

THE TEMPLE OF EARTH

BY POUL ANDERSON

ILLUSTRATED BY ORBAN

All his life, Rikard had defied the warlords of Coper City, but even the stoutest outlaw could be outnumbered. Now Rayth offered him freedom for the death of the Chief Engineer. It seemed simple enough—until Rikard began to learn the History of Earth!

"Here they come!"

Leda's voice vibrated in the ears of the four men with her. They stood with their helmets touching so they could talk, eyes looking down the rugged sweep of Copernicus to the force which came running upward against them. At their backs, the brutal heights of rock climbed for the stars, but they stood in a recess between looming crags, as good a defensive position as they could hope for.

"Eight, nine—" Rikard strained his eyes through the queer tricky light and shadow—the

brilliant rushing blue of Earth nearly in full phase, the utter dark of knife-edged umbras, a sprawling savage confusion of spires and cliffs tumbling down toward the far ghostly shimmer of the plain. "Ten at least, I make it, probably more. It'll be a rough fight."

The tiny metal-glinting specks bounded closer, twenty-foot leaps from height to height, and now they could see the sheen of Earthglow on spears and axes. Rikard said slowly: "It will most likely be death if we make a stand. Let anyone who wishes go



down to them now, and I will not think the less of him."

"Down to execution or enslavement? You should know us better than that," said Huw. He hefted his own ax, and shadows crept over the folds of his flexi-cord suit. "Heh, they'll have to come at us only a few at a time. We'll mince 'em as they do."

A mutter of assent rumbled from Jonak and Chungti. Leda remained silent, but one gauntletted hand closed on Rikard's arm.

The outlaw chief's gaunt dark face flashed in a brief grin. "Thank you," he said. "We'll at least show the damned Copers that Nyrac can still fight."

He moved away from the group and strung his bow. It was a big one, suitable for the giant who wielded it, and had been in his family for a long time. Plastic bow, wire string, steel arrows that leaped out with a hundred pounds of force behind them—such a weapon could pierce a spacesuit and come out the other side in a rush of air. Wood and cord were of little use on the surface; they dried and cracked in the sucking vacuum, sizzled by day and froze by night. But with this weapon he had sent more men than he remembered to Earth.

Standing in the abysmal shadow of a crag, he nocked an

arrow and took aim. The bow thrummed in his hand and a bright shaft sprang forth. One of the attacking band suddenly leaped up, fell, and rolled down the long slope with the moisture-laden air gushing out like his fleeing soul.

"There's one less!" cried Leda savagely, and raised her pike. None heard her speak in the looming silence, but they saw her lips laughing behind the plastic helmet. Rikard turned for a glimpse of her, the strong fair face, the heavy yellow hair—turned blue and green now by the pouring Earthlight, but not the less good to look on.

He had stolen her three years before, in a raid on Moonburg, and she had fought him bitterly for awhile. But later there had been understanding between them, and when the Copers overran Nyrac and he and a few men fled into rebellious exile, she was the only one of his wives who had come with him. They smiled briefly at each other and then he faced back toward the enemy.

His bow throbbed again, and he cursed as the shaft whipped past a nearing figure. The man hurled a spear; it bounced off the crag and Huw stepped forth to seize and throw it back. Rikard fired once more, and another warrior tumbled to the stony ground, to freeze in death.

Now they were close, terribly close, a good dozen of them rushing in on him. He sent a final snapped shot against them, dropped the bow, and grabbed up his ax. Swiftly the outlaws fell into a defending line: Rikard, Huw, and Jonak, the heaviest, standing shoulder to shoulder between the two great pillars; Leda and Chungti just behind them with pikes at the ready.

The first of the Copers hit Rikard with the furious velocity of a broad jump, ax swinging down against the chief's helmet. Rikard caught the blow on his own weapon's handle, twisted it down, and kicked the attacker in the belly. He bounced away, wide open for assault, but it wouldn't do to leave the line. The next was almost instantly on the outlaw, blade cleaving vacuum. Rikard's ax blurred down and crashed into the space helmet. The shock of the blow rammed home in his own muscles, but it had burst open the tough plastic. Air whirled out, white with frost, red with the blood that suddenly foamed from mouth and nose.

The enemy's own ax had dropped from his fingers as Rikard's blade smashed home, and clanged off the chief's helmet. Rikard smote at the warrior beyond, hit a metal shoulder plate, and dodged a counterblow. Leda

thrust between him and Jonak, driving the pike home with a terrible force that split the Coper's suit at the belly. He lurched back, clutching futile hands against the streaming air, his face distorted with unheard screams.

Two of them were on, Rikard now, ax and spear, blows clattering off his helmet and shoulder plates as he dodged and parried and hewed. He whirled his weapon over his head, brought it crashing down to break another helmet and the skull beneath, and his own yelling rang in his ears.

From the corner of one eye he saw Jonak fall. Snarling, he swung on the killer, his blow parried by the other axhead. "Go to Mars, you bastard!" he growled, and hailed blow after blow against the enemy's guard, a leaping dancing fury of steel that drove the fellow back until he was against a cliff. Rikard sprang in and slew him.

Panting, he whirled around to see that the Copers had broken his line, that they raged three or four about each of the survivors, thrusting and smiting, a flicker of light and hard metal against the monstrous blacknesses of shadow. Even as he watched, Chungti went down with a spear in him. Huw and Leda stood back to back, beating off the pack that snarled around

them, and Rikard launched himself across the space between to fall on the Copers. He clove one helmet from behind, pitched another man aside, parried a thrust and kicked the thruster back, and joined his comrades.

A cloudiness of freezing moisture fogged his helmet, and Huw toppled against him. He stood over the body and struck home. Leda swept her pike in a wide arc, got it between a man's legs and tripped him, and stabbed him before he could rise. Then a Coper got between her and Rikard, threw his arms around her from behind and dragged her to the ground.

They closed in on Rikard, hemming him in a solid wall of armored bodies, bearing him down and holding him fast with four men on each arm. When they brought forth wire and began lashing his hands together he kicked out, rose to his feet and knocked them away as they came on him, until someone else tackled him and he went down once more.

Captured! By the living Earth, no clean death in battle, but captured!

He lay gasping the hot foul air of his suit, looking up to the crystal dark of heaven, a million needle-sharp stars and the ghostly glory of the Milky Way, up to Earth's huge blue disc, and the

world, the Moon-world of witch-light and shadow and cruel fanged stone, reeled about him with his dismay. Captured!

