

PLANET STORIES



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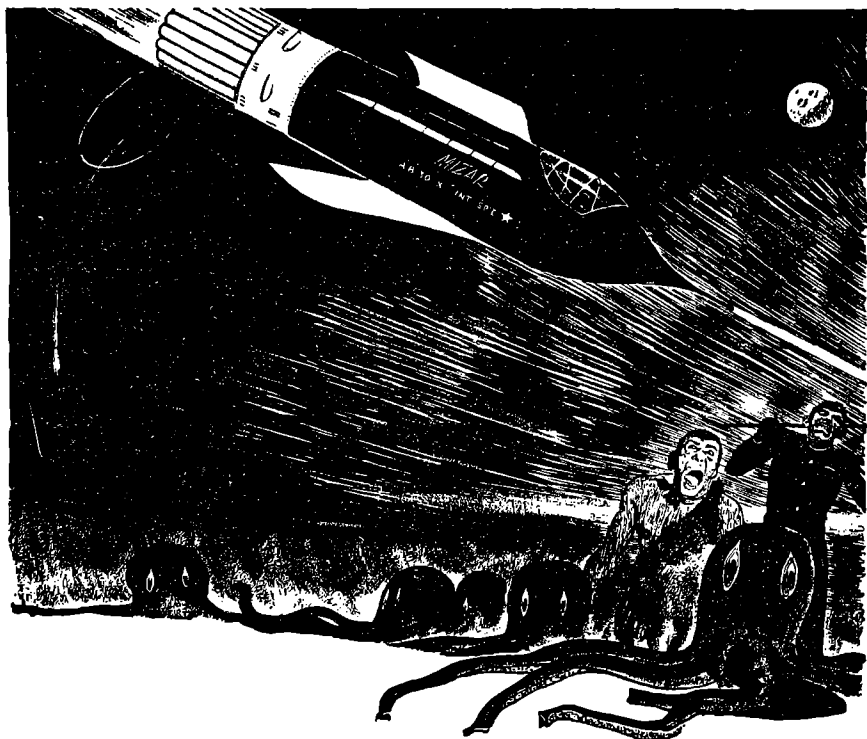
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He drove her down like a blazing meteor.

SWORD OF FIRE

By EMMETT McDOWELL

Jupiter Jones, naked and helpless in the slime of that vile world, cursed the space warp that had flung him down among its groveling mutants. For their rising, excited whispers proclaimed him a knight in shining armor—the bright weapon in his hands their only hope against the terrible octopods!

THE MIZAR, a glittering needle with stubby, backswept wings, hurtled out of deep space, arced into orbital flight a thousand kilometers above the surface of the planet: The starship had approached from the night side. Now, as it decelerated rapidly, it flashed into the raw orange daylight of the planet's K1 type sun, angled downward into the stratosphere.

Inside the Mizar's control blister, Jupiter Jones lifted red-rimmed eyes to the fuel

gauge. It showed only a few centigrams left. Little more than enough to land.

He swore under his breath, hunched lower over the controls, a long, loose-framed man with a shock of red hair and vivid green eyes. The olive uniform of the Galactic Colonization Board was wrinkled as if it had been slept in, and he had allowed his beard to grow. The bushy orange-red mass of it hid his face almost to the eyes.

He was alone in the ship. He'd been



alone, operating the Mizar single-handed since Briggs, his co-pilot, had gone crazy and killed himself.

It had been a damned inconsiderate thing for Briggs to do, Jones felt. Not that he could altogether blame the co-pilot.

They had blundered into a space warp beyond Alpha Centaurus. The Mizar had been flung into an uncharted region of the cosmos, hundreds, perhaps thousands of parsecs from Sol. Hopelessly lost, the chance of ever finding their way back to

Earth had been slimmer than trying to locate one certain atom of oxygen in Earth's envelope of air. Briggs had cracked under the strain.

When the co-pilot had failed to relieve him at the end of his watch, Jupiter Jones had switched the controls over to "George," the robot pilot, and had gone in search of him. He'd found Briggs dead in his bunk. An analysis of his stomach had revealed that he'd taken cyanide. There had been no note. Nothing.

He had recorded the tragedy in the log along with a biting opinion of the Psychiatric Board for allowing a man with a flaw in his psychosis to be assigned to advance exploration. Then he'd heaved the body out the refuse port.

Well, he was still lost, Jupiter Jones reflected savagely. Fortunately though, he'd discovered this huge K1 type sun with its system of seven planets while he still had fuel enough to reach it.

Spectroscopic observations had revealed that the second planet possessed an atmosphere high in oxygen and showing traces of water vapor. It was a small world about the size of Mars and uncomfortably close to its flaming orange sun, but it had been his only bet.

He glanced obliquely at the fuel gauge again. His lips thinned, and he dropped his eyes to the scanner.

Immediately, the surface seemed to bounce up at him. Dense jungles. The sheen of an inland sea. The terrain flowed past like an immense relief map.

Then he saw the city.

IT ROSE at the edge of the sea, all turrets and spires and battlements like a walled medieval town. He caught a glimpse of quays with ships warped against them, of cultivated fields like a vast checkerboard. Then the Mizar had flashed past. The city seemed to dwindle and vanish, only the sparkle of orange sunlight on the spires lingering an instant longer.

Jupiter Jones blew out his breath. His first reaction had been to swing the Mizar around, but caution prevailed. He was too old a hand at Galactic exploration to burst unannounced on an alien culture.

The terrain below had been growing progressively rougher. Just ahead a range of mountains reared saw-edged peaks into the clouds. He nursed the Mizar along until the gorges fell away beneath him like blue-green troughs. There was no sign of habitation anywhere.

He braked and banked, spiraling lower and lower, dropping into a deep valley with a river cutting through it like a silver thread. At the last moment, he frantically buckled himself down and cut in "George".

Flame bellowed around the Mizar as the

automatic landing jets burst into life. With a fierce crackling roar the star ship sliced through the tangled vegetation, came to rest a hundred meters from the river.

Jupiter Jones threw off the safety straps, stood up, feeling a tingle of excitement take hold of him.

He was down, the ship resting on the crust of a strange world. A world that might well be his home for the rest of his natural life.

It was a dismaying thought.

With gravity dragging at his feet once more, he moved to the transparent rind of the thermoplas blister and stared out.

The landing jets had charred a huge swathe in the vegetation, charred it to the finest ash and baked the ground like brick, leaving a wall of jungle hemming the ship in.

Nothing moved.

He flicked on the outside amplifiers, but the silence was tomb-like. The thunder of his descent must have frightened off all the wild life.

He was conscious of a cumulative weariness like an ache. Experience had taught him the necessity of being fresh before venturing into an alien environment. He entered his landing in the log, switched on the electronic alarm.

"Let 'George' keep watch," he thought. "George's" senses were keener than any human's, and "George" could be depended on!

With a last glance at the dark mass of jungle, he climbed down the ladder to the cabin, flung himself into his bunk.

He was awakened by the wild ringing of the alarm bell.

JUPITER JONES sprang from his bunk. It seemed as if his head had barely touched the pillow; but as he yanked himself through the well to the control blister above, he saw that night had fallen.

The bluish pallor of the riding lights illuminated the instruments. Through the skin of the blister, he could see the black vault of the heavens sparkling with unfamiliar constellations. But that was all. The Mizar, itself, seemed to be lying in a vale of tar-like darkness.

The clamor of the bell never abated.

It drowned out any sound that might be coming through the amplifiers.

He shut it off. As the ringing fell silent, he could hear coughing grunts. The hair on the nape of his neck rose like the hackles of a dog and he switched on the floodlights.

Instantly the burn blazed with a fierce white illumination. He caught a glimpse of a dozen startled figures at the edge of the jungle!

They were human—in shape at least—tall, kilted men with long red hair and copper colored features. Blinded by the light they stood in postures of frozen surprise.

Staring out from the darkened blister, Jupiter Jones thought he'd never seen such feral savagery as was reflected in their expressions. Like—like mad wolves! They were armed with bows. Swords dangled from harness over their backs. Two of them carried a litter.

A frown clouded Jupiter's face.

The litter-bearers belonged to a different race. They were squat, naked, powerful brutes, their slick hides tinged a greenish cast. But it wasn't altogether that. The pair had a passive, resigned look like oxen.

Like the beasts of burden they appeared to be, he thought. Probably a slave race. Then his whole attention was focused on the fantastic creature in the litter.

It was no bigger than a large monkey. Eight spidery arms sprouted from its grotesque body which was covered with a glittering purple shell like a huge mollusk. Jupiter Jones noted these details almost before the creatures recovered from their surprise at the blinding light. His first impression of the purple-shelled octopod in the litter had been that it must be a captive.

Then the octopod raised a silver tube to an orifice in its head, blew a single, piercing note.

The two slate-green porters wheeled and bore the thing off into the jungle. The half dozen naked, copper-skinned warriors followed hard on their heels for all the world like a pack of fox hounds.

He wiped the sweat from his forehead. Lord, he thought; what was that thing?

Could it have been the dominant life form?

He switched out the floodlights, reset the alarm. His first exultation at finding a habitable and inhabited world began to give way to a gnawing distrust.

Suddenly the darkness appeared malignant, concealing hosts of savage brute-men, unguessable horrors. There was the feel of movement out there. He heard something grunt and thrash in the underbrush followed by a squealing noise like a stuck pig.

He shivered, glanced at the photo-electric chronometer.

The sun had set at nine hours, Earth time, he saw. It was fifteen o'clock now. He had ascertained the rotation of the planet while still out in space and knew it wouldn't be light for three hours yet.

He set himself to the task that had occupied him during every leisure moment since the warp had hurled the Mizar beyond the known regions of space—charting the stars in an effort to locate himself.

But he couldn't concentrate. He kept listening subconsciously for any untoward sound of the world outside.

HIS real name was Jones RV860-09-34271. The Jupiter had been pinned on because he had been marooned once on that planet for three months and had lived to tell about it.

There were two things which Jupiter especially didn't like. He didn't like men; and he didn't like women.

He prided himself on being self-sufficient and tough—and he was tough, morally tough, and physically and intellectually tough. He had grown up in the stews of Venusport, fending for himself since the age of nine. Because he'd never seen the stars, he'd had one consuming ambition—to go to space.

He had studied, worked and fought his way through the Galactic Colonization Board's Institute of Technology. The Institute was a hard school. The men of the advance exploratory units, the special corpsmen, had to be well versed in all sciences from astro-physics to zoomorphology.

No one had believed that Jupiter could make it. Briggs, who had been an upper

classman, had ridden him unmercifully. All of which had merely crystallized his determination. In the end he'd graduated with top honors.

It was the same sort of determination that sustained him at this moment.

Jupiter had long since reached the dismaying conclusion that the Mizar had been swept entirely beyond the local system, even beyond any of the adjacent star clusters. That was the final straw that had caused Briggs to crack.

At thought of Briggs, Jupiter Jones spat into the waste chute and arranged his lank frame before the powerful electronic telescope with which all the ships of advance exploration were equipped. But he didn't use it right away. Instead, he gazed upward at the star-encrusted heavens.

The milky way, he saw, began down near the horizon, though it climbed less than a third of the way up into the sky. The rest of that tremendous path was blotted out by an inky blackness.

He tugged at his beard. There was something familiar about that black pall, and he turned to the star charts again.

Sure enough the "rift", a dark nebula, split the milky way from the constellations of Centaurus to Cygnus!

He must be very close to it, perhaps within a few light years, for it to blot out so much of the super galaxy. But was it the same one? There were hundreds of these dark nebulae. And even if it was, on what side of it was he in relation to Earth?

His elation slowly ebbed.

Pulling out his notes, he recommenced the endless task of mapping the universe. He kept hard at it until the giant orange sun had suffused the sky with a saffron light, blotting out the stars.

The Mizar was only one of many such units probing the local star system in search of habitable worlds. Their role in the long Galactic Colonization plan was to make a superficial examination: vegetation, atmosphere, dominant life form if any and report their findings. Later, depending on the reports of these advance units, the real exploration by staffs of specialists commenced.

Although Jupiter was sure the planet

was too many light years off ever to be colonized, he entered the composition of the air in the log from force of habit.

He broke out the emergency pack, selected a semi-automatic carbine from the Mizar's arsenal. He added electroscope, geiger counter, ultra violet ray lamp and prospecting tools to the load. If he ever were to lift the Mizar from the surface again, he must find a deposit of uranium or thorium bearing minerals.

Then he shaved off his great red beard, revealing a hard face, bold featured with a wide, thin-lipped mouth. He slung the load to his shoulders, opened the main port.

