster was heavy in his hand.

A voice hailed him from outside the door. "It's useless, Solman. Come out of there!"

He bit back a reply and lay waiting.

A woman's voice took up the refrain. It was a good voice, he thought irrelevantly, low and well modulated, but it had an iron ring to it. They were hard, these Janyards, even their women led troops and piloted ships and killed men.

"You may as well surrender, Solman. All you have done has been to accomplish our work for us. We suspected such an attempt might be made. Lacking the archeological records, we couldn't hope for much success ourselves, but since my force was stationed near this sun I had a boat lie in an orbit around the planet with detectors wide open. We trailed you down, and let you work, and now we are here to get what you have found."

"Go back," he bluffed desperately. "I planted a bomb. Go back or I'll set it off."

The laugh was hard with scorn. "Do you think we wouldn't know it if you had? You haven't even a spacesuit on. Come out with your hands up or we'll flood the vault with gas."

Laird's teeth flashed in a snarling grin. "All right," he shouted, only half aware of what he was saying. "All right, you asked for it!"

He threw the switch on his helmet.

IT WAS LIKE a burst of fire in his brain, a soundless roar of splintering darkness. He screamed, half crazy with the fury that poured into him, feeling the hideous thrumming along every nerve and sinew, feeling his muscles cave in and his body hit the floor. The shadows closed in, roaring and rolling, night and death and the wreck of the universe, and high above it all he heard—laughter.

He lay sprawled behind the machine, twitching and whimpering. They had heard him, out in the tunnels, and with slow caution they entered and stood over him and watched his spasms jerk toward stillness.

They were tall and well-formed, the Janyard rebels—Earth had sent her best out to colonize the Sagittarian worlds, three hundred years ago. But the long cruel struggle, conquering and building and adapting to planets that never were and never could be Earth, had changed them, hardened their metal and frozen something in their souls.

Ostensibly it was a quarrel over tariff and trade rights which had led to their revolt against the Empire; actually, it was a new culture yelling to life, a thing born of fire and loneliness and the great empty reaches between the stars, the savage rebellion of a mutant child. They stood impassively watching the body until it lay quiet. Then one of them stooped over and removed the shining glassy helmet.

"He must have taken it for something he could use against us," said the Janyard, turning the helmet in his hands; "but it wasn't adapted to his sort of life. The old dwellers here looked human, but I don't think it went any deeper than their skins."

The woman commander looked down with a certain pity. "He was a brave man," she said.

"Wait—he's still alive, ma'm—he's sitting up—"

Daryesh forced the shaking body to hands and knees. He felt its sickness, wretched and cold in throat and nerves and muscles, and he felt the roiling of fear and urgency in the brain. These were

enemies. There was death for a world and a civilization here. Most of all, he felt the horrible numbness of the nervous system, deaf and dumb and blind, cut off in its house of bone and peering out through five weak senses . . .

Vwyrdda, Vwyrdda, he was a prisoner in a brain without a telepathy transceiver lobe. He was a ghost reincarnated in a thing that was half a corpse!

Strong arms helped him to his feet. "That was a foolish thing to try," said the woman's cool voice.

Daryesh felt strength flowing back as the nervous and muscular and endocrine systems found a new balance, as his mind took over and fought down the gibbering madness which had been Laird. He drew a shuddering breath. Air in his nostrils after—how long? How long had he been dead?

His eyes focused on the woman. She was tall and handsome. Ruddy hair spilled from under a peaked cap, wide-set blue eyes regarded him frankly out of a face sculptured in clean lines and strong curves and fresh young coloring. For a moment he thought of Ilorna, and the old sickness rose—then he throttled it and looked again at the woman and smiled.

It was an insolent grin, and she stiffened angrily. "Who are you, Solman?" she asked.

The meaning was clear enough to Daryesh, who had his—host's—memory patterns and linguistic habits as well as those of Vwyrdda. He replied steadily, "Lieutenant John Laird of the Imperial Solar Navy, at your service. And your name?"

"You are exceeding yourself," she replied with frost in her voice. "But since I will wish to question you at length . . . I am Captain Joana Rostov of the Janyard Fleet. Conduct yourself accordingly."

Daryesh looked around him. This wasn't good. He hadn't the chance now to search Laird's memories in detail, but it was clear enough that this was a force of enemies. The rights and wrongs of a quarrel ages after the death of all that had been Vwyrdda meant nothing to him, but he had to learn more of the situation, and be free to act as he chose. Especially since Laird

would presently be reviving and start to resist.

The familiar sight of the machines was at once steadying and unnerving. There were powers here which could smash planets! It looked barbaric, this successor culture, and in any event the decision as to the use of this leashed hell had to be his. His head lifted in unconscious arrogance. *His!* For he was the last man of Vwyrdda, and they had wrought the machines, and the heritage was his.

He had to escape.

JOANA ROSTOV was looking at him with an odd blend of hard suspicion and half-frightened puzzlement. "There's something wrong about you, Lieutenant," she said. "You don't behave like a man whose project has just gone to smash. What was that helmet for?"

Daryesh shrugged. "Part of a control device," he said easily. "In my excitement I failed to adjust it properly. No matter. There are plenty of other machines here."

"What use to you?"

"Oh—all sorts of uses. For instance, that one over there is a nucleonic disintegrator, and this is a shield projector, and—"

"You're lying. You can't know any more about this than we do."

"Shall I prove it?"

"Certainly not. Come back from there!"