A tall man, apparently the chief of the band, counted the survivors and then put his helmet against Rikard's. His face was sharply carved, dark-eyed, with the pointed beard of a Coper noble and the hollow cheeks corpse-blue in the light. He said slowly: "Yes, you are the rebel leader. I'm glad we took you alive."

Rikard looked sullenly back at him.

"Behave yourself," advised the other. "Remember we hold the woman too."

They scaled the heights of Copernicus and descended to the plain which the crater ringed in. Not far off was an armored dome with sentries before it, one of the airlocks leading to a tunnel. They entered this and came to the long tube-lit bareness underground. A few Coper soldiers were posted here, taking turns at guard duty on the outside.

Like all their city freemen they wore more clothes than the outlying barbarians, who rarely donned more than a pocketed kilt if that much—these had tunics as well, and flat steel helmets, and carried the swords that

were useful underground though ineffective against a spacesuit; nor did they have the war-paint of barbarian fighters. They did not mock the prisoners—the name of Rikard of Nyrac had been too frightening for the past year—but they leered at Leda.

Even the outlaws were glad to shed their spacesuits. Sweat and the needs of nature made it uncomfortable to be outside more than a few hours at a time. They were stripped, their hands bound behind them, and marched between an alert guard down the tunnel toward Coper City. It went rapidly, the long bounding pace of men in home territory who had no ambush to fear.

Rikard's mind whirled over the catastrophes of the past hours. He and his men—some fifty in all—had been living mostly on the outside since the fall of Nyrac a year ago. They had had seal tents which they moved from place to place, and had descended into the tunnels and cities often through old unguarded airlocks to raid for food, water, air, and the killing of Coper men. While they fought, they had been a symbol of resistance to the free people within and beyond the expanding Coper empire, they had checked its advance a little, they had been a rallying force and many young men had come to

join them. There had been hope.

Then—Rikard and his four companions returned from a scouting trip to find their camp in the hands of the enemy. They had fought clear, had been pursued, and finally this squad had hunted them down and captured the two rebel leaders—and that was all there was to it. That was the end—the end of the fight, the end of hope, the end most likely of life.

His bitter dark eyes turned on the leader of the squad. That one had donned a tunic of brilliant colors, the dress of a mighty noble, and the sword at his waist was jeweled. "Who are you?" he asked coldly.

The lean face smiled. "I am Rayth, prince of Coper City," he answered. "It was—fortunate for both of us—that I should have happened to lead the group that found you. Others would have had you killed out of hand, but I can find better uses for you." He nodded at Leda. "Yes indeed."

Her head lifted haughtily, shining raw gold of hair spilling over broad shoulders to her supple waist. Rikard snarled and wrenched at his bonds. They dug harshly into his wrists, and a guard pricked him with a spear.

Rayth held Rikard's bow between his hands. "This is an unusually fine weapon," he said. "I hadn't thought the barbar-

ians had anything so good. You may get it back, but you'll have to earn it."

The tunnel opened into a great cavern, a reaching vastness whose farther walls could not be seen. It was farmland, peasants going between the long rows of tanks and tending a riotous greenery of food plants, an occasional hard-faced overseer pausing in his rounds to salute the prince. They went by a stock-yard, cattle, pigs, sheep, and poultry in their pens, slaves cleaning and feeding. Not far off was a slaughterhouse, and Rayth's aristocratic nose crinkled.

A winding ramp led up through other levels. They passed the drab, huddled compartments of the lower classes, gray-clad peasants crowded with their families into doorless rooms. Above that was a factory level, where acolyte engineers labored over weapons and tools, over ore-smelting and refining, and other workmen turned out clothes and food and the remaining necessities of life. The party stopped here to deliver the battle-torn spacesuits for repair. Flexicord would be mended, plastic melted together again; nobody cared about the stripped bodies withering on the outside.

Rikard could not forbear to

ask: "Where is your air factory?"

"That is farther up, in the Temple and in direct charge of the Chief Engineer," said Rayth politely. "It is, after all, among the most vital jobs." He raised his eyebrows. "You didn't have an air plant at Nyrac, did you?"

"No. We bought or took it from elsewhere as needed."

"Ah, I thought so. Most of the barbarians do. Now, Rikard, you are a man of intelligence, and I ask you to think a bit. We must have extra air, to replace that which is lost one way or another, but it takes skill and some equipment to get it from the minerals in which it is locked. Rather than war on us, one of the few places where they can produce it, would it not have been wiser to accept us in friendship and receive from us a steady and dependable supply?"

"We were freemen. Now we are slaves, and must grovel to your overlords and give them all we make in exchange for a miserly ration. That is reason enough to fight you."

"I don't think," said Rayth sardonically, "that your own slaves notice any change."

Rikard clamped his lips tight.

Above the factory level was a park. It was known that the life of the air, and hence of man, depended on green plants, so even

the smallest village had its farms and even the outlaws' crowded seal-tents had contained some pots of vegetation. But Rikard and Leda had never seen anything like this riot of blooms and rearing trees, had never felt grass soft and cool beneath their bare feet, and the girl drew a gasp of wonder and buried her face in a huge sweet cluster of roses.

Rayth drew his sword and cut the flowers and handed them to her with a bow. "No fairer than you," he smiled.

She cursed and threw them at his feet.

There were folk of noble class around, warriors, administrators, ranking Engineers, and their children and colorfully gowned women. They gathered about, laughing, shouting, cheering, and Rayth nodded affably but led the way onward.

Above the park were the levels of the spacious upper-class apartments, where others of gentle birth went about in litters and slaves scurried humbly on their errands. Rikard noticed the guardsmen standing rigidly here and there, and decided that the power of the overlords was not so secure as it might look.

On and on, until at last they stood before a high wall ornamented with murals of ancient triumphs and festivals. Four

sentries stood in front of the door, bringing their spears to rigid salute as Rayth approached. A footman opened the door and they were ushered into the prince's home.

It was richly furnished, with hangings and vases and furniture of priceless ancient work—older than the Fall, it must be—as well as the clumsier recent articles of carved wood and hammered metal. Rayth led the way to a spacious chamber whose outer window looked on the sky. Automatically, Rikard stepped over there to make a survey. This place must be high in the dome which rose over the city's underground levels. He could look down the great sweep of metal and concrete to the rugged plain beneath, and out toward the sharply curving horizon and the mighty ringwall which shouldered above it. The stars thronged and blazed in a cold glory of sky.

"Unbind them," said Rayth.

Rikard stretched mightily, rubbing cramped arms. Leda stepped over beside him and her hand stole into his. The guards marched out, except for two who stood alertly against the wall.