A strong saffron sunlight beat into his eyes as he let himself to the ground. He stood still a moment, feeling the dirt press against the soles of his feet, examining the blank hostile wall of jungle, tasting the moist warm air.

Bird-like creatures flitted through the foliage. The vegetation looked mesozoic with its great pulpy stems and fern-like fronds. One of the bird things sailed overhead. It was apple green and appeared as if it might be some freakish symbiosis of plant and animal.

Damn Briggs, he thought for the hundredth time. It was suicidal to attempt the exploration of a strange world alone!

II

JUPITER STARTED CAUTIOUSLY for the river, his feet kicking up little puffs of the powdery ash left by the jets. When he reached the jungle, he halted again, unpleasant memories of the cannibal plants of Sirius III in the back of his mind. Then, setting his jaw, he forged ahead.

It was hot and green in the jungle. Sweat coursed down his face, plastered his tunic to his back.

He had gone less than thirty meters when he broke into a well traveled trail paralleling the river.

Jupiter Jones' nostrils flared. He came to an abrupt halt. Although he wasn't yet thirty-five, he was known as an old man in the special corps. He had survived partly because of an instinct of danger that was almost psychic.

He sensed it now in the sudden dryness of his mouth, the hammering of his heart as his adrenal glands surcharged his blood. Then away in the distance, he heard the winding of a horn!

At least, it sounded like a horn. His hands tightened about the carbine and he held his breath. But though he listened for some time, the sound wasn't repeated.

Gradually, the valley narrowed. Tall cliffs towered above him like the jaws of a vise. He had gone about five miles, the limit he had set himself for the first day, when he caught the sound of splashing mingled with laughter.

He stopped in midstride, his nerves atingle. The sounds went on punctuated by giggling screams. He slid the safety off the carbine, crept forward.

A hundred meters upstream the jungle on the opposite bank gave way to meadows that swelled up to meet the talus at the foot of a towering thousand foot cliff.

Where the meadow dipped down to the stream there was a little gravel beach, and a band of women and children were splashing in the shallow water.

Jupiter stood stock still, peering out from the forest like a tiger.

The women were tall, brown skinned, their hair wet and glistening like seals. Naked children squealed and played among the pebbles of the beach.

His glance strayed beyond them to the cliffs, which were pitted by cave mouths, broken by ledges. He could distinguish the figures of men and women in breechclouts and skins clinging to the face of the rock like flies.

These people had neither the brutish look of the green skinned slaves he'd seen last night, nor yet the ferocity of the warriors. He felt the hot sluggish breeze shift, blowing from him towards the bathers.

Instantly, the women were thrown into a panic. Those with children snatched them up, and the whole pack broke from the water, fled screaming towards the cliffs!

Jupiter Jones narrowed his eyes in alarm. Their sense of smell must be keen as a hound's! He could see the males leaping down the cliffs, brandishing clubs. It reminded him of a disturbed colony of

baboons he'd seen once. Gad, but he'd stirred up a hornet's nest! He began to back warily from the river bank.

THERE was a grunt behind him; a branch snapped. He tried to whirl around, bringing up his carbine. A pair of arms wrapped around him, seized him in a crushing grip!

Shock closed Jupiter's throat. He twisted, wrenched frantically.

The arms tightened like steel cables. There were more grunts, triumphant shouts, the crashing of underbrush.

Across the river the caveman had come to a halt. Then suddenly he saw them turn and flee, scampering up the cliffs like terrified monkeys, tearing at each other in their efforts to get away from the thing that had him in its grip.

Jupiter Jones was a powerful man—doubly so on this planet of mild gravity. Furthermore he'd been in too many tight scrapes to be overly bothered with scruples.

Recovering from his first shock, he twisted the carbine over his shoulder until he felt the muzzle prod into flesh and pulled the trigger.

The flat vicious "craack!" of the rifle slapped back from the cliffs. The arms relaxed. He wrenched himself free, spun around.

One glance told him these were the lean red-haired savages he'd seen last night. He was already pulling the trigger as he recognized them. The shot knocked the nearest brute off his feet.

The others hesitated, ringing him in like a pack of wolves. Down the trail, the two green tinted porters stood nervously, the litter perched atop their shoulders.

The glittering purple-shelled octopod was sitting bolt upright in the litter. At this distance it looked like a huge snail—an obese snail that has grown out of its shell. Perched on one of its tentacles was a kite-like thing.

Jupiter jerked the gun around. But at that moment the purple shelled monstrosity tossed the kite-thing into the air where it spread enormous membrane wings.

With a shock, he realized that the kite was alive—a huge, flying, web-like bird!

He put a bullet through it. But if the shot had the least effect, it wasn't apparent. The creature swooped at him suddenly like a hawk dropping on a rabbit.

He shot again, then tried to hurl himself aside, but the pack hampered his movements. One moist wing snared him, slapped around him like wet rubber. He twisted, squirmed toppled to the ground, rolling over and over.

The other wing lapped around him, binding his arms to his side, squeezing, squeezing.

The pain was intolerable.

As if from a distance, he could hear shouting. The savages had closed around him, snarling, baying triumphantly like hounds at the kill, but he was only dimly conscious of them.

The octopod on the litter put a silver tube to its mouth. A loud mourning note wound through the jungle.

The horn! It was the horn, he'd heard earlier. It was also the last sound that he heard, for the terrible constriction never relaxed. Blackness welled up suddenly behind his eyes, blotted out everything.

WHEN Jupiter Jones struggled back to consciousness, he was lying in a cage like a wild animal.

The realization shocked him.

The cage, he saw, was about two and a half meters long, very narrow and barely high enough for him to sit up in. It was only one of a whole row of such cages, and they were all occupied by men and women like himself.

His gun was gone. His pack, even his clothes had been taken away from him. He grasped one of the bars, pulled himself to a sitting posture. His neck felt stiff and for a moment his head swam dizzily. Then the scene jarred into focus.

Afternoon sunlight overlaid everything like an angry orange wash. Striped tents had been pitched along the river bank. Four of the purple-shelled octopods squatted about a cloth spread on the ground beneath the largest pavilion.

Its sides had been raised to permit the free flow of air, and he could see the creatures plucking food from strange

vessels and goblets with their snakey tentacles.

All about the tents green men and copper-skinned hunters milled in a senseless jostling confusion like a circus breaking its stand.

Suddenly, his eyes narrowed. The octopods were being waited on by a hairless pink skinned species of human. That made four distinct races he'd observed since landing. He ticked them off on his fingers—the cave people, the red haired fighting men, the green and stolid porters. Now these bald, hairless white slugs of men.

The white men were doing most of the work, herding the porters about, packing chop boxes. Jupiter frowned. An odd little protuberance, he discovered, sprouted from the backs of all their necks.

The protuberances varied in size, some no larger than a small snail shell, others as big as a tangerine. They were plum colored and looked as if they were made of horn. What the devil could the things be?

He shifted his eyes to a lank, coppery fighting man and saw that he bore one of the things on the back of his neck also. They all did, he realized with a sudden dryness of mouth.

All along he'd been aware vaguely of the stiffness in his spine. With a thrill of alarm, he felt the back of his neck, touched a knob-like thing just below the base of his skull.

The shock of the discovery left him sick at his stomach.

He examined it gently with his finger tips. It was small, hard. He had the uncomfortable conviction that it was alive, feeding off of him like a leech.

He tugged at it, but it was firmly anchored, the flesh about it quite numb. In panic he tried to twist it off.

Instantly a blinding flash of pain seared through him like acid tingling out to the very tips of his fingers. He pitched forward, cracked his head on the bars of his cage, slid to a prone position.

For moments he lay there unable to lift a finger although his brain was clear, lucid. It was as if the thing had perceived his intention and had paralyzed the voluntary motor centers of his brain!

WITH mounting horror, Jones realized that the molusk-like organism must be fastened directly to his spinal cord. He had best not meddle with it again until he learned more about it.

"Za'min—car?" he heard a voice say behind him.

He sat up, looked around, realized with a start that the paralysis was gone, leaving no appreciable ill effects.

There was a girl in the next cage watching him out of wide yellow eyes. She was one of the cave people, he recognized with a scowl of suspicion. It was impossible to mistake the air of wildness about her—like a caged leopard.

She was quite naked, crouching in her cell with her uncombed black hair hanging down to her sturdy brown shoulders.

"Za'min—car?" she repeated.

He shook his head. What the devil was the girl driving at?

She looked puzzled then touched her breast, said: "Lete."

"Lady?"

"Lete—Lete—Lete," she insisted, jabbing herself in the chest each time.

She had small flashing white teeth, a pretty face, brown as sepia. In fact she was sepia all over, a warm rich tint that made Jupiter Jones uncomfortably conscious of the fish-belly whiteness of his own skin.

But it was her eyes that caught his interest. The iris was large, yellow, flecked with green like a cat's eye. The pupil wasn't round but a narrow slit.

He wondered if Lete was her name or the name of her tribe or what. He pointed at another captive, said:

"Lete?"

The girl revolved her right shoulder with an impatient gesture that fascinated him.

"Io. Io. Ca'min 'Kagan'!" she said, or so the words sounded. Then she touched her breast. "Na'min 'Lete'."

Obviously the girl was trying to tell him that the cave people were called "Kagan", but that her name was "Lete".

Pointing eagerly at the scaly octopods beneath the pavilion he said, "What are they?" in a questioning tone.

For an instant fear mirrored itself in

Lete's yellow eyes. She shuddered, then she seemed to grasp what he wanted and said: "Anolyn."

"Anolyn," he repeated, "Anolyn." Next he pointed at the fighting men. They were "Nehogans", the porters were "Rik'gans".

Lete was an enthusiastic teacher and Jupiter began to acquire a sizable vocabulary. He didn't know how long they kept it up. Hours possibly. They were interrupted by the sudden opening of his cage door.

He stared at it in amazement, for it had swung back apparently of its own volition. There was no one within a dozen feet. There had been a "click", and then it had opened.

Before he could grasp what was happening, he found himself crawling out of the cage and standing up. Then he started for the pavilion where the purple-shelled octopods—the Anolyns as Lete called them—were waiting.

His brain reeled. He tried to stop. He couldn't! He had absolutely no command over his muscles!

It was like a nightmare. And yet his conscious mind wasn't in the least affected.

He entered the pavilion stooping slightly and stopped—like a machine subject to its operator's whim.

The Anolyns made no sound. They regarded him in utter silence, their tentacles waving in the air like the feelers of a cricket.

"What do you want?" Jupiter tried to ask and found that his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth. He'd been struck dumb!

The sweat popped out on his face, but his expression remained as unchanged as a wooden mask.

III

ALTOGETHER IT WAS THE most uncanny interview that Jupiter Jones had ever experienced. He stood paralyzed while the Anolyns scrutinized him.

Not a sound passed between the creatures, not an expression marred their soft white visages. It was impossible to even guess at their thoughts.

Jupiter had more than a smattering of biology, and he'd been confronted with weird forms of life before. But nothing so outlandish. He wished he could get one of the Anolyns on the dissecting table in the Mizar's laboratory.

Suddenly a thought impinged on his consciousness, an emotionless, inhuman query: "Where did you come from?"

He could feel the alien entity that was the octopod probing at his brain cells with invisible feelers of thought. He could no more resist answering than if he had been under the influence of salanedrin, the Venusian truth serum.

"Earth. A planet of the system of Sol." He gave the galactic space coordinates, but realized that they had no meaning outside their frame of reference. "From beyond the stars," he amplified.

"How?" There was shock, surprise, scepticism in the thought.

He visualized the starship, the space-warp that had flung him hundreds of parsecs out of his course. But he had the feeling that he might as well try to explain nuclear physics to a Hottentot.

He was conscious of a growing doubt in the minds of his captors—almost as if they were afraid of him. All at once, he felt himself turn, start out of the pavilion.

The Anolyns, he realized, must have finished their examination. But it was a startling sensation to find himself going back across the clearing like a sleep walker.

What had they learned? Had they picked his mind clean? One of the fighting Nehogans separated himself from his fellows and followed him back to the cages.

Without conscious volition, Jupiter stooped and crawled inside. The door shut after him with a "click". The lean red-haired Nehogan squatted on his heels just outside.

Jupiter wiped the sweat off his forehead, and instantly realized that he had regained control of his muscles.

It was dusk, a hazy burnt amber twilight that made everything appear as if he were wearing tinted glasses. The pink-skins had broken camp, loaded the Rik'gans formed them into a caravan. A detachment of fighting men moved to the head of the procession.