Coldly, Daryesh estimated distances. He had all the superb psychosomatic coordination of his race, the training evolved through millions of years, but the sub-cellular components would be lacking in this body. Still—he had to take the chance.

He launched himself against the Janyard who stood beside him. One hand chopped into the man's larynx, the other grabbed him by the tunic and threw him into the man beyond. In the same movement, Daryesh stepped over the falling bodies, picked up the machine rifle which one had dropped, and slammed over the switch of the magnetic shield projector with its long barrel.

Guns blazed in the dimness. Bullets exploded into molten spray as they hit that fantastic magnetic field. Daryesh, behind



it, raced through the door and out the tunnel.

They'd be after him in seconds, but this was a strong longlegged body and he was getting the feel of it. He ran easily, breathing in coordination with every movement, conserving his strength. He couldn't master control of the involuntary functions yet, the nervous system was too different, but he could last for a long while at this pace.

He ducked into a remembered side passage. A rifle spewed a rain of slugs after him as someone came through the magnetic field. He chuckled in the dark. Unless they had mapped every labyrinthine twist and turn of the tunnels, or had life-energy detectors, they'd never dare trail him. They'd get lost and wander in here till they starved.

Still, that woman had a brain. She'd guess he was making for the surface and the boats, and try to cut him off. It would be a near thing. He settled down to running.

It was long and black and hollow here, cold with age. The air was dry and dusty, little moisture could be left on Vwyrdda. How long has it been? How long has it been?

**J**OHN Laird stirred back toward consciousness, stunned neurones lapsing into familiar pathways of synapse, the pattern which was personality fighting to restore itself. Daryesh stumbled as the groping mind flashed a random command to his muscles, cursed, and willed the other self back to blankness. Hold on, Daryesh, hold on, a few minutes only—

He burst out of a small side entrance and stood in the tumbled desolation of the valley. The keen tenuous air raked his sobbing lungs as he looked wildly around at sand and stone and the alien stars. New constellations—Gods, it had been a long time! The moon was larger than he remembered, flooding the dead landscape with a frosty argence. It must have spiraled close in all those uncounted ages.

The boat! Hellblaze, where was the boat?

He saw the Janyard ship not far away,

a long lean torpedo resting on the dunes, but it would be guarded—no use trying to steal it. Where was this Laird's vessel, then?

Tumbling through a confusion of alien memories, he recalled burying it on the west side . . . No, it wasn't he who had done that but Laird. Damnation, he had to work fast. He plunged around the monstrous eroded shape of the pyramid, found the long mound, saw the moongleam where the wind had blown sand off the metal. What a clumsy pup this Laird was.

He shoveled the sand away from the airlock, scooping with his hands, the breath raw in throat and lungs. Any second now they'd be on him, any instant, and now that they really believed he understood the machines—

The lock shone dully before him, cold under his hands. He spun the outer dog, swearing with a frantic emotion foreign to old Vwyrdda, but that was the habit of his host, untrained psychosomatically, unevolved—There they came!

Scooping up the stolen rifle, Daryesh fired a chattering burst at the group that swarmed around the edge of the pyramid. They tumbled like jointed dolls, screaming in the death-white moonlight. Bullets howled around him and ricocheted off the boat-hull.

He got the lock open as they retreated for another charge. For an instant his teeth flashed under the moon, the cold grin of Daryesh the warrior who had ruled a thousand suns in his day and led the fleets of Vwyrdda.

"Farewell, my lovelies," he murmured, and the remembered syllables of the old planet were soft on his tongue.

Slamming the lock behind him, he ran to the control room, letting John Laird's almost unconscious habits carry him along. He got off to a clumsy start—but then he was climbing for the sky, free and away—

A fist slammed into his back, tossed him in his pilot chair to the screaming roar of sundered metal. Gods, O gods, the Janyards had fired a heavy ship's gun, they'd scored a direct hit on his engines and the boat was whistling groundward again.

Grimly, he estimated that the initial

impetus had given him a good trajectory, that he'd come down in the hills about a hundred miles north of the valley. But then he'd have to run for it, they'd be after him like beasts of prey in their ship --and John Laird would not be denied, muscles were twitching and sinews tightening and throat mumbling insanity as the resurgent personality fought to regain itself. That was one battle he'd have to have out soon!

Well—mentally, Daryesh shrugged. At worst, he could surrender to the Janyards, make common cause with them. It really didn't matter who won this idiotic little war. He had other things to do.

**N**IGHTMARE. John Laird crouched in a wind-worn cave and looked out over hills lit by icy moonlight. Through a stranger's eyes, he saw the Janyard ship landing near the down-glided wreck of his boat, saw the glitter of steel as they poured out and started hunting. Hunting *him*.

Or was it him any longer, was he more than a prisoner in his own skull? He thought back to memories that were not his, memories of himself thinking thoughts that were not his own, himself escaping from the enemy while he, Laird, whirled in a black abyss of half-conscious madness. Beyond that, he recalled his own life, and he recalled another life which had endured a thousand years before it died. He looked out on the wilderness of rock and sand and blowing dust, and remembered it as it had been, green and fair, and remembered that he was Daryesh of Tollogh, who had ruled over whole planetary systems in the Empire of Vwyrdda. And at the same time he was John Laird of Earth, and two streams of thought flowed through the brain, listening to each other, shouting at each other in the darkness of his skull.

A million years! Horror and loneliness and a wrenching sorrow were in the mind of Daryesh as he looked upon the ruin of Vwyrdda. A million years ago!

Who are you? cried Laird. What have you done to me? And even as he asked, memories which were his own now rose to

answer him.