"And now what?" asked the barbarian.

"Why, I suppose you will want to clean yourselves. There is a bathroom over that way. After-

ward we will eat, and then we can talk."

There were garments for the prisoners, of a soft colorfulness such as they had not known since the last time Nyrác captured a trading caravan in the tunnels, and there was a feast of skillfully prepared meat and bread, fresh fruit, wine and delicacies for which they had no name. They sat around the table and gorged.

Rayth exerted himself to be pleasant. He brought in slave girls to dance and play, he kept the wine glasses full, and the words that flowed from his smiling lips had nothing to do with immediate reality. Despite himself, Rikard had to listen with interest and reply where he could, and Leda sat enchanted.

The prince got onto ancient history, which seemed to be a pet subject of his. He discoursed of a thousand years of war, politics, conquest and liberation, dynasties and gods and people, and after the vague heroic songs of the barbarians it was a new experience to listen to his crisp cynical prose. They could still read and write in Coper City, though only a few nobles besides the Engineers took the trouble to learn, and so they remembered with precision.

"But the Fall?" whispered

Leda. "What was that?"

"The Fall from Earth?" Rayth smiled and arched his brows. "Well, my fair one, suppose you tell me what you think."

"Why—I never thought much about it," she said, her broad clear forehead wrinkling above the steady blue eyes. "They say that man came from Earth originally, and sinned, and was condemned to dwell in the world here until the sin is redeemed. The souls of the dead return to Earth—"

"Or to Mars, if they are criminals or Copers," grunted Rikard.

Leda threw him a little frown and spread her hands helplessly. "That is all I know."

"Hm—well, it's the general story. Our Engineers tell it to our own commons, since it helps keep them in check. But what would you say if I told you Earth is another world like our own?"

"It couldn't be," said Leda. "The story is that on Earth you can walk on the outside without a spacesuit. And there is green everywhere, and great pools of water, and everyone has enough to eat."

"Oh, yes, beyond doubt Earth is not quite the same as Luna. After all, man and his animals are so ill suited to life here that I think it only reasonable to suppose they came from Earth—not

in any mystic Fall, but by ordinary physical means."

"They jumped?" asked Rikard scornfully.

"No, they—well—I'll come to that later. They had ways. Such few books as have survived tell something about what happened. Men came here from Earth to look for minerals which they needed. Cities were built here and there over the face of Luna, and tunnels cut to connect them and to get at the ores. They were wise, those ancients. They built not only the things we now have and use in a blind fashion, by rote, without much understanding—smelters, sun-power accumulators, spacesuits, and all the rest—but they had other things as well. Weapons more deadly than bow or ax, machines which carried them over the surface and hauled their loads and did the work we must do by hand—but those things have long worn out or been destroyed, and their remnants have been wrecked for the metal in them. We have a few relics in our Temple here, that is all." Rayth's eyes gleamed briefly.

He went on in a moment. "The sin and the Fall were something different from what the Engineers have said in their sermons. I don't know exactly what happened, except that even those wise ancients were not united,

they were divided into—cities, I suppose—and the separate colonies here were owned by these various cities. A war broke out, not a war as we know war but something with doom in it, all the power of the machines turned loose to blast and burn. It must have destroyed civilization on Earth; at least there have been no visitors from there in a thousand years or more. Here on Luna the colonies also fought, but in a more limited way since they had not the greatest engines of destruction. But it was enough to wipe out many cities—you must have seen some of the ruins—and to destroy most of the equipment. Such wise men as survived had not the tools to work with to rebuild all they must have, and the turbulent new generations paid little heed to teachings which had no relation to their own experience. The remaining machines wore out, the wise men died, the cities fought with swords and spears for the necessities of life, and finally the long night of ignorance fell on us. And that is the true story of the Fall."

"How do you know?" challenged Rikard.

"Oh, I have read the remaining old books and fragments of books, and used my own head to piece together what little was known. Coper City has kept

more knowledge than the others anyway. Those went back to naked barbarism, retaining barely enough tradition to survive; but we, living in what had been the most important of the old colonies, kept somewhat more than that. There have always been a few in Coper City who knew the truth, though they lacked means to do anything about it."

Rikard leaned back in his chair and surveyed the prince with arrogant eyes. "All right," he said. "I'll accept it. What's the difference anyway? What do you have us here for and why are you telling us this?"

"Oh—I wanted you to realize that our frank goal of conquering the world is not the unmitigated evil you insist. It will bring knowledge to the barbarians, give them back their heritage, and end their stupid squabbling in a unity of all mankind."

"At the price of making them slaves and paupers!"

"Well, I didn't say we were doing this for our health," said Rayth mildly. "The outlier raids have been more than a little costly and annoying to us, and of course we can always use more workers. However, please don't tell me you are some kind of martyr whose heart bleeds only for your poor oppressed

people. Your are angry because your wealth and power were stripped from you. If you could get those back threefold—"

His keen features jutted over the table as he leaned forward. "We will impose the social pattern of Coper City everywhere, yes, because it is our own. But we'll have to take the most able and trustworthy barbarians into our own noble ranks as full citizens. How would you like to trade the circumscribed darkness of Nyrac for a dwelling like this, a score of slaves, a personal guard, a city for your private estate? How would you like a hand in shaping the future?"

"Hm." Rikard scowled and ran a hand through his stiff black hair. "You won't give me that for nothing."

"No, no. But you'll need a strong patron, my friend. Everyone else will assume as a matter of course that you'll be executed or sent to the mines. It will take all my influence to get you pardoned. In exchange, you can do me a few services." His teeth flashed white in his beard. "The first of which can begin now!"

"Hm?"

"I want you to kill a man for me."

"Well—" Rikard sat thinking a moment. "Who is he?"

"I'll come to that. It's nobody

you know or care about. If you fulfil that mission, there will be others, and your rise can be swift."

"You turn me loose with a sword," said the barbarian slowly, "and expect me to do just what you want?"

"Naturally," said Rayth, "I will keep your charming lady as a hostage." He smiled on Leda and a slow hot flush crept up her cheeks and stained her breast. "I shall see that she is not bored."

With a shave and a haircut, a decent tunic and a sword at his waist and a feather-cap tilted rakishly over one ear, Rikard could pass for anyone but the hunted rebel of Nyrac—a young guardsman off duty, perhaps, recruited from some recently conquered province and swaggering into the civilization which had swallowed his people. He drew no special attention as he pushed through the crowded hubbub of the city, except from an occasional bold-eyed maiden.