Jupiter's cage was equipped like the others with stretcher poles. Two squat porters approached and lifted it to their shoulders, moved into line with the other captives. One of the Anolyns gave a blast on a horn. The head of the caravan moved into the jungle.

Imperceptibly, darkness had fallen, but no lights were lit. The inhabitants of this strange world seemed to see as well by night as by day.

Jupiter could feel his bearers fall into a rough trot. The cage swayed, jolted rhythmically—an upsetting motion. He felt progressively worse and worse.

"Damn!" he thought miserably; "it's making me seasick!"

THE next two weeks were a period of orientation for Jupiter. The caravan travelled by night to avoid the heat. They were fed twice daily—a thick gruel-like substance in which chunks of meat and vegetables had been diced—and it never varied.

Neither did Jupiter's guard ever leave him. He was an aloof, ferocious man with a hawk nose, a copper red skin and pale blue eyes—ice blue eyes. His name, Jupiter learned, was Reiloc and he regarded the cavepeople with contempt, the porters with scorn, the pink skins with loathing.

As they wound down out of the mountains onto a broad plain, Jupiter had managed to pick up a smattering of the language from Lete who occupied the cage just ahead.

The wild girl was devoured by curiosity, but when Jupiter tried to explain where he had come from, she grew frightened and silent.

"The Wanderer-from-Beyond!" he overheard her telling Reiloc in a low voice. "Did you hear him? Is it true, Reiloc?"

The copper skinned fighting man scratched his head.

"We caught him near your village. He fought with thunder and lightning. He carried many queer tools in a pack, which no one understands. It's very strange, too, that the night before, we saw a blazing ship fall out of the sky. But when we went to investigate, the ship was unharmed.

Then it burst into a blinding ball of light. We didn't stay."

Lete clasped the bars, peered at Jupiter wide-eyed.

"The flaming chariot! It was you who came down from the stars!"

Jupiter nodded.

"The Wanderer!" she repeated in an awed voice. "You are the Wanderer-from-Beyond! With the Sword of Fire!"

He frowned, started to shake his head.

"Who is this Wanderer supposed to be?"

"But you must be him," Lete almost pleaded. "At night the old men gather around the fires and tell of his coming." Her voice had taken on a mystic quality. "Out of the night sky he'll come in his chariot of flames, they say, like a star fallen to Yogol. The Wanderer-from-Beyond. He'll come with lighting in his hand—the Sword of Fire—and drive the Anolyn back into the sea, back into the slime from whence they arose.

"He'll free all the men of Yogol and restore their knowledge. Then he'll ascend in a ball of fire, vanish into the beyond."

Jupiter didn't say anything. The legend was only too familiar. Terran history was full of such folk heroes sent to free the people from their oppressors. It was always the same fundamentally, and it always cropped up wherever there was a conquered, downtrodden, helpless people. The myth seemed to answer some universal human need.

Even Reiloc, he saw, appeared excited and uneasy.

"Suppose I am?" Jupiter suggested.

"Why, then—you'll destroy the Anolyn." Lete's face fell. "But you're as helpless as we are! You're not the Wanderer after all. You've been making fun of me."

Reiloc burst into relieved laughter, and Lete looked hurt.

"Stranger things have happened," said Jupiter dryly. He didn't intend to throw away any possible advantage that might accrue to him if these savages believed him to be the mythical Wanderer. He was shrewd enough though, to perceive that he wouldn't appear very impressive in a cage, and filed the idea away, turning the subject to the Anolyn instead.

THIS was a hunting party, he learned.

They were headed back now for the city. Jupiter wondered what they called it.

The city didn't have a name, Lete insisted. She called it the city by the Dra Dur, which meant Red Sea. Yes, there were other cities, but none of them had a name.

"Why should they?" Reiloc grunted.

What were the Anolyn? Such a strange question. Jupiter could see for himself that they were—well, Anolyn.

Neither Reiloc nor Lete understood what he was driving at. The Anolyn were different, they admitted, but all things were different.

It was obvious that the cave girl and the fighting man considered themselves separate species and hated each other cordially.

The humans who associated themselves with the Anolyn, Lete informed him with scorn in her voice, were "Edir".

"Edir" as near as Jupiter could make out, meant "voluntary slave"; a term that brought a savage growl from Reiloc and shut him up for three days.

The Anolyn, Lete told Jupiter, entered into a person once they caught him, and that person was "Edir" forever. He couldn't escape. Why? Because no one ever had.

She didn't know what the thing on the back of her neck was, and neither did Reiloc. The Anolyn had put it there, and it was dangerous to meddle with it.

And that was as much as Jupiter could learn.

ON the fifteenth day they struck a small farming community, and after that they traveled by day on a paved road between cultivated fields.

Jupiter saw many more of the green tinted Rik'gans being used like draft animals. There were also black hairy people with tails who were kept in pens and watched the caravan pass out of sad, lack-luster eyes.

The hairy men were Begans, Lete told him. The Anolyn bred them for food. Occasionally they ate the Rik'gans, but the meat was coarse and tough.

Horror sprang into Jupiter's green eyes.

"They eat them?"

Lete shrugged. "Of course. And so have you."

He went deathly pale. He could feel his stomach revolt at the thought.

"The Anolyn breed men for special purposes," Lete went on, unaware of the loathing in his eyes, "fighters, meat animals, the pink-skinned Caligans. Oh, there must be fifteen or sixteen different kinds. They're all 'Edir,'" and she dismissed them with a shrug of her shapely brown shoulders.

Jupiter's cage was swaying along the plastic ribbon of a road. It was all he could do to keep from being sick, but he knew now the subtle distinction that had been troubling him.

The humans weren't slaves. They were domesticated—like cattle or dogs or horses. And Lete's people were wild with all the contempt of the wild thing for its tame cousin!

Reiloc, trotting beside the cage, grunted suddenly and raised his arm, pointing ahead. Jupiter lifted his eyes, felt a tingle of excitement run through him.

There, glittering in the rays of the setting sun were the spires and battlements of the city by the *Dra Dur*.

NIGHT had fallen by the time they reached the city gate. Yogol, as Lete called the planet, had no satellite. The darkness was unrelieved except by the faint starshine.

The caravan halted beneath towering walls of deeper blackness. In his cage Jupiter heard a horn sound, then a groaning that must be the massive gate rolling aside. The caravan began to move again.

They passed into a canyon between dark buildings. And all about him he could hear the shuffle of feet, low voices. He was like a blind man in the midst of a crowd.

Strange spicy smells beset his nostrils and a cold dank, salty odor that must be the *Dra Dur*. He could hear the lap of water and shouts and loud thumpings and the creak of tackle. And through it all ran the sibilant voice of the invisible throng.

After an interminable march, they

turned through a massive entrance into a well lit building. The noise of the city stopped as the door swung shut behind them. Jupiter squinted his eyes, blinded by the sudden light.

Sometime before, the caravan had split up, and only the cages holding the wild people remained. Then without warning, they too turned off down a bisecting passage.

"Lete!" he yelled after the girl; "Lete!" His own bearers were carrying his cage straight ahead. The girl waved at him forlornly and called:

"A'towee, Jupiter."

It meant, "Goodbye forever" as near as he could translate it. He felt lonely—more lonely even than after Briggs' suicide.

Good Lord! he thought in alarm. He'd better watch himself. He'd been in space so long that he was growing overly fond of this naked little barbarian. The biological urge could be a damned traitorous emotion, and there was no place for a woman in his plans.

He frowned. Unless he should need Lete to lead him back to his ship . . .

"Where are they taking the others?" he demanded of Reiloc who still paced soundlessly beside his cage.

"To the training pits."

"And me?"

Reiloc appeared puzzled. "To the house of the Radiant God. But it's very strange."

Before Jupiter could voice the questions rising to his lips, a door opened in the wall ahead. He was borne inside an enormous vaulted chamber, his cage dropped on the floor. Reiloc hadn't entered, and the porters retreated through the door. It closed behind them.

Jupiter though, had scarcely been aware of their departure. His whole attention was focused on a huge statue of an Anolyn dominating the room.

The idol shed a soft luminescence, and there was a sense of power in its execution that was god-like:

"In their own image," he thought irreverently, then he sucked in his breath.

The stuff of the image was radio-active! Some incredibly rich uranium or thorium bearing ore. Radium too! He'd never seen anything quite like it. Neither pitchblende

nor carnotite. And it must weigh a ton!

Enough to take him half way across the super galaxy!

He gave a harsh laugh. He had found his fuel. It only remained for him to escape carrying a ton of heathen idol with him!

IV

JUPITER WAS CROUCHING ON the floor of his cage when the door to the corridor opened softly behind him. He turned his head.

A girl, he saw, had slipped inside. She let the panel close behind her, stared at him out of wide violet-blue eyes.

She was a slim fragile thing with pale yellow hair like winter sunlight. A Caligan, a pink-skinned woman, he realized. The first he'd seen.

She wore a shoulderless, clinging, single-piece garment of yellow fur. Suddenly the garment moved, pulling itself higher up one shoulder, settling snugly about her waist.

Moved of its own volition!

"It's alive!" Jupiter burst out. "What in Heaven's name is that thing?"

The girl wrinkled her forehead. "Of course, it's alive. It's a boj. Have you never seen one?"

He shook his head.

She lifted the creature away from her skin, held it out to him through the bars.

"Put it on."

Jupiter took it gingerly. It was light and flat with the warm limp feel of a fresh pelt. The under side of the boj was hairless, the skin like foam rubber. He could find neither eyes nor mouth.

The girl sensed what he was looking for, laughed infectiously.

"It hasn't any," she said; "it breathes and feeds through its skin. Put it on."

Jupiter let it touch his body. At once the boj wrapped itself around him. It was electrically alive, vibrant. He could feel a pleasant tingle in his nerve ends and glanced at the Caligan girl in surprise.

She wore an amused expression and nothing else. There was an utter lack of self consciousness about her. Jupiter found himself comparing her soft, deli-

cately rounded figure with Lete's lithe brown boyishness.

The Caligan girl suddenly held out her hand for the boj. He peeled it off reluctantly, asking:

"Who are you?"

"Tabak," she replied. "Did you come to Yogol in a fiery chariot from beyond the stars?"

He nodded.

Tabak's blue eyes widened. She drew close to the cage as if pulled by a magnet, peered intently into his eyes.

"May—may I come into your mind?"

Jupiter's hard, bewhiskered face stiffened in surprise.

"Telepathy! Is that what you mean? Can you do that?"

"A little—if you help. We Caligans are closer to the Anolyn than the other races. But we haven't much time before they come to examine you. Won't you let your barriers down? The whole city is alive with rumors . . ."

JUPITER had recoiled instinctively from having his innermost privacy violated. He scowled in suspicion, asked: "Who sent you? What're you after?"

"No one." She bit her lip. "There's a legend, a—a myth if you like, about the 'Wanderer-from-Beyond', who is to drive the Anolyn back into the sea."

He scratched his beard which had grown back since his captivity.

"How did you get in here?"

"I'm a favorite of one of the Anolyn. I've the run of the temple. Please, please let me inside. I must know. You'll understand much more about Yogol than I could ever tell you."

Her last words decided him. He needed information desperately if he were ever to escape.

"What shall I do?" he asked in grudging consent.

"Will me to enter. Think! Open your mind to me. There's nothing to fear. No need to be suspicious. I'm not an Anolyn. I can't force myself on you . . ."

A dazzling light seemed to burst behind Jupiter's eyes. The girl was in. He could feel her!

He was aware of Tabak's mind, quest-

ing, probing. His brain pulsed as if he had a violent headache.

At the same time, a whole new set of memory patterns, unfamiliar facts, stray incidents and ideas made themselves felt. It was as if a volume of the Encyclopedia Galactica had been up-ended and all the information therein had been poured into his brain helter-skelter with the utmost confusion.

Somehow, he knew all that Tabak knew, all that she'd ever felt or seen or heard; but horribly jumbled, meaningless like the scrambled parts of an intricate jig-saw puzzle.

He heard her exclaim aloud: "It's true! The Wanderer - from - Beyond!" Then a fear thought: "*I must go! They musn't find me here!*"

He felt her mind withdraw, saw her slip from the temple room, a slim, graceful figure in the shimmering yellow fur cloak—the living sensuous boj. He was too appalled to try to stop her.

His mind was like a warehouse of unrelated, unassorted, unassimilated facts. He needed time to incorporate the confusing jumble into intelligible order.

Time and contemplation.

He was to get neither yet, he saw, for the door opened almost on Tabak's heels, and three of the Anolyns crawled in like fat, purple-shelled snails.

JUPITER was put through one of the worst ordeals of his life—all the more degrading because it was conducted in contemptuous silence.