It had been the Erai who rebelled, the Erai whose fathers came from Vwyrdda the fair but who had been strangely altered by centuries of environment. They had revolted against the static rule of the Immortals, and in a century of warfare they had overrun half the Empire and rallied its populations under them. And the Immortals had unleashed their most terrible powers, the sun-smashing ultimate weapons which had lain forbidden in the vaults of Vwyrdda for ten million years. Only—the Erai had known about it. And they had had the weapons too.

In the end, Vwyrdda went under, her fleets broken and her armies reeling in retreat over ten thousand scorched planets. The triumphant Erai had roared in to make an end of the mother world, and nothing in all the mighty Imperial arsenals could stop them now.

Theirs was an unstable culture, it could not endure as that of Vwyrdda had. In ten thousand years or so, they would be gone, and the Galaxy would not have even a memory of that which had been. Which was small help to us, thought Laird grimly, and realized with an icy shock that it had been the thought of Daryesh.

The Vwyrddan's mental tone was, suddenly, almost conversational, and Laird realized what an immensity of trained effort it must have taken to overcome that loneliness of a million years. "See here, Laird, we are apparently doomed to occupy the same body till one of us gets rid of the other, and it is a body which the Janyards seem to want. Rather than fight each other, which would leave the body helpless, we'd better cooperate."

"But—Lord, man! What do you think I am? Do you think I want a vampire like you up there in my brain?"

The answer was fierce and cold. "What of me, Laird? I, who was Daryesh of Tollogh, lord of a thousand suns and lover of Ilorna the Fair, immortalized noble of the greatest empire the universe has ever seen—I am now trapped in the half-evolved body of a hunted alien, a million years after the death of all which mattered. Better be glad I'm here, Laird. I can handle

those weapons, you know."

The eyes looked out over the bleak windy hillscape, and the double mind watched distance-dwarfed forms clambering in the rocks, searching for a trail. "A hell of a lot of good that does us now," said Laird. "Besides, I can hear you thinking, you know, and I can remember your own past thoughts. Sol or Jaanya, it's the same to you. How do I know you'll play ball with me?"

The answer was instant, but dark with an unpleasant laughter. "Why—read my mind, Laird! It's your mind too, isn't it?" Then, more soberly: "Apparently history is repeating itself in the revolt of the barbarians against the mother planet, though on a smaller scale and with a less developed science. I do not expect the result to be any happier for civilization than before. So perhaps I may take a more effective hand than I did before."

It was ghostly, lying here in the wind-grieved remnants of a world, watching the hunters move through a bitter haze of moonlight, and having thoughts which were not one's own, thoughts over which there was no control. Laird clenched his fists, fighting for stability.

"That's better," said Daryesh's sardonic mind. "But relax. Breathe slowly and deeply, concentrate only on the breathing for a while—and then search my mind which is also yours."

"Shut up! Shut up!"

"I am afraid that is impossible. We're in the same brain, you know, and we'll have to get used to each other's streams of consciousness. Relax, man, lie still; think over the thing which has happened to you and know it for the wonder it is."

Man, they say, is a time-binding animal. But only the mighty will and yearning of Vwyrdda had ever leaped across the borders of death itself, waited a million years that that which was a world might not die out of all history.

What is the personality? It is not a thing, discrete and material, it is a pattern and a process. The body starts with a certain genetic inheritance and meets all the manifold complexities of environment. The whole organism is a set of reactions

between the two. The primarily mental component, sometimes called the ego, is not separable from the body but can in some ways be studied apart.

The scientists had found a way to save something of that which was Daryesh. While the enemy was blazing and thundering at the gates of Vwyrdda, while all the planet waited for the last battle and the ultimate night, quiet men in laboratories had perfected the molecular scanner so that the pattern of synapses which made up all memory, habit, reflex, instinct, the continuity of the ego, could be recorded upon the electronic structure of certain crystals. They took the pattern of Daryesh and of none other, for only he of the remaining Immortals was willing. Who else would want a pattern to be repeated, ages after he himself was dead, ages after all the world and all history and meaning were lost? But Daryesh had always been reckless, and Ilorna was dead, and he didn't care much for what happened.

Ilorna, Ilorna! Laird saw the forgotten image rise in his memory, golden-eyed and laughing, the long dark hair flowing around the lovely suppleness of her. He remembered the sound of her voice and the sweetness of her lips, and he loved her. A million years, and she was dust blowing on the night wind, and he loved her with that part of him which was Daryesh and with more than a little of John Laird . . .  
O Ilorna . . .

And Daryesh the man had gone to die with his planet, but the crystal pattern which reproduced the ego of Daryesh lay in the vault they had made, surrounded by all the mightiest works of Vwyrdda. Sooner or later, sometime in the infinite future of the universe, someone would come; someone or something would put the helmet on his head and activate it. And the pattern would be reproduced on the neurones, the mind of Daryesh would live again, and he would speak for dead Vwyrdda and seek to renew the tradition of fifty million years. It would be the will of Vwyrdda, reaching across time—But Vwyrdda is *dead*, thought Laird frantically. Vwyrdda is gone—this is a new history—you've got no business telling us

what to do!

The reply was cold with arrogance. "I shall do as I see fit. Meanwhile, I advise that you lie passive and do not attempt to interfere with me."

"Cram it, Daryesh!" Laird's mouth drew back in a snarl. "I won't be dictated to by anyone, let alone a ghost."