Toward the north side of the dome, roughly at ground level, was the area of those who were more than simple freemen without being quite nobles—merchants, shopkeepers, independent artisans of all kinds. Moving through that district, Rikard was struck by the bearing of the

folk, neither servile nor haughty, neither uncouth nor overly mannered, a more civilized version of the barbarians, egalitarianism. It occurred to him that this class was an element which had entered into no one's calculations.

But he had a mission, and the farther he went the more desperate it began to seem.

There's little choice, he thought grayly. If I'd refused, he'd have had me slain then and there. But that I, who was chief over the freemen of Nyrac, should sink to be Rayth's assassin—!

Kill the Chief Engineer of Coper City.

Rayth had shown him the layout, warned him that the Temple had its own guards, and said that several of his men had attempted the job before and failed bloodily. On the other hand, could he but accomplish his task and fight his way out of the Temple, there'd be a gang of the prince's bully boys waiting to escort him home. Rikard had pulled off more daring stunts than this.

As to why the old man should be murdered, Rayth had said little except that he stood in the way of certain plans, and Rikard, who had small tenderness for any Copers, didn't inquire further.

He cast a glance behind him now and again as he thrust through the crowds which

swarmed and eddied around bazaars, taverns, and playhouses, and once or twice thought he glimpsed a couple of the prince's hard-faced personal guards lounging inconspicuously after him—but he wasn't sure, the mob was too much a blend of every element in Luna. A richly dressed, pot-bellied merchant borne in a litter by four slaves; a pair of gay young warriors staggering out of a tavern compartment; a hawker shrieking his wares where two corridors ran together; a wondering leather-clad barbarian; a fantastically painted strolling player, thrumming his harp and grinning at the girls as they went by; a humble gray worker; a serious-faced young Engineer, his long red robes swirling about him—it was a gay and noisy throng, a whirl of life and color, and Rikard could not altogether suppress an answering smile. There was nothing like this in the poor little outlier towns.

He came from the passageway to a broad, grassy plaza, and felt a sudden tightening of his muscles and a rising throb in his breast. Beyond it, there was a great wall reaching the height of many levels, porticoed and velvet-hung, with the sign of holy Earth inlaid above the door. The Temple.

It was past time for services,

and few people were in sight before the wall—mostly acolytes hurrying on their various tasks, and six Temple guardsmen standing rock-stiff in gilt breast-plates and plumed helmets before the looming gate. Rikard stood for a moment studying them, the long pikes and the swords at their hips, and wondered how many more there were inside the sacred precincts. He drew a deep breath, filling his nostrils with the cool rich scent of grass and flowering shrubs for perhaps the final time.

Well—Leda was still Rayth's hostage. He shook himself, straightened his back, and walked boldly up to the gate.

Two pikes slanted across his path. "Hold! What do you wish?"

"I have to see the Chief Engineer."

"This is not the time for audiences. Come back after the sunrise ceremonies."

"It won't keep. I bear special news from the Lands-that-see-not-Earth."

The guards captain's face lit with a flicker of interest. "What is it?"

"It's for the ears of his Wisdom alone."

"Then wait your turn."

"Look here," said Rikard, "you can send him a message that it concerns certain newly found ores of power. If his Wisdom

isn't interested, I'll go my way. But if you don't do this much, I'd hate to be in your skin when he learns what you've kept from him."

"Hmmm—well—" The captain rubbed his chin. There was a superstitious awe deep within his eyes, and the other sentries gaped. "Well, all right." He peered narrowly at the barbarian. "You're not of the city. Where are you from?"

"Moonburg, if you must know. But my message!"

The captain blew a whistle, and an acolyte came forth from within to receive the word and run back with it. Rikard stood waiting, trying not to shiver with the gathering tautness of the moment. Rayth had told him to give this message, and it seemed to work. The prince had added that the Temple was seeking to recover the lost secret of the legendary Tommic's Power, so immensely more potent than the sunlight batteries, but had not gone far for lack of the necessary metals. To Rikard, Tommic had merely been a local god worshipped by some towns, though in other stories he was the devil responsible for the Fall.

"Your sword," said the captain.

Rikard shrugged. It was understandable that no visitor

should bear weapons within the Temple, especially after Rayth's last few attempts. He unslung his glaive and handed it over, and permitted them to search him for concealed knives. It did not seem to occur to them, in spite of his hard-thewed size, that hands and shod feet have killed men.

The acolyte returned, a full Engineer with him. The latter spoke hurriedly. "Who are you, stranger, and what is this word you bear?"

"I am Atli Athur's son of Moonburg, your Knowledge," said Rikard, bowing as low as his stiff-necked soul permitted him. "If it please you, this word I have should not be discussed out in public."

"No—no—certainly not. I'll take you to his Wisdom. Follow me."

Rikard went after the swirling red robe, his narrowed eyes taking careful note of everything they passed. Down a long muraled corridor, opening into rooms which seemed oddly little like religious centers—they glittered with metal and glass and plastic, and Engineers in drab, stained smocks labored with a bewildering variety of instruments, past a couple of guards-men—

The thing to do, he thought grimly, was to break the old

fellow's neck, grab a sword from the nearest armed man, and try to cut his way out. None of Rayth's men were allowed inside the Temple, but if they were waiting just beyond the gates he might have some chance.

The corridor ended in a tall doorway where four sentries in gold and scarlet stood by rigidly held pikes. Beyond was the great audience chamber.

It was lavishly furnished, gold and jewels and velvet and the lovely ancient works. The far side was a great sheet of plastic opening on the raw splendor of landscape and an Earth at the full, its eerie blue radiance streaming in to blend with the soft glow of fluorotubes. Rikard had little time for esthetics; his gaze roved in search of enemies.

No soldiers in this room, and the Engineer who guided him was closing the massive door on the sentries—praise the gods, it gave him a chance to kill the Chief and burst out and surprise those men! About a dozen Engineers stood around the Throne of Wisdom—high-ranking to judge from their robes, most of them young and burly, not a one of them bearing sword or dagger.

Rikard knelt before the Throne until a voice that was almost a whisper said: "Rise, my son, and say your message."

"Thank you, your Wisdom." The rebel got up and moved closer to the old man who sat before him. A very old man, he saw, thin and stooped and frail, with a halo of white hair about the gaunt face and the luminous eyes and the wonderful dome of a forehead. For an instant, Rikard despised himself.

But Leda, Leda of the fair tresses and the low sweet laughter and the undaunted gallantry, Leda was hostage to Rayth.