The Anolyns took immediate possession of his mind. He was made to crawl out of his cage and stand stock still while they examined him like judges at a fat cattle show.

From time to time burning mental questions exploded in his brain. Jupiter was enough of a psychologist to know that they were intended to stimulate subconscious memory patterns.

He felt as if he'd been thrust into a press and all his information was being squeezed out of him like cider from an apple. But unlike his experience with Tabak, he could learn nothing from them.

The Anolyn maintained a perfect mental barrier.

In spite of that he began to sense that they regarded him with growing alarm. He could almost feel their control over him tighten.

At length he was directed out into the corridor, marched into a tiny bare cell. Not until the door closed on him with a small final click, did the Anolyn remove their control.

Jupiter sank white and shaken onto the hard, narrow bunk.

The cell was about ten feet square, windowless with walls of bare white plastic. The ceiling was plastered with a green phosphorescent mould, lighting it eerily. There was a single stool and a table and that was all.

He locked his hands beneath his head. His green eyes looked older. They seemed to peer inward as he sought to organize the flood of information he'd received almost instantaneously in that startling, intimate exchange with Tabak.

Gradually it dawned on him that he was in full possession of Tabak's life history—all the millions of insignificant items that went to make up the girl's personality.

Once he realized that, the pieces began to click into place. It was indeed like a jig-saw puzzle. And slowly the picture appeared.

Tabak was a pet, like a cat or dog, and as such she'd had a greater opportunity to observe the purple-shelled octopods.

The Anolyns hadn't always been the dominant life form on Yogol. Ages ago, eons perhaps—Tabak had entertained only the vaguest notion of time—the humans had ruled the planet. They had built splendid cities, now crumbled into dust and even the dust buried beneath the jungle mould. Only the legend remained.

The ancients, according to that legend, had experimented finally with telepathy. They had discovered that the young of the Anolyn — a semi-intelligent, telepathic, parasite—acted as a thought receiver and transmitter if it were allowed to fasten its tentacles directly into the spinal cord.

The fad spread. More and more Yogolians began to make use of the telepathic parasites.

Then one day the adult Anolyn rose from the sea and, through their young, took over the human race.

Not all at once and not everyone.

Some had refused to allow the Anolyn to be fastened to their necks. These few fled to the wilderness, where during ages of warfare with their Anolyn dominated brothers, they had sunk into barbarism. These were the Kagans, the wild cave people whom the Anolyn now hunted for sport.

As for the Anolyn themselves, they had abandoned the fallen human cities, building their citadels around the inland seas from whence they'd sprung. They had evolved their own unique culture.

They appeared to know only the most rudimentary facts of the physical sciences, though they had made startling advances in the biological field.

Even their cities were built by minute, coral-like creatures working under telepathic direction. Certain insects had been trained to spin thread from their own body secretions and weave fabrics. Humans had been bred for specialized functions: draft animals and meat animals, soldiers and sailors and artisans.

As soon as a Yogolian attained adolescence, a young Anolyn was fastened to his spinal cord. Thus the humans were forced to act both as living incubators for the Anolyn young and as servants for the adults.

It was, Jupiter realized with horror, a wholly parasitic culture. Orgies were held, and gladiatorial combats, one Anolyn pitting its human vehicle against another. Empathy was perfect.

There were other things, unmentionable things which Jupiter tried to thrust from his mind. Scenes from the training pits, the biological breeding stations . . .

He was sick at his stomach, sick and emotionally exhausted. He could see no hope of escape. Not so long as the horrid parasite remained fastened to his spinal cord.

And by its very nature the creature couldn't be dislodged or killed!

He closed his eyes, feeling as depleted as if he'd run the mile, slid over the lip of consciousness into deep sleep.

HE WAS ROUSED BY TABAK, the Caligan girl, shaking his shoulder. "Wake up!" she was whispering urgently, her violet-blue eyes shining with suppressed excitement. "Wake up, Wanderer-from-Beyond, and come with me!"

Jupiter sat up with a start. "How did you get in here?"

Tabak rotated her shoulder, and the yellow furred boj rippled like liquid light. "Through the door."

"But it was locked."

"It operates by telepathic control."

"Of course."

Jupiter scratched his beard. He'd known it all along. Nor was that all. If he would only concentrate, he could manipulate the lock himself!

To his growing amazement, he realized that he knew the city by the *Dra Dur* as well as his home town of Venusport.

While he slept, his subconscious had integrated Tabak's fund of knowledge, made it a part of his own. He was changed. He didn't look at things quite the same. His own hard ruthless personality had become tintured with something of Tabak's soft deviousness.

He didn't like it.

His fingers closed on the girl's shoulders, bit into the flesh. "What have you done to me?"

"I? I've done nothing. I've come to help you, Wanderer-from-Beyond."

"How?"

"Please," she said; "don't you believe me?"

"Why should I?"

She lifted her arms, touched his temples with her fingertips. "Come in," she said simply. "Come into my mind so that you can have no more doubts."

Almost against his will, he peered into her eyes, experiencing an odd frightening sensation of sinking into their wide, violet-blue depths. Down. Down. His very being seemed to merge with the girl's.

All at once, the room swam back into his vision, but from a different angle. Everything looked a little strange. Then he saw himself!

Literally!

Saw himself through Tabak's eyes!

With a peculiar sense of detachment, he observed his own lean, muscular, sun-reddened frame, his wiry red beard, tangled hair half-closed green eyes. And all the time he was aware of Tabak's flow of thought—her emotions, sensations, the bubbling fluid well of her subconscious.

"Now do you trust me?"

Jupiter was acutely embarrassed. Their conjoining was more intimate than any physical relation could have been. Tabak's very soul lay naked before his mind's eye.

"Trust you. Yes. For Pete's sake, let me go!"

He staggered, blinked, realized that she'd thrust him out of her mind. He wiped the sweat off his forehead, stared at the girl curiously.

Her cheeks were pink with confusion, and she wouldn't meet his eyes.

"I—I've never done that with a man before," she said. "You believe me, don't you?"

"Yes. But how did you do it?"

"By means of the Anolyn that are attached to our necks. See." She turned her back, lifted her wheat-blond locks with one hand.

Jupiter could see the tiny plum-colored lump. Tabak's neck was slender, delicately formed. He was struck anew by the contrast between her and Lete, the wiry, pagan-souled cave girl.

Lete was rawhide, tough, pliable, resilient. But this Caligan girl was a steel rapier. In that moment of intimacy he had glimpsed something of the truth.

For all her apparent softness, Tabak could be infinitely more dangerous!

THE door opened instantly at Tabak's mental command. Jupiter followed her into the corridor, saw that it was empty.

"Where are the Anolyn?"

"They—they are occupied. Those here in the temple." Tabak shivered. "Come, it's on our way. I'll show you."

"On our way where? Show me what?"

She said, "I'd rather let you see for yourself," and started up the passage, her bare feet soundless on the hard composition floor.

Jupiter padded at her elbow. This was all familiar. He couldn't overcome the feeling that he'd been here before. It was Tabak's memory patterns playing tricks on him, he knew. The girl's experience had actually been implanted in his brain.

When they reached the ramp angling downward into the gloom, a vague alarm got hold of him, but he followed her onto it without protest.

The way led down and down. The air was dank. Moisture dripped from the walls. It grew slippery underfoot.

Abruptly, the ramp came to an end. He could see the glint of water ahead.

Subconsciously, he knew it was a canal running beneath the streets to the *Dra Dur*. He knew it just as he knew that there was a network of these canals like fingers reaching into every part of the city. Just as he knew of the ledge a scant foot above the water, even as Tabak crept onto it.

The living boj fur glowed with a pale phosphorescent light as she sidled into the vaulted aquaduct. It lent her a wraith-like appearance to Jupiter, a few paces behind.

"Shhh!" she cautioned him, coming to a stop. "Don't make a sound here!"

Jupiter's mouth felt dry. He could see nothing but the girl's vague luminous outline, hear nothing but the lap of water against the shelf at their feet.

Then Tabak clutched his hand, pulled him forward and into a bisecting passage running at right angles to the aquaduct. He could see the glow of light ahead.

The passage curved, the light bursting on his eyes, half blinding him. Together they crawled to the very end of the tunnel and peered out.

It was a courtyard that Jupiter found himself looking into. The orange sun beat down warmly on the flagstone pavement, on the large shallow pool in the center of the court.

There were Anolyn in the pool, fifty or sixty of them, floating like purple jelly-fish. Humans, too. Pink skinned Caligans, wild Kagans, fighting men and the stolid green porters. Even the tailed, ape-like Begans were represented. They moved with a dreamy apathy like sleepwalkers.

"Their minds are under the control of

the Anolyn in the pool," Tabak breathed into his ear. "The Anolyn have entered into them. They feel and see and hear exactly what their human vehicles do."

Jupiter's face was drawn. He could hear music. The scale was all wrong, it registered discordantly in his ears. It was coming from one of the balconies that rose in tiers above the courtyard. Food and drink had been spread on cloths.

"They'll be here for days," Tabak whispered.

Hardened as Jupiter was, nevertheless he was sickened at the deeds being enacted under his eyes. They were unthinkable. His fists clenched.

He could bring himself to watch no longer. He turned his head away, said hoarsely: "Let's clear out of here."

Tabak was silent as she led him back down the tunnel to the vaulted canal.

"Can you swim?" she asked as they reached the water's edge.

"Yes."

The girl stripped off the boj, laid it on the ledge, dived into the canal like a slim, naked, sea nymph. Her head broke water a dozen feet out creating phosphorescent ripples.

Jupiter plunged after her. The water was black, cold, salty. He kept up with the girl easily using strong breast strokes.

At length she paused again, treading water near the opposite wall of the aqueduct.

"There's a tunnel here, a man's height below the surface. It leads into another chamber. Are you willing to try it?"

"Go ahead."

Tabak upended in a surface dive, the black water closing over her feet. Jupiter followed her down. He found the hole with his hand, swam into it. On and on—ten—twenty—thirty yards. His lungs felt as if they must burst.

Air began to dribble out his nose. He kicked furiously, driving himself ahead. Suddenly he realized he was out of the tunnel. He shot up to the surface, broke water, gasping air into his scalded lungs.

That had been close, too close. He floated on his back breathing deeply.

After a minute he rolled over and stared about him.

HE WAS in a vast echoing chamber. Orange sunshine streamed in from open skylights. Steps led down into the water. Tabak, he saw, was already standing on the edge of the floor looking down at him.

He swam to the steps, climbed out. There was a faint odor of putrefaction in the air.

Tabak said: "These rooms are the laboratories. There are other entrances; but they're all guarded by Nehogans."

He frowned. "What was it you wanted me to see?"

"This way," she said and led him through dissecting tables, past shelves of fantastic creatures preserved in some liquid, and into a small office-like room at the side.

Spread out on a shelf were the contents of Jupiter's pack: the medicine chest, emergency rations, spare ammunition, testing apparatus, prospecting tools, his light carbine, the electroscope and geiger counter. It was all there.

Tabak's violet-blue eyes glittered with excitement.

"There are your weapons, Wanderer-from-Beyond! Now you can drive the Anolyn back into the sea!"

Jupiter's face didn't betray his consternation. The carbine was pitifully inadequate. In fact, so long as the horrible little parasite was fastened to his spinal cord, he knew that he would be incapable of using it against the Anolyn.

If he could only rid himself of the parasite, though, and get to his ship with even a chunk of that idol . . .

He narrowed his eyes as a new thought struck him.

"Tabak, we must get rid of these spinal parasites first. I—" He nearly said, "I think," but realized that he mustn't show any doubt. "I can do it. But I'll need your cooperation."

"Can you?" she cried in excitement and seized his hands, peering into his eyes. "Can you really? You *are* the Wanderer, then!"

He looked quickly away. He didn't dare let her glimpse what was in his thoughts.

"Yes."

"Let me come into your mind; let me be sure," she pleaded.

"Tabak, you'll have to trust me."

"Why?" her blue eyes clouded in suspicion. She released his hands, backed away. "What is it you want to do to me? What are you hiding? What are you afraid I'll see?"

He swore under his breath. There wasn't time to argue, even if he could overcome the girl's suspicions, which he doubted was possible unless he opened his mind to her.

Without the slightest warning he jumped for Tabak, grabbed her and swung her off her feet.

The girl screamed, twisted, kicked and bit, wild with terror. The thick walls confined her cries. She was soft and tiny like a small white kitten in his hands. A spitting, scratching, squalling kitten.

He imprisoned her arms and legs, carried her out into the main laboratory.