Persuasively, the answer came, "At the moment, neither of us has much choice. We are hunted, and if they have energy trackers—yes, I see they do—they'll find us by this body's thermal radiation alone. Best we surrender peaceably. Once aboard the ship, loaded with all the might of Vwyrdda, our chance should come."

Laird lay quietly, watching the hunters move closer, and the sense of defeat came down on him like a falling world. What else could he do? What other chance was there?

"All right," he said at last, audibly. "All right. But I'll be watching your every thought, understand? I don't think you can stop me from committing suicide if I must."

"I think I can. But opposing signals to the body will only neutralize each other, leave it helplessly fighting itself. Relax, Laird, lie back and let me handle this. I am Daryesh the warrior, and I have come through harder battles than this."

They rose and began walking down the hillside with arms lifted. Daryesh's thought ran on, "Besides—that's a nice-looking wench in command. It could be interesting!"

His laughter rang out under the moon, and it was not the laughter of a human being.

"I CAN'T understand you, John Laird, said Joana.

"Sometimes," replied Daryesh lightly, "I don't understand myself very well—or you, my dear."

She stiffened a little. "That will do. Lieutenant. Remember your position here."

"Oh, the devil with our ranks and countries. Let's be live entities for a change."

Her glance was quizzical. "That's an

odd way for a Solman to phrase it."

Mentally, Daryesh swore. Damn this body, anyway! The strength, the fineness of coordination and perception, half the senses he had known, were missing from it. The gross brain structure couldn't hold the reasoning powers he had once had. His thinking was dull and sluggish. He made blunders the old Daryesh would never have committed. And this young woman was quick to see them, and he was a prisoner of John Laird's deadly enemies, and the mind of Laird himself was tangled in thought and will and memory, ready to fight him if he gave the least sign of—

The Solarian's ego chuckled nastily. Easy, Daryesh, easy!

Shut up! his mind snapped back, and he knew drearily that his own trained nervous system would not have been guilty of such a childish emotional response.

"I may as well tell you the truth, Captain Rostov," he said aloud. "I am not Laird at all. Not any more."

She made no response, merely drooped the lids over her eyes and leaned back in her chair. He noticed abstractedly how long her lashes were—or was that Laird's appreciative mind, unhindered by too much remembrance of Ilorna?

They sat alone, the two of them, in her small cabin aboard the Janyard cruiser. A guard stood outside the door, but it was closed. From time to time they would hear a dull thump or clang as the heavy machines of Vwyrdda were dragged aboard—otherwise they might have been the last two alive on the scarred old planet.

The room was austere furnished, but there were touches of the feminine here and there—curtains, a small pot of flowers, a formal dress hung in a half-open closet. And the woman who sat across the desk from him was very beautiful, with the loosened ruddy hair streaming to her shoulders and the brilliant eyes never wavering from his. But one slender hand rested on a pistol.

She had told him frankly, "I want to talk privately with you. There is something I don't understand . . . but I'll be ready to shoot at the first suspicion of a false move. And even if you should some-

how overpower me, I'd be no good as a hostage. We're Janyards here, and the ship is more than the life of any one of us."

Now she waited for him to go on talking.

He took a cigarette from the box on her desk—Laird's habits again—and lit it and took a slow drag of smoke into his lungs. *All right, Daryesh, go ahead. I suppose your idea is the best, if anything can be made to work at all. But I'm listening, remember.*

"I am all that is left of this planet," he said tonelessly. "This is the ego of Daryesh of Tollogh, Immortal of Vwyrdda, and in one sense I died a million years ago."

She remained quiet, but he saw how her hands clenched and he heard the sharp small hiss of breath sucked between the teeth.

Briefly, then, he explained how his mental pattern had been preserved, and how it had entered the brain of John Laird.

"You don't expect me to believe that story," she said contemptuously.

"Do you have a lie detector aboard?"

"I have one in this cabin, and I can operate it myself." She got up and fetched the machine from a cabinet. He watched her, noticing the grace of her movements. You died long ago, Ilorna—you died and the universe will never know another like you. But I go on, and she reminds me somehow of you.

IT WAS a small black thing that hummed and glowed on the desk between them. He put the metal cap on his head, and took the knobs in his hands, and waited while she adjusted the controls. From Laird's memories, he recalled the principle of the thing, the measurement of activity in separate brain centers, the precise detection of the slight extra energy needed in the higher cerebral cortex to invent a falsehood.

"I have to calibrate," she said. "Make up something I know to be a lie."

"New Egypt has rings," he smiled, "which are made of Limburger cheese.

However, the main body of the planet is a delicious Camembert—"

"That will do. Now repeat your previous statements."

*Relax, Laird, damn it—blank yourself! I can't control this thing with you interfering.*

He told his story again in a firm voice, and meanwhile he was working within the brain of Laird, getting the feel of it, applying the lessons of nerve control which had been part of his Vwyrddan education. It should certainly be possible to fool a simple electronic gadget, to heighten activity in all centers to such an extent that the added effort of his creative cells could not be spotted.

He went on without hesitation, wondering if the flickering needles would betray him and if her gun would spit death into his heart in the next moment: "Naturally, Laird's personality was completely lost, its fixed patterns obliterated by the superimposition of my own. I have his memories, but otherwise I am Daryesh of Vwyrdda, at your service."

She bit her lip. "What service! You shot four of my men."