"You brought word of ores of power found on the far side of Luna," said the Chief Engineer. He pursed his lips and tapped his knee with the jeweled slide rule of his office. "But how would the heathen there know what to look for?"

"They weren't looking for anything, your Wisdom," replied Rikard. He stood some five feet away—one easy jump. "It was a certain Engineer-educated trader from this city, Borsu by name, who several years ago was captured by Moonburg men attacking a caravan of his. I had him for slave, but he was so bold and wise, a man that soon we were more friends than master and servant, and it was he who organized an expedition to the heathen lands. He thought their ores, which we on Earthside have little exploited, could be obtained for our manufactured goods at

a fine profit and sold here in Coper City. It was he who saw those deposits and had them mined. On our return, we found that Moonburg had been brought under your city's rule, but nevertheless—" .

They were relaxing their wariness, intent on his account.

"—we thought that we could still do business, especially with the Temple. As Borsu was ill, I left him in Moonburg and came myself to—" .

He hit the Chief Engineer with a smack of bodies and his hands closed around the thin neck.

Thunder and stars exploded in his skull. He reeled aside, falling to the ground, and the Engineer rushed on him with the club he had pulled from his long sleeve.

Rikard kicked out, and the Coper flew backward, grunting. The barbarian snarled and lurch- ed to his feet. Swords and dag- gers gleamed as the others yank- ed them from concealment.

Trapped. They weren't stupid, these Engineers, and now he was trapped!

Rikard hurled himself forward in a flying tackle, hit the nearest man and rolled over on the floor with him. Wrenching the fellow's dagger loose, he bounded back to his feet and rushed another Engineer.

"Alive!" screamed the old man. "Take him alive!"

For the torture cells—no! Rikard closed with the Engineer, stabbing him in the shoulder before he could slash with his sword. He pulled the glaive loose and backed toward the wall, growling, sword in one hand and dagger in the other. The men formed a defensive line around their Chief and brandished their blades.

The wounded Engineer rose suddenly and sprinted for the door. Rikard threw the knife after him, missed, and groaned as the door was swung wide and the four guardsmen entered.

"Ha, Nyrac!" he yelled and threw himself upon them. His sword whistled, clanged off the metal shaft of the nearest pike, and raked the cuirass beyond. Another guard hit him with the butt of his pike and he stag- gered. Now the blows rained on him, smashing thunder of vio- lence and lightning-shot dark- ness. The sword fell from his hand and he toppled, still curs- ing. Someone kicked him as he fell.

He lay there, half conscious, mumbling through a mask of blood while they bound him. When the reeling and the blur- ring ended, and only the thump- ing pain and the slow drip of red were left, he sat up and

glared at them where they stood around him.

"I thought Rayth was wiser than that," muttered an Engineer.

"It wasn't a bad trick." The old man fingered his throat with a wry smile. "He almost made it. But who are you, so bold as to go alone and unarmed in war against the Temple?"

Rikard shook his ringing head. The sickness in him was as much from stupefied dismay as from his hurts. That he should have failed—that he should have been captured and bound like a pig for slaughter the second time!

"Hm—now let me think." The Chief Engineer stroked his chin. "Obviously Rayth would only have tried this with an assassin so bold and strong that there would be some chance of success, and at the same time one over whom he had enough of a hold to drive him to this desperate mission. Now it is only ten or fifteen hours since we heard that the mighty Rikard of Nyrac had been captured by this same Rayth."

"Rikard of Nyrac—aye, your Wisdom, they said he was big and dark, it must be he. Right?" A foot kicked the prisoner.

"Gently, Wanno, gently. There is no cause to maltreat him when he is helpless. Nobody was killed

in this little affair." The Chief Engineer stooped over Rikard and smiled. "See here, my friend, I have no ill will for you. I've chuckled for a long time over your impudent bearding of the Copèr lords, and I wouldn't mind doing you a good turn if you'd let me."

"But first I have to do something for you, eh?" Rikard grinned without humor. "It seems to be a city custom."

"Be reasonable, man. You've failed your mission; Rayth will have no further use for you, and only here is there protection. I daresay you've no love for Rayth, and he is our greatest enemy as well."

Rikard was silent.

"Now what reason did you have to do his foul work for him? I cannot quite imagine Rikard of Nyrac turning assassin for hire."

"They say a woman was captured with him, your Wisdom," said one of the Engineers thoughtfully.

"Ah, so. And Rayth holds her. Hm." The Chief Engineer paced back and forth, the robes swirling around his thin stooped form. Suddenly he said: "Bring this man a bowl of wine."

It was a fire coursing in his veins, the leaden haze lifted from his mind and he looked at his captors with cleared eyes. The Chief Engineer said to him:

"Rikard, this is the situation in Coper City. The old bold dynasty of the Mayors has faded till the last of them sits bibbing in his apartments with little interest in anything save a new wench. Meanwhile the struggle for the real power over this growing empire lies between the great nobles, of whom Rayth is chief, and the Temple, which recruits from all ranks and is thus closer to the people and more alive to their wants. The world has come down far since the Fall. What was a wise and glorious and adventurous civilization has been destroyed, and this, its successor, is stagnant and cruel and ignorant; it has done little which was new or decent in a thousand years. I do not say that the Temple is blameless; the early Chief Engineers found it convenient to monopolize what true knowledge was left and to ally themselves with the nobles in crushing the commons. But in the past generation we have tried to make some amends, we have spoken against human slavery and unjust laws, and we would like to teach all men enough to make them more than walking bellies. Temple and nobles agree that man must be united—"

Rikard snarled at him.

"—but it is rather for us to learn freedom from the barbar-

ians, in exchange for our order and culture, than for them to be enslaved by us; and there is a sharp split between the parties. Furthermore, we have tried to regain the ancient knowledge by the methods with which it was won in the first place—that is, by trying our ideas to see if they work, rather than by blind acceptance of ancient authority. You must have noticed our laboratories as you entered. But this leads to heretical questioning of everything, and the nobles do not like it.

"Thus Rayth has several times sought to have me assassinated. There is little I can do save guard against it—I would get no satisfaction in the courts. If he should succeed, he could use his influence and very likely get one of his own hand-picked Engineers named to my office. For we—scientists—are a small party in the Temple, and only the more or less accidental fact that I was converted to such views shortly after assuming the slide rule has given us our success. If we could somehow overcome him, there would be a chance to make some improvement in human life, perhaps even to reach Earth eventually. If we fail, as seems all too probable, the long night will descend completely."