The Anolyn possessed no anaesthesia. The dissecting tables were equipped instead with straps to hold their victims motionless while they operated. Jupiter buckled the girl face down on one of the tables.

"Please!" she begged hysterically. "Please!"

"I'm not going to hurt you," he growled and left her to get his medicine kit from the other room.

The kit had been devised to handle almost any emergency that might befall one of the Galactic Colonization Board's special corpsmen. Jupiter found the hypodermic syringe, sterilized it and filled it with exsrocain. The drug was the latest development in a spinal anaesthetic that deadened the nerves of the entire body, inducing a temporary state of suspended animation.

It was a delicate operation, but he inserted the needle between two of the girl's vertebrae, felt her flinch away from him. She lay on the hard slab, quiescent, crying silently.

"Won't hurt," he grunted, and ejected the exsrocain directly into the spinal fluid. Under his breath he counted: "One-two-three-four."

He felt for her pulse, but there was no sign of a heart beat. He found the mirror in the kit, held it before her nostrils. The

mirror didn't cloud.

Sweat stood out on Jupiter's forehead. He wiped his palms on his thighs, lifted Tabak's wheat blonde locks, exposing the small purple protuberance. It looked like a sea shell fastened to the back of her neck.

His hand was trembling. He had to pause and get a grip on himself. Then he grasped the Anolyn, pulled it gently but firmly away from the girl's skin.

For a moment he thought it was going to stick, then it slid free, the tentacles dangling like short, fine threads.

He examined the creature minutely to make sure no faintest spark of consciousness remained.

He felt weak with relief. The spinal anaesthesia had worked, putting the Anolyn into a state of suspended animation at the same time that it had the girl.

Suddenly he could contain himself no longer. He hurled the creature down on the hard floor with all his strength, smashed it into a shapeless blob, ground it into paste with the butt of his carbine.

VI

IT WOULD BE AN HOUR BEFORE the effects of the anaesthesia wore off the Caligan girl. Jupiter prowled the laboratories, investigating the extent of the research performed by the Anolyn. It was crude, elementary.

Only with the breeding of specialized forms had they had any starting successes and that had been a trial and error, hit and miss practice that had taken literally thousands of years.

He was not impressed. Like all parasitic cultures, the Anolyn civilization was rotten at the core, degenerate. One ship of the Galactic Security Patrol could wipe them out of existence.

He found clothes in a locker, a kilt for himself and a length of some black fabric which Tabak should be able to use in lieu of the boj.

When he returned to the dissecting table he saw that the color was returning to the girl's cheeks. He unfastened her, sat down on a stool and waited.

After a moment, Tabak's lids flickered. Her eyes opened; she gazed at him in sudden terror.

"Feel the Anolyn," he said.

She sat up. Her hand went hesitantly to the back of her slender neck. He saw the amazement spread over her face.

"It's gone! You—How? How did you do it?"

She slipped suddenly from the blood-stained dissecting table, seized his hand, held it to her forehead. She was half laughing, half crying.

"You are the Wanderer! Forgive me for ever doubting. I'll atone for my sacrilege." She was hysterical with relief and awe and hope. "I'll never question your will again, never fail in obedience—"

"Rubbish!"

Jupiter regarded her startled expression with satisfaction.

"You're temporarily overcome by surprise," he went on. "You haven't had a chance to think. I know you inside out—too well to believe I could fool you for very long. And," he added ruefully; "you know me the same way. There's the rub. But I need you—and you need me."

The girl was silent.

"Yes," she agreed finally; "that's true. You're a man. A strange man. But you're not the Wanderer. You plan to use us to help you escape back to your ship, then desert us. But I don't think you will. Desert us, I mean."

It was Jupiter's turn to look discontented.

"Why not?"

"Because—" she began and started to smile. "You won't like this, but you're too soft. Deep down on the inside you're too fine, too idealistic to pull a trick like that. Your conscience wouldn't let you.

"You've been hurt. Many times. When I looked inside your mind, I could see the scars. I could feel how you'd armored yourself with a harsh shell to hide your true feelings. You have a saying among your own people: 'Scratch a cynic and you'll find an idealist!'"

"Well, I'll be damned," said Jupiter. Then almost hesitantly, "But you'll help. I need someone I can trust." He wiped the sweat off his forehead. "Someone I

can trust with my life to take the Anolyn from my own neck."

"You'll trust me," she said; "because you must. You're really not self-sufficient. No one is."

Jupiter regarded her silently, coldly. Then he picked up the hypodermic, sterilized it, filled the barrel with exsrocain.

"This is a damned ticklish trick. The needle must be inserted between the vertebrae so that it doesn't injure the spinal cord and yet—"

"Lie down," she interrupted. "I know as well as you how it must be done."

"But—"

"Don't be alarmed. I'm in possession of all your experience, just as you are of mine!"

Jupiter swallowed, laid face-down on the stained table. "For Heaven's sake, be careful!"

Tabak ran her fingertips along his backbone, locating the spot to insert the needle. It sent cold chills prickling through his skin.

"And you're sure you know exactly what to do?"

She laughed. "Of course, I know. Don't tell me you've forgotten the girl on Betelgeuse XI—the one you used to put into a state of suspended animation whenever you had to ship out so that she couldn't be unfaithful between voyages."

Jupiter made a choking sound. Before he could think of anything to say, he felt the needle prick his flesh. He winced, heard Tabak begin to count:

"One . . . two . . ."

SLOWLY Jupiter became conscious of a smart in the nape of his neck like a bee sting. He opened his eyes, sat up, touched the base of his skull.

The hard little lump was gone.

Relief left him weak. He caught Tabak's eye, felt his face grow warm.

"About that girl on Betelgeuse XI—" she began uncomfortably.

"You don't need to explain. Under the circumstances you were entirely justified."

He swore under his breath, slid off the table, began to throw his equipment into the pack. "Have you any ideas about how

we can get out of here?"

"Don't be angry, Jupiter. I was only teasing. I—"

Tabak's eyes suddenly widened.

She was staring beyond him, Jupiter realized. He twisted around, reaching instinctively for his carbine.

Not thirty feet behind them an adult Anolyn sprawled on the floor, tentacles exploring the air. Its soft brown eyes were regarding them intently. The gray doughy face was expressionless.

"Quick! Kill it!" Tabak screamed. "Kill it before it sends out a call for help!"

The creature was obviously puzzled, unable to understand why the two humans failed to respond to its control.

Jupiter shot it squarely between the eyes.

The hollow, pointed bullet, blew away the entire back of its head. It slumped into a quivering heap. A pool of thin, pinkish blood made an ever-widening stain on the floor.

"The cat's out of the bag now," he said in a tight voice.

Tabak nodded.

"There's a guard at the door. You'll have to kill him, Jupiter, before we can get out of here. I only hope you're as good as you think you are."

Jupiter took a short length of strong plastic cord from his pack, made a loop in it. His face looked older, grimmer. His vivid green eyes were dull.

"Where is he stationed?" he said.

THE dissection laboratory occupied a long, hall-like room in one wing of the temple. The pool of water was at one end, the main entry at the other.

Tabak wound the black cloth about herself sarong-fashion, nodded towards the arched doorway.

"There's a—a lobby of sorts through there. The guard stays just outside on the street. He'll be a Nehogan, Jupiter. They're terrible men—"

Jupiter brushed past her. He reached the lobby, crossed it swiftly.

"Open the door," he said to Tabak who had followed him.

She looked suddenly frightened.

"I can't, Jupiter. Not without the Ano-

lyn on the back of my neck to transmit my thought! We'll have to go back the way we came."

His eyes sought the door. The blank, solid panel mocked him. He ran his fingers over its surface, but could find no slightest protuberance anywhere.

"Look out!" Tabak suddenly whispered.

Jupiter sprang back like a startled cat.

The door was opening.

The thick, solid panel swung inexorably inward. He flattened himself against the wall, the carbine clubbed in his hands. His palms were sweaty.

Then an Anolyn appeared in the entrance, scuttled inside on its eight tentacles. Jupiter swung the carbine.

There was a dull crunch as the stock connected with the creature's head. Jupiter didn't give it a second glance, but sprang into the doorway.

A tall, coppery Nehogan warrior lounged just outside. With a flick of his wrist, he dropped the loop of plastic over the guard's head, yanked him backward through the door.

Any cry the Nehogan might have uttered was cut off at its source. He thrashed wildly, but Jupiter only tightened the noose, the muscles in his arms and shoulders bunching savagely.

Suddenly he got a look at the man's distorted face.

"Reiloc!" he cried and immediately slackened the cord.

Reiloc sprawled on the floor, gasping painfully.

"Are you crazy?" Tabak cried. "Kill him, Jupiter! Kill him before he can give the alarm." She suddenly snatched the carbine, aimed a blow at the prone warrior's head. Jupiter tore it out of her hands.

Reiloc pushed himself unsteadily to his feet. He looked from the dead Anolyn to Jupiter, his hand massaging his bruised throat.

"What are you?" he whispered painfully. "What manner of man are you who can kill the Anolyn in their own temple?"

Jupiter's hesitation didn't show on his face. In a cold voice of authority, he said:

"The Wanderer-from-Beyond!"

Reiloc's eyes widened. Doubt and hope

struggled in his grim countenance. Then the savage Nehogan dropped to one knee, held his sword out to Jupiter, hilt first.

JUPITER sat beside the embrasure, staring out at the street below. Behind him Reiloc was pacing back and forth in the bare little cell like a caged wolf. The copper skinned Nehogan was nervous, worried. Action was his only emotional release.

Tabak said: "Stop it, Reiloc! You're driving me crazy!"

Reiloc quit pacing, squatted on his heels. But he couldn't stay still. Rising to his feet again, he growled: "Wait, wait. Are we waiting for them to come drag us out of here and take us to the vivisection rooms?"

Tabak said: "Only for a little while longer."

The Earth man continued to stare morosely down at the street. Under Tabak's guidance the three of them had secreted themselves in this neglected cell just off the sanctum of the Radiant God.

When the city was new this chamber had been a part of the defenses of the temple in case of an uprising. But as the ages crept past without any threat from the human cattle, even its existence had gradually been forgotten.

Outside, the city by the Dra Dur was in the grip of hysteria. The alarm had gone out and the street below was deserted except for occasional patrols of Nehogans.

Jupiter squinted at the angry orange sun. It seemed to rest on the rooftops. Only a minute or two and the ceremony should begin. He faced back into the room.

Tabak said: "I think it's crazy."

"Crazy or not, we need her," Jupiter said. "We can't hope to succeed without her."

He closed his eyes searching the memory patterns imprinted on his brain by Tabak.

The temple was built in the form of a hollow square with the breeding pens located in the main courtyard. Every day the human guinea pigs were driven up a back way into the sanctum of the Radiant God. There they were exposed to the hard radiations emitted by the statue.

No wonder the Anolyn could create endless mutations. The effects of hard radiation on the genes were known to every school child in the Galactic Federation.

He was still standing beside the window when the faint sound of cymbals broke the silence.

"Here they come!" Tabak whispered.

Reiloc stiffened, jerked out his sword. He put his hand to the back of his neck as if to reassure himself that the Anolyn was actually gone. Jupiter had removed it while they waited. Its absence seemed to give the Nehogan confidence.

"You both know what to do?" Jupiter asked.

"Yes."

He adjusted the pack over his shoulders, picked up his carbine, assured himself that a cartridge lay in the chamber. The clash of cymbals was louder, reinforced by the chant of voices.

He went to the door, followed by Reiloc and Tabak. There was a short dark passage beyond which ended abruptly in a solid wall. A well opened in the ceiling overhead, though, with a ladder bolted inside it.

He gave Tabak a boost up into the well, then Reiloc. In a moment they'd climbed out of sight.

Jupiter leaped upward, caught the bottom rung, pulled himself hand over hand up into the thick darkness.

The clash of cymbals, the chant of voices had a hollow, muffled quality. He heard Tabak pant, then whisper, "I've got it open!" The cymbals were suddenly louder.

He crawled out of the well on Reiloc's heels, replaced the cover.

They were inside the sanctum, he saw, where he'd been left when he had first been brought to the city by the Dra Dur. The huge radioactive statue of the Anolyn was the only source of light. It shed a chill greenish pallor through the circular temple room.

The room itself was at least a hundred feet across, surrounded by pillared cloisters. They had come up behind the pillars where the feeble light from the idol scarcely reached.

The rhythmic chant came from the other side of the floor. Jupiter sucked in his breath. A procession of humans was filing out of the darkness.

A scrawny, naked Caligan was in the lead, making cabalistic signs with a phallic instrument resembling the Egyptian sistrum as he moved in front of the idol.