"Consider my situation, woman. I came into instantaneous existence. I remember sitting in the laboratory under the scanner, a slight dizziness, and then immediately I was in an alien body. Its nervous system was stunned by the shock of my entry, I couldn't think clearly. All I had to go on was Laird's remembered conviction that these were deadly foes surrounding me, murderous creatures bent on killing me and wiping out my planet. I acted half-instinctively. Also, I wanted, in my own personality, to be a free agent, to get away and think this out for myself. So I did. I regret the death of your men, but I think they will be amply compensated for."

"H'm—you surrendered when we all but had you anyway."

"Yes, of course, but I had about decided to do so in all events." Her eyes never lifted from the dials that wavered life or death. "I was, after all, in your territory, with little or no hope of getting clear, and you were the winning side of this war, which meant nothing to me

emotionally. Insofar as I have any convictions in this matter, it is that the human race will best be served by a Janyard victory. History has shown that when the frontier cultures—which the old empire calls barbaric but which are actually new and better adapted civilizations—when they win out over the older and more conservative nations, the result is a synthesis and a period of unusual achievement.”

He saw her visibly relaxing, and inwardly he smiled. It was so easy, so easy. They were such children in this later age. All he had to do was hand her a smooth lie which fitted in with the propaganda that had been her mental environment from birth, and she could not seriously think of him as an enemy.

The blue gaze lifted to his, and the lips were parted. “You will help us?” she whispered.

Daryesh nodded. “I know the principles and construction and use of those engines, and in truth there is in them the force that molds planets. Your scientists would never work out the half of all that there is to be found. I will show you the proper operation of them all.” He shrugged. “Naturally, I will expect commensurate rewards. But even altruistically speaking, this is the best thing I can do. Those energies should remain under the direction of one who understands them, and not be misused in ignorance. That could lead to unimaginable catastrophes.”

Suddenly she picked up her gun and shoved it back into its holster. She stood up, smiling, and held out her hand.

He shook it vigorously, and then bent over and kissed it. When he looked up, she stood uncertain, half afraid and half glad.

*It's not fair!* protested Laird. The poor girl has never known anything of this sort. She's never heard of coquetry. To her love isn't a game, it's something mysterious and earnest and decent—

I told you to shut up, answered Daryesh coldly. Look, man, even if we do have an official safe-conduct, this is still a ship full of watchful hostility. We have to consolidate our position by every means at hand. Now relax and enjoy this.

HE WALKED around the desk and took her hands again. “You know,” he said, and the crooked smile on his mouth reminded him that this was more than half a truth, “you make me think of the woman I loved, a million years ago on Vwyrdda.”

She shrank back a little. “I can't get over it,” she whispered. “You—you're old, and you don't belong to this cycle of time at all, and what you must think and know makes me feel like a child—Daryesh, it frightens me.”

“Don't let it, Joana,” he said gently. “My mind is young, and very lonely.” He put a wistfulness in his voice. “Joana, I need someone to talk to. You can't imagine what it is to wake up a million years after all your world is dead, more alone than—oh, let me come in once in awhile and talk to you, as one friend to another. Let's forget time and death and loneliness. I need someone like you.”

She lowered her eyes, and said with a stubborn honesty, “I think that would be good too, Daryesh. A ship's captain doesn't have friends, you know. They put me in this service because I had the aptitude, and that's really all I've ever had. Oh, comets!” She forced a laugh. “To space with all that self-pity. Certainly you may come in whenever you like. I hope it'll be often.”

They talked for quite a while longer, and when he kissed her goodnight it was the most natural thing in the universe. He walked to his bunk—transferred from the brig to a tiny unused compartment—with his mind in pleasant haze.

Lying in the dark, he began the silent argument with Laird anew. “Now what?” demanded the Solarian.

“We play it slow and easy,” said Daryesh patiently—as if the fool couldn't read it directly in their common brain. “We watch our chance, but don't act for a while yet. Under the pretext of rigging the energy projectors for action, we'll arrange a setup which can destroy the ship at the flick of a switch. They won't know it. They haven't an inkling about subspatial flows. Then, when an opportunity to escape offers itself, we throw that switch

and get away and try to return to Sol. With my knowledge of Vwyrddan science, we can turn the tide of the war. It's risky—sure—but it's the only chance I see. And for Heaven's sake let me handle matters. You're supposed to be dead."

"And what happens when we finally settle this business? How can I get rid of you?"

"Frankly, I don't see any way to do it. Our patterns have become too entangled. The scanners necessarily work on the whole nervous system. We'll just have to learn to live together." Persuasively: "It will be to your own advantage. Think, man! We can do as we choose with Sol. With the Galaxy. And I'll set up a life-tank and make us a new body to which we'll transfer the pattern, a body with all the intelligence and abilities of a Vwyrddan, and I'll immortalize it. Man, you'll never die!"

It wasn't too happy a prospect, thought Laird skeptically. His own chances of dominating that combination were small. In time, his own personality might be completely absorbed by Daryesh's greater one.

Of course—a psychiatrist—narcosis, hypnosis—

"No, you don't!" said Daryesh grimly. "I'm just as fond of my own individuality as you are."

The mouth which was theirs twisted wryly in the dark. "Guess we'll just have to learn to love each other," thought Laird.

The body dropped into slumber. Presently Laird's cells were asleep, his personality faded into a shadowland of dreams. Daryesh remained awake a while longer. Sleep—waste of time—the Immortals had never been plagued by fatigue—

He chuckled to himself. What a web of lies and counterlies he had woven. If Joana and Laird both knew—

**T**HE MIND is an intricate thing. It can conceal facts from itself, make itself forget that which is painful to remember, persuade its own higher components of whatever the subconscious deems right. Rationalization, schizophrenia, autohypnosis, they are but pale indications of the

self-deception which the brain practices. And the training of the Immortals included full neural coordination; they could consciously utilize the powers latent in themselves. They could by an act of conscious will stop the heart, or block off pain, or split their own personalities.