He stopped, and there was a

moment's silence in the great chamber. Then Rikard said: "I suppose you're telling me more or less the truth. I don't really care, one way or the other. But why? What do you want of me?"

"I don't know," said the Chief Engineer frankly. "I really don't know whether it wouldn't be safer all around just to return your head to Rayth. But—Rikard, the Temple has been at one grave disadvantage. Its younger men are often doughty fighters, as you have seen, but they are still mostly technicians, intellectuals, people without practical experience in warfare. You, on the other hand, have fought all your life. If you have any suggestions, they will be carefully considered."

"And what do I get from this?"

"Your life, of course, and your freedom. Likewise your woman's, if we can save her. We can talk later of other rewards. You may find it worthwhile to work with us."

Rikard leaned back against the wall, letting his mind slide over the facts and the chances. Presently he nodded his blood-matted head and began to talk.

The Temple gate burst open and the big man shot out in a flying leap that carried him over the heads of the sentries to land

on the plaza grass. A spear flew after him. He grabbed it and whirled about and threw it back.

"Stop him!" roared an Engineer. "Kill him! He killed the Chief!"

The guards sprang at Rikard, yelling, and others booted out of the Temple in their wake. He was already fleeing toward the corridor beyond. A shrieking laborer sought to bring him down—he kicked the man in the teeth, beat another aside with the flat of his sword, and pushed a way into the suddenly milling throng.

Half a dozen armed men were around him, blades flashing out. One grinned savagely in his beard. "We thought you were dead," he gasped. "You were in there so long—"

"We'll all be dead if we don't get out of here," snapped Rikard.

The raging Temple warriors were crowding through the press of humanity toward them. And from the swirling mob there seemed to rise one great groan. "*The Chief is dead . . . The Chief is dead . . . They killed him, the dirty murdering nobles —*"

The old fellow's claim to be beloved of the people was not a lie, thought Rikard tautly, and crammed a fist into the mouth of the nearest man who rushed, weeping and cursing at him.

Swords and pikes clattered together as the guards hit the tight circle of Rayth's warriors. Rikard led the retreat, his sword whistling and thumping—he did not cut, but he hammered a way through the mob, and it fell back before his great bloody shape.

"The ramp—over there—"

They braced themselves and leaped, ten feet straight up, arcing forward to land on the upward-curving surface. Then they ran!

A hurled spear flashed, and one of Rayth's men toppled. Two more had been pulled down by the bare hands of the commons, and another had fallen in the retreat. The crowd, half angry, half frightened, moved slowly after them.

They dashed into a corridor on the noble level, and the two city guardsmen posted there clanged the gate shut in the face of pursuit. Panting, they stopped and looked at each other.

"There'll be Mars to pay down there," said the leader hoarsely. "Riots—"

"Take me to his Excellency," said Rikard.

"Aye—at once—and good work, barbarian! You did a job that we've tried to do for the past five years."

They went swiftly down the long passageways, up ramps and stairs, past the sumptuous apart-

ments of the rich where men and women, children and servants and slaves cowered at sight of drawn weapons and at the faint, rising noise of the lower levels. When they came to Rayth's door, they entered without ceremony.

The prince leaped to his feet, spilling his wine-glass, and the lean bearded face blazed at Rikard. "Is it done?" he yelled. "Did you really do it?"

"Aye—aye—" The rebel leaned wearily on his sword and let his eyes rove the chamber. There were seven or eight other men seated around the table, mostly older and fatter than Rayth but all with the rich dress and the inbred hauteur of the rulers. There was also a high-ranking Engineer, a sly-faced elderly man whose heavy-lidded eyes barely flicked over the newcomers before retreating back to their own dreams. But it was to Leda that Rikard's gaze went first, Leda who had been sprawled sullen and splendid on a couch and who now started up and ran to him and clung wordlessly to his bleeding form.

"Aye, he's dead," nodded the barbarian.

"It took you several hours," said Rayth. "I was sure you had failed."

"They made me wait a long time while the Chief finished an

—an experiment, they called it. But I got at him, broke his neck, and grabbed a sword and chopped my way out.” Rikard strode boldly over to the table and grabbed up a glass and drained it.

“Do you hear that?” Rayth turned on the others and his voice rose to a shout. “Do you hear that?” His laughter was loud and wild. “He’s dead! His Wisdom Laon XIII, Chief Engineer of Coper City, is dead! Are you ready to assume the post, Jastur?” he cried to the Engineer. “Would you like to take the name of Laon XIV?”

“It might be a good idea to wait for some confirmation,” said the other imperturbably.

Rayth paced the chamber, restlessly, eyes smoldering, and the guests muttered to each other. Rikard and Leda paid no attention; they were holding close, and his hands and lips caressed her with a new and desperate tenderness.

Someone else entered, a strong young acolyte who saluted and said between gasps for air: “He’s dead, sirs, he’s been killed, and it’s Mars down there! The commons are running wild!” There was a knife-slash across his face; blood dripped slowly to the red of his gown.

“What did you see?” snapped Rayth. He sprang over and grab-

bed the acolyte by the shoulders and shook him. “What did you see?”

“I—I heard a great uproar in the audience chamber, through the closed doors. That must have been something else, though, for his Wis—old Laon came out and went into a laboratory. Then some hours later he returned to the chamber, and—and presently there was another noise, louder and lasting longer—then I saw this man here burst out, knock down a guard in his way, and go down the hall. I looked in—they were lying heaped in blood, and an Engineer came in and lifted the old man and shrieked that he was dead. Then there was panic, everyone running, guards fighting to get out after the killer—I slipped away and came here as you told me, sir—”

“Dead!” Rayth’s shout echoed between the walls. “Dead, d’you hear? After five years I’ve killed the old swine, and Temple and commons alike are rioting—What more excuse do we need?”

“Excuse?” whispered a noble. “Certainly!” Rayth grinned. “As a public-spirited gesture, we assemble our personal guards and march them down there to restore order. With the Temple occupied by us, your election to the slide rule becomes a certainty, Jastur.”

"There'll be fighting," said the Engineer nervously. "The young Engineers are—were—almost all on his side, you know; they won't receive you kindly—and then there are the commons—"

"Bah! Engineers and mobs against trained blades? Certainly there'll be bloodletting, but it won't be our blood—at least, if we can get down there before they have time to organize."

Rayth lifted his voice to a shout, and a guards officer stepped in and saluted. There was something like terror under his hard-held mask. Rayth snapped swift orders and he ran off.