Behind him came the others, two by two—wild Kagans fresh from the jungle, a man with four arms, several with prehensile tails, some with fur and some hairless. They walked with the same dreamy preoccupied air of the humans that Jupiter had seen in the courtyard, and prostrated themselves before the glowing idol. They were possessed, dominated by the lone Anolyn who brought up the rear.

Lete was the fourth from the end.

The cymbals suddenly clashed and fell silent. The ritual was about to begin.

Jupiter brought the rifle to his shoulder, took careful aim at the purple-shelled octopod directing the ceremony, pulled the trigger.

VII

THE SHOT REVERBERATED IN the chamber of horrors like a clap of thunder. The lone Anolyn slumped forward, half its head shot away.

With drawn sword, Reiloc leaped past Jupiter. He ran for the glowing idol, began to hack at one of ten tentacles with his sword. Tabak and Jupiter were right behind him. They grabbed Lete by either arm, hauled the bemused cave girl to her feet.

Some of the shock of the Anolyn's sudden death had been transmitted to the humans under its control. They stared at the profaners of the temple with pained uncomprehending eyes.

Reiloc snatched up the severed radio-active tentacle, dashed after Jupiter and Tabak who were half carrying Lete between them.

"This way!" Tabak cried. "This way!"

They burst out of the sanctum into a broad corridor, almost ran over another Anolyn. Jupiter shot it in its tracks.

No signs of pursuit had developed by

the time they reached the ramp. Lete was recovering from her shock. She struggled wildly, cried:

"What's happening? What are you doing with me?"

"We're escaping," Jupiter grunted.

"But you can't. The first Anolyn we meet will stop us. I don't understand—"

"Be silent, foolish one," growled Reiloc, "he's the Wanderer!"

"But you're Edir!"

"We're Edir no longer. He's broken our bonds."

Lete seized Jupiter's hand. "Then you *are* the Wanderer. You weren't laughing at me back there in the cages. But why—"

"No time now," Jupiter said and plunged onto the ramp.

They ran down it wildly, crazily, reached the canal at the bottom.

"We'll have to—" Jupiter began, when Lete screamed.

"I can feel them!" the cave girl cried. "They're trying to pull me back! Jupiter—"

She bit her lips, her cheeks suddenly bloodless. "They're gone," she said in a shaken voice. "They mustn't have guessed who I was."

Jupiter stared at her. Lete's yellow eyes were wide, frightened. She swallowed miserably.

"We'll have to get that Anolyn off your neck at the first opportunity," he said, turned to Tabak. "This canal leads to the Dra Dur. Is that right?"

"Yes," said Tabak in a queer voice; "but Jupiter—"

"What are our chances of getting through now?" he interrupted.

She shrugged slim white shoulders. "Every second we waste here lessens them."

Without another word, he started along the ledge paralleling the canal.

At regular intervals of about a block ramps led down to the aqueduct from the surface above. They crossed the mouths of other canals on narrow bridges. A perfect labyrinth of underground waterways stretched beneath the city.

At the fifth ramp, Jupiter heard a twang. Something whistled past his head. He almost lost his footing as he glanced up and

saw a dozen Nehogans on the ramp leading up to the street.

Lete spun around and tried to run, knocking Reiloc into the water with a splash. Tabak caught her, held the cave girl in spite of her terrified efforts to escape.

Jupiter dropped to one knee, changing the carbine to automatic, sent a burst of shots into the warriors above.

They didn't retreat, but with fierce yells charged straight into his gun. They were possessed, like Moros running amok. The last one was less than a yard away before he brought him down with a shot through the chest.

That had been close. He felt weak as he pulled Reiloc from the water.

"They know where we are," the giant Nehogan growled ominously, "our chances to—"

"Look out!" Tabak screamed.

Jupiter whirled around. He was just in time to see Lete run at him with Reiloc's sword. The cave girl had snatched it from the Nehogan's scabbard. Holding it like a lance, she flung herself on Jupiter, her face contorted with hate!

JUPITER jumped convulsively into the canal. His instinctive reaction was the only thing that saved him.

He broke water, saw that Reiloc had wrenched his sword away from the cave girl. He was holding her as she fought furiously to tear herself away, kicking, clawing at the Nehogan's face with her nails. She had gone utterly berserk. Jupiter was stunned.

Then he heard Tabak screaming: "Jupiter! Quick! It's the Anolyn! They've possession of her mind. Hurry!"

He scrambled desperately back on to the ledge.

"You've got to take that Anolyn from her neck! They know everything we do through her," Tabak cried wildly. "They've been in possession of her mind ever since we reached the canal. That's how they knew where to ambush us. Anywhere we go they'll be able to send men to intercept us."

Jupiter nodded grimly. As he prepared

the hypodermic of exsrocain, the Caligan girl pitched in and helped Reiloc pin Lete face down on the ledge.

Jupiter's fingers were shaking as he located a spot on Lete's naked back, plunged the needle between two of her vertebrae.

"One—two—three—four," he counted. Without bothering to test for consciousness he wrenched the little plum-colored shell from the cave girl's neck, smashed it against the wall of the aquaduct.

"Carry her!" he ordered Reiloc, and threw his instruments back into the pack, slipped a fresh drum of cartridges into the carbine. He could hear the thud of running feet on the ramp leading to the surface.

"Back!" he said tersely. "We'll have to try another way!"

For an hour they followed Tabak through the network of aquaducts, twisting, cutting down bisecting canals until Jupiter was exhausted. He and the big Nehogan had been carrying the unconscious wild girl by turns. Twice they saw Anolyn floating down to the sea like big purple squids. Jupiter shot them before they could telepath an alarm.

Tabak was in the lead when she stopped abruptly, put her hand to her mouth.

"What is it?" Jupiter hissed.

"The canal! Look!"

He raised his eyes. The tunnel came to a blind end just ahead. Then he saw that actually the roof dipped down beneath the surface.

"We've reached the seawall," Tabak said in a stricken voice. "I've never tried to leave the city by the canals, but I've heard that it was impossible. I'd forgotten—"

Jupiter seized her shoulders. "What do you mean?"

"They—they run entirely underwater for ever so far and come out beneath the Dra Dur. The Anolyn built them that way in order to keep the humans from escaping through them."

Jupiter swore in *Lingua Galactica*. "Suppose we go back to the streets. Can we reach the top of the wall? Does the sea come right up to its base?"

"Yes," Tabak said with a shiver.

Reiloc had stretched Lete out on the shelf. She was returning to consciousness,

Jupiter saw; and he stooped, splashing water from the canal into the cave girl's face. Her eyes opened groggily. She pushed herself to her elbows, stared about her with the quick, terrified look of a wild thing.

"You all right?" Jupiter asked.

She let her head drop. "Yes. I couldn't help it, Jupiter. I—"

"You'll do now," he said, not unkindly, and helped her to her feet. "Come on. We haven't any time to waste."

When they reached the surface, Jupiter saw that night had fallen, and with it a thick fog had rolled in from the Dra Dur, choking the streets solid. It was like wet lamb's wool pressing against his eyeballs.

They held hands to keep from becoming separated. Voices reached them out of the fog. Footsteps passed and faded away. At length they found a stair leading to the top of the sea wall, felt their way upward.

IT SEEMED like hours to Jupiter before they reached the top. He lay flat on his belly, felt for the edge. He could see nothing below, but a faint lap-lap of wavelets against the base of the wall came up to him.

"How deep is the water here?"

"D-deep enough," Tabak whispered in a frightened voice.

"All right, we'll jump."

Lete gasped. There was a startled, protesting growl from Reiloc.

"Jump blind, from here—from the top of the wall into the sea?" the Nehogan said. "Are you mad, Jupiter?"

"Can you think of any other way to escape?"

Tabak said in a queer, strained voice: "I'll jump. I'm not afraid—not too afraid."

Jupiter heard her move toward the edge of the wall. "No! Wait! I'll go first—"

But the Caligan girl had already leaped outward into the thick wet darkness.

Jupiter felt suddenly cold all over. He knew that he would never smell salt water again without recalling the horrible expectancy of that moment. Time stood still. Then far below they heard a splash!

"Tabak!" he called softly. He gave her time to rise to the surface. "Tabak!" He didn't dare lift his voice.

There was no answer. Just the monotonous lap of the water against the sea wall.

"God!" he thought. "She's hurt herself!" And he sprang outward into the encompassing blackness.

He seemed to fall for an eternity before he struck. It was like hitting a plank. The jar ran up his legs. He went down, down, half-dazed. Then he was clawing frantically to the surface.

He broke water. He could see nothing. It was like the bottom of a well.

"Tabak! Tabak! Where are you?"

His fingers touched something. It was the girl's shoulder. She was moving feebly, half-conscious. Treading water, he seized her, slid his arm across her chest, began to tow her away from the wall.

"Jump!" he called to Reiloc. "I've Tabak."

"By the Radiant God!" came the Nehogan's hoarse voice; "here I come!"

There was a splash, followed almost immediately by another, as the cave girl leaped also. The pair of them came up, blowing, unhurt.

"Which way?" Reiloc gasped.

"Follow the wall." Jupiter was trying to recall Tabak's memory patterns. "We're near the edge of the city, I think. There should be a beach just ahead."

They swam on, guiding themselves by the lap of water against the base of the wall. Jupiter, with his arm across Tabak's shoulder and breast, felt the girl shudder.

"Jupiter," she said weakly. "Jupiter, is that you?"

"Yes. Are you all right?"

"I—I think so. I can swim now."

All at once, he realized that the lapping of the water had changed to a faint, shushing sound.

"The beach!" he said.

Reiloc grunted. Lete didn't say anything. The wild girl swam like an otter, silent and alert. Jupiter touched bottom, helped Tabak up the beach, where they all flung themselves down in the warm sand.

A breeze had started up and was ripping the fog into wisps. A few stars glittered from the torn sky. The wall of the city loomed above them dark and threatening.

Tabak's fingers closed convulsively over Jupiter's hand.

"I'm afraid," she whispered. "It's so big and so empty out here. And there's no place where we can hide from them. They'll be after us in the morning with Nehogans and web-birds. They'll never let you go, Jupiter, never! They're afraid that you'll be able to unite the wild Kagans—"

"If we can only reach the ship," he muttered, and felt around in his pack for the metal tentacle that Reiloc had hacked from the Radiant God.

It was safe, thank the Lord, though it was only a fraction of the fuel he would need. The whole idol, that was what he must have. His eyes narrowed in the darkness.

The cave girl said in a nervous voice, "We must reach the jungle before daybreak."

He pulled himself to his feet. Lete took the lead, striking out for the invisible hills. She seemed to possess an instinct as unerring as a homing pigeon's. Every step, Jupiter realized, was taking him further and further from the source of his fuel.

DURING the next twelve days they dodged about the hills. Time after time they escaped discovery by the narrowest margin. Parties of Nehogans combed the jungle, while the web birds wheeled back and forth in the sky like observation planes. Nothing but Lete's jugglecraft saved them.

On the thirteenth day they ran into a party of hunters from Lete's colony. The cave men were strongly thewed brutes, armed with spears and clubs, dressed in the skins of animals.

They were suspicious at first. But when Lete explained that Jupiter was the Wanderer-from-Beyond, they grew excited as children.

Jupiter had to demonstrate his lightning stick. That night they had a feast, and the cave men left at dawn to spread the word that the Wanderer-from-Beyond had actually appeared.

Two days later they reached the ship.

As Jupiter parted the last screen of leaves and saw the familiar hull of the Mizar, he had to bottle up his emotions

to keep from yelling and dancing a jig. He ran his hand fondly along the cool metal, caught Tabak watching him with a twinkle in her blue eyes. He took his hand away guiltily, started for the port.

It was then that Lete balked. The cave girl refused absolutely to enter the belly of the monster, as she put it. Nor did Reiloc look overjoyed at the prospect.

Jupiter was determined to drop like a fiery comet out of the night sky before the startled cave men. At length he consented to let Reiloc and Lete go ahead on foot to prepare the wild Kagans for his coming.

He and Tabak watched the pair disappear into the jungle, then he touched the button activating the lock.

Even as he did so there was a sudden swish overhead, and a shadow raced across the clearing. The Caligan girl screamed. From the corner of his eye, Jupiter saw a web-bird dropping out of the sky like a hawk!

He picked up Tabak, tossed her bodily through the port, tumbled in after her. He kicked the massive door shut not a second too soon. Racing up the ladder, he searched the sky through the transparent thermoplas blister.

It was an empty, hot blue bowl cupping the ship, the jungles and mountains. Then he saw the web-bird rise in sweeping spirals like an enormous buzzard.