Daryesh had known his ego would be fighting whatever host it found, and he had made preparations before he was scanned. Only a part of his mind was in full contact with Laird's. Another section, split off from the main stream of consciousness by deliberate and controlled schizophrenia, was thinking its own thoughts and making its own plans. Self-hypnotized, he automatically reunited his ego at such times as Laird was not aware, otherwise there was only subconscious contact. In effect a private compartment of his mind, inaccessible to the Solarian, was making its own plans.

That destructive switch would have to be installed to satisfy Laird's waking personality, he thought. But it would never be thrown. For he had been telling Joana that much of the truth—his own advantage lay with the Janyards, and he meant to see them through to final victory.

It would be simple enough to get rid of Laird temporarily. Persuade him that for some reason it was advisable to get dead drunk. Daryesh's more controlled ego would remain conscious after Laird's had passed out. Then he could make all arrangements with Joana, who by that time should be ready to do whatever he wanted.

Psychiatry—yes, Laird's brief idea had been the right one. The methods of treating schizophrenia could, with some modifications, be applied to suppressing Daryesh's extra personality. He'd blank out that Solarian . . . permanently.

And after that would come his undying new body, and centuries and millennia in which he could do what he wanted with this young civilization.

The demon exorcising the man—He grinned drowsily. Presently he slept.

**T**HE SHIP drove through a night of stars and distance. Time was meaningless, was the position of the hands on

a clock, was the succession of sleeps and meals, was the slow shift in the constellations as they gulped the light-years.

On and on, the mighty drone of the second-order drive filling their bones and their days, the round of work and food and sleep and Joana. Laird wondered if it would ever end. He wondered if he might not be the Flying Dutchman, outward bound for eternity, locked in his own skull with the thing that had possessed him. At such times the only comfort was in Joana's arms. He drew of the wild young strength of her, and he and Daryesh were one. But afterward—

We're going to join the Grand Fleet. You heard her, Daryesh. She's making a triumphal pilgrimage to the gathered power of Janya, bringing the invincible weapons of Vwyrdda to her admiral.

Why not? She's young and ambitious, she wants glory as much as you do. What of it?

We have to escape before she gets there. We have to steal a lifeboat and destroy this ship and all in it soon.

All in it? Joana Rostov, too?

Damn it, we'll kidnap her or something. You know I'm in love with the girl, you devil. But it's a matter of all Earth. This one cruiser has enough stuff in it now to wreck a planet. I have parents, brothers, friends—a civilization. We've got to act!

All right, all right, Laird. But take it easy. We have to get the energy devices installed first. We'll have to give them enough of a demonstration to allay their suspicions. Joana's the only one aboard here who trusts us. None of her officers do.

The body and the double mind labored as the slow days passed, directing Janyard technicians who could not understand what it was they built. Laird, drawing on Daryesh's memories, knew what a giant slept in those coils and tubes and invisible energy-fields. Here were forces to trigger the great creative powers of the universe and turn them to destruction—distorted space-time, atoms dissolving into pure energy, vibrations to upset the stability of force-fields which maintained order in the cosmos. Laird remembered the ruin of

Vwyrdda, and shuddered.

They got a projector mounted and operating, and Daryesh suggested that the cruiser halt somewhere that he could prove his words. They picked a barren planet in an uninhabited system and lay in an orbit fifty thousand miles out. In an hour Daryesh had turned the facing hemisphere into a sea of lava.

"If the dis-fields were going," he said absent-mindedly, "I'd pull the planet into chunks for you."

Laird saw the pale taut faces around him. Sweat was shining on foreheads, and a couple of men looked sick. Joana forgot her position enough to come shivering into his arms.

But the visage she lifted in a minute was exultant and eager, with the thoughtless cruelty of a swooping hawk. "There's an end of Earth, gentlemen!"

"Nothing they have can stop us," murmured her exec dazedly. "Why, this one ship, protected by one of those spacewarp screens you spoke of, sir—this one little ship could sail in and lay the Solar System waste."

**D**ARYESH NODDED. It was entirely possible. Not much energy was required, since the generators of Vwyrdda served only as catalysts releasing fantastically greater forces. And Sol had none of the defensive science which had enabled his world to hold out for a while. Yes, it could be done.

He stiffened with the sudden furious thought of Laird: That's it, Daryesh! That's the answer.

The thought-stream was his own too, flowing through the same brain, and indeed it was simple. They could have the whole ship armed and armored beyond the touch of Janya. And since none of the technicians aboard understood the machines, and since they were now wholly trusted, they could install robotcontrols without anyone's knowing.

Then—the massed Grand Fleet of Janya—a flick of the main switch—man-killing energies would flood the cruiser's interior, and only corpses would remain aboard. Dead men and the robots that would open



fire on the Fleet. This one ship could ruin all the barbarian hopes in a few bursts of incredible flame. And the robots could then be set to destroy her as well, lest by some chance the remaining Janyards manage to board her.

And we—we can escape in the initial confusion, Daryesh. We can give orders to the robot to spare the captain's gig, and we can get Joana aboard and head for Sol! There'll be no one left to pursue!

Slowly, the Vwyrddan's thought made reply: A good plan. Yes, a bold stroke. We'll do it!