"We'll unite all our personal forces," said the prince, biting the words out as he paced from wall to wall. "The Mayor's men and the regular city guards aren't to be relied on; I wouldn't be surprised if half of them swung to the Temple's side if they get a chance. Most of the regular army is out of the city, on garrison or combat duty, and it wouldn't be too safe either. But between us we've got three hundred trained bold men ready to follow us down there."

"*Us?*" squeaked a noble.

"Oh, stay if you want. I'm going down!" Rayth turned to clap Rikard's shoulder. "You too, my friend. You've done well, oh, excellently well, and you'll have a rich reward!"

The Nyracan shrugged. Inwardly, he was filled with a sudden wonder as to whether he had done the right thing or not. He didn't much care, really, who won; they were all Copers to him—but the prince's payment was more certain and tangible than the Temple's, and—

Too late now.

He went into the bathroom, where Leda washed and bandaged his hurts and whispered to him: "There is more behind this than you say, my dearest. I know you too well."

"Aye, there is, but I can't tell you now. Stay close by me and don't be too surprised at anything I may do."

Leda went back to Rayth and said: "Give me a blade too."

"You—a woman?" he asked.

"I've sent more men to Earth than you ever did," she snapped. "From here on, Rikard and I fight together."

"Well—I hate to risk such beauty being hacked up—but far be it from me to oppose that beauty's lightest wish," laughed the Coper. "Remember, though—you'll be among my own troops, and they don't take kindly to traitors."

She smiled at him. "How could anyone betray you?" she whispered.

"The oldest trick in the world," sighed Rayth, "and it

still works. Very well, take what you wish from the armor chest over there."

She and Rikard equipped themselves with weapons—a sword for her, an ax for him—cuirasses, and helmets. By that time they could hear the sound of marching feet. Rayth buckled on his own armor, lifted his sword in a mocking salute to his timorous comrades, and walked out into the hall.

It was a strong and well-trained force, filling the corridor with hard bodies and edged steel, pikes and axes aloft, raising a shout that roared and boomed down the hall as Rayth appeared. He put himself in the van, with the barbarians in the second rank behind his, and the troop started off to battle.

Clang of booted feet slammed echoing on the metal floor, rattle and clash of armor, grim jests tossed from lip to bearded lip. These were the killers, the professionals without fear of man or Earth, the trained elite which formed an army within an army and the fulcrum of the noble power. Watching them, marching with them, Rikard felt a sudden sick doubt within him. Untrained barbarians had toppled before this iron weapon—

They came to the closed gate, and Rayth unlocked it and led

the way down the ramp beyond. Level after level dropped past them, deserted now, silent and empty, but the broken roaring from below had grown, screaming its outrage, screaming for blood.

When they emerged on a landing at the ceiling of the Temple level and looked down twenty feet, it was to a boiling pool of humankind, gray workers, naked slaves, velvet merchants, leather artisans, women and children, howling and trampling until the din shook the walls and rattled the teeth in a man's skull. The surge of white, hating faces reached beyond vision, mouths agape, eyes red and running, animal voices barking and clamoring. Rikard had never seen a true mob before, and the elemental violence of it shook even his calloused soul. It did not occur to him to regret the fact that many of these people must die.

Rayth stood for an instant stroking his beard, thinking, and then he lifted his sword and sprang over the rail. The lines followed him, jumping one by one, a dozen men simultaneously floating down with pikes reaching beneath them.

They landed among the mob, hewing a clear way even as they fell, and struck out. The crowd surged back, leaving red remnants underfoot, and the troopers

continued to leap—forward ranks pressing toward the Temple, while the rearward lines were still jumping. Rayth's blade whistled and butchered; his face was alight with a dark glee. Rikard and Leda, sandwiched between others, could do nothing but add the weight of their bodies to the mass of the troop. The pack howled and bayed and cursed around them.

Missiles began to fly, hammers, ore-lumps, crowbars, wrenches, anvils hurled by brawny arms. A guardsman staggered and fell, his face cracked open. Another was seized by the cloak, dragged into a group of women, and carved with butcher knives. A third had his pike snatched from him, and a big smith jabbed it into the throat of a fourth before he was killed. The crowd gave way before the ruthlessly advancing soldiers, but it closed behind them and filled the air with noise and flying death.

"They killed the Chief!"

Leda's eyes were wide and her breast rose and fell behind the binding corselet. Her voice came dimly to Rikard under the boom and howl of raw voices. "They hate us!"

"So they do." He smiled bleakly.

Now the Temple was before them, its high wall looming over

the trample and clamor, a thin line of its own guards holding back the rioters. Rayth's red blade lifted anew, and his bugler wound a single harsh note. The troop moved forward on the double.

Vaguely, Rikard heard the prince calling to the guards, "Let us through—Mayor's order—protect you—"

"No one goes in—you bloody swine!"

The bugle screamed again and the soldiers locked ranks and charged.

Swords and pikes clanged at the gate; the sudden recoil hurled the rear lines backward. Rikard grabbed Leda's flowing hair and pulled her ear close to his lips and muttered swiftly, "Listen, we're with the Temple. First chance you get, break free and go over to them—once we're inside!"

She clasped his hand, briefly, and then the sentries were down and the troop rushed inside.

Beyond was a long narrow darkness of corridor. Nothing stirred, nothing spoke; they hastened through a fumbling gloom with only their footfalls and hoarse breathing and clash of metal for company. Rikard heard Rayth's voice, puzzled. "Where are the others? The Temple has plenty of its' own guardsmen, where are they? Has everyone

fled?" Then, he laughed. "If so, why, it makes our task all the easier. Forward!"

They burst into the great audience chamber, and it was lighted and the Temple was waiting for them.

The young Engineers were reinforced by commoners, weapons in hand and armored in spacesuits.

The invaders let out one roar and the forward ranks hurled spears that bounced off metal and plastic and tough cord. From the Engineers, arrows suddenly darkened the air, the whistling death flamed among the soldiers and the lines sagged amidst their toppling members.

There was a press from the rear, men driven forward, and in the instant's bawling panic only Rikard knew what it was—the Temple guardsmen, aided perhaps by armed commoners themselves, throwing their power out of the rooms and side passages where it had lurked, blocking the troop's retreat and falling on it from the rear!

The line eddied and swirled about him, spears flying, arrows and hurled throwing-axes, the ranks of Rayth buckling under pressure from both ends. Time to get out of here, before anyone suspected that he, Rikard of Nyrac, had led them into the trap.

He turned on the man beside him and his ax hewed low, shearing through flesh and bone of a leg. As the screaming warrior fell, he brought his weapon up, a backhanded blow crashing into the face beyond. The man behind him thrust from the side; he took the spear on his cuirass and kneed viciously. Stooping over, he undercut another of his late companions, and Leda reached over his back to slash down the soldier beyond.