A black speck appeared above the crest of a ridge. It was another of the ungainly creatures. It joined the first and the pair began to circle high in the sky above the ship. Three more flapped into his range of vision. They kept coming until at least fifty of the giant web-birds hung wheeling and dipping monotonously above the Mizar, but so far away they were little more than black specks.

VIII

HE WAS STILL STARING UP AT them when the Caligan girl climbed up into the control blister beside him.

"Can't you shoot them down?" she protested.

He shook his head.

"They stay out of range. I don't understand it. The way they act, you'd think

they knew just how close they could come."

"Of course they know!" Tabak bit her lip. "Jupiter, they're directed telepathically by the Anolyn, and the Anolyn picked your brain clean!"

He said: "Damn!"

"They—they can't get at us in here," Tabak asked, "can they?"

He shook his head. "We're safe enough as long as we stay inside. We could fly away, I suppose, but as soon as we came back they'd pick us up again. And I haven't enough fuel to waste any of it."

The Caligan girl brightened.

"At least we're giving Reiloc and Lete a better chance to get through. We've drawn off all the birds for miles around."

Jupiter nodded, broke open his pack. Tabak's blue eyes were alive with curiosity as she watched him feed the radioactive tentacle into the fuel hoppers, reset the alarms and check the instruments.

Tabak poked into every corner of the ship, "Oh-ed" and "ah-ed" with delight. She wanted to know about everything. But before Jupiter could tell her she would say, "This is Briggs' cabin, isn't it?" Or, "This is the galley," and laugh at his expression.

"Jupiter," she said soberly, with one of her quick shifts of mood. "Are—are you very fond of Lete?"

He raised his sandy eyebrows. "What made you ask that?"

"I don't want to see you hurt, Jupiter." Tabak grew more and more confused under his level stare. "You don't know the Kagans. They—they're promiscuous like animals. Lete would never understand your morals. She couldn't—"

Jupiter slapped his leg, burst into laughter.

"Good heavens, I'm not in love with her. Why, I'll be leaving Yogol as soon as I can get enough fuel. I couldn't take her with me anyway."

"Oh," said Tabak.

Jupiter's eyes suddenly widened.

"You were speaking *Lingua Galactica*!"

"Why not? I know it as well as you."

They were back in the control blister. She sank into an acceleration chair, smoothed the short black sarong over her legs, raised her eyes to his. A small frown drew her

brows together.

"Jupiter, what is love?"

"What did you say?" he asked, not sure that he'd heard her aright.

"Love. There's no such emotion among Yogolians. Sexual attraction, but not love.

What is it, Jupiter?"

He gave her a startled, baffled look.

"It—it's a romantic invention," he said, "to dress up the biological urge. It's something you feel for another person like hunger only not so tangible."

She nodded to herself. "That's what I thought, but I wasn't sure. Is it very strong, Jupiter?"

"It can be."

"What are the symptoms?"

He scratched his chin. "It hits different people different ways. You—you— Oh, hell," he said, "I don't know. What ever made you ask?"

"I've got it," she said in a stricken voice.

Jupiter sat bolt upright. "You mean you're in love?"

She nodded unhappily, stood up. "I think I want to be by myself." Averting her head, she walked quickly to the door and slipped out of sight down the ladder before Jupiter could recover from the shock.

"Hey!" he cried, springing to his feet; "where are you going?"

There was no answer. Then he heard the door of Briggs' cabin open and close. Suddenly his eyes widened. He dropped down the ladder, tried the door, but it was locked. "Tabak! Tabak!" he called, rapped on the panel. "Open up!"

"Go away," he heard her call in an unsteady voice; "please go away and leave me alone."

"Tabak, listen," he said. "You didn't mean me? You weren't talking about me when you said—" His voice trailed off. Confound it, that didn't sound at all the way he wanted it to.

There was something suspiciously like a sob from beyond the door.

"No!" Tabak said in a muffled voice.

"Of course not!"

Jupiter felt suddenly very foolish. Without another word, he turned on his heel, strode from the passage.

TWO days later the web-birds came—tiny black specks wheeling around and around in the sky like vultures drawn by carrion. Jupiter stood in the control blister and scowled up at them.

He was worried about Reiloc and the cave girl who should have returned yesterday. Maybe he'd better not wait any longer. He was turning away to call Tabak, when a wild clamor broke loose from stern to stern of the Mizar as the alarm bell began to ring. Jupiter's head jerked up! The black specks were plummeting Yogol-wards, diving like kingfishers.

Then he saw Lete break from the encircling jungle, sprint for the ship. The cave girl was alone. There was no sign of Reiloc anywhere.

Jupiter yelled down the tube to Tabak: "Open the port! Quick!"

He heard her gasp as he sprang for the keys that brought the needle gun into play.

It was a precision weapon, a fine, invisible ray of disruptive force. As the first of the web-birds dropped arrow-like into range, the ray touched it. The creature exploded like a fountain of spray. He got two more before the startled birds sheered off.

Snapping on the outside amplifiers, he yelled: "Lete!" His voice boomed through the loudspeaker—a giant's voice that stopped the cave girl dead in her tracks. "Lete! What's wrong?"

She stared upward in fright at the gleaming bullet-shaped monster.

"Quick, girl, speak up!"

"The Anolyn," she said in a small voice.

"What about them?"

"The Anolyn have sent a great army of Nehogans. Our men have seen them, less than a day's march from here."

"Get in the ship!" Jupiter commanded.

Lete began to tremble, but she was too frightened to disobey. She climbed meekly through the port. With a hollow "clang!" it shut behind her.

JUPITER blasted the starship off the ground with the jets. He couldn't use the inertialess stellar drive inside Yogol's gravitational field and the Mizar rocked sickeningly as it hurtled above the surface under rocket propulsion.

Lete covered in the shock absorber where Jupiter had buckled her down against her will. Her yellow eyes were glazed. She was like a wild animal in a trap.

Tabak was pale, but she stared eagerly through the transparent rind of the blister. Jupiter shot her an approving glance. He'd never realized how blue the Caligan girl's eyes were—cerulean blue, alive, dancing like a little girl's with a new doll.

"Take the scanner," he said gruffly. "You should know how it operates."

"May I? I'll be ever so careful."

She found it unhesitatingly, turned it on. The surface of Yogol sprang on the screen in three dimensional reality. Tabak gasped.

"I'm almost afraid I might fall into it!" Then she stiffened. "There they are! There! Look, Jupiter!"

He glanced into the screen. The valley widened out below, and he could see a great army of men camped on the level ground. Thousands of the copper skinned Nehogan warriors! They stood in excited clusters, staring upward, pointing at the Mizar with its comet tail of flame.

Jupiter could make out the striped tents of the Anolyn in the center of the encampment. He could see pink skinned Caligans and stolid porters. He turned to the terrified cave girl.

"What happened to Reiloc?"

Lete only moaned.

"Answer me!" he snapped. "Where's Reiloc?"

"He—he stayed at the cliffs to organize my people into an army. The tribes have been coming in for days. Ever since the word spread that the Wanderer has appeared. Reiloc said to tell you that he was going to split his forces, attack from both ends of the valley."

Jupiter swore under his breath. "We're going down," he told Tabak. "Going down fast. Hang onto your hair."

He put the Mizar into a tight spiral, drove her down like a blazing meteor. The star ship must have presented an awe-inspiring sight, jets shooting streamers of flame, her nose pointed directly at the cluster of striped tents in the center of the army.

Below him, the Nehogans scattered panic-stricken. The surface was rushing up at him like a gigantic expanding cannon ball. He cut in "George", buckled himself down frantically.

The Mizar seemed to explode as every available jet burst into life. A thunderous booming roar deafened him. Then the ship struck with a jar that almost shook loose his teeth.

He threw off the straps, dived for the control panel.

ASH covered the ground where the tents had been. At least half of the purple shelled octopods had been consumed instantly by the jets. The Anolyn who remained alive were scuttling for the protection of the jungle. Jupiter swung the needle gun into action.

The Nehogans had outstripped their slow-moving masters, who crawled like a cluster of frightened tortoises across the bare, flat land. The sides of the valley were alive with humans; they had fled that far and had turned to watch in frightened silence.

Jupiter concentrated on the Anolyn, picking them off one by one. Only a few seconds actually had elapsed since the Mizar had appeared over the horizon, and already less than a dozen of the terrified creatures were left, crawling desperately for the hills.

A sudden whisper of wings sounded overhead. Something like the shadow of a cloud raced across the flat land toward the cluster of fleeing octopods.

"The web-birds!" Tabak cried

Jupiter lifted his eyes, saw a flock of the ungainly creatures. There must have been nearly a hundred of them. They swooped down on their Anolyn masters, plucked the octopods from the ground with a furious beating of wings.

Jupiter's eyes widened in disbelief as the remaining Anolyn were borne to safety above the tree tops.

The Mizar was left all alone in the center of the valley.

Then to a man the frightened mob on the hillsides fell down on their faces, arms extended before them toward the ship e-

low, and a great babbling cry arose:

"The Wanderer! The Wanderer-from-Beyond!"

Tabak whirled away from the plastic rind.

"Jupiter! There comes Reiloc now! He must be warned, Jupiter! He doesn't know that the Anolyn have fled. He'll attack!"

At the head of the valley a mass of half-naked cavemen were streaming from the trees. They were a wild, undisciplined lot like an army of soldier ants on the march. Even from this distance, Jupiter recognized the giant figure of Reiloc striding at their head.

He swore in *Lingua Galactica*. "I can't afford to leave the ship just yet. Not until we know how that crazy Anolyn army's going to behave. The ship's our ace in the hole."

"I'll go," Tabak said, and darted for the well.

Jupiter watched her disappear down the ladder with a vague feeling of uneasiness. Then he turned back to the transparent rind. He caught sight of her again, running across the level ground toward Reiloc, waving her arms—a slim, blonde figure in the sarong, barefooted and barelegged. He swallowed disconsolately.

So, he thought, it must be Reiloc that she's crazy about. Reiloc!

He could see the giant Nehogan leave the cavemen, hurry toward the girl. They met on the level valley floor between the ship and the wild Kagans who were still debouching from among the trees.

Jupiter's blood ran suddenly cold. A flock of web-birds had appeared over the crest of the hill.

He leaped for the keys of the needle gun.

"Reiloc!" he yelled through the P. A. "Tabak! Watch out! The birds!"

He got three of the ungainly flying webs with the needle ray. Then he couldn't shoot any more.

"Oh, hell," he said.

The web-birds had dropped onto the pair in the open. Jupiter could see neither Reiloc nor Tabak. Only the monstrous fluttering of the creature's wings. Then the

flock lifted slowly into the air bearing the Nehogan and the Caligan girl aloft. Jupiter didn't dare fire for fear of hitting either the one or the other.

They rose higher, higher, then straight as wild bees they lined out for the distant city by the Dra Dur. }

Jupiter was beside himself with helpless rage and consternation. He couldn't chase them in the starship. It would be like attempting to follow a school of fish in an ocean liner.

He was stunned. He sank into an acceleration chair, while the web-birds with their human freight, became smaller and smaller in the distance.

DURING the days following the capture of Tabak and Reiloc, Jupiter was frantic. He couldn't rid his mind of the horrors that the fragile Caligan girl might be undergoing. The breeding stations, the biological laboratories, the inhuman orgies that took place in the city by the Dra Dur. Reiloc would be no better off, except that they might kill him outright instead of by degrees. Every hour's delay multiplied their danger.

Jupiter drove himself unmercifully, but there weren't enough hours for him to cram in all the things that had to be done.

He allowed the Kagans to retain their loose tribal organization. More tribes joined the march on the city by the Dra Dur every day. They were more like a migrating people than an army. They were bound together by only one common impulse—a desire to annihilate the Anolyn.

Lete was some help to Jupiter there. The cave girl acted as liaison officer between him and the Kagan chiefs. He was aware that she had risen to a position of eminence among her people—an Amazon chieftainess, a cave girl Joan of Arc.

Her rise to power suited him because it left him free to organize the Nehogan army.

They were his only trained body of men and they were useless so long as the parasites were fastened to their necks. The Anolyn could regain control of them, turn his own army against him.

Jupiter set himself to the impossible task of administering the exsocrain to the

Nehogan soldiers, the Caligan advisers, even the green skinned porters.

He made short hops in the star ship, setting up his camp ahead of the slow moving army. As soon as they began to stream in, he set to administering the drug. He trained a staff of Caligans, who were more adept at such things. He synthesized gallons of the stuff and taught them how to synthesize it.

And all the time he lived in perpetual dread of the Anolyn's next move.