"What's the matter, Daryesh?" Joana's voice was suddenly anxious. "You look—"

"Just thinking, that's all. Never think, Captain Rostov. Bad for the brain."

Later, as he kissed her, Laird felt ill at thought of the treachery he planned. Her friends, her world, her cause—wiped out in a single shattering blow, and he would have struck it. He wondered if she would speak to him ever again, once it was over.

Daryesh, the heartless devil, seemed only to find a sardonic amusement in the situation.

And later, when Laird slept, Daryesh thought that the young man's scheme was good. Certainly he'd fall in with it. It would keep Laird busy till they were at the Grand Fleet rendezvous. And after that it would be too late. The Janyard victory would be sealed. All he, Daryesh, had to do when the time came was keep away from that master switch. If Laird tried to reach it their opposed wills would only result in nullity—which was victory for Janya.

He liked this new civilization. It had a freshness, a vigor and hopefulness which he could not find in Laird's memories of Earth. It had a tough-minded purposefulness that would get it far. And being young and fluid, it would be amenable to such pressures of psychology and force as he chose to apply.

Vwyrdda, his mind whispered. Vwyrdda, we'll make them over in your image. You'll live again!

## GRAND FLEET!

A million capital ships and their

auxiliaries lay marshaled at a dim red dwarf of a sun, massed together and spinning in the same mighty orbit. Against the incandescent whiteness of stars and the blackness of the old deeps, armored flanks gleamed like flame as far as eyes could see, rank after rank, tier upon tier, of titanic sharks swimming through space—guns and armor and torpedoes and bombs and men to smash a planet and end a civilization. The sight was too big, imagination could not make the leap, and the human mind had only a dazed impression of vastness beyond vision.

This was the great spearhead of Janya, a shining lance poised to drive through Sol's thin defense lines and roar out of the sky to rain hell on the seat of empire. They can't really be human any more, thought Laird sickly. Space and strangeness have changed them too much. No human being could think of destroying Man's home. Then, fiercely: All right Daryesh. This is our chance!

Not yet, Laird. Wait a while. Wait till we have a legitimate excuse for leaving the ship.

Well—come up to the control room with me. I want to stay near that switch. Lord, Lord, everything that is Man and me depends on us now!

Daryesh agreed with a certain reluctance that faintly puzzled the part of his mind open to Laird. The other half, crouched deep in his subconscious, knew the reason: It was waiting the posthypnotic signal, the key event which would trigger its emergence into the higher brain-centers.

The ship bore a tangled and unfinished look. All its conventional armament had been ripped out and the machines of Vwyrdda installed in its place. A robot brain, half-alive in its complexity, was gunner and pilot and ruling intelligence of the vessel now, and only the double mind of one man knew what orders had really been given it. *When the main switch is thrown, you will flood the ship with ten units of disrupting radiation. Then, when the captain's gig is well away, you will destroy this fleet, sparing only that one boat. When no more ships in operative condition are in range, you will activate*

*the disintegrators and dissolve this whole vessel and all its contents to basic energy.*

With a certain morbid fascination, Laird looked at that switch. An ordinary double-throw knife type—Lord of space, could it be possible, was it logical that all history should depend on the angle it made with the control panel? He pulled his eyes away, stared out at the swarming ships and the greater host of the stars, lit a cigaret with shaking hands, paced and sweated and waited.

Joana came to him, a couple of crewmen marching solemnly behind. Her eyes shone and her cheeks were flushed and the turret light was like molten copper in her hair. No woman, thought Laird, had ever been so lovely, and he was going to destroy that to which she had given her life.

"Daryesh!" Laughter danced in her voice. "Daryesh, the high admiral wants to see us in his flagship. He'll probably ask for a demonstration, and then I think the fleet will start for Sol at once with us in the van. Daryesh—oh, Daryesh, the war is almost over!"

Now! blazed the thought of Laird, and his hand reached for the main switch. Now—easily, causally, with a remark about letting the generators warm up—and then go with her, overpower those guardsmen in their surprise and head for home!

And Daryesh's mind reunited itself at that signal, and the hand froze . . .

No!

*What? But—*

The memory of the suppressed half of Daryesh's mind was open to Laird, and the triumph of the whole of it, and Laird knew that his defeat was here.

**S**O SIMPLE, so cruelly simple—Daryesh could stop him, lock the body in a conflict of wills, and that would be enough. For while Laird slept, while Daryesh's own major ego was unconscious, the trained subconscious of the Vwyrddan had taken over. It had written, in its self-created somnambulism, a letter to Joana explaining the whole truth, and had put it where it would easily be found once they started looking through his effects in search of an explanation for his paralysis.

And the letter directed, among other things, that Daryesh's body should be kept under restraint until certain specified methods known to Vwyrddan psychiatry—drugs, electric waves, hypnosis—had been applied to eradicate the Laird half of his mind.

Janyard victory was near.

"Daryesh!" Joana's voice seemed to come from immensely far away; her face swam in a haze and a roar of fainting consciousness. "Daryesh, what's the matter? Oh, my dear, what's wrong?"

Grimly, the Vwyrddan thought: Give up, Laird. Surrender to me, and you can keep your ego. I'll destroy that letter. See, my whole mind is open to you now—you can see that I mean it honestly this time. I'd rather avoid treatment if possible, and I do owe you something. But surrender now, or be wiped out of your own brain.

Defeat and ruin—and nothing but slow distorting death as reward for resistance. Laird's will caved in, his mind too chaotic for clear thought. Only one dull impulse came: I give up. You win, Daryesh.