Rikard bent his knees and leaped, soaring over the fallen, a dozen pikes stabbing up after him. He hardly noticed the sharp bright pain where one raked his thigh; he was through their line and Leda was with him. They drifted down among the Engineers.

A big red-faced young man snarled behind his space helmet and lifted an ax as Rikard descended. Someone else grabbed his arm. The helmets were left propped open, and his voice could reach. "No, Shan, those are friends!"

"Oh, sorry—I forgot." Shan swung about and spattered the brains of the nearest trooper.

The fight was now pressed into the audience chamber; men jammed together, slashing and hacking at arm's range—there'd soon be more room, thought

Rikard grimly, and took his place in the Engineer line. The Temple, though, had order and plans of a sort, however relatively untrained its fighters were, while the invaders were broken up into knots and fragments where their discipline could not exist. The important thing was to hit them, and keep hitting them, so they didn't get a chance to reform.

His ax smote, clanging off metal, raking the face and the arm behind. A blade hacked at him; he caught it on his helve and turned the blow and hewed back. Leda was beside him, her clear war-cry raising as she stabbed and struck; Shan the Engineer was chopping and roaring pious mottoes on his other flank; the Temple men pushed against the roiling soldiers, took their blows on their heavier armor, and gave them back with murder behind. The clamor of men and metal was a roar as of sundering worlds.

Rayth was fighting like a demon, his blade whirling and shrieking, his voice lifted in a rallying-cry that drew his scattered followers together. He had courage, thought Rikard above the snarl of combat—perhaps he was a fitter chief after all. But too late now!

Ha, there went another, tumbling with his head half off his

shoulders—so, a helmet crumpled, and the skull beneath it.

Back and forth the battle raged, breaking and tearing, ruining the chamber and the lives of men, and over it lifted the great calm disc of Earth and the million scornful stars. Back and forth, trampling, sundering, killing and laming, and Rikard was painted with blood and his arms grew weary from swinging the ax.

The chamber began to clear as men fell; it was floored with corpses and one had room to cast a spear or take a flying leap down on the head of an enemy. The soldiers had suffered hideously, but there were many Temple dead, ordinary guardsmen, scantily armored commoners, Engineers with their spacesuits pierced or their helmets cloven. The fight was breaking into knots and clusters, small whirlpools of murder swaying back and forth over the great blood-wet space, men springing through the air at each other. It seemed to Rikard, as he raised blurred eyes toward holy Earth, that the disc had grown noticeably gibbous—had they fought that long?

“Over here! Stand and fight, men of Coper!”

It was Rayth, backed into a corner above a high heap of fallen Temple men, foremost in

a grim and haggard line of troopers hurling back wave after wave. Rikard shook his head, a sudden dark sense of destiny on him, and moved across the floor with lifted ax.

"You," said Rayth, very softly. "You—the triple turncoat—" Suddenly he threw back his head and laughter pulsed in his throat. "Oh, it was lovely, man, lovely, I never thought you had that kind of brains! Shall we play the game out?"

He stepped from his line, tossing his sword and catching it again, kissed his hand to Leda, and fell into an alert position before Rikard. The barbarian growled, squared off, and fell on him.

Rayth danced aside from the shrieking ax, and his blade whipped in against Rikard's throat. The rebel rolled, barely ducking the thrust, and Rayth grinned without much malice and sprang at him. His sword clattered and yelled, biting the Nyracan's arms, bouncing off the hard-held guard to sing around his opponent's ears. Rikard fell back, grunting in surprise, and Rayth pursued him, lightfooted, leaping, playing with him.

Scream and clangor of steel, hoarse gasps for breath, bounding human forms in a strange and terrible grace of murder,

clash and bite and two faces staring into each other's eyes across the web of flying metal. Rikard hewed out again and again, cleaving empty air; his phantom enemy was somewhere else to rake him until he staggered and splashed his blood on the floor.

Leda yelled and sprang on Rayth from behind. His sword whirled around, caught in the guard of hers and sent it spinning free, and slewed back to meet Rikard's charge. He retreated before the rebel's rush, laughing, parrying blow after clumsy blow, waiting for the end.

It came swiftly. Rikard's bull charge forced Rayth back into a corner where he braced himself and smiled. As the ax whirred down toward his skull, he lifted his blade to parry it as he had done before—and the steel broke across.

Rikard stood gasping, reeling on his feet, looking down at the body of his foe with a numbness stealing over him. He hardly noticed the sobbing girl who flung herself into his arms; he stood mute for a long while and when he spoke at last it was dully.

"That wasn't right. I didn't kill him—a flaw in his blade did—it isn't right, somehow."

The Chief Engineer came to Rikard where he stood watching the first harsh glare of sunrise creep over the heights of Copernicus. The barbarian leaned heavily on his woman. He had taken many hurts.

Laon's old face was drawn with weariness; there was no great triumph in him. "It's over," he said. "It was a bloody, horrible business, but we hold the entire city now, all levels; the nobles are our prisoners and the Mayor is our puppet and the Temple is victorious. Thanks to you, my friend."

"There is more to do," said Rikard. "The armies will hear about this, out in the conquered provinces, and many of them, at least, won't like it. There'll be hard fighting to hold what we have."

"Oh, yes. Though I think with some diplomacy, and with the provinces restless at their backs, they may decide—well, we must see. And afterward there is much more to do, generations of

work—Are you with us, Rikard?"

"I suppose so. I'll have to think about it. Nyrac should not be a mere province, but—well—I'll think about it."

"At least," said Laon, "we can rest a little while now."

"It's over, darling, darling," whispered Leda. "The fight is over."

Rikard held her close, but he was thinking of the armies beyond the city, and the restlessness of the conquered towns and the ruthless will of those still free; of the long task of raising men turned into brutes by centuries of injustice and oppression, of making them free and fit to use their freedom, and of all the evil elements which would be seeking to thwart that goal; of the still greater war to be fought by quiet men. In the Temple, the war to regain the lost wisdom of the ancients, the battle which would hammer out the long road back to Earth.

"No, Leda," he said, very softly, "it's just beginning."

Poul Anderson and your editor, Wade Kaempfert, have at least one thing in common. Both have trouble getting others to pronounce their names the way it sounds best to them, though Poul puts his trouble first, and Kaempfert last. For the purists, it's Pole Anderson and Wade Kemfer. Any other major problems you want solved?