Overhead the web-birds wheeled and dipped, at first hundreds, then thousands of the creatures as they drew closer to the city. They were the eyes of the Anolyn, he sensed. They followed the army like gulls following a ship.

On the seventeenth day they reached the broad plains surrounding the city by the Dra Dur, deployed before the towering walls and battlements.

The Nehogan general and Lete were closeted with Jupiter in the Mizar, laying their final plans, when a postern gate opened and a man left the city, made his way alone toward the lines of the invading army.

HE WAS a Caligan in a living, yellow furred boj and sandals. His eyes were peculiar—a glazed blue like enamelware. He made no move to escape or defend himself when the pickets grabbed him.

He said that he had a message for the Wanderer-from-Beyond from the Anolyn.

He was turned over to a Nehogan officer and brought before Jupiter in the Mizar.

One look at the man told Jupiter that he was possessed—that he was merely a vehicle through which some Anolyn inside the city was seeing, hearing, speaking, acting—

In an undertone he cautioned Lete and the Nehogan general not to mention their plans, turned to the Caligan envoy.

"What message do the Anolyn send?"

The Caligan stood like a man in a cataleptic trance, regarded Jupiter with fixed, unwinking attention.

"I am to inform you that the girl, Tabak, and the man, Reiloc, are unharmed."

Jupiter realized suddenly that his forehead was covered with sweat. He didn't interrupt.

The Caligan continued in that flat, unemotional voice:

"Unless you disband your army and send them away, the girl will be turned over to the long-tailed Begans to play with. If she survives the animal-men, which is doubtful, she will be sent to the biological laboratories for vivisection. Reiloc, of course, will be operated on immediately."

The Caligan paused. The control blister was still.

"In the event you agree to the Anolyn terms," the emissary went on, "both Tabak and Reiloc will be set free outside the city gates. You are to take them aboard your ship and leave Yogol forever.

"Post-hypnotic commands have been implanted in both their minds. If you return or attempt treachery, of any kind, they will kill you.

"You have until sunup to give us your decision."

The Caligan stopped talking.

Jupiter let his breath run out between his teeth. The orange sun was sinking into the Dra Dur. Lete's yellow eyes glittered. The Nehogan general opened his mouth to speak. But Jupiter silenced him with an imperative gesture.

"This is not something to be decided without thought," he told the unwinking emissary. "We'll give you our answer before daybreak." He turned to the guards. "Lock him in my cabin."

No sooner had the door closed on the Caligan envoy, than Lete sprang to her feet. She was clad in the fur of some jungle beast. A sword and dagger hung at her waist. She made Jupiter think of a savage Joan of Arc more than ever and he could feel his heart sink.

"There is but one answer," she flashed, "and that's to attack! Attack tonight before they can bring up reinforcements.

"This is the first time the Kagans have been united. Do they think we're foolish enough to throw away everything for the life of a man and a girl!"

Jupiter didn't say anything.

The Nehogan general shook his head. He looked somewhat like Reiloc except that he was older, heavier.

"After all," he said, "many men will die during the battle. Is that any reason to abandon the fight? What's the life of two people against the whole world? I don't understand it. The Anolyn must be very desperate to offer such terms. It is a trick, maybe."

"No," said Jupiter. "No, I don't think it's a trick." But he knew that it would be impossible to explain his feelings either to the cave girl or the Nehogan general. Such sentimentality was foreign to their natures. If he attempted to dissuade them from their purpose, they would go ahead in spite of him. And he couldn't blame them.

He said: "We'll attack at sun-up."

"But why wait until then?" Lete demanded hotly, "When the Anolyn will be expecting us?"

"To give me time to get inside and open the gate," he told her.

"You can get inside the city?" the Nehogan general asked incredulously. "Undetected?"

"I think so. It's worth a try."

"Yes," said the general grimly, "if you can get the gate open it may mean the difference between victory and defeat. When will you start?"

Jupiter was staring at the spires and steeples of the city by the Dra Dur, bathed in the angry orange rays of the setting sun.

"One hour after dark," he said.

IX

JUPITER DISMOUNTED THE needle ray. It never had been intended to serve as a hand weapon. It was like carrying a fifty millimeter anti-aircraft gun, but on this planet of mild gravity he was able to handle it well enough.

He encased it carefully in waterproof wrappings. Then he broke out a space-suit.

Sun up. The order was to attack at sun up! It didn't give him much time.

The Yogolians knew nothing about reducing a fortified city, but they had cut timbers for scaling ladders. The cavemen could run up them like monkeys. They

should carry the walls by sheer numbers.

Lete and the Nehogan general watched him curiously as he donned the spacesuit. He picked up the unwieldy gun, started through the soft black night for the city.

They went along with him discussing their plans. He answered in grunts, his voice harshly metallic coming through the diaphragm. At the front lines he left them behind and went on alone across the level plain like a robot in the cumbersome suit.

The impulse to run was almost uncontrollable. Suppose the Anolyn were suspicious. They might have been bluffing, Tabak and Reiloc might already be dead. He began to sweat.

He plodded on steadily through soft, plowed land. He reached a pasture and a herd of the long-tailed Begans ran up sniffing him curiously. The black, hairy men followed him, grunting, among themselves, to the opposite fence where they stopped. They had been trained not to climb fences.

All at once he realized that he had come to the beach. The walls of the city loomed darkly massive above him. Stars twinkled in the velvet sky.

He waded out into the water. The stars vanished as the Dra Dur closed above his helmet. He snapped on his torch.

The light drove a lance through water ahead, revealing the sandy bottom, strange submarine creatures. He struggled on and on, the pitch of the sea floor becoming steeper. It was like a fairyland of grottoes and trailing seaweed. Then the rays from his torch struck the gaping mouth of a cave.

Only it wasn't a cave at all. It was more like a tunnel—a tunnel that the ancients had driven through the mountains.

Jupiter felt his heart leap into his throat. It was what he had been searching for—the mouth of one of the canals leading beneath the city by the Dra Dur.

He turned into it, his light revealing smooth composition walls, green and slick with algae. He must have gone a mile before he found a ramp leading to the surface.

As his helmet broke water, he saw that his luck was still holding. He was beneath the temple of the Radiant God. The ramp

which continued on up into the temple proper was deserted.

He sat down, unwrapped the needle gun, then started up the ramp like some amphibious monster of the deep. Tabak and Reiloc, he was sure, were being confined in the temple. The breeding pens more than likely, since that was where most of the human guinea pigs were confined.

He didn't encounter a single Anolyn until he reached the central courtyard.

The courtyard was divided into runs like a dog kennel. It was dark with a pitch-like blackness. He hastily shut the air intake valve on the spacesuit. The stench was terrible. He could hear grunts, soft voices. Someplace in the darkness a girl was crying.

Jupiter was revolted to the depths of his being. When he thought of Tabak being shut up here, he could feel his blood run cold.

How was he going to find her in this mess? He didn't dare use the torch and time was running out.

Overhead the stars were paling. A light appeared diagonally across the courtyard. He flattened himself against the wall.

IT WAS a torch, he saw, in the hand of a pink skinned Caligan. A dozen grotesque Anolyn followed the torch bearer, then a company of Nehogans. Jupiter watched them make their way between the runs.

His eyes suddenly narrowed. They had stopped before a cage in which he could see a girl.

The door was opened, the girl dragged out, hustled toward a pen of long tailed Begans. The smoky light of the torch glared briefly on her face.

Tabak! They had taken away the girl's sarong, caged her like a wild animal.

Jupiter swung up the needle ray. He could see them leading Reiloc from the next cage.

He yelled: "Tabak! Reiloc! To me!" and flicked on the ray gun.

The disruptive beam of force touched one of the guards. There was a brief, brilliant flash. Then another and another as the ray fingered guard after guard.

The yard went from light to dark to light again, freezing the action. Jupiter saw Tabak break away, sprint toward him down the corridor between the runs. Reiloc was directly behind her. The giant Nehogan had snatched a sword from one of the guards whom Jupiter had rayed down. He brandished it over his head, yelled savagely.

More Nehogans poured into the courtyard, summoned telepathically by the Anolyn. Then Reiloc and Tabak were crowding beside him.

"The city gates!" Jupiter barked. "We've got to reach them before dawn!"

"This way," Tabak cried. She plunged into a passage leading from the court.

"Not so fast," Jupiter grunted. "I can't keep up in this damned suit."

The Caligan girl slowed down. Behind them the pandemonium from the breeding pens became fainter and died away. Reiloc, pounding along at Jupiter's elbow, said:

"Has the city been attacked?"

"No. Sun up. We've got to open the main gate."

They burst from the temple into the street. The guard at the entrance was caught flatfooted. Reiloc laid him out with a blow of his sword, and they ran on down a strangely deserted street.

"Where's everybody?" Jupiter panted.

Tabak said over her shoulder. "There's only a skeleton force in the city. Most of the Nehogans were in the army they sent after us."

Red was streaking the East, when they reached the gate. It was guarded by a lone Anolyn and a dozen Caligans.

Jupiter rayed the octopod and the Caligans scattered like frightened birds. Reiloc started the mechanism that rolled back the massive, circular gate. No one tried to stop them.

Jupiter continued to wait tensely, covering the street with the needle ray. He was still waiting when the advance body of the encircling Nehogan army poured through the entrance.

He stood there—a scowl on his lean brown face as the Nehogans continued to trot into the city. They were veterans. They fanned up the streets, searched the buildings as they went. There were a

few sharp clashes, but that was all.

In less than an hour, the city by the *Dra Dur* had fallen.

The Anolyn had retreated silently into the sea from whence they had arisen.

AS THE last chunk of the Radiant God went into the fuel hoppers aboard the Mizar, Jupiter realized that there was nothing left to hold him on the planet.

The Yogolians were busy organizing themselves into a cohesive people. Outside the city walls, the horde was camped. Lete was high in the council of chiefs and an expedition was being planned against a second town further up the coast.

They were a resilient race, these Yogolians. Now that they had the means to combat the Anolyn, it wouldn't be long before the last of the octopods were driven back into the *Dra Dur*. They didn't need him any more.

Jupiter climbed the ladder to the control blister. It was night, the bluish pallor of the riding lights illuminating the instruments. All about him rose the dark spires of the city by the *Dra Dur*.

He stared upward through the blister. The huge, dark nebula seemed to cut a hole in space.

He felt a tingle in his nerve ends. He was sure Earth lay on the other side of that hundred-and-twenty-light-year long stretch of blackness. A sudden wave of homesickness gripped him.

Why not blast off now—this minute?

He could feel his heart pump a little faster. The ship was fueled up, ready to go. He had told Reiloc only a little while ago that he might leave any time—tonight even.

He hadn't seen Tabak since the fall of the city. He had tried to find her, asking questions of everyone, but nobody seemed to know anything about her. The Caligan girl obviously was avoiding him.

Jupiter swore under his breath. His fingers touched the controls. Flame rumbled suddenly in the jets, rebounded in orange billows past the blister.

As soon as Jupiter was beyond Yogol's gravitational field, he switched to the inertialess stellar drive, turned the ship over

to "George". He leaned back in his seat. It was good to feel the weightless buoyancy of deep space again.

Someone said: "Dinner is being served in the galley, sir!"

Jupiter shot out of his chair, banged his shoulder against the overhead, forgetting all about his lack of weight. He rebounded helplessly to the deck, squirmed around.

"Tabak!" he gasped.

The Caligan girl stood beside the ladder leading below. She was dressed in Brigg's olive-green uniform, her eyes dancing.

"But I thought you'd gone away!"

Her face softened. "I couldn't. It— it's too strong for me, Jupiter. I've been in Brigg's cabin all the time. I knew that was one place you'd never go."

He said: "Then it was me?" his eyes slowly kindling.

Tabak nodded.

Jupiter shoved off from the back of the shock absorber, grabbed the girl in his arms. "You're crazy," he said, "you didn't have to stow away."

"But you said you wouldn't take anybody with you when you left."

The tube began to buzz angrily; the red light winked on. Jupiter stiffened.

"Who's *that*?"

Then Reiloc's voice sounded in the communicator.

"Will you come down here and show me how to eat?" he demanded in an aggrieved voice. "My coffee is floating in a ball around the ceiling!"

Tabak giggled.

Jupiter couldn't believe it. He said, "Who else is aboard?"

"No one. Just Reiloc and me. You're not angry, are you? He was wild to come. I never could have stayed hidden if it hadn't been for him. He brought me food and—"

"You mean he knew, where you were all the time?"

"Yes," she said meekly.

"Are you coming down?" Reiloc belted; "or must I starve?"

"Go ahead and starve," said Jupiter. "we're busy."