The collapsed body picked itself off the floor. Joana was bending anxiously over him. "Oh, what is it, what's wrong?"

Daryesh collected himself and smiled shakily. "Excitement will do this to me, now and then. I haven't fully mastered this alien nervous system yet. I'm all right now. Let's go."

Laird's hand reached out and pulled the switch over.

Daryesh shouted, an animal roar from the throat, and tried to recover it, and the body toppled again in a stasis of locked wills.

It was like a deliverance from hell, and still it was but the inevitable logic of events, as Laird's own self reunited. Half of him still shaking with defeat, half realizing its own victory, he thought savagely:

None of them noticed me do that. They were paying too much attention to my face. Or if they did, we've proved to them before that it's only a harmless regulating switch. And—the lethal radiations are already flooding us! If you don't

cooperate now, Daryesh, I'll hold us here till we're both dead!

So simple, so simple. Because, sharing Daryesh's memory, Laird had shared his knowledge of self-deception techniques. He had anticipated, with the buried half of his mind, that the Vwyrddan might pull some such trick, and had installed a posthypnotic command of his own. In a situation like this, when everything looked hopeless, his conscious mind was to surrender, and then his subconscious would order that the switch be thrown.

Cooperate, Daryesh! You're as fond of living as I. Cooperate, and let's get the hell out of here!

Grudgingly, wryly: You win, Laird.

The body rose again, and leaned on Joana's arm, and made its slow way toward the boat blisters. The undetectable rays of death poured through them, piling up their cumulative effects. In three minutes, a nervous system would be ruined.

Too slow, too slow. "Come on, Joana. Run!"

"Why—" She stopped, and a hard suspicion came into the faces of the two men behind her. "Daryesh—what do you mean? What's come over you?"

"Ma'm . . ." One of the crewmen stepped forward. "Ma'm, I wonder . . . I saw him pull down the main switch. And now he's in a hurry to leave the ship. And none of us really know how all that machinery ticks."

Laird pulled the gun out of Joana's holster and shot him. The other gasped, reaching for his own side arm, and Laird's weapon blazed again.

His fist leaped out, striking Joana on the angle of the jaw, and she sagged. He caught her up and started to run.

A pair of crewmen stood in the corridor leading to the boats. "What's the matter, sir?" one asked.

"Collapsed—radiation from the machines—got to get her to a hospital ship," gasped Daryesh.

They stood aside, wonderingly, and he spun the dogs of the blister valve and stepped into the gig. "Shall we come, sir?" asked one of the men.

"No!" Laird felt a little dizzy. The

radiation was streaming through him, and death was coming with giant strides. "No—" He smashed a fist into the insistent face, slammed the valve back, and vaulted to the pilot's chair.

The engines hummed, warming up. Fists and feet battered on the valve. The sickness made him retch.

O Joana, if this kills you—

He threw the main-drive switch. Acceleration jammed him back as the gig leaped free.

Staring out the ports, he saw fire blossom in space as the great guns of Vwyrdda opened up.

MY GLASS was empty. I signalled for a refill and sat wondering just how much of the yarn one could believe.

"I've read the histories," I said slowly. "I do know that some mysterious catastrophe annihilated the massed fleet of Janya and turned the balance of the war. Sol speared in and won inside of a year. And you mean that you did it?"

"In a way. Or Daryesh did. We were acting as one personality, you know. He was a thoroughgoing realist, and the moment he saw his defeat he switched wholeheartedly to the other side."

"But—Lord, man! Why've we never heard anything about this? You mean you never told anyone, never rebuilt any of those machines, never did anything?"

Laird's dark, worn face twisted in a bleak smile. "Certainly. This civilization isn't ready for such things. Even Vwyrdda wasn't, and it'll take us millions of years to reach their stage. Besides, it was part of the bargain."

"Bargain?"

"Just as certainly. Daryesh and I still had to live together, you know. Life under suspicion of mutual trickery, never trusting your own brain, would have been intolerable. We reached an argeement during that long voyage back to Sol, and used Vwyrddan methods of autohypnosis to assure that it could not be broken."

He looked somberly out at the lunar night. "That's why I said the genie in the bottle killed me. Inevitably, the two personalities merged, became one. And

that one was, of course, mostly Daryesh, with overtones of Laird.

"Oh, it isn't so horrible. We retain the memories of our separate existences, and the continuity which is the most basic attribute of the ego. In fact, Laird's life was so limited, so blind to all the possibilities and wonder of the universe, that I don't regret him very often. Once in a while I still get nostalgic moments and have to talk to a human. But I always pick one who won't know whether or not to believe me, and won't be able to do much of anything about it if he should."

"And why did you go into Survey?" I asked, very softly.

"I want to get a good look at the universe before the change. Daryesh wants to orient himself, gather enough data for a sound basis of decision. When we— I— switch over to the new immortal body, there'll be work to do, a

galaxy to remake in a newer and better pattern by Vwyrddan standards! It'll take millennia, but we've got all time before us. Or I do—what do I mean, anyway?" He ran a hand through his gray-streaked hair.

"But Laird's part of the bargain was that there should be as nearly normal a human life as possible until this body gets inconveniently old. So—" He shrugged. "So that's how it worked out."

We sat for a while longer, saying little, and then he got up. "Excuse me," he said. "There's my wife. Thanks for the talk."

I saw him walk over to greet a tall, handsome red-haired woman. His voice drifted back: "Hello, Joana—"

They walked out of the room together in perfectly ordinary and human fashion.

I wonder what history has in store for us.